



THE Ickniel Way TRAIL

The Chalk Grassland

For most of its length the Ickniel Way runs over chalk. The route passes through, and close to many National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Although few unaltered chalk grassland sites now exist they remain one of the most precious elements in the English countryside. The 20th century saw the addition of fertilisers the end of grazing and the ploughing up of grasslands all of which has greatly reduced the number of sites. Often all that remains of the original grassland amongst the intensively farmed arable fields are the verges of the green lanes of the Ickniel Way.

Typical chalk loving plants to be found along the way include the nationally rare pasque flower and ground pine, the more common kidney vetch and clustered bellflower and a wide range of orchids.

It is probably the butterflies which provide the greatest visual attraction for naturalists. Suitably managed chalk grassland may support many species and very large populations of these beautiful creatures. Look out for Brimstones, Orange Tips and the rarer Chalkhill Blues.



We hope you enjoy the Trail. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding the route, please contact the appropriate County Council.

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A 170 mile route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders

THE Ickniel Way TRAIL



BEDFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, ESSEX, HERTFORDSHIRE & SUFFOLK



Crossing six counties, the Ickniel Way Trail is a 170 mile (274 km) route linking the Ridgeway National Trail in Buckinghamshire with The Peddars Way National Trail on the Suffolk/Norfolk border.

A regional route for walkers since 1992, is also available for horse riders and cyclists providing a walking and riding link between the two National Trails.

The Trail passes along an ancient chalk ridge but there is a variety of landscapes to view including flat fenland and rolling chalk downland, as well as picturesque villages and ancient beech woodland.

The southern part of the Ickniel Way Trail passes through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

History

The Ickniel Way is probably the oldest road in Britain. Historically a series of routes across the landscape, the Trail is part of an ancient trading route that followed the chalk ridge across southern England, from the Norfolk Coast across East Anglia, to the plains of Wiltshire and on to the coast in Dorset. Today you can make this journey by following four recreational routes – The Peddars Way National Trail, The Ickniel Way Trail, the Ridgeway National Trail and the Wessex Ridgeway.

Archaeology

The Ickniel Way is a complex treasure trove of archaeological remains, waiting to be explored. The relics and sites of man's occupation span several thousands of years, beginning from the earliest Neolithic times (4000 - 2000 BC), and running through the Roman and Saxon periods.

Amongst the most common features of the Ickniel Way are the barrows or burial mounds dating from the Bronze Age (2000 - 700 BC) and earlier. Good examples are the Five Knolls burial mounds at Dunstable and those at Telegraph Hill in Hertfordshire.

Crossing the Ickniel Way at right-angles are long dykes, or bank and ditch earthworks, which may have once separated the path into territories. The longest and most easterly of these is the Devil's Ditch near Newmarket.



THE Icknield Way TRAIL

In Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, the route runs through the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

In **Buckinghamshire** the Trail links with the Swans Way and the Ridgeway National Trail. The route passes Chequers, the country residence of the Prime Minister.

In **Bedfordshire** the chalk grasslands and woodlands found along the Trail are home to many special plants and animals. The Dunstable Downs and Sundon Hills give excellent views across several counties.

In **Hertfordshire** the Trail passes through Letchworth, Britain's first garden city. Ebenezer Howard the originator took the advantages of both town and country and sought to blend them in a new style settlement.

The Icknield Way crosses back and forth across the **Cambridgeshire** border. The intense arable use of

the land now makes a livestock farm an unusual enterprise but there is a herd of wild boar near Balsham – kept well confined behind strong fences to ensure that your encounter with them will be on an imaginative menu rather than face to face!

In **Essex** the Trail runs through the isolated villages of Chrishall, Elmdon and Strethall. Although these were traditionally agricultural communities, by the 17th century many of the villagers worked in the new textile industry centred on Saffron Walden.

In **Suffolk** the route passes through the picturesque villages of Gazeley, Dalham and Moulton and there are wonderful views over the Breckland with its unique landscape of large sandy fields separated by windbreaks of gnarled Scots Pines.

The route ends in Suffolk where you can join The Peddars Way National Trail northwards to the North Norfolk Coast path or link to the west with the Hereward Way, which runs from Rutland Water through Ely and Brandon. To the east lies the Angles Way – the Broads to Brecks path which begins at Great Yarmouth and runs along the Waveney/Little Ouse valley.



As there are numerous villages and towns of various sizes along the route, many different types of accommodation are available, some of which provide facilities specifically catering for the needs of horse-riders and cyclists.