

# Walk the HOOP

Hitchin Outer Orbital Path



North Herts Ramblers Association

## Distances and Accessibility

The HOOP follows public rights of way, countryside paths and some pavements to form a 12 mile (19.3km) route around Hitchin town centre and surrounding countryside. The route can be broken down into stages using local roads to make walking the HOOP much easier. There are also bus stops available along most main roads taking you to/from the town centre.

**Section 1** – Hitchin Town Centre (market place) to Ickleford Church – 4.5 miles (7.2km)

**Section 2** – Ickleford Church to Cambridge Road (Hitchin Garden Centre) – 3 miles (4.9km)

**Section 3** – Cambridge Road (Hitchin Garden Centre) to Wymondley Road – 2.5 miles (4km)

**Section 4** – Wymondley Road to Hitchin Town Centre (market place) – 2 miles (3.2km)

Follow the 'HOOP' logo along the route.



## North Herts Ramblers Association

We are the local North Hertfordshire group of the Ramblers' Association a national charity. We cater for walkers of all ages and all levels of ability. We have a varied programme of weekly walks in this area, plus social events and holidays in the UK and overseas. Walking is a healthy way to enjoy our beautiful countryside and to meet new like-minded people.

For a more detailed route description of the HOOP visit our website – see link on back page.



The Hitchin Outer Orbital Path – HOOP allows you to explore the history of Hitchin and surrounding villages, travelling through beautiful Hertfordshire countryside and encompassing a wide range of wildlife habitats. The route is approximately 12 miles (19.3 km) and can be walked in several stages with bus connections on local roads to Hitchin Town Centre.



Hitchin Old Market

Since Saxon times food markets have been held in the historic **Old Market Square (A)**, and continue today; while the Arcade was originally the entrance for horse drawn coaches to the stables sited here. The Physic Garden and the Museum tell more of the local history and are worth a separate visit.

**Oughtonhead Common (B)**, as the name suggests, is where the clear waters of the River Oughton rise from the chalk which forms the Chiltern Hills to the west. Sensitive management helps the river support a good variety of wildlife.



Speckled Wood butterfly



Oughtonhead Common was originally a medieval "cow common" where Hitchin "commoners" grazed their cattle. The land is prone to flooding and is of little use for agriculture or development. It is now a wetland Local Nature Reserve, owned by North Herts District Council and is grazed by native Longhorn cattle.

**Cadwell Farm (C)** is home to the well known 'Hitchin Lavender'. Lavender growing was at its height in the nineteenth century when a hundred acres were grown around the town of Hitchin, becoming renowned nationally. After centuries of being grown in the area lavender eventually stopped being farmed in the 1960's, beginning again in 2000 at Cadwell Farm.

The Icknield Way is known as the oldest road in Britain, with a history dating back to Neolithic times (4,000-2,000 BC). It winds its way across Hertfordshire on its way to Norfolk, passing by what is left of an Iron Age hillfort at **Wilbury Hills (D)**. Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of a gateway, buildings and storage pits, though there is little visible today.



## Public Transport

For travel details contact Intalink Traveline on 0871 200 2233 or [www.intalink.org.uk](http://www.intalink.org.uk)

## Further Information

North Herts Ramblers Association – [www.nhr.org.uk](http://www.nhr.org.uk)

This leaflet has been produced by North Herts Ramblers Group with support from the Countryside Management Service (CMS) and using grants from the Parish Paths Partnership, North Herts District Council and the Ramblers Association. The Parish Paths Partnership is administered by CMS and funded by Hertfordshire County Council.

**The Countryside Management Service** works with Communities in Hertfordshire to help them care for and enjoy the environment. For information on further opportunities to enjoy Hertfordshire's countryside including Healthwalks visit [www.hertslink.org/cms](http://www.hertslink.org/cms) or ring 01462 459395.



**Purwell Nine Springs Nature Reserve (E)** managed by the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, supports a wide range of habitats and species. From open water to reedbeds, fen meadow to wet woodland this small site has a lot to offer. Kingfishers breed on the reserve and water voles frequent the ditches.



The hamlet of **Charlton (F)** is the birthplace of Henry Bessemer of iron smelting fame and the windmill was converted to a foundry at one time. The Windmill Pub now occupies the windmill's site. The River Hiz rises at Wellhead just outside the village.



# Walk the HOOP



Longhorn – Oughtonhead Common



Lavender fields – Cadwell Farm



**Key**

- Refreshments
- Route
- Road Crossing
- See text
- Letchworth Greenway



The Windmill pub – Charlton



Water vole (Brian Sawford)

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