

Waltham St Lawrence, Paley Street and Hawthorn Hill

A lovely, varied, long walk in the countryside with ancient tree highlights, mainly on good wide paths and tracks.

1. Park in The Street at Waltham Saint Lawrence and walk up past The Bell pub to the church and turn right. The beautiful churchyard has a selection of Yew, Sycamore and Holly trees. Continue along the lane looking for a footpath sign on the right-hand side. Take this path, crossing a driveway until you turn left to meet a lane. Turn right. continue along the lane passing some cottages with red painted woodwork and look for a stile for a footpath on your left immediately before the next houses. Cross into the field. Follow the path along the wall and through the mainly, sycamore trees. At the end of the field cross another easy stile and keep left along the left-hand edge of the field. Cross one more stile and continue into a short brickwork tunnel and walled path. At the end, emerge into Shottesbrook Park passing the church on your left-hand side. In the churchyard on the left is an ancient yew tree, first mentioned in 1854. It has a girth of over 6 metres and a walnut tree growing through the middle of it's hollow stump.
2. Exit onto the lane and continue straight on across the grass with the lake on your right-hand side. There are always birds on the water including Egyptian geese, Coot, Mallard and Moorhen and much more in differing seasons. At the lakeside, one of the ancient black poplar trees is almost 7 metres in girth with an oak of over 5 metres. There are other ancient specimens including sweet chestnut and lime in the surrounding landscape. Keep walking keeping the lonely old dead tree on your right-hand side. Reach and cross the stile. Continue on the path and if you're lucky in spring, you may see baby lambs in the field on your right. Follow the footpath around the edge of the cricket field until you reach the lane. turn right and first left into Walgrove Gardens. Follow the road as it angles left. As the road bends right look for the footpath sign and turn left onto the grass. Go through the gate and continue on the left hand path. This kinks left and right at the top of the field through another gate. Keep going until you meet the road. Cross the road carefully and turn left. As you walk down the hill, the path is diverted into St Mary's churchyard. Facing you is a huge ancient Sequoia tree chopped at the top to limit its height. If you go around to the back of the church in the corner, you will see an extremely old Yew Tree thought to be well over 500 years of age. Having looked at the tree go around the church and join the roadside path down the hill. At the road junction, take a footpath on your right through the trees. Pass through the gate on your right and walk along the edge, then middle of the field until you reach a lane. Expect to see many red kites and buzzards in the area. Turn left and immediately right. Continue on the lane through the fields. You should find skylarks and Meadow Pipits here most of the year. They'll be easiest to find when singing in spring and summer. On your left is White Waltham airfield so expect to see and hear some small aircraft activity. On reaching a garden and some trees, take the track on your right through the middle of the fields. The wide track passes into a hedgerow so keep going, ignoring a footpath sign to your right, and this track will take you up, over a bridge over the M3, and into Paley Street. Keep going, passing many lovely properties until you meet a main road.
3. Cross the road and turn left on the roadside path. in a few steps you will find a bench to rest on and a bridge over The Cut river, a Thames tributary. Continue on your walk turning right into Sheepcote Lane. Walk the entire length of this lane which contains a sharp left bend. Reach the main road and cross carefully to the footpath opposite. Follow the path around to the right until you meet a tarmac access track and you face metal gates with various warnings. Turn left onto the public bridleway. Keep going along this lovely tree lined track passing two huge concrete blocks. You reach some farm buildings and public footpath signs Take the one through the gate to your right. This path gently curves right and up to the treeline. At the Hedgerow go through the gate and turn left along the field edge continuing into the next field keeping on the same field edge. On reaching the track cross straight over and through the gate with the container on your right. The path follows the track to the next hedgerow and then the

path is slightly to the left of the fence across the next field. Through the next hedgerow with a double gate. The path goes straight across what is sometimes a ploughed field but usually a path has been marked out. There are two large trees quite close together to aim for and a footpath post if your eyesight is good. At the footpath sign turn right to the road.

4. At the road, turn left and make use of the grassy edge as traffic be fast and busy. After about 100 m, you will see a track on the right-hand side of the road so cross carefully and follow this. In good years, particularly in spring this path has a multitude of woodland flowers. At all times of the year it is a particularly pleasant sheltered path. The path widens and becomes a managed track passing Chawridge Bank, a BBOWT nature reserve. The reserve has Field Maples, Devil's-bit Scabious and Lesser Whitethroats in season. When you reach the T junction turn right.(Ashmore Lane). Keep going along the straight track until you reach Fernygrove Farm where there is a farm shop and popular café (not open Sunday and Monday). Continuing past the farm follow the track as it bends around to the left to the main road.

5. At the main road cross to the opposite side the bridleway on the right in front of the house. Follow this as it winds around close to the road and look for an exit to the right a permitted path and bridleway. Cross the road into Pendry's Lane. Continue past the wooden gate onto another lovely wide track. This has a golf course for company, through the hedge on the right, for part of the way. After a long walk The Cut appears in front of you so cross it via the wooden footbridge. Try stopping here just in case of a sighting of a kingfisher as the water is generally quite clear and there are a few perching spots nearby. After the bridge continue onto the lane in the same direction. When the lane bends to the left, keep right onto the footpath running alongside the garden of the big house. At the main road, cross carefully onto the track opposite. When you reach the metal gate with the concrete block turn right along the restricted Byway. At the multi track junction continue straight onto the path through the metal gate. Once past the buildings there are reasonable views of the lakes on the left which hold a number of interesting waterbirds in Winter. Before long you meet the M4 motorway. It's necessary to turn right here following the path before going up the long slope to the road.

6. Turn left across the bridge. Note that there will be no footpath now for about a quarter of a mile. Take care. You will pass a road sign for Beenhams Heath. Turn right into Smewins Road at the signpost for White Waltham. Just after the third electrical services pole on the left-hand side go through the metal gate onto a footpath. The route of the path is to the right-hand side of the field. Pass into the second field and continue on the right-hand side. Go through the next gate and cross the wooden bridge into the 'polo field'. The footpath crosses this field to a point roughly halfway along the left-hand side. Sometimes the field is marked up for use by horses or for a polo match. It's nice short grass easy for walking. Cross via the bridge and follow the footpath across the next field and along the tree line. The fields here held many Pied Wagtails when I crossed them in October. The path soon goes through a gate into another field and keeps along the left-hand edge to a path crossroads. Go straight across to the next path. Go through another gate and enter a field. The path is fairly obvious and may be muddy after a lot of rain. It soon reaches another wooden bridge and another two gates and vehicle tracks before it reaches the main road. Nearly home now.

7. Turn right here for about 100 m and then turn left into Hall's Lane. Opposite the first stile you crossed on this walk there are footpath signs so go through the gate and turn slightly left across the field towards the large area of woodland. Go through the gate and through another lovely woodland glade. Through another gate keeps you on the footpath and after another you turn right. After passing the allotments, you finally reach The Street where you parked your car. Now if it is open, The Bell pub may feel an enticing option.