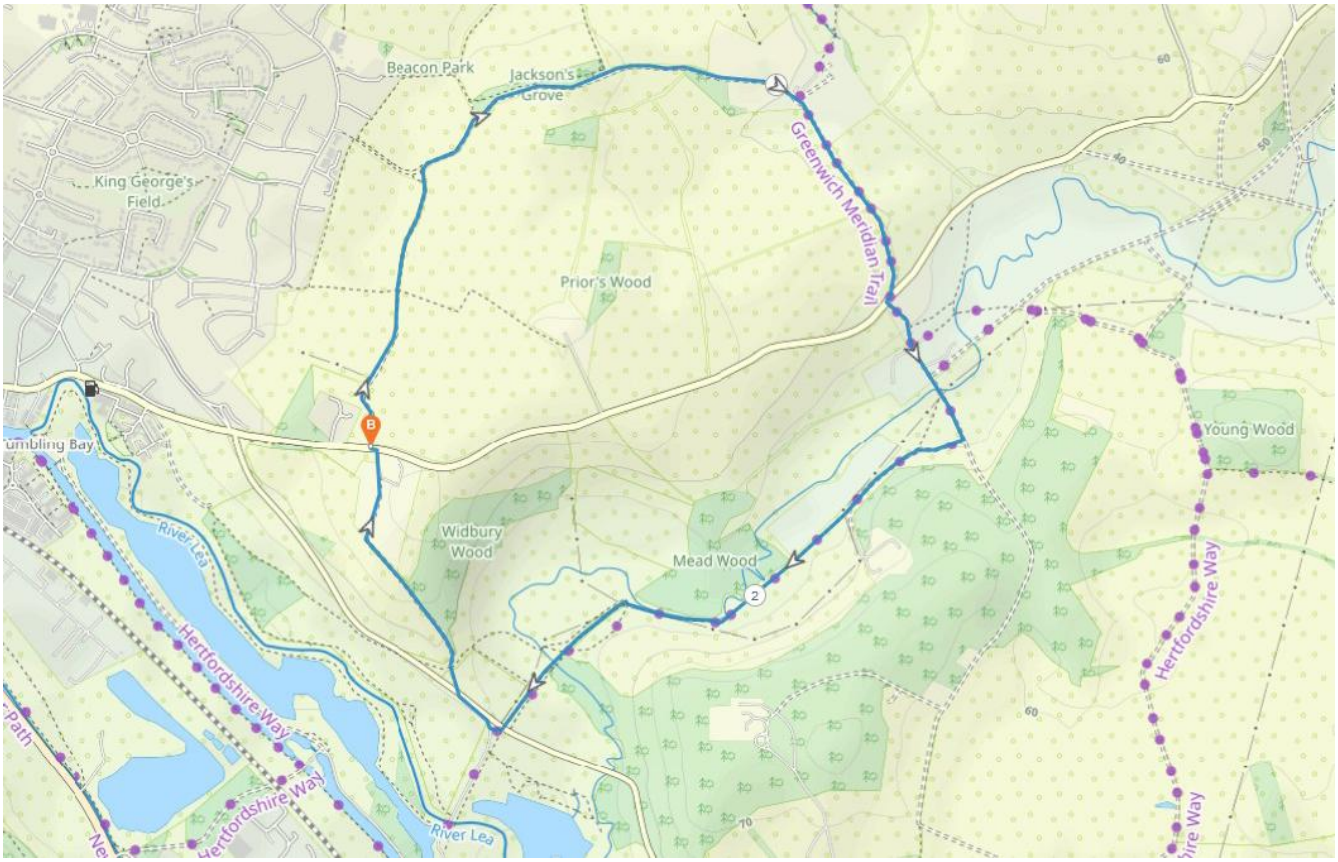
The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

Ware and the River Ash



This is a fantastic three mile circular walk with loads of variety and interest. If you want a longer walk you could also visit the nearby Amwell Nature Reserve on the River Lea.

Distance: 3 miles / 4.8 km

Ascent: 177 feet / 54 metres

Duration: 75 minutes

Difficulty: Easy, but there is one stile and the climb up Widbury Hill is steep

Start / finish: just east of Ware, at the speed limit signs on the B1004

Refreshments: several options in Ware

The name Ware is a corruption of weir, of which there are several on the Rivers Ash and Lea. There has been a settlement at Ware for over 5,000 years, with Mesolithic remains being found. It was a substantial Roman settlement and medieval Ware is mentioned in the Canterbury Tales. Ware went on to become a centre of the malting trade, hence the many malting mills in the town.

Arrive in Ware via car, bus or train. If driving, parking can be found on public roads on the eastern side of the town (e.g. Vicarage Road, opposite the petrol station on the B1004).

Walk east along the B1004 via the pavement on the southern side of the road, and follow the road out of town. Walk up the hill, cross Hollycross Road, and then continue up the hill using the permissive path on top of the embankment.

Pass the bus stop and just beyond the speed limit signs, cross the B1004 to take the signposted Public Bridleway 11. This is clearly defined and has an old orchard on the left and arable land on the right.



Carry on along the bridleway. The orchard ends and there are fields on either side. To the left you will see way-marked footpaths leading to the houses in Ware. Ignore those.



As you continue along the bridleway it will gradually bend to the right and lead you towards woodland. When you reach the wood, keep it to your left. You should now be heading east.

When you get towards the end of the wood, on your right-hand side you will see two large trees. The Greenwich Meridian runs between them. If you are minded to you can jump back and forth from one hemisphere to the other.



Continue in an easterly direction until you come to Newhole Farm and the farm track where you should bear right. (The photo shows the farm building when you look back the way you have just come.)



You are now on the Harcamlow Way which runs 141 miles between Harlow and Cambridge. Carry on in a southerly direction on the Harcamlow Way until it joins the road.

Cross the road carefully and, slightly to your right, you will see Public Footpath 35 signed Watersplace Farm. This will take you down through the farm to the ford on the River Ash.



Cross the river on the footbridge to the right-hand side of the ford and continue back up the valley side opposite.

The River Ash is one of only about 260 chalk rivers in the world (with almost 10% of them in Hertfordshire). These rare and unique river systems support many vulnerable species, but face challenges from human activities including pollution, over-abstraction and impacts of climate change. Recently, a seven-year project under the leadership of the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust has completed an award-winning restoration of 7 kilometres of the River Ash. The project included reintroducing meanders and wiggles, regrading the river bank, reconnecting the river to its floodplain, introducing woody debris features and more gravel. These measures will slow water flow and reduce flooding, as well as creating and enhancing wetland habitats. These will support native plants, herons, dragonflies, damselflies, amphibians and fish. (Editor's note: The restoration was completed in 2025, and the project won the UK River Prize at the River Restoration Centre's 2026 awards.)

200 metres on from the river, as you approach the woods, there is a driveway which goes off to the right, waymarked for The Hertfordshire Way. The Hertfordshire Way is a 195 mile long-distance footpath around the whole of the county.



Take this marked route. Follow the drive, passing the black timber clad house on your left.

The drive will swing sharply round to the left. Just before it does so, bear right to go through the metal kissing gate and continue on the marked path across the field.

Stay at the bottom of the slope and follow the fence line heading for the wood on your right. Go past the edge of the wood and you will find yourself following the course of the River Ash.



You will come to what looks like a bridge (but isn't; it is the old railway embankment).

To the side of it is an old stile leading to a straight path heading west. This is Amwell Walkway, a former railway line; the line was a victim of the Beeching cuts and closed to passengers in 1964. It is now a way-marked path.

Do not cross the stile, nor the embankment, but instead continue with the fence line on your right.



If you have the time, you can follow Amwell Walkway all the way to the Amwell Nature Reserve on the Lea. The old quarry is now a 37 hectare Site of Special Scientific Interest and is internationally important for wintering wildfowl, as well as being one of Britain's most important sites for dragonflies.

You have just re-crossed the Greenwich meridian.

In 200 metres go through a metal kissing gate to continue on the marked footpath. Continue along Amwell Walkway. It will cross the River Ash again on a wooden footbridge. Immediately after, bear right on The Hertfordshire Way marked path. Further on you will reach the point where the Walkway goes under the road.



Immediately after going under the bridge there are steps on your right leading up the embankment. These give on to a drive. Go to your right until you reach a pair of gates which open on to Hollycross Road.



Diagonally across the road from the gates is a gap in the hedgerow. This gives on to a clearly defined path which goes around the field.

This path swings to the right, but just before it does so, you will see a marked path / track which leads steeply northwest up the hill through a copse.



Follow the track with the copse on your right-hand side. The climb up the hill is rather steep. At the top of the slope you are on the summit of Widbury Hill.



The views from here are excellent, particularly to your left across the Lea Valley. According to the English Heritage national monuments records Widbury Hill contains the remains of an Iron Age fort, though there is little indication of that on the ground today.



Continue on the path over the summit. It will bend to the right and lead to a farm. Head through the farm to a stile; beyond the stile the track leads down to the B1004. Turn left and retrace your steps back in to Ware.

You have now completed the circular walk.



This route last walked by CPRE in February 2024.

All walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended, and a compass may be helpful.

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

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