



Stewartby to Ridgmont walk

In the footsteps of John Bunyan - Stewartby Lake, Millennium Country Park, Lower Shelton, Marston Thrift Woods, Cranfield and Holcot Wood. Largely flat.

Length 19.3 kms, 12 miles

Toughness 4 out of 10

Maps Explorers 208 (Bedford & St Neot's) and (from Hill Farm) 192 (Buckingham & Milton Keynes).

Landranger 153 (Bedford & Huntingdon).

Features The walk follows the South and West shores of Stewartby lake before turning North to Lower Shelton and across farmland. Next you head West through the lovely woods of Marston Thrift to Cranfield. The route then largely follows a Sustrans cycle route heading South, but it makes for excellent and surprisingly remote walking to Holcot Wood. Finally head South-West across open countryside, largely following the John Bunyan Trail to Brogborough and Ridgmont station.

Points of interest

Stewartby

This village (not visited on the walk, but worth a quick browse before you start) was built in 1935 by the Stewart family, owners of the London Brick Company. Resident workers benefited from such novel amenities as electricity and sewerage.

The **Wind Turbine** is over 120 metres tall and went up in 2014. Its yearly output is 4.5 million kwh (depending on how windy it's been). It supplies electricity to the Forest Centre and to over 1000 houses.

Cranfield

Cranfield is probably best known today for the airport and the School of Management (now a university), but there is more to it than that. There may have been a simple wood and thatch building on the site of the Church in Saxon times; there was certainly a village then. The first known

mention of Cranfield was in 918. The village people in the early days worked for the Abbot, in return for the land they themselves held in the village. The Saxon word “field” or “feld” means “a clearing in the forest”, so Cranfield is a forest clearing occupied by cranes (not the mechanical kind). A stone church was built in the 12th and 13th centuries, with the upper part dating from the 15th. Like most villages Cranfield’s population and the demand for housing has been steadily growing. According to the 1901 census there were 1,239 people living in the village, by the 2011 census, there were 5,369.

Sustrans Route 51

Sustrans are responsible for the National Cycle Network, a UK-wide network of signed walking and cycling paths connecting cities, towns, and countryside. Route 51 connects Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford, Cambridge, Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich, Felixstowe, Harwich and Colchester. The section which this walk follows is largely off-road, little used by cyclists or others and ideal for walking.

John Bunyan Trail

An 81 mile circular route, starting and finishing near the poet’s birthplace at Bedford, promoted by Bedfordshire Ramblers.

Clay Way

Encountered late in the walk, this runs for 11 miles from the Forest Centre by Stewartby lake, via Ridgmont station and Cranfield to Bromham Mill.

Walk Options

Two short cuts are suggested in the text:

- Lower Shelton (Section 2) to Beancroft Road (section 4). This option reduces the distance by 3.7 kms (less if you have to follow field boundaries as paths are not clearly defined) and it is worth considering if you want to spend more time at Ridgmont Heritage Centre. This option is not well marked and the paths are unclear in places, but it does cut out probably the least interesting sections of the main walk.
- before Ashbrook Farm to Roxhill Manor Farm (section 3), along the John Bunyan Trail. This reduces the distance by 1.4 kms.

Map users may want to extend the walk using the network of paths to the North-East and North-West of Ashbrook Farm. In truth this would add little to the walk, other than a few fields! If you have time to kill, it may be better to explore Stewartby, Marston Thrift, Rectory Wood or Cranfield at your leisure. Better still, make sure to arrive at Ridgmont station heritage centre in time for a beverage and a cake!

The main bus operator is Uno. Their services C1/C10/C11 connect Milton Keynes, Cranfield, Lower Shelton and Bedford. In the week they run half hourly for most of the day, though only alternate buses serve Lower Shelton. At weekends and on Bank Holidays there are half hourly buses between Milton Keynes and Cranfield; every other bus continues to Bedford, but not via Lower Shelton. To get a bus from Cranfield, continue from The Swan up Court Road, then turn left on High Street to the War Memorial, or catch it from the Cross Keys.

Travel

Stewartby (TL015423) and Ridgmont (SP965374) are both in Bedfordshire.

Both Stewartby and Ridgmont are on the line served by trains from Bletchley to Bedford. You can either travel from Euston via Bletchley (buying a return to Stewartby) or from St Pancras via Bedford (buy a return to Ridgmont). There is usually little difference in cost, so it is really a question of convenience. Note that there are no trains on a Sunday and that a full rail service with promotional fares was re-introduced early in 2024 after a prolonged period of closure.

Lunch

- The Exhibition, 39 Upper Shelton Road, Marston Moretaine. 4.3 kms in to the walk (plus 300 metres off the route). It is thought that this is a community pub which does not serve food. Tel: (01234) 768202
- The Swan/Gurkha Kitchen, 2 Court Road, Cranfield. 11.7 kms in to the walk. This specialises in Nepalese, Indian and Chinese cuisine, including some vegetarian dishes. Open from noon every day to 10 pm (but 9 pm on Sundays). <https://www.gurkhakitchencranfield.co.uk/> Tel: (01234) 757689
- Cross Keys, 159 High Street, Cranfield. This adds 700 metres to the distance if you follow the directions in the text. Tel: (01234) 750213.

Tea

- Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre. 'Enjoy afternoon tea in the original Ladies Waiting Room, explore the Victorian Booking Office'. Open Wednesday to Sunday only. Food is served 10am to 3pm, but tea, coffee and cake served to 4 pm.

Help Us!

After the walk, please leave a [comment](#), it really helps. Thanks!

You can also upload photos to the  [SWC Group on Flickr](#) ([upload your photos](#)) and [videos to](#)  [Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:

By Car

Start MK43 9LY **Finish** MK43 0XP

Help National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

Version Apr-24 [Mike Powell](#)

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Walk Directions

- 1 Stewartby to Lower Shelton (3.4 kms)
2. If arriving from Bletchley, leave Stewartby station on platform 2 and turn right on Green Lane (from Bedford you arrive on platform 1 and need to cross the line by the level crossing), then in 20 metres cross over and take the tarmac path opposite. In 50 metres go through a gap in the wooden fence, forking left on a wide track, with a wooden fence on your left, a security fence on your right and Stewartby Lake visible beyond. In 180 metres you pass the clubhouse of Stewartby Water Sports Club (behind the fence). In 120 metres you pass the corner of the fence on your right. The railway line runs parallel on your left and a prominent wind turbine is visible ahead, as it will be for most of the walk!
3. In 200 metres you pass a public footpath post with a black arrow and in 40 metres a picnic table. In 300 metres you approach a signpost indicating 'Forest Centre 0.8 kms'. **【!】** Turn right immediately **before** the sign, following a clear path with a wire mesh fence on your left at first and a surfaced path running parallel.
4. In 250 metres go through a wooden gate and continue on a surfaced path, which curves to the right in 50 metres and back to the left in 30 metres. In 40 metres you pass a public footpath post, with fine views of the lake. In 40 metres you pass immediately to the right of the wind turbine and to the left of an information board. In 200 metres at a public footpath post take a narrow unsurfaced path to the right, towards the lake. The path curves to the left. In 200 metres you pass a box with emergency drowning equipment (just in case). In 80 metres you merge with the main surfaced path again at a black arrow on a yellow topped post. In 15 metres take another path to the right. In 20 metres you pass an information board about butterflies and continue on a rough path. In 100 metres take a wooden footbridge over a ditch.
5. You pass a memorial seat in 35 metres and another in 60 metres. In 300 metres, after a third seat, the path turns away from the lake shore. In 45 metres, go through a wooden gate and in 15 metres turn right on a wide surfaced track. In 80 metres fork left and in 25 metres keep left again at a high wooden signpost.

6. In 50 metres go through a metal gate and turn right on tarmac. In 50 metres cross the end of a road (Lakeview) and continue on a tarmac path opposite between houses, with a Jubilee Walk sign. In 50 metres turn left on Bedford Road and in 60 metres turn right, just after Cook Close, at a green public footpath signpost. In 50 metres you pass a cricket ground on your left.
7. In 70 metres turn right at a footpath post to cross a ditch and continue on tarmac, passing a play area on your left. Turn left in 50 metres, right in 15 metres (now parallel with the noisy main road) and left again in 80 metres, to go through a subway in 20 metres, which takes you under the A421. In 40 metres at the end of the subway, turn right, pass stone bollards in 50 metres and turn left. Continue on Lower Shelton Road, passing an old chapel (imaginatively named The Old Chapel) on your left in 220 metres. You can catch a bus to Milton Keynes or Bedford from here (in the week).
8. **2 Lower Shelton to Walnut Tree Farm (1.3 kms)**
9. In 100 metres turn left at a public footpath signpost, between numbers 119 and 121 (signed for the Jubilee Walk). In 40 metres turn right before a gate (leading in to fields), continuing with a wooden fence on your left and private gardens to your right. In 45 metres continue ahead at a Jubilee Walk post, ignoring a path to your left (though you may have to return to this point shortly). In 35 metres turn right and left at an easily missed post to continue in the same direction (*note that this short section is often poorly maintained, so if it is impassable you should either step over the low fence to your left or return to the last path, now on your right, then follow the fence round, going over a waist high fence, until you reach a Jubilee Walk post to your right*). In 55 metres at the corner of the fence on your right and a Jubilee Walk post, continue across a field (300°). In 150 metres pass an isolated tree. In 80 metres at another post, continue with a line of bushes on your right. In 50 metres go under pylons at another post and path junction. *The Jubilee Walk goes left here; this way offers a short cut to Hill Farm in Section 4, which is described in detail immediately after this section.* For the main walk, go over the wooden footbridge on your right here, ignore the path ahead and turn left (North West) with the ditch and field boundary now on your left.
10. In 300 metres at another post, continue across a possibly ploughed field. If the path is not apparent, the direction is now 340°, i.e. heading just to the right of farm buildings and barns ahead. In 300 metres go through a metal gate by a field gate and in 45 metres pass to the right of the barns (grid reference SP989434) at Walnut Tree Farm. In 45 metres turn left at a bend in Bedford Road (*but note that the Exhibition pub is 300 metres to the right on the opposite side of the road*).
11. **Short cut from Lower Shelton to Beancroft Road**
12. Turn half left (West) at the path junction under pylons, across a field, heading for the right edge of trees visible ahead. In 120 metres you pass the corner of the copse on

your left. Follow the left hand edge of a very large field. In 180 metres, follow the field boundary round to the right (the map shows the path cutting the corner of the field). In 20 metres turn left over a footbridge at a yellow topped footpath post. The map shows the path heading due West across the next field; if there is no path apparent on the ground, turn right, with the field boundary on your right, then in 120 metres follow the boundary round to the left. In 130 metres turn right over an easily missed footbridge. The path across the next field may again be unclear; the map shows it continuing at 280 degrees. Alternatively, turn left (field boundary on your left), then right at the corner of the field in 140 metres to pass under pylons in 60 metres. Keep following the field boundary round to the right and in 300 metres turn left over a small ditch – this is a path junction but there is no sign or footbridge. The more obvious path continues ahead to Beancroft Road, but for the direct route in 15 metres go through a wide gap on your right and cross the next field uphill on no obvious path, making for two large buildings visible on the horizon (still 275 degrees). As you near the buildings you will see a green public footpath finger post. In 250 metres turn right on Beancroft Road (but note that the passage to the road can be very overgrown – if it is impassable, you may have to return to the previous path junction, turn right and right again on the road). In 20 metres turn left at a green public footpath sign and resume the main walk as indicated in the first paragraph of section 4).

13. 3 Walnut Tree Farm to Roxhill Manor Farm (3.2 kms)

14. In 50 metres ignore the path to the right, by a telegraph pole. In 220 metres the road bends to the left and you take a path to the right at a green public footpath sign (North-West), gently uphill with a hedgerow and overhead wires to your right and wide views to your left. In 500 metres at the end of the hedge, by a telegraph pole with a black footpath arrow, pass under the wires and continue across a large field. In 300 metres you reach a junction with an unmade drive at a public footpath post (the John Bunyan Trail – JBT – uses this path). *The short cut turns left here, following the directions in the final paragraph of this section.*
15. *For the main walk*, turn right on the drive, which turns to the left in 150 metres and to the right in 150 metres. In 90 metres turn left at a white house (Ashbrook Farm). The gravel drive ends here and you continue with woods to your left. In 200 metres ignore a path to the right, with a sign for the JBT, which leaves you for now (*map users who wish to extend the walk could turn right here; for general advice refer to Walk Options*). In 420 metres turn left on a wide gravel drive at another footpath post (*the path to the right here also provides scope for extending the walk*), with a black arrow on blue and the copse still on your left at first.
16. In 900 metres, after the end of the huge field on your left, the path turns left. In 200 metres pass the first buildings of Roxhill Manor Farm on your left. In 60 metres you pass a car park on your right and continue on tarmac, past a footpath post. The short cut joins you from the left here.

17. *For the short cut*, follow the unmade drive past corrugated farm buildings on the right in 580 metres and the left in 70 metres. For a short section the path is very uneven underfoot with large stones and there are safety notices everywhere. In 80 metres you turn left, after the Site Office on your left. There is a footpath post directly ahead. Resume the main walk below.

18. 4 Roxhill Manor Farm to Marston Thrift (3.1 kms)

19. In 50 metres you pass ponds to your right. Follow the minor road (Roxhill Road) downhill, with fine views of the wind turbine you passed much earlier (now seen from the North-West) and in 600 metres turn right on Marston Hill (road). In 50 metres cross Beancroft Road and turn left. This is an unclassified road but be careful as there is no pavement and the traffic can be very fast. In 280 metres turn right at a green public footpath sign (possibly obscured) marked 'Rectory Wood, 1', immediately after Hill Farm (*the short cut from Lower Shelton joins you here*). In 100 metres the path turns to the left. In 25 metres turn right in a field at a Jubilee Walk post. Go over a footbridge with a hedgerow to your right, at the top of the field. In 180 metres pass under wires. In 150 metres continue in the next field, with infant trees to your left. In 180 metres you pass the farm buildings on your right. There are wide views to your left on this section, including the obligatory wind turbine (West face now).

20. In 300 metres there is another Jubilee Walk post with woods immediately ahead (Marston Thrift). Turn right here and left in 5 metres, ignoring the stile ahead. The bridleway is regularly used by horses and is likely to be muddy. In 220 metres, turn left to enter the woods by a metal kissing gate at an information board and map with a sign for Marston Thrift SSSI. In 10 metres turn right and downhill on a narrow twisting path through these delightful woods, never straying far from the right hand edge.

21. In 380 metres you pass another information board and ignore a gate to the right. In 520 metres leave Marston Thrift by a wooden barrier and immediately turn right (ignoring the prominent blue sign ahead).

22. 5 Marston Thrift to Cranfield (1.6 kms)

23. In 20 metres continue ahead (300°) on a surfaced path (Thrift Way) at a Rectory Wood sign, ignoring other surfaced paths both to the left and to the right. In 25 metres you pass a convenient picnic table. Leave the surfaced path here and take the beautifully maintained 'mown pedestrian path' to the left of the picnic table. Soon a brook is audible if not visible just to your left. In 70 metres pass to the left of a yellow topped public bridleway post and continue on the grass path. In 150 metres turn left on the surfaced path, then in 40 metres take another section of mown path. In 180 metres rejoin the surfaced path. In 50 metres (after a sign for Sustrans Route 51, of which much more later) you ignore another surfaced path to

the right, with a useful map. In 5 metres go through a metal field-gate and continue on a gravel then concrete drive.

24. In 100 metres pass Rectory Farm on your right. In 150 metres ignore a green sign for a public footpath to your right (map users will note that this offers an alternative route to the Cross Keys, which has not been checked on the ground) and continue uphill, on tarmac and then concrete again. In 520 metres you pass a cemetery on your right and the drive turns to the left. For the main route, ignore the following paragraph, but for the Cross Keys, take the path to the right immediately after the cemetery car park.
25. For the Cross Keys pub, take the path to the right immediately after the cemetery car park, with a public bridleway sign. In 50 metres pass through a metal gate. In 150 metres turn left up steps. In 25 metres go through a metal gate and follow the right edge of a recreation ground, with a school visible to the right. In 160 metres leave the recreation ground by a metal gate to the right and continue on a path. In 40 metres, turn left on Red Lion Close (not named), with the school buildings just to the right. In 40 metres turn right on an unnamed road. In 30 metres turn left on a public footpath between houses. In 70 metres cross the High Street to the Cross Keys. Leaving the pub, either re-trace your steps back to the main route and turn right, or cross the High Street and turn right. In 300 metres, just after Orchard Way opposite, take a path to your left. In 50 metres continue on an unnamed road. In 90 metres turn left on Court Road, opposite the church and resume the main walk directions at the end of Section 5.
26. For the main route, in 100 metres turn right on Rectory Lane (*ignoring the narrow public footpath ahead, unless you do not wish to visit Cranfield for lunch, in which case you should go this way between residential fences and turn left on the road ahead in 50 metres*).
27. At the end of Rectory Lane in 60 metres, turn right on Court Road (you will return this way after lunch). In 20 metres pass the Church of St Peter and St Paul on your left. The Swan pub is on your left in 60 metres.

28. 6 Cranfield to Manor Farm (4.6 kms)

29. Turn right from the pub and retrace your steps past the end of Rectory Lane. Stay on Court Road and in 60 metres you pass the end of the public bridleway between houses (*referred to in italics above*), then in 20 metres pass Hartwell Farm, both on your left. In 180 metres go over the stile which is set back on your left, with a green public footpath sign, in to a field with a wire fence to your right.
30. Follow the wire fence in to a second field in 40 metres. **【!】** The map indicates that the right of way cuts across the field at 160°, but there may be no sign of it on the ground. Either take a compass bearing, making for a clump of trees when they come in to view, or follow the right edge of the field and in 180 metres turn left (East) away from houses which are visible to your right. In 80 metres at a clump of

trees turn right (South) over a ditch, marked by a black arrow on a post (if you have taken the right of way, you also cross the ditch here).

31. Cross the next field, up and down on a clear path. In 250 metres turn left (East) and downhill, away from The Kennels (as named on the map but not on the ground). You have a ditch on your left and a temporary fence on your right. In 120 metres turn right at a yellow post and in 60 metres go over a footbridge. In 15 metres go under overhead wires and continue South on a narrow grassy (possibly muddy) path, with rough hedgerows on both sides. In 280 metres merge with a more obvious path to your left and continue on a wider and easier path.
32. You follow this wide grassy path predominately South for nearly a kilometre, with no turnings off, overhead wires close by, tall hedgerows on both sides and no views to speak of. In a little more detail, in 50 metres you pass another Sustrans 51 sign, now with a danger area to your left, and in 25 metres go under the wires, which are now on your left. In 220 metres pass back under the wires, and in 50 metres you go under the wires once again and continue gently downhill.
33. In 50 metres you pass a yellow post on your right. In 150 metres the path turns left (East), you pass another prominent blue Sustrans Route 51 sign and continue gently uphill. In 35 metres you pass back under the wires. In 80 metres your path turns right (South) and in 100 metres back to the left. In 50 metres at another blue Sustrans 51 sign indicating 5 miles to Milton Keynes and 2¼ to Salford, now out in the open, the path makes an unexpected, disorientating and very sharp turn to the right, almost doubling back. A small lake is visible behind to the left. In 180 metres you pass under more wires at the top of the climb (a 12% climb according to a sign).
34. In 160 metres you pass some metal posts and **[!]** in 10 metres, just before a wooden gate and a sign welcoming you to Reynolds' Wood, turn right (245°) on a grassy path in to Holcot Wood, with a wire fence to your left. In 200 metres ignore a stile to your left and continue ahead, still with a wire fence on your left (240°). In 280 metres you cross an underground gas pipeline. In 120 metres you turn right on a wide track, which merges from the left (Route 51 again).
35. **[!]** In 20 metres take the path to the left opposite a convenient seat, to the left of a field gate and marked by a public bridleway arrow (opposite a gate leading back in to Holcot Wood). You are back on the John Bunyan Trail, though it is not marked here. Keep to the left edge of the field (South-East). Continue downhill with woods to your left on a well worn grassy path, with wide views to your right. In 500 metres continue in to the next field, ignoring a gate in to Reynolds Wood on your left, now going uphill. In 220 metres turn right at the corner of the field, following a sign for the Clay Way, with a hedgerow on your left.
36. In 120 metres the wide track turns left at a gap in the hedge, still with a hedgerow on your left. In 450 metres you pass barns on your left. In 150 metres go round a

metal field gate at another Clay Way sign, ignoring the vehicle approach to Manor Farm on your left.

37. 7 Manor Farm to Ridgmont (2.2 kms)

38. In 180 metres you pass semi-detached white houses on your left (Brogborough Manor Cottages). In 200 metres you take a bridge over the A421 with a lake visible to your left (and a last view of the South-West face of your familiar wind turbine). In 150 metres carefully cross Bedford Road and turn left. In 15 metres go up three steps on your right, following a green public bridleway and JBT sign in to woods. In 120 metres take a rusty bridge over a cycle path. Turn left and left again, on to the cycle path in 40 metres and under the bridge in 15 metres.
39. Continue ahead at a path junction in 300 metres (there was a fallen post here in early 2024). The houses of Brogborough are soon visible to your right (Brogborough itself has little to offer, other than a Chinese takeaway). In 180 metres you pass residential garden fences. In 60 metres continue through a play area.
40. Continue on grass, passing to the right of an enclosed play area and to the left of a netball court and exercise equipment. In 100 metres keep to the right of an under sized football field. In 60 metres continue on an unmade road, with a line of garages to your left.
41. In 45 metres turn left on a tarmac path at a green public footpath sign (160°) with industrial units ahead. In 350 metres continue on Brockley Way (towards the Amazon distribution centre). In 120 metres turn right on Badgers Rise (not named here) then in 100 metres left on tarmac (after Amazon) at a green footpath sign.
42. In 120 metres you fork left at a yellow post, through an unexpected fragment of woodland which has somehow survived the industrial development all around it! In 100 metres you come out on Station Road with Ridgmont station opposite (trains for Bedford leave from the near side, but you need to cross the line for trains to Bletchley).

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