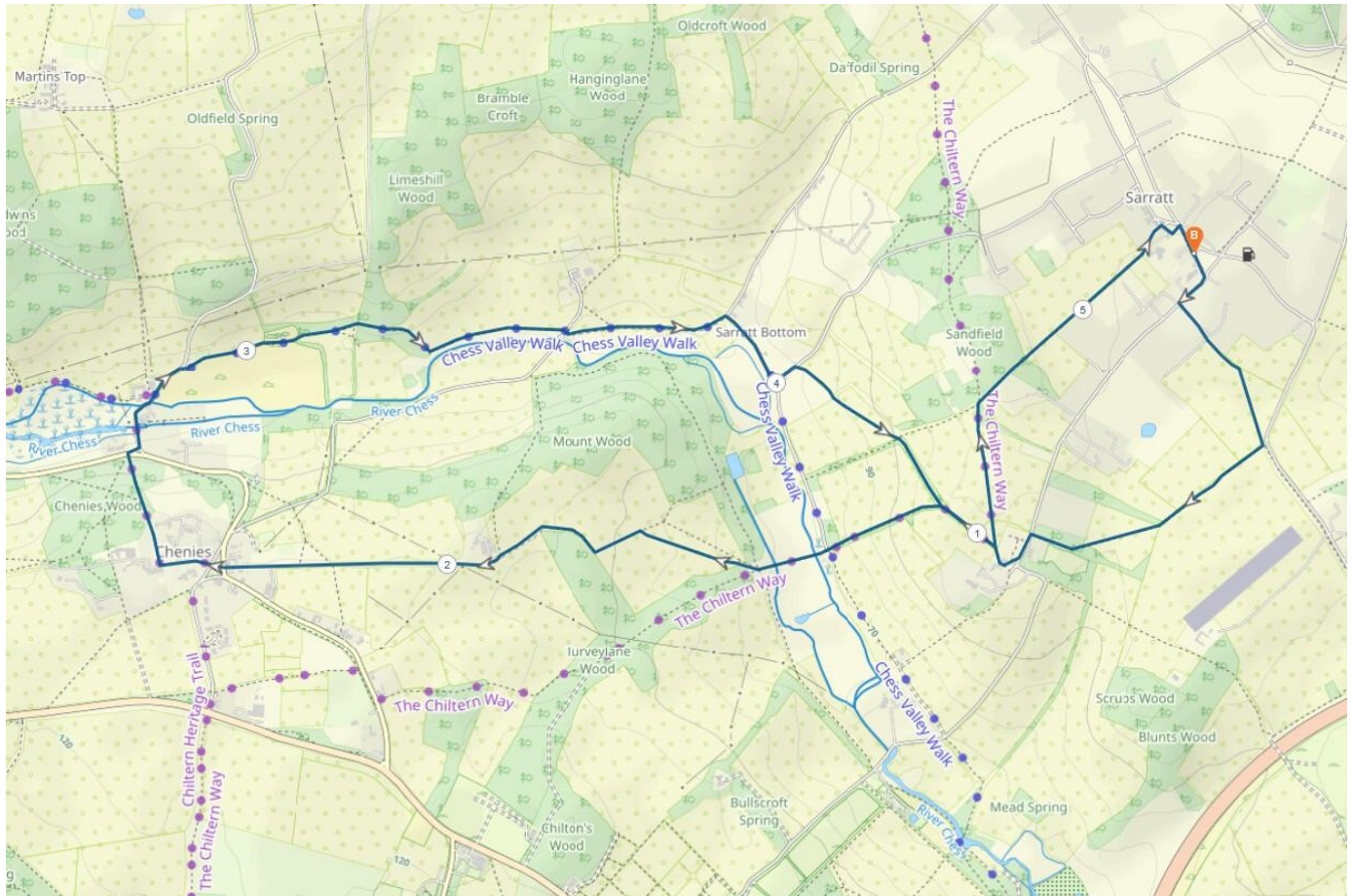




The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

Sarratt, Chenies and the River Chess



This 5 mile circular walk is almost entirely within the beautiful Chilterns National Landscape. The walk explores the peaceful valley of the River Chess, partly in Three Rivers District and partly in Buckinghamshire.

Distance: 5.3 miles / 8.5 km

Ascent: 465 feet / 142 metres

Duration: 3 hours

Difficulty: Moderate - several steep hills which can be slippery in wet conditions

Start / Finish: At Sarratt Village Hall at the southern end of the green at Sarratt, Three Rivers District. There is roadside parking all along the green.

Refreshments: The Cricketers, The Cock Inn and The Boot in Sarratt, and The Bedford Arms and The Lion in Chenies

With Sarratt village hall on your right, walk past a grassy hollow and turn right onto Church Lane.

Walk about 100 yards along Church Lane then turn left onto the public footpath along a tarmac drive signposted to 'Micklefield Green ¼'.

Where the tarmac drive turns right go straight ahead through the gate and follow the path along 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.

Go through the gate at the far side of the field, then immediately turn right onto the public footpath signposted to Church End.

Follow the path along the right hand side of the field with the hedgerow on your right.



Where the hedge turns slightly left follow the path through the gate to the right.

Go diagonally across the next field towards the group of trees in the far corner.

Continue on the path through the trees and a gate. Turn right 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.



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

Follow the path through the churchyard. Keep the church porch and tower to your right. Go through the gateway on the western side of the churchyard and then stay left to follow the path along the hedge. You are now on The Chiltern Way.

Keep the hedge on your left as you continue on through the kissing gate ahead.



Continue to a path junction with a double avenue of trees beyond. Turn left here - staying on The Chiltern Way - to immediately head downhill into the Chess Valley. There are wonderful views across the valley.

The path down the hill is steep. At the foot of the field go through the gate and continue downhill through a small copse. Go through the next gate on your left, then turn right onto the public footpath signposted 'Chenies ¾'.



Cross the river Chess on the footbridge - you are now in Buckinghamshire.

Continue over the floodplain to cross another small stream channel and footbridge.

Continue straight ahead through the next gate, then immediately turn right through another gate and follow the path uphill and diagonally across the field.



At the far side of the field turn left to walk alongside the hedge towards a wood. Follow the track as it goes around the end of the wood.

Go through the gate and stay on the track, passing to the left of the farm buildings. The path soon joins the farm drive.

Continue straight ahead on the drive into Chenies village. Cross over the road onto the small green ahead, by the village sign.



Cross the road on the far side of the green and go up the drive leading to Chenies Manor and the church.



St Michael's Church and the manor house 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 certain afternoons - see the [Chenies Manor website](#) for information on opening times and ticket prices.

Just before the gates to Chenies Manor, turn right onto the public footpath which runs between the manor and the church.

Then go straight down the hill through the wood, ignoring the path to the left. The steep section of this path can be very slippery.



At the bottom of the path, cross the road and continue on the tarmac lane opposite, crossing 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.



About 200 yards beyond the river, turn right onto the footpath, following 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.

Follow the Chess Valley Walk as it heads downstream.

Within half a mile you re-enter Hertfordshire and reach Frogmore Meadow Nature Reserve.



Frogmore Meadow is 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. 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 on a raised boardwalk and through the gate in the corner of the field.

The path then runs through a small woodland, and on between fences with a field on the left.



The route continues along the Chess Valley Walk, on more boardwalks in places.

Further on, the route passes the Crestyl watercress farm, sadly no longer operating. The river here has the crystal-clear water and wide, shallow and stony bed typical of chalk streams.



The once-widespread Hertfordshire watercress industry flourished in the wide valleys and nutrient-rich waters of the chalk streams. Water quality issues have plagued watercress production more recently. 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.

Continue on the Chess Valley Walk along the concrete road.

At the white-painted cottages turn right and continue along the road, staying on the Chess Valley Walk.



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

After 70 yards, just beyond the houses, turn right onto the public footpath signposted 'Sarratt Church ½'.

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.



From the field corner go uphill through the tree avenue to reach the path junction encountered earlier in the walk.

From here, retrace your earlier steps through the next gate to reach the corner of the churchyard.



Do not go into the churchyard; instead turn sharp left and go through the kissing gate in the field heading for the wood beyond.

Go through the gate at the far side of the field, then through the gate opposite 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.

Go between houses to return to the green.



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This route last walked by CPRE in February 2025.

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

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.