# Woburn Abbey & the Greensands

*Bow Brickhill Station – Woburn – Potsgrove – Heath & Reach – Old Linslade – Leighton Buzzard*

| **Length:** 16 ½ miles (26.3km) | **Underfoot:** Mainly well made paths, sandy tracks and minor roads. A handful of early portions in the woods above Bow Brickhill can be slightly muddy. |
| **Terrain:** With one brief exception in Rushmere Park, this rolling walk consists of very gentle ascents and descents. | **Maps:** 1:50,000 Landranger 165 Aylesbury & Leighton Buzzard; 1:25,000 Explorer 192 Buckingham & Milton Keynes. |

**Getting there:** Bow Brickhill is situated on the secondary Marston Vale line, and requires a change to reach it from London. **There are no services on Sundays.**

Three trains an hour run from London Euston to Bletchley (37-49 mins), and one train an hour runs from Clapham Junction (76 mins) via West Brompton *for District Line* (68 mins) and Shepherd’s Bush *for Central Line* (62 mins). From Bletchley one train per hour runs to Bow Brickhill (7 mins). Marston Vale line trains normally connect well with the fastest trains from Euston, meaning the full journey can be done in around 57 mins.

**Getting home:** Leighton Buzzard is served by 3 trains an hour to London Euston (34 – 47mins) and 1 train an hour to Clapham Junction (70 mins) via Shepherd’s Bush *for Central Line* (58 mins) and West Brompton *for District Line* (62 mins).

**Fares:** The cheapest option is to purchase a day return to Bow Brickhill, which will cover all the journeys, for £20.00 (£10.00 child, £13.20 railcard).

**Useful websites:** Parts of the route follow the [Greensand Ridge Walk](#). The route passes [Woburn Abbey](#) and its deer park, through the nature reserves at [Sandhouse Lane Nature Reserve](#) and the recently-opened up [Rushmere Park](#).
Route description

- Alighting at Bow Brickhill’s little halt from the Bletchley direction, cross the level crossing to reach a mini-roundabout. Cross Station Road and continue ahead on the narrow verge of busy Brickhill Road. After 20 metres, head left at the footpath sign, along a fenced field-edge path towards the houses of Bow Brickhill.

- The path comes out on to the end of a cul-de-sac of modern houses. Walk straight ahead along the road to the far end, heading right in front of the row of bungalows. Follow the path which squeezes past the last bungalow. Emerging into a field, take the clear path straight ahead towards the low hills. The route becomes fenced and climbs gently, joining a small track by stables.

- Continue uphill and having quickly reached the edge of a wood turn left up a faint track climbing alongside the fence. Crossbills are a common sight and sound in these woods. At the top of the hill, the path swings left between fences. Keep straight ahead past a large white house and a golf course to join another path next to Bow Brickhill’s little church.

The parish church of All Saints dates on this site from the 12th century, though most of what you see is a 15th century re-modelling, and 18th century restoration. The well-known hymn tune Bow Brickhill was composed in honour of this idyllic little church by Sydney Nicholson, and was first performed here in 1923.

- Turn right, pass through a gate to reach a small road. Turn sharp left back downhill on the road, dropping between steep banks to a lay-by on the right. Take the waymarked path to the right up shallow steps. At the top, you veer right following occasional waymarks through the wood, passing close to a small white house. Just afterwards you swing left around the top of a small dip. This soon becomes a clear path through rhododendron bushes and then across brackeny heathlands.

- Eventually you arrive at a broad crossing path and turn right, heading slightly uphill. Ignore the first broad path to the left by the end of a golf fairway. By a second fairway, turn left at a waymark post. This path soon reaches a very broad sandy ride, where you turn right along it through the conifers.

- At a track junction by a lodge house and a car park continue straight ahead, now on a track between tall scots pines. Just after a brief drop, you reach a pair of yellow waymark posts. Turn right here on a clear path which begins a gradual descent through the young trees.
- At a path junction by a bench turn right, then veer left at a fork, along the edge of a more open area dominated by silver birch. At the next fork keep left below a small rise and at a T-junction almost at the edge of the wood, left again (Marked with ‘No horses or cycles’ sign). Keep close to the boundary fence and soon turn right through a waymarked metal kissing gate. Cross an open field to reach a minor road.

- Take the footpath just to the left, climbing through woods full of jays and the occasional black squirrel, and then out into fields. A clear waymarked path leads down to the derelict Horsemoor Farm.

- At the path junction next to the barn, follow the footpath markers ahead, veering right after a little concrete bridge up towards a stile in the hedgerow ahead. Cross the field of beets and pass through an archway cut in the next hedge. Here take the left hand path, following waymarks across four fields towards the church towers of Woburn.

- You emerge on the A5130 on the edge of Woburn, turning right, passing the row of 18th century almshouses to pass through the centre of the village.

*Woburn high street houses a fine collection of Georgian buildings, dating back to a rebuilding of the village after a fire in 1724. It grew in importance as a horse-changing location on the stagecoach network, with 27 inns and the first 24-hour post office outside London. The lack of a connection to the rail network led to a rapid decline in importance and population after the mid-19th century.*

- Cross the main road at the zebra crossing and head left on Park Street. Pass St Mary’s church and through the foot gate beside the lodge house and the lion-topped gates which mark the entrance to Woburn Park. Then leave the road, heading right on a signed footpath into the park, passing Upper Drakeloe Pond.

- Join a track past the attractive ensemble of cottages at Park Farm. Past a cattle grid, dogleg left then right to pass between the substantial estate farm buildings and a half-timber house with ha-ha. Follow the road as it swings right round the back of the buildings, past the Woburn Abbey ticket window (if you’re sticking to the public rights of way through the park, there is no need to buy a ticket) and the Horse Pond.
You are now in Woburn Abbey’s 3000 acre deer park, one of the largest such parks in Europe. At pretty much any time of year you are likely to see some of the nine species of deer that inhabit the park. Its most famous inhabitants are the Pere Davids deer, saved from extinction when the 11th Duke of Bedford brought the last surviving specimens from China in the 1880s.

- Where the road veers left, keep straight ahead on a track past a map signboard. The track climbs to water level at the Shoulder of Mutton pond, with Woburn Abbey appearing beyond it to the left. The track becomes fainter and comes alongside the park fence at the point where the Greensand Ridge Walk enters the park. If you want to visit the abbey, follow the path to the left.

- Continue ahead, bearing left away from the fence, following the yellow-topped posts across the grass. You follow the length of Basin Pond to arrive at a tarmac track next to ornamental Basin Bridge. Turn right up the track to climb through the park, eventually arriving at a fork. The right of way continues straight ahead between the two tracks, following a fence past half-timbered Paris House to reach a gate in the substantial, 7-mile long, park wall.

- Through the belt of trees, turn right on a path along the field edge. When this reaches the A4012, turn left uphill on the broad verge. At the hilltop, opposite the turn to Milton Bryan, cross and pass through the footgate beside a lodge house, leading onto a ridgetop treelined drive, giving vast views across rolling farmland towards the Chilterns.

This long drive leads eventually to the hamlet of Battlesden, specifically to the site of Battlesden House, a large nineteenth century house that was gradually demolished over the last few decades of the century. Only the ground floor remained at the time of World War 1, when it was used as a nursing home, before being demolished completely, leaving only a coach house and this drive.

- After a little over a kilometre, the drive passes through a gate, immediately after which you turn right (following a waymark) on a track descending into a small valley. The track crosses the valley floor and climbs straight back up again to the isolated hamlet of Potsgrove.

- Turn right on the little road past the chapel and the handful of houses, looking out for muntjacs grazing in the arable fields along the road. At a road junction turn left towards Heath & Reach, on another minor road leading across the open hilltop. It meanders down into a valley bottom, where just after a cattle grid, turn left on a footpath alongside Bushycommon Wood.
Where the wood ends, pass through a kissing gate into the next field, veering right on a track cutting diagonally across to the A5. This field is a reclaimed sandpit, hence the remaining random brick buildings. Cross the A5 – this is the old Roman Watling Street – with extreme care and take the tiny Sandhouse Lane opposite.

Where the road curves right, turn left through an unmarked metal kissing gate. Almost immediately you come to a information board with a map of the Sandhouse Lane Nature Reserve.

This nature reserve is a reclaimed sand pit, parts of which had been filled with waste from an asphalt plant. The scrubby woodland and lichen heathland provides valuable habitats for birdlife, reptiles and orchids. This is one of a series of reserves in the former sand pits of the greensand region around Heath & Reach, managed by the Greensand Trust.

Take the left hand path across the lichen heathlands, looping around the partially flooded pit. At a signpost continue towards Heath & Reach. When you glimpse another information board to your left, take the path across to it. Pass through the kissing gate to join a fenced permissive path. This runs down the side of the reserve then turns to follow a busy road, climbs to a barn where it turns to follow a more minor road.

Where the fenced path ends, continue to follow the permissive path waymarks along the field edge, then at a gate turn right on a footpath across a field to a road junction, where there is an information board on the history of the Overend Green area.

Take the lane straight ahead. After 20 metres, turn left through a kissing gate, and then immediately right on a fenced path paralleling the road downhill. The path eventually rejoins the road, just before entering the village of Heath & Reach.

At the road junction, turn left on a dead end road next to The Cock inn. Pass through the chicane blocking the road to traffic and past the back of houses. At the first opportunity, turn right on unsurfaced Thomas Street and at the end turn left on busy Woburn Road.

Cross with care and take the first right – Linslade Road – then right again on dead end Thrift Road.
At the end of the road, pass the gate and take the path to the left of the Royal British Legion hall, leading into the woods. Keep straight ahead through a kissing gate into Rushmere Park, recently opened up with an extensive network of permissive paths. Ignore the paths to your left and right and follow waymark posts through the silver birches.

Just after the path begins to drop sharply, take the permissive path signed to the left. This wanders through the woods above a deep valley, and after crossing a cycle trail you come to a signed junction. Take the left hand path here (following the white waymark) to soon reach another junction. Here turn right steeply downhill on a bed of pine needles. Cross the valley floor to reach a small road.

Turn left along the road, keeping straight ahead at the next junction. Where the road is blocked by a chain fence, veer right to join a path down to the road. Turn left, and almost immediately come to a crossroads with a large pair of lodgehouses.

Turn right, then almost immediately veer left on the Greensand Way Trail (following the muntjac sign!), which runs just above the road. At the end of the wood, leave the Trail and continue in the field beside the road. Ignore the first gate out onto the road and at the bottom of the field keep straight ahead on an earth path to join the road just before a bridge.

Turn left on the road – with caution as it can be busy – across two bridges crossing arms of the River Ouzel and then over a humpback bridge across the Grand Union Canal. Just past a white house turn left, taking the left hand of two roads towards the church. Turn right through a gate into the churchyard and climb towards the church.

The church of St Mary the Virgin is the parish church of Old Linslade, a village of which little now exists. Linslade is now a large modern settlement around a mile to the south, around Leighton Buzzard station. The church on this site was originally a pilgrimage location, based on a now-lost holy well with supposed healing powers. In 1299, the Bishop of Lincoln banned pilgrimages to the well, on threat of excommunication.

In front of the church, turn right through the ornamental gate, left through a rusty metal footgate out of the churchyard. Immediately, turn right then left to join a narrow waymarked fenced path. This drops and runs alongside the canal.

At a path junction below the brick railway embankment, keep left beside the canal to a bridge just ahead, where you cross the canal and turn right along the towpath, past the canal-side Globe Inn.
This is part of the Grand Union Main Line, a 137-mile amalgamation of waterways that links London with Birmingham, married together in the 1920s, demonstrating the importance that it retained as a commercial route well into the railway age. The corridor used by the canal up the Ouzel valley was subsequently used by Robert Stephenson to build the first London – Birmingham railway, now the West Coast Mainline to the northwest.

- The canal swings around a meander through the water meadows, passes Leighton Lock and then continues for a further kilometre – splitting Leighton Buzzard from Linslade – to reach a road over-bridge, where you leave the towpath and turn right to cross the canal. To visit Leighton Buzzard’s historic town centre turn left.

- At the roundabout keep straight ahead, and where the road forks use the pedestrian crossing to take the left-hand road (Old Road). At the first cross roads keep left, still on Old Road and then at a mini-roundabout turn left on Station Road to reach Leighton Buzzard station.