

2019 Late Summer Walk Sarratt, Chenies and the River Chess

This year our walks will explore more of Hertfordshire's beautiful countryside and diverse landscapes. The 2019 Late Summer Walk is a circular route of just over 5 miles, starting in Sarratt, which explores the peaceful valley of the River Chess (see below), partly in Three Rivers District in the south west of the county. A section of the route is in Buckinghamshire. The area covered is also within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



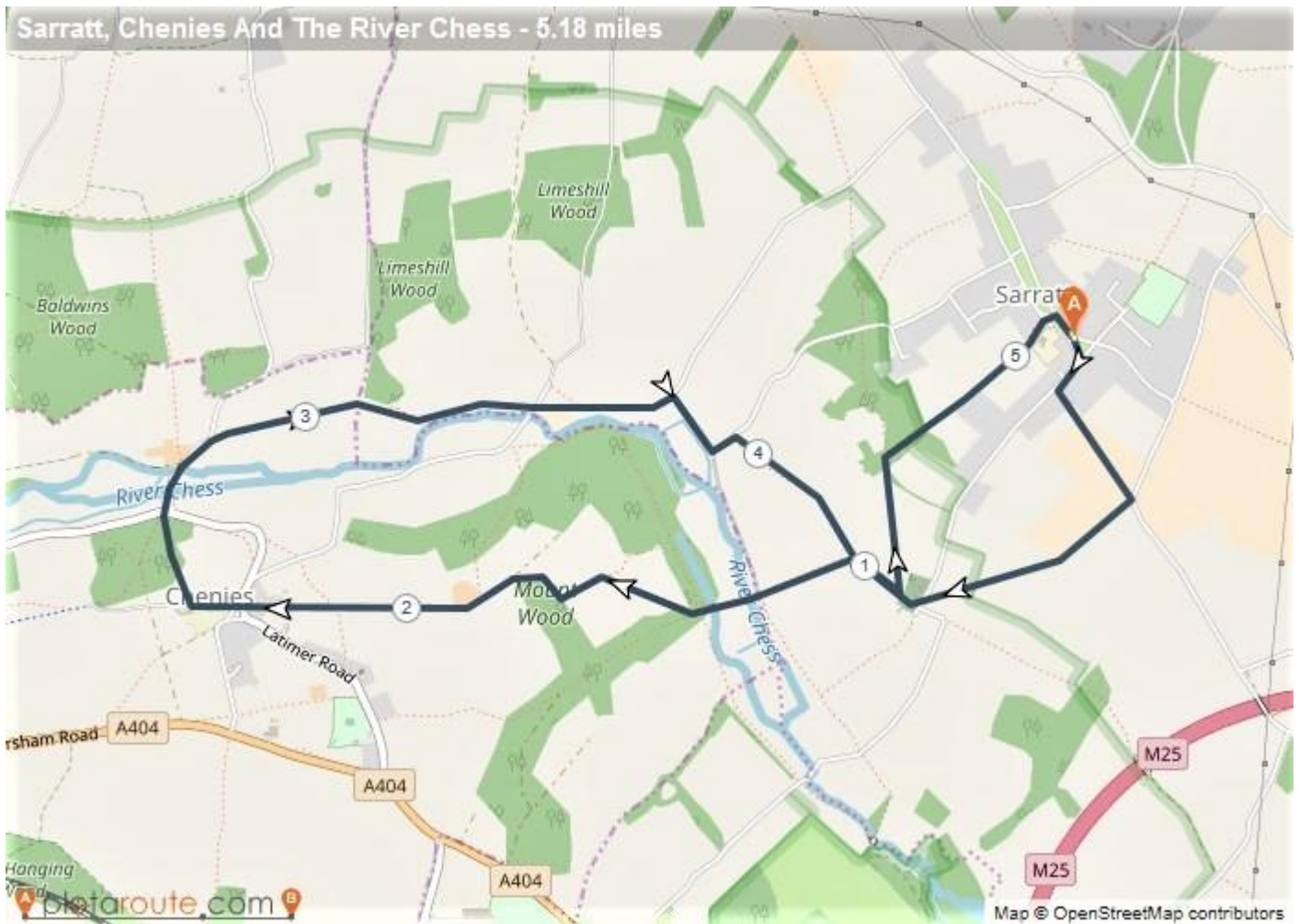
From Sarratt the walk passes through Church End before going down into the Chess valley. It crosses the river then heads uphill to reach Chenies, with its manor house and church, then drops down again to the river. From here the route is downstream along the Chess Valley Walk, passing through a nature reserve and alongside watercress beds. Finally there is a climb to return to Church End and Sarratt. As well as the two climbs there is a steep downhill section from Chenies which may be slippery in wet weather. There are pubs in Sarratt, Church End and Chenies, together with a village shop in Sarratt. A shorter route of just over 4 miles misses out Chenies.

Sarratt is located in a maze of narrow lanes just over 4 miles south of Hemel Hempstead and 3 miles north of Rickmansworth.

Use the postcode for Sarratt Village Hall: **WD3 6AS**

From the A41 turn off at the Hemel Hempstead junction onto the A414, then go left at the traffic lights onto the A4251. At the next traffic lights turn onto the B4505 (Box Lane) towards Bovington. Then follow signs for Chipperfield and Sarratt. From Rickmansworth take the A404 towards Little Chalfont and Amersham and follow signs for Sarratt.

Park near to point A on the map below, at the southern end of the green in Sarratt, close to the village hall and The Cricketers pub, where there is roadside parking.



North is at the top of the map.

To begin the walk: with the village hall on your right walk towards the far end of the green, past a grassy hollow which was once a pond, and turn right onto Church Lane. There is a signpost to '12th Century Church' (see photo right).



Walk a short distance along Church Lane then take the public footpath along a tarmac drive from the left hand side of the road leading to Adams Nurseries, signposted to 'Micklefield Green ¼'.

Where the tarmac drive turns right go straight ahead through the gate to the side of the metal field gate (see photo right) and follow the left hand side of the field ahead.



Then take the right hand fork in the path, heading across the field to the far boundary, aiming to the left of the solitary tree in the hedgerow.



Go through the gate at the far side of the field (see photo left), then turn immediately right to follow the path along the right hand side of the field (see photo right). The public footpath is signposted to Church End.





Where the hedge turns slightly left go through the gate to the right (see photo left).

Go diagonally across the next field towards the group of trees in the far corner (see photo right).



Continue on the path through the trees and go through the next gate. Turn sharp right, pass the remains of a stile and continue through the car park of the Cock Inn to the road. This is Church End. The original village of Sarratt (meaning a dry place) grew up near the church here, but from the 17th century cottagers migrated to the edges of the green in Sarratt (then called Sarratt Green) where they could exercise common grazing rights. The newer settlement is now far larger than Church End.

Turn left along the road past the front of the pub, then go into the churchyard of Holy Cross Church (see photo right).



Although not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, old Sarratt was an ancient settlement. The 12th century church was built in an unusual cruciform shape which was later extended. The 15th and 16th century tower contains Roman bricks, perhaps from a building discovered nearby, and has a 'saddleback' roof unique in the county.

Inside the church there are medieval wall-paintings, a Jacobean pulpit, with its canopy or tester, and other features of interest. Opposite the church is a row of almshouses, with a Victorian post box set into the wall (see photo right).



Follow the path through the churchyard around the church with the porch and tower to your right. Go through the kissing gate in the corner (see photo left) then turn left to follow the path along the hedge through the kissing gate ahead (see photo right).



The path leads to a gate with a double avenue of trees beyond (see photo left). Go through the gate then turn left to go downhill into the Chess valley on the public footpath signposted 'Chenies 1'. From here there are views across the valley (see photo right).





The path down the hill is steep, with a badger sett alongside. At the foot of the field go through the kissing gate (see photo left) and continue downhill through a small copse. Go through the next kissing gate (see photo right), then turn right onto the public footpath signposted 'Chenies ¾'.



Cross the river Chess on the footbridge (see photo above left) - you are now in Buckinghamshire. Continue over the floodplain to cross another small stream channel and footbridge. Go through the next gate (see photo above centre), then immediately turn right through another gate (see photo above right), bearing left on Public Footpath 15 signposted 'Chenies ½'. This leads uphill out of the wood and diagonally across the field beyond.

At the far side of the field turn left to walk alongside the hedge towards a wood, then follow the track as it goes around the end of the wood. Go through the gate and stay on the track, now with a field to the left and a hedge on the right.

Just before the farm buildings ahead there is a kissing gate on the right giving access to a public footpath (see photo right).

If you would like to follow the short-cut route take this path, which goes through the wood ahead and back down into the Chess valley. At the far edge of the wood turn right onto Holloway Lane and follow this to cross a footbridge over the river, rejoining the route described by the entrance to the watercress beds.

Note that this section has not been test-walked and walkers are recommended to carry an Ordnance Survey map with them.



To continue on the route described, keep straight ahead to pass to the left of the farm buildings, at the far side joining the farm drive with a row of trees to the left. Continue straight ahead on the drive into Chenies village. Cross over the road onto the small green ahead, by the village sign (see photo right).

Alternatively turn left and left again to visit either of the two pubs in the village.



Attractive cottages surround the green, where there is also an old pump.

When you are ready to resume your walk, cross the road on the far side of the green and go up the drive leading to Chenies Manor and the church (see photo right).



St Michael's Church and the manor house (see photo right) have for centuries occupied this site high above the river. The brick-built manor house dates from 1460, and from 1526 until 1954 was owned by the Russell family, later Dukes of Bedford: their mausoleum adjoins the church.



Chenies Manor and its renowned gardens are open to the public on Wednesdays and Thursdays from April to October from 2 to 5 pm, and at other times for events. We recommend visiting cheniesmanorhouse.co.uk for further information, as opening times may change.



Just before the gates to Chenies Manor, turn right onto the public footpath which runs between the manor and the church (see photo left). Then go straight down the hill through the wood (see photo right). The steep section of this path can be very slippery.



At the bottom of the path, cross the road and go onto the tarmac lane opposite, (Chenies Hill) which runs downhill towards the river. The first bridge crosses the millstream which supplied the adjacent Dodds Mill. The second bridge crosses the river Chess. Follow the road for a short distance. To the right is a view over the water meadows, which were once deliberately flooded to promote early spring grass growth (see photo right).



A short distance beyond the mill turn right onto the Chess Valley Walk. The Chess is a Chilterns chalk stream, which rises from springs flowing out of the underlying aquifer in and around Chesham, then flows to meet the River Colne at Rickmansworth, 11 miles away to the south east. The Chess Valley Walk follows the valley for 10 miles, accessible from railway stations in several places.

Follow the Walk as it heads downstream. Within half a mile you re-enter Hertfordshire and reach Frogmore Meadow (see photo right), a Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust reserve which protects a remnant of species-rich flood meadow: such habitats have declined drastically since 1945. Wildflowers thrive here, supporting insects, birds and other wildlife which have vanished from intensively-managed countryside.



To explore the reserve go through the gates by the reserve sign (see photo right) and leave by the same route.

There are numerous anthills here where green woodpeckers love to feed, while the river is a stronghold for water voles, now rare due to habitat loss and predation by mink, descendants of escapees from fur farms. The reserve's grassland is still managed in the traditional way, with cattle brought in to graze the 'aftermath' when the hay crop has been removed in early August.



The Chess Valley Walk continues through the gate in the corner of the field (see photo left) a short distance beyond and to the left of the reserve entrance. The path runs through a small woodland, then between fences alongside Frogmore Meadow to the right (see photo right).



The route continues along the Chess Valley Walk, on boardwalks in places (see photo left). A short distance further on the route passes the Crestyl watercress farm (see photo right), one of only three watercress beds still operating in Hertfordshire.



This once-widespread industry flourished in the wide valleys and nutrient-rich waters of the chalk streams. Sadly water supply and quality issues have plagued watercress production here recently and supplies are limited. Hot and dry weather, pollution and over-abstraction from the aquifer for the public water supply have all contributed to this situation. All of our precious chalk streams face similar problems.



The river here has the crystal-clear water and wide, shallow and stony bed typical of chalk streams (see photo left).

The short-cut route rejoins the main walk route here, after crossing a footbridge adjacent to the watercress farm (see photo right).



Continue on the Chess Valley Walk along the concrete road (see photo left) which runs alongside the watercress beds (on the other side of the hedge).

At the white-painted cottages (see photo right) turn right and walk along the road, staying on the Chess Valley Walk.



Continue on the road (Moor Lane) for just over 200 yards, then turn left at the road junction by the no-through-road sign to join the road (Dawes Lane) which goes uphill.



In a short distance, just beyond the houses, turn right onto the public footpath signposted 'Sarratt Church ½' (see photo right).

The path heads slightly uphill alongside a hedge on the right, to go through a gate in the hedge ahead, then goes diagonally up the field beyond towards a row of trees (see photo right).



From the field corner go uphill through the tree avenue (see photo left) to reach the gates encountered earlier in the walk (see photo right). Go through the gate and retrace your earlier steps through the next kissing gate to reach the corner of the churchyard.



Do not go into the churchyard; instead turn left and go through the kissing gate in the field (see photo left) heading for the wood beyond. Approaching the wood there is a last view of the Chess valley (see photo right).



Go through the gate at the far side of the field (see photo left), then through the gate opposite (see photo right) onto the public footpath signposted 'Sarratt Green ¼'.





The path emerges from the trees, then runs alongside a hedge with trees to return to Sarratt (see photo left).

Go between houses to return to the green (see photo right).



If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and celebrate the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone to enjoy. Our website www.cpreherts.org.uk contains more information about our work and how you can donate and perhaps volunteer.

This route was last walked by CPRE in August 2019.

Note: all walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended.

CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered charity no. 1162419, address: 31a Church Street, Welwyn, AL6 9LW, tel: 01438 717587.

We are the county branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.