

Studham Common Walk

2.4 km (about 1.5 miles)



greater knapweed

Starting point:

2 With the Red Lion to your right, head across the common. Keep the goal-posts on your left and take the bridleway that leads westwards, towards the Old School House. In spring, you can see the delicate white flowers of pignut in the rough grass at the edge of the playing field; its tubers are a favourite food of badgers. In summer, this area is bright with the flowers of rosebay willow-herb and knapweed.

3 On your left is a small wood, flanked by blackthorn scrub. The phrase "a blackthorn winter" is often used when its white blossoms appear during a cold snap. Wild hop vines climb through the bushes on the right. The gorse here was once an important source of fuel for the commoners and now provides valuable protection for nesting birds. Bracken grows alongside the bridleway and elsewhere on the common. In spring its unfurling "crosier" tips look very attractive. Bracken is an invasive plant which quickly stifles other plant growth. Every year FOSC volunteers cut it back along with gorse and bramble bushes to keep paths open and create glades amongst the trees.

The bridleway opens out into an area of rough grass where in summer you may see the small black chimney sweeper moth whose caterpillars feed on the flowers and seeds of pignut. Ahead is the Old School House.

Optional detour/Blue Walks: About 20 minutes

This route takes you past the school and up Valley Road to Studham's beautiful 13th Century Church, returning to West Common along pleasant footpaths. One route passes the traditional Bell PH dating back to the middle ages. (See routes on the map.) For the more energetic, footpaths beyond the church take you to Whipsnade and Dunstable Downs, with magnificent views across the Vale of Aylesbury.

Access Information

The Blue Walk has no gates, stiles or steps. The paths are earth or grass and some of the paths are narrow. There are no steep slopes. This walk is likely to be suitable for all terrain pushchairs during drier months.

4 70 metres before the Old School House, take the path on the left running up into the wood. At the top of the incline, follow the path along the edge of the wood. Most of the woodland here dates from after World War II. Near the path there are cherry and oak trees and some large hawthorns. On the left are some deep pits; their origin is uncertain but they may be "marl" pits, where people dug out chalk to improve heavy clay soils. Speckled wood butterflies often fly in the patches of sunlight.

1 The walk starts and ends at the War Memorial on West Common, close to the Red Lion PH. The open grass area here is for everyone's enjoyment at rest or play and where popular events like Studham's Annual May Fair and Bonfire Night take place.

Access Information

West Common has no gates, stiles or steps. The paths are earth or grass. There are some slopes. This area is likely to be suitable for users of pushchairs and mobility scooters, especially during summer.

The paths around Middle Common and East Common have no gates, stiles or steps, however there are four narrow wooden bridges (50cm wide). The paths are earth or grass. There are no steep slopes. Suitable for pushchairs if these can be carried over the bridges.

10 Cross over Byslips Road to Middle Common. Continue along the bottom path to return to the War Memorial, or take a detour up to the Jubilee Copse. Look out for rooks and green woodpeckers foraging for insects in the grass around here.

9 Turn left on this track to return to Middle Common. Dead trees like the one on your left provide a vital source of insect food for woodpeckers and other birds. The trees and thick scrub to the right cover pits where the commoners used to excavate for red gravel. The verges here are one of the best areas on the common for wild flowers and butterflies. The yellow bird's-foot trefoil is food for the caterpillars of the common blue butterfly. The caterpillars of the marbled white and various "brown" butterflies feed on the grasses here, while the adult butterflies drink the nectar of the bramble, knapweed and thistle flowers. In some years you may spot wild orchids. Here, as in other parts of the common, FOSC volunteers periodically clear small areas of scrub and thick grasses to create a variety of 'microclimates'. This is essential to encourage a wider diversity of wild flowers and insect life.

8 Follow the path round to the left, along the hedge that forms the county boundary between Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire. This mature and dense hedgerow is a haven for wildlife. It is one of the few sites in the county where the dormouse, a protected species, is found. Hazel in the hedge is an important food for them. Blackthorn is abundant here and provides beautiful white blossoms in spring and sloes in autumn. Bluebells grow in the shade of the large beech trees. Follow the path down the slope to the concrete track that runs along the bottom of the common.

dormouse

Optional detour/Green Walk: About 30 minutes.

Turn right into the neighbouring field and follow the path which leads towards the Sports Field on Clements End Road. Here you can watch cricket on summer weekends, before returning via Common Road and the Old School House (see route marked in green on the map)

Access Information

The Green Walk has two narrow kissing gates.

6 Half way along this path is a bench where you can rest and enjoy the fine views over the common and the open countryside beyond. This is also an ideal place to spot kestrels, sparrow-hawks and, if you are lucky, buzzards, red kites and the occasional hare. The common is at its best in early summer, with a succession of grasses and wild flowers, such as buttercup, sorrel, oxeye daisy, clovers and several types of yellow dandelion-like flowers. Mowing for hay is left until late in the season to ensure that seeds have set and ground-nesting birds such as skylarks have finished nesting.

7 Cross Byslips Road to regain the path on East Common. Continue beside the hedgerow which forms the southern boundary. Much of oldest hedgerow here has been lost over time and FOSC volunteers are gradually restoring it with new hedging plants and trees.

ox-eye daisy



skylark

5 The path now crosses the road to Middle Common. Continue straight ahead, along the southern boundary path, the highest point of the common. Looking to your left, near the road, you will see two beech copses planted in 1973 and further over, the Jubilee Copse, planted by villagers in 1977 to commemorate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. The young trees beside the path were planted by the Parish Tree Warden. In the autumn the brambles behind them provide a rich harvest of blackberries for people and wildlife.

