

The Alban Circle – a country walk around the town.

Revised May 2011

Introduction

This nineteen-kilometre (12 mile) walk encircles St Albans. The route passes through woods, fields, sports grounds, parks and along the banks of the River Ver. There are views of the Abbey, Roman remains and other historic features of the city.

There are several options for starting points with parking, and pubs or cafés for lunch. Footpath numbers are stated where they appear on the green signposts.

This walk is ideally suited to public transport. St Albans City Station is only about 1 km from points 10 and 11 on the map. St Albans Abbey Station is close to point 12. Radial bus routes from either the City Station or the centre of town give access at several points and offer escape routes if the full circuit is too much (details below).

It was first published in the Spring 2010 edition of the Ramblers' Stile magazine and has proved to be very popular. It has been updated to incorporate feedback from walkers, other changes which have taken place since the description was first written and some recent changes to bus routes.

A separate article on places of interest along the route is also available

The Walk

(1) Start at the Village Hall free car park with toilets, High Street, **Sandridge**, AL4 9DD, TL169104.

Cross the High Street and walk north 250 metres. Turn R up Church End and into **St Leonard's** churchyard, passing R of the church. Shortly after leaving the churchyard there are two diverging tarmac paths. Take the left hand path (FP22) between houses. Follow tarmac path W and slightly S between houses and greens for 400m to the junction of Langley Grove and **Woodcock Hill**.

Turn L and follow Woodcock Hill E for 200m to the edge of the village. Take FP 31 along the high grass bank on the RHS of the road up towards the **radio mast**. Turn R on FP20 behind two houses before the radio station fence **(2)**.

Follow the field edge for 200m, and then turn R between fields on FP 25. Turn left on byway 2 just before **Nashe's Farm**. Cross a local road, bridleway 10 continues in the same direction. *There are long rural views to the east and south and Jersey Farm estate is visible to your right.*

At a hedge line the bridleway bears slightly L then sharp R round **Oak Farm (3)**. Turn sharp R through the farmyard gate, then almost immediately L (SW) along FP 49 which passes through two gates between barns and into a field. Cross the field diagonally to your right (SW) for about 100m. You will eventually see a stile in the hedge behind a house. Cross this stile with care (the fence either side is electrified) and follow the next field edge for 50m SW with the hedge on your left. The path line continues straight across the open field but is not always reinstated. After 300m downhill pass through the hedge gap onto **House Lane** near bus-stops **(4)**.

Cross House Lane and turn L towards a roundabout on Sandpit Lane. Cross this Lane near the roundabout, go R a few metres to North Drive, an entrance to **Oaklands College**. Go S on this bridleway between fields, pass the equestrian centre and animal pens. There is a toilet on the R. After another 100m you reach the centre of the College where three drives meet and the student **café** (with more toilets) is visible W across the car park **(5)**.

Continue straight along South Drive to the main **Hatfield Road (6)**. Cross and go L, turning R into Colney Heath Lane, then R into Hill End Lane. Immediately after crossing the Alban Way take next L Hixberry Lane. After 150m turn R into **Highfield Park (7)**. *This has been developed from the grounds of Hill End hospital and has many specimen trees and art installations.* Follow the main path 400m until you see the bulk of a sports centre in front of you. Then angle half-left across the grass of this Village Green towards a gap in the hedge. Pass through this gap and cross the sports field diagonally to a gate in the left hand corner.

Turn L on **Highfield Lane (8)** for 200m. Take L turn, the continuation of Highfield Lane ignoring Highfield Park Drive which bears away R. After a short row of houses cross road into Winchfield Wood (not Winchmore Wood as stated on the map), and follow the winding path. After emerging from the tall trees of this wood turn L along a tarmac path leading SW and eventually joining Highfield Park Drive at a roundabout. Continue on the foot and cycle path along LHS of Highfield Park Drive to reach a second roundabout at the junction with London Road (9).

Go R on London Road and cross at lights. Continue R along London Road and opposite fire station turn L into leafy Herons Way footpath between houses. After 150m turn R on **New House Park**, then after 500m L on **Mile House Lane**. Continue under brick railway arch (*careful - no footpath*). After 50m turn R onto FP 60 across golf course. *This is the home course of Sam Ryder, St Albans seed merchant, and founder of golf's Ryder Cup.*

After the clubhouse, the path narrows between fences then under a small brick railway arch. Through the arch, turn sharp L up the steps onto the **Alban Way (10)** – Turn R along the Alban Way. *On either side there are former water cress beds which are now nature reserves.* Immediately after crossing high bridge over the River Ver, turn R down steps to river. Follow path upstream with the Ver on your R *past allotments and ruins of Sapwell nunnery.* At **Cottonmill Lane (11)** cross the river Ver then continue upstream along the path on the north bank of the river with the old swimming pool on your R. Follow this path through woods, crossing the river via a footbridge, and reaching **Holywell Hill (12)**.

Cross this road into **Verulamium Park** keeping the river on your right and continue upstream along the river bank. Westminster Lodge Swimming Pool becomes visible through the trees on your left. After following the river bank for 500m climb steps to the Causeway and cross the Ver for possible lunch at the **historic Fighting Cocks** pub. *The Abbey is five minutes walk up the hill.* After recrossing the Ver continue upstream NW between river and lake to **St Michaels Village (13)**. *There are four pubs and a waffle house making this an alternative lunch stop.* Leaving the park turn R to cross river. *On the left are the historic Kingsbury manor and the restored mill. Ahead is Fishpool Street, one of St Albans most attractive street scenes.* Turn L up **Branch Road**. *Look left to restored Kingsbury Barn dated 1374.* Cross Verulam Road at nearby zebra, then go L as far as **Oysterfields**. Enter Downedge green space and cross it corner-to-corner.

Cross **Batchwood Drive (14)** and follow tarmac drive uphill (Bridleway 2) past golf course. (*Views back to the Abbey*). After 500m turn L off tarmac up ancient sunken Bridleway 2 towards Childwick Green. Continue on field edge (*view L to Gorhambury House across Ver valley.*) Go to far corner of golf course by large log seat. Here turn R off bridleway towards **Batch Wood (15)** along field edge path with hedge on R.

As you approach Batch Wood along the field edge path you will see three paths. The RH path runs along the edge of the wood beside the golf course. The LH path continues around the field edge. Take the middle path which enters the wood in a NE direction and continues in that direction through the wood. Follow this path in more or less a straight line, ignoring paths to right and left, down then uphill for 500m, emerging onto public playing field. Cross field to far left hand corner N and join tree-lined Bridleway 1 between fences. Go through a gate into pick-your-own Hawkswick Farm to **Harpenden Road (16)**. Cross main road and follow tarmac farm road for 500m. At Cheapside Farm turn L between barns, then bear R across field to rail bridge.

Just after the rail bridge turn L through a gap in the hedge into the **Heartwood Forest (17)**. *This 350-hectare space is being planted with 600,000 trees by the Woodland Trust to become England's largest new native woodland. The whole area is accessible except remaining farmed fields and new tree-planting.* Once through this gap turn right and go through a metal kissing gate into a newly planted area. Langley Wood is on the

horizon across the field in front of you. Turn left and follow a wide new track leading away from the bridleway between newly planted trees. Continue for 400m to where three hedgerows meet. *Note Woodland Trust 2010 planting of oak, cherry, ash and other native trees.* Turn right and follow the track with the hedge on your left for 400m to the corner of Langley Wood. Turn left through the hedge gap and follow the N edge of the wood for about 100m, then turn right on a narrow path into the wood.

After 10m, turn right on the clear main path. *You are among hornbeams and other trees which have been grown and coppiced here since at least 1600.* Follow the path which curves left and goes gently downhill with the edge of the wood on your right. At the bottom turn right out of the trees and cross 80m of grass to a kissing gate. Turn left and follow bridleway 9 down to Sandridgebury Lane. Cross the lane and follow footpath 33 through kissing gates across fields to the Sandridge Village Hall car park (1)

Alternatives

You can park either at Westminster Lodge (8) or at the Roman Museum in St Michaels near (13) (both with a charge) and lunch in Sandridge where there is a choice of pubs and a shop.

At point (5) you can walk the whole length of Hixberry Lane for refreshment at the Plough, Tyttenhanger, then continue to Winchmore Wood through the village.

The principal bus routes passing the points referenced in the walk description are:

Map point	Location	Bus routes
1	Sandridge Village	304, 620
4	House Lane/Sandpit Lane	S3
6	Hatfield Road/Oaklands College	300, 301, 304, 602, 620, 724
7	Hill End Lane	655
8	Highfield Lane	304
9	London Road/Fire Station	84, 602, 658, 659
11	Cottonmill Lane	S4
12	Holywell Hill/Abbey Station	S4, S5, S8, S9, 321, 621, 655, 724
13	St Michaels Street	300
14	Batchwood Drive/Verulam Rd	34, 301
16	Harpenden Road	321

The latest bus and train information can be found at www.intalink.org.uk

Acknowledgements

Walk designed by Peter Osborne 2008-9. Peter thanks the Friends of the Hertfordshire Way who trialled it with him, Herts Ramblers who refined the description and Chris Beney who created the map.

Peter Osborne