

Houghton Conquest Circular Walk 4 to the Greensand Ridge

Introduction

This circular route takes you from the village up onto the Greensand Ridge and back down into the flat Bedfordshire plain. The walk takes in a variety of landscapes and wildlife.

Houghton Conquest can be reached by road from the A6 (Bedford –Luton) or from the B530 (Bedford – Ampthill) roads. Parking is available in the Village Hall car park but may be limited if other functions or events are taking place there. On-street parking is available elsewhere in the village. Please park thoughtfully.

There is an hourly bus service from Bedford (Route 42).

Start/Finish Point

The walk starts from the Village Hall Houghton Conquest (OS Grid TL044415 – OS Explorer Maps 208 and 193)

Access and General Information

Length: 5 miles. **Time:** 2 hours

Surface Types: The walk goes across varied surfaces ranging from a hard, firm surface to grass or uncultivated earth paths. Please note that this route can become very muddy in winter or in wet weather.

Refreshments: There are two pubs in Houghton Conquest - The Knife and Cleaver and The Anchor. There is a shop near to the village hall.

Route Description

All public paths in the parish have been clearly way-marked along their entire length. Finger-posts are used where a path leaves a road after which way-marking discs - normally attached to posts - clearly indicate the route of the path.

Please keep only to the way-marked paths. For easy access and for your safety, stiles have been replaced whenever possible with either self-closing kissing gates or step-through stiles, and bridges have been provided with handrails.

We hope you enjoy this walk. Please leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but photographs and pleasant memories.

1. From the village hall car park turn right (R) towards the roundabout and then turn left (L) into Rectory Lane. Walk towards end of Rectory Lane until footpath (fp) on R signposted "Houghton Conquest Meadows/ Kings Wood" is reached. Follow fp round to left past the nature reserve information panel. Go through kissing gate and follow the path between the hedgerows.
2. Go through the gate into Glebe Meadows nature reserve. Carry on through next gate and head towards way marker post (wmp) at the entrance gate to Kings Wood. At this point you may take one of the permissive paths through Kings Wood. Otherwise turn L on the outside of the wood and to the kissing gate in the corner of the field. Turn R through the gate and follow the wood boundary fence all the way up the hill to where there is a gate and a wmp in the wood's boundary fence.
3. Continue over two fields and turn L onto the wide track leading to the buildings of Brickhill Pastures. Follow the concrete farm road through the buildings and continue to where the road bends right and a fp crosses. Turn L along the field edge path with the hedge on the left to a wmp which directs you to angle R across the field to the far corner of the field and another wmp in the hedgerow near the corner of Montague Wood.
4. Cross the bridge over the ditch and take a slight angle L across this field to a wmp by a tree and a gap in the hedgerow in front of you. Go through the gap over a footbridge and follow the path straight forward towards a power line. The fp continues for a short distance beyond the power line and joins another fp from Haynes West End where you should turn L to a bridge. However, if this route is unclear turn L at the power line and follow the

hedge line to the bottom of the field then turn R to reach the bridge on the left.

5. In 2020 this bridge was broken. To continue the walk go straight ahead along the footpath to join London Lane and turn L (*Alternatively cross the bridge (if repaired) by the ford and walk up the slope into West End Farm yard (currently used to store construction machinery). Pass the farm buildings and where the access road turns R turn sharp L through the hedge and go down a steep bank to a footbridge across a ditch. Cross the bridge and follow the footpath across this field towards the furthest electricity pole and pass through a gap in the hedge to a short track which leads out onto London Lane. Turn L.*)
6. Take care of traffic on this narrow lane. As you proceed down the lane pause to take in the view on the R across the Ouse Valley. Follow the lane for some distance down the hill until a sharp right hand bend is reached with the entrance to Bury Farm to the L. From the farm entrance follow the path signposted across the field with the church in view in front of you, passing to the R of an electricity pole and through a gap in the hedge on the far side of the field. Continue with the hedgerow on the L and then onto a path between houses and gardens back to Rectory Lane. Turn R and retrace your steps back to the village hall.

Features on the Route

The Old Rectory

Built in 1724 in the time of Rev. Zachary Grey probably on the site of an old moated farmhouse and still has the best surviving moat in the area. Moated houses were the fashion in the 12th and 13th centuries. There were at least 6 other moated sites in the parish at the time.

Kings Wood and Glebe Meadows

Local Nature Reserve and S.S.S.I. (Site of Special Scientific Interest). The wood is an ancient broadleaved woodland, mainly of ash, oak and field maple with some fine hornbeam and lime in the centre. The meadows are 'un-improved pasture' and so contain a wealth of different flowers and grasses.

Conquest Bury and London Lane

The Bury Manor, home of the Conquest family for some 20 generations, occupied a site very close to the present Bury Farm buildings in a secluded and sheltered spot set well back from the lane, on rising ground to the south of the settlement to which the family was to give its name. The Manor house was probably built on the site of an earlier building in the early C15th and was of some size and substance. In 1605 the Conquests entertained James I for two nights and it is likely that this quiet lane was, for that short time, an extremely busy road with the Royal entourage, local dignitaries, court messengers to and from London (to say nothing of the inevitable C 17th sightseers) all converging on the Bury. In 1740 the last of the Conquest family left the house and it was let out as a farmhouse until 1856 when the "new" Bury Farm was built. The old manor house was totally demolished, the moats were filled and all trace of its existence disappeared.

The Ouse Valley

Pause for a while at the top of London Lane to enjoy the extensive view. Major features which can easily be identified are (starting from the right) the two vast hangars at Cardington originally constructed for the building of huge airships (such as the ill-fated R101). If you spot an "airship" today it will be a barrage balloon used for weather forecasting. Moving left, on the horizon, the white water tower at Ravensden is very obvious. The Pyramid of the leisure complex in Bedford can be picked out with Bedford town stretching westwards towards Kempston. Immediately below you lies Chapel End. To the far left in the middle distance lies Wootton with the woods around Stagsden on the distant skyline beyond.

Acknowledgements

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Comments on this walk would be appreciated. Please email them to letsgobeds@gmail.com

