

Colchester has had a long and interesting history as Britain's oldest recorded town including elephants, massacres, witches and wine.

In 43AD, the Emperor Claudius advanced on Camulodonum with his Roman army, which included elephants, to accept the surrender of the British Kings. The settlement then became a Colonia (giving Camulodonum the highest rank of Roman cities and citizenship of the Roman Empire) but it was poorly defended. The people who lived in the new colonia drove the native Celts from the area calling them nothing but captives and slaves.

Due to this, there was an uprising in AD61 by the Celts led by Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni tribe. They razed Camulodonum to the ground, massacring the citizens in sacred groves. The layer of ash left by the devastation can still be found throughout the centre of modern Colchester and is referred to

as the 'Boudican destruction layer'.

Moving into the 17th century, the Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins, had his headquarters in Colchester for 2 years from 1644. The Witchfinder General was a feared figure and was responsible for the death of at least 300 people, who were all supposed to have practiced witchcraft. In actual fact, they were more likely to have had a wart or knowledge of herbs than to actually have practiced black magic.

Colchester has a long military history and as a result was a target for bombings in WWII as well as being in the first line of defence if there was a Nazi invasion.

Nowadays, Colchester is known as a university town and the almost continental climate gives it good conditions to produce exceptionally fine English wine. Just what you need after a long ride in the countryside!

Terrain

Mostly flat, some hills, muddy

Ordnance Survey Map Ref

Explorer map 184 Colchester

Parking

Parking available at **Gosbecks Archaeological Park**, Maldon Road (B1022) but there is a height restriction barrier 2.1m.

Refreshments

The Heckford Angel, Heckfordbridge
Tel: (01206) 330225

Various pubs and restaurants in Colchester

Transport

Colchester Station Approx. 4 miles / 6.7 km
Public Transport Information 0870 6082608

Vets

Paton & Lee, Calves Lane, Stoke By Nayland, Colchester, CO6 4RR
Tel: 01206 262371

Places to visit

Colchester Zoo Large zoo with over 200 species of animal, split into various zones. Admission fee Tel: 01206 331292

Colchester Castle Set in the largest ever Norman Keep, the museum takes you through 2000 years of British history
Admission fee. Tel: 01206 282939

Abberton Reservoir Visitor Centre & Nature Reserve Excellent birdwatching at this 1200 acre reservoir and wetland site.
Free admission. Tel: 01206 738172

Colchester Circular Route

A route ideally suited to walking or cycling



4 miles / 6.7 km

Gosbecks Archaeological Park is deemed to be one of the most important Roman and Iron Age sites in Britain and has over 2000 years of pre-Roman history as well as being the royal seat of various native kings. The site is that of Camulodonum (present day Colchester) and one of the most famous native kings, Cunobelin (known to the Romans as King of the Britons), is known to have resided there. Excavations first began in the 19th century when an amateur archaeologist discovered a Romano-Celtic Temple. It was revealed that this was built in the mid 2nd century, possibly dedicated to Camulos, the Celtic god of war (Mars being the Roman equivalent). The true scale of the site was not known until aerial photographs were taken in the 1930's. The site is also home to the largest Roman Theatre in Britain, which could hold up to 5000 people. You can see the theatre and temple are marked out on the ground, showing where these would have stood originally during Roman times



In 1945 Mr Bert Beales found a bronze figure whilst ploughing at Gosbecks. He took it home and not realising that it might be of importance, put it in his garden shed for safe-keeping. Two years later, an expert recognised the statue as that of the Roman god Mercury. The statue is now on display at Colchester Castle museum and is thought to be one of the best preserved Roman bronze statues found.



The Roman River runs south of Colchester and is part of the Roman Valley Conservation Zone and further downstream a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). There is a Roman Valley Countryside Centre which details local and natural history of the area at Olivers Orchard, Olivers Lane, Stanway. This is a just a short detour from the route and they have picnic and refreshment facilities.

The Roman River is only a stream at this point of the ride but there is enough current for a game of pooh-sticks off one of the wooden bridges en route!