



The countryside charity  
Hertfordshire

## Stanstead Abbots and the River Ash Valley



This is a circular walk of 5½ miles. For those not wanting to walk this far, a shorter return route is available. Stanstead Abbots is a village in the Lea Valley just over 2 miles downstream from Ware. This walk explores the higher land to the north of the village and also drops down into the valley of the river Ash, a tributary of the Lea. For much of the walk there are far-reaching views in all directions.

Distance: 5.5 miles / 8.9 km

Ascent: 318 feet / 97 metres

Duration: 2.5 hours

Difficulty: Easy to moderate - some hills

**Start / Finish:** The public car park to the north of the High Street in Stanstead Abbots, (what3words cracks.heads.dwell). Alternatively, start from the St Margarets railway station just two-tenths of a mile west of the public car park.

**Refreshments:** there are several pubs and cafes in Stanstead Abbots

Leave the car park and turn left (east) onto the High Street. (If you arrive by train, turn left out of the station onto Station Road and follow the road across the bridge over the river Lea to reach the High Street.)

Walk east along the High Street, admiring the Georgian and older buildings. Just past the Red Lion pub turn left onto Cappell Lane. Cross the road by the building with the clock tower: this is the Old Clock School, dating from around 1636, now a private house.

Walk along Cappell Lane, passing St Andrew's Church which dates from 1880 and was built close to the centre of the village when the original medieval parish church of St James, located one mile from the village, was thought to be too far away. Where the pavement immediately alongside the road ends (about 700 yards from the junction with the High Street and opposite house number 88) turn right onto Public Bridleway 17, signposted 'Wareside 2'. This is also the route of The Hertfordshire Way.



The path goes gently uphill. After a short distance keep going straight ahead into the edge of some woodland with a hedge on the left. Further on beyond the woodland there is a deep ditch on the right. Keep climbing steadily, keeping straight ahead as the path levels out.

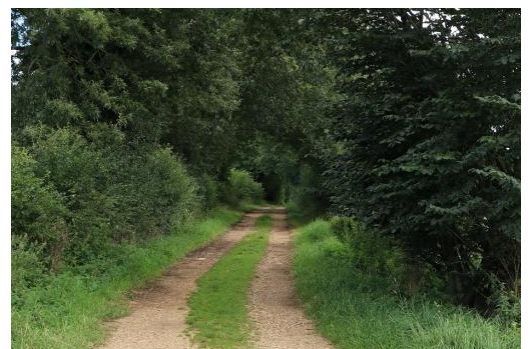
The route continues to climb very slightly on a wide grassy track between arable fields.

When you reach a crossroads of bridleways (where the Hertfordshire Way goes straight on), turn left onto public bridleway 18 marked 'Holly Cross Road  $\frac{3}{4}$ '. From here there are views to the left across to the wooded slopes of the far side of the Lea Valley and towards London.



From the next t-junction look left to see the chimneys of the Rye House power station in Hoddesdon which supplies most of Hertfordshire.

Turn right here onto public footpath 16 signposted 'Waterspace Farm  $\frac{3}{4}$ '. You are now walking between hedges and trees.



A little further on pass a red brick building on the left which is a lodge for the Easneye estate, then pass some cottages on the left before going into the estate woods. The track goes downhill through the woodland, crossing a stream. Soon ahead there is a view of the Ash valley.

The track goes over a cattle grid and between pasture fields to reach a ford across the river Ash by Watersplace Farm.



Cross the river by the footbridge, then almost immediately turn right: this is the trackbed of the former branch railway line to Buntingford, which opened in 1863 and closed to passengers in 1964.



Follow the old line, then just before the cottages on the right take the track which goes uphill to their right.

There is a view of the curve of the Easneye woods and a row of willow trees on the valley floor.



At the top of the hill keep on towards the woodland ahead, with views across the Ash valley to the left, staying on the route of the Hertfordshire Way clockwise direction with the wood to your left.



At the far corner of the wood you have a choice. If you prefer a shorter route (of 4½ miles) keep going straight ahead on the Herts Way clockwise direction which brings you directly back to Stanstead Abbots: after a mile you will rejoin the path you took uphill out of the village.

To keep on the longer route described here, turn left to keep the wood on your left. You are now on the Harcamlow Way, a figure-of-eight route linking Cambridge and Harlow, covering 141 miles and originally devised in the 1970s.

The next mile of the route runs to the right of the hedge, crossing the brow of the hill which at its highest point is just under 250 feet (76 metres) above sea level. There are views across arable land, woods and hedges.

Later the path runs alongside another wood where it takes a sudden left and right turn.



Where the path turns to the right to go round a pond, turn right onto the path which crosses a large arable field towards woodland in the distance.

To the left in your view there is a pink-walled house and farm silos.



On the far side of the field continue straight on, keeping the white-topped post to your left, with woodland to the left and a field to the right.

Beyond the end of the wood the path bends slightly to the right along a line of telegraph poles, and goes past a small pond towards another wood. The route turns onto a wide grassy track with the wood on the right and later a hedge on the right. From here views open up of the Lea Valley again as the path begins to go downhill.



The path turns slightly to the left and passes a small copse on the left, then occupies a grassy track between trees and a ditch or stream to the left and a low hedge on the right.

Ignore the turning to the right which is a wide grass track leading to red brick buildings. Instead go through the narrow gap at the left end of the hedge ahead.

Keep on ahead with the ditch/stream still to the left and a field to the right, bending gradually to the right.



Cross the footbridge ahead and turn right, staying to the left of a ditch bordered by a line of trees on its left bank.

Just before the red brick house turn left onto public footpath 6 signposted 'Stanstead Abbots ½'.



Follow the wide track beside telegraph poles over a slight rise in the land.

Then take the right-hand fork at the Y junction keeping on public footpath 6, still following the telegraph poles (although either path returns to Stanstead Abbots).

From here there are views in all directions.



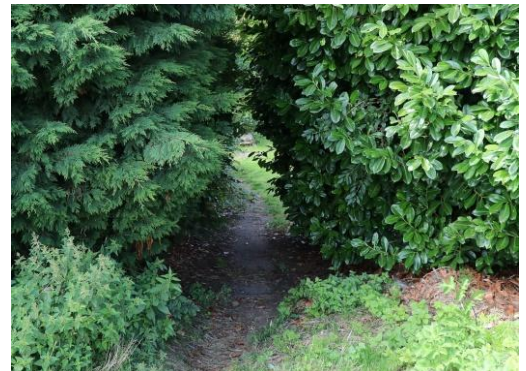
Continue downhill, perhaps pausing to enjoy the view of London's tall buildings which are 20 miles away.

Immediately ahead are the buildings in Stanstead Abbots occupied by Hertfordshire's last surviving maltsters, French and Jupps.



Eventually go through the gap in the hedge to emerge between houses.

Go down the steps, then left and immediately right to go downhill again to reach Cappell Lane, then turn left to retrace your steps to the High Street.



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This route last walked by CPRE in August 2024.

If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and promote the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone. For more information on our work, or to sign up for our newsletter, make a donation, or volunteer with us, please visit [www.cpreherts.org.uk](http://www.cpreherts.org.uk)

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

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