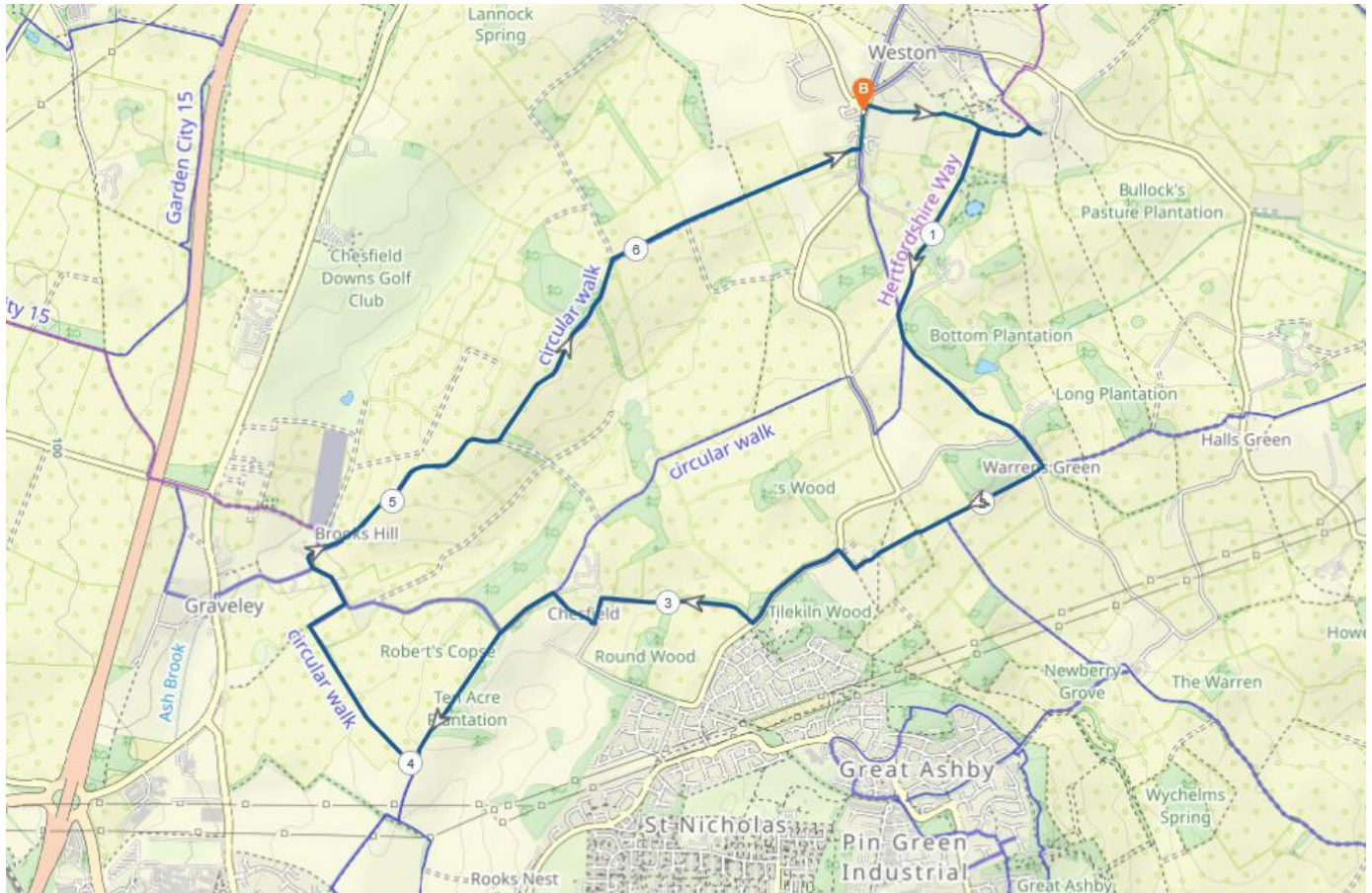




The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

Weston, Forster Country and Graveley



This 6.75 mile circular walk explores the lovely fields and woodlands northeast of Stevenage, including Forster Country. On a fine day there are long-range views all the way to the Chilterns, and in springtime there are masses of bluebells. In the southern portion of the route, what is now precious urban-fringe countryside will soon be irrevocably lost to mass-development north of Great Ashby, north of Stevenage and east of Graveley.

Distance: 6.75 miles / 10.9 km

Ascent: 300 feet / 92 metres

Duration: 3 hours

Difficulty: Easy - with some gentle hills

Start / Finish: Weston village in North Hertfordshire District. There is roadside parking along the main street - Damask Green Road.

Refreshments: the Waggon & Horses and the George & Dragon in Graveley, and the Cricketers in Weston

Start the walk at the small grassy triangle of land on the western side of Weston village. Walk north up the street about 40 yards, and turn right on the footpath signed for the church and Halls Green.

Follow the path past a rugby pitch and into a second field with a children's playground. Keep close to the hedge on the right and go through a gateway in the far right-hand corner. Keep straight ahead on this path to reach the churchyard.



If the church (Holy Trinity) is open you may wish to explore the interior with its intact four Norman arches of the crossing at the base of the tower, part of an early 12th century structure. The upper part of the tower and the brick chancel are Victorian. The nave beams rest on unusual carved heads, two of which are said to resemble King Henry IV and his Queen. Near the main gate to the churchyard is the 'grave' of the legendary local giant Jack O'Legs.

To resume the walk, leave the churchyard via the same wooden gate where you entered.

Note the roundel waymark of the Hertfordshire Way, with its white arrow on a green background. You will now be following the Hertfordshire Way as far as Graveley.



Follow the footpath about 150 yards to the second kissing gate on the left, then go straight across the field under the wires to the kissing gate on the far side on the edge of the wood.

Go straight on through the small wood, then through the next kissing gate to emerge into Weston Park.



Follow the line of the path between the trees.

Go through the wooden and metal kissing gate, just after passing a Wellingtonia tree to the left.

Then go straight across the drive and under the boughs of a large Horse Chestnut tree on the other side of the drive.



Go through the next kissing gate into another part of the park. Bear slightly left and head for the large decaying tree stump, then go alongside and slightly to the right of a row of lime trees.

Cross to the left of this row of trees to go through a kissing gate, then turn right along the drive.



Go through the gateway then turn left immediately to walk alongside the edge of the wood to the left.

At the next waymark post take the left-hand path going straight on, with the edge of the wood still to your left.



The edge of the wood turns away to the left: continue on the path straight ahead, eventually passing a very mature oak tree on the left and head for the kissing gate in the hedge ahead.

Go across the next small field to the metal kissing gate ahead to reach a road.



At the roadside go straight on ahead. Follow the road around the sharp right-hand bend.

After a short distance the road turns sharp left: keep straight on here, leaving the road to follow the public footpath number 27 and a Hertfordshire Way finger post.



Follow the footpath straight on ahead, initially with a wood and then a hedge to the right.

Continue straight on to reach the gravel drive at Tilekiln Farm.

Go straight on with the Dell Barn and a manège to the right. Turn right to continue to follow the drive, then turn left onto the road.



Follow the road for about 500 yards. Just past the section of road with woodland on both sides turn right onto the footpath signposted 'Public Footpath 10 Manor Farm ½'.

Keep going straight on this footpath with a hedge on the left and a young plantation on the right enclosed by a wire fence.

Keep on the path until you emerge onto a road.



This is the deserted village of Chesfield. In a field opposite and not accessible to the public, there are ruins of the church of St Etheldreda, once at the centre of the village. The church was built in the 14th century and last used in 1731. Today there are just farm buildings and a few houses here.

Turn left here and follow the road to its junction with another road.

Turn right and follow the road around a sharp bend to the left.



A little further on, where the road turns sharply to the right, go straight on, still following the Hertfordshire Way.

You now have a wood to the left and a large arable field to the right. Ahead the Lister Hospital in Stevenage is very visible and beyond there are views across Stevenage to the south west and over Hitchin to the west, with the scarp of the Chiltern Hills beyond.



Walk past the end of the wood to the left to reach a path junction - there is a signpost on the left (partly in the hedge) and a wide path to the right running through the field to the northwest.



You are now in Forster Country. The novelist E M Forster (1879-1970) spent 10 years of his childhood, from 1883, in the house called Rook's Nest which is close to here. The house in his novel 'Howards End' was based on Rook's Nest, which had once been owned by a Howard family and known as 'Howards'. The Hilton of the novel, written between 1908 and 1910, is Stevenage. Forster said in a radio broadcast in 1946, at the time when Stevenage was designated as a new town, 'I was brought up.....in a district which I still think is the loveliest in England'.

In a letter to The Times in 1960 a group of literary figures, including W H Auden, John Betjeman, Sir Arthur Bryant, Graham Greene and Vita Sackville-West, used the description 'Forster Country' when deploring the threat to use the area for an expansion of built-up Stevenage. The letter expressed the hope that 200 acres around Rook's Nest could be preserved, 'because it is the Forster Country of Howards End'.

If you want to see more of Forster Country, keep going straight ahead through the gap in the hedge. You will now be walking in what was the last remaining farmed land in the Stevenage Borough area. Go under the electricity lines, turn left at the hedge and follow the path around the corner of the hedge, under the second set of wires. From here you have a view towards the spire of St Nicholas church, the church of old Stevenage which has Norman origins, while Rook's Nest is on the hill to the left.

To continue on our route, retrace your steps to the signpost partly in the hedge.

Follow the wide path through the middle of the field as it heads over the hill to the northwest. This too is slated for mass-development.



The footpath begins to run downhill towards Graveley.

At the T-junction of footpaths by the signpost turn right, continuing to follow the route of the Hertfordshire Way.

Follow the path to the road, then turn left and walk into the village. Take care on this short stretch of road which can get quite busy. Turn right onto the short stretch of road leading to Graveley Church.



St Mary's is a Grade 1 listed building, dating from the 13th century, with older elements. Immediately to the west of the church are the 17th century buildings of Graveley Hall Farm.

With your back to the church, turn left and walk the short distance to where the Hertfordshire Way finger post points to the left.

Here this walk leaves the Hertfordshire Way and goes straight on along the bridleway between hedges, beginning a gentle climb.



You will soon begin to see far-reaching views back over Graveley to the Chiltern Hills in the distance.

The bridleway runs all the way to Weston, a distance of about two miles, much of it along the hill top and brow, from where the views continue.



Keep following the path, keeping to the left-hand route past the wooden seat under the wires on the top of the hill.

A little further on the route goes slightly downhill and bends to the right, with views ahead over fields, hedges and woodland.



The route then bends to the left, passing a small wood on the right.

Ahead the route runs along the edge of the brow of the hill, with oak trees to the right, and later on both sides of the path.

There are further views to the right over fields and woods.



The route runs to the right of another wood (How Wood), then beyond the wood there is a short section between fields. At the far end by several field gates, turn right at the waymark post.

There is now a broad path ahead running between fields, with Weston in the distance.



Keep going straight ahead, going through a kissing gate as you near Weston.

In the last field you will see the gap in the hedge ahead. Go through the gate into Rowan Close, then turn left at the road. You are now in Damask Green on the edge of Weston.

Continue 200 yards north along Damask Green Road to return to the grassy triangle at the start of the walk.



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This route last walked by CPRE in April 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.