

A walk from Cassiobury Park

With Andrew Clark

This beautiful walk takes you from the outskirts of Watford into the depths of the countryside to see a host of wild flowers.

START: Cassiobury Park car park, Gade Avenue, Watford. Nearest postcode WD18 7LH. Grid ref TQ 092 968. An alternative start point is Grove Mill Lane car park. Nearest postcode WD17 3TU. Grid ref TQ 080 982. The Cassiobury Park option can get very busy, especially at weekends and during school holidays

DISTANCE: 5 miles with 290ft of ascent

TERRAIN: A gentle walk with one easy climb. Woodland paths can be muddy at times

MAPS: OS Explorer 172, Chiltern Society 28

REFRESHMENTS: The Cha Cha Cha Café is located 500m up the hill from the car park. None on the walk

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Bus 352 between Hemel Hempstead and Watford (Mon to Sat); Bus W30 Watford Circular (Mon to Fri). Watford Metropolitan Station is close by, with direct trains to Baker Street.

Route

From the car park, take the surfaced path which leads down to the river. Turn right along the riverbank past the playground and miniature railway. At a major junction of paths turn left and cross the two bridges over the river and the canal.

1. Walk ahead for 20m then turn right on Footpath 30. Follow it as it gently rises up the hill then levels out between the golf fairways. After 800m the track meets a major junction of paths.
2. Where Footpath 30 swings to the right, continue straight ahead on Footpath 1 towards Chandlers Cross. Go past the Whippendell Wood information board and follow the path downhill. Continue for 1.3km ignoring all paths left and right to exit the wood at Rousebarn Lane. Cross over the lane and go through the gate to enter Harrocks Wood.
3. After a few paces turn right on a narrower woodland path. Follow it for 500m past a bench to a T-junction.
4. Turn left past an electricity pole and stay in the same direction for 350m to exit the Wood first through a wooden gate and then a metal one. Take the path ahead between fence and hedgerow. Go through the next gate into a lane. Walk past Oak Farm on the right and the entrance to Redheath Farm Bungalow on the left.
5. Just after the entrance turn left on a path to Rousebarn Lane – a distance of 1.5km. After c730m, walk past the entrances to Newland's Spring and Dell Wood and continue ahead along the right-hand edge of a field. Go straight across the next field down to a kissing gate at Rousebarn Lane. Cross the lane and enter the wood opposite.
6. Walk a few paces to a crossing path and turn right along it. Follow it for 500m as it runs parallel to the lane then emerges into it. Continue along Rousebarn Lane to the junction with Lodge End.
7. Turn left and follow the lane uphill towards Gade Bank. At the bottom of the hill continue straight ahead over the canal bridge.
8. Just before the second street lamp, bear left on a rough track and follow it over two bridges to meet a junction of paths.
9. Turn left along a surfaced path to the next footbridge over the river. Do not cross the bridge but turn right, continue beside the riverbank for 240m then turn right to go back up to the car park.

Alternative start point from Grove Mill Lane car park

Take the path at the back of the car park past the metal barrier. Ignore all tracks left and right, continue straight ahead for 550m to a major junction of paths at point 2 and turn right. Follow the main route until returning back to point 2 then stay on Footpath 30 to the car park.

Points of Interest

'Cassiobury' probably comes from the name of a pre-Roman tribe called 'Cassii' or 'Cashio' and the Saxon word Bury for a fortified settlement. At the time of the Domesday Book the whole area belonged to the Abbey of St Albans. In 1545 Henry VIII granted the manor of Cassiobury to Sir Richard Morrison, who began the construction of a mansion which was finally completed by his son. The estate eventually passed to the Earls of Essex, who occupied it for more than 250 years. The house fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1922. The park itself first took shape in 1909 when Watford Urban District Council purchased 65 acres to create 'a people's park and pleasure ground'. More land was purchased later and it now measures c190 acres. Today it's the largest public open space in Watford and has a variety of sports facilities and attractions for children. Parts of the park are designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

A The Nature Reserve occupies the area of land between the river and the canal and is managed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The former watercress beds have developed into marshland surrounded by alder and willow woodland. It can be explored by following the Heron Nature Walk.

B The Gade is a chalk stream that rises in the hills around Dagnall and flows down to join the river Colne at Rickmansworth.

C The Grand Union Canal runs for 137 miles from the Thames at Brentwood to the junction with the Digbeth Branch Canal in Birmingham and is an amalgamation of a number of historic waterways. The section through Cassiobury Park was part of the Grand Junction Canal and was

cut through in 1796. It has been described as 'one of the loveliest sections of a canal so near a town anywhere in Britain.'

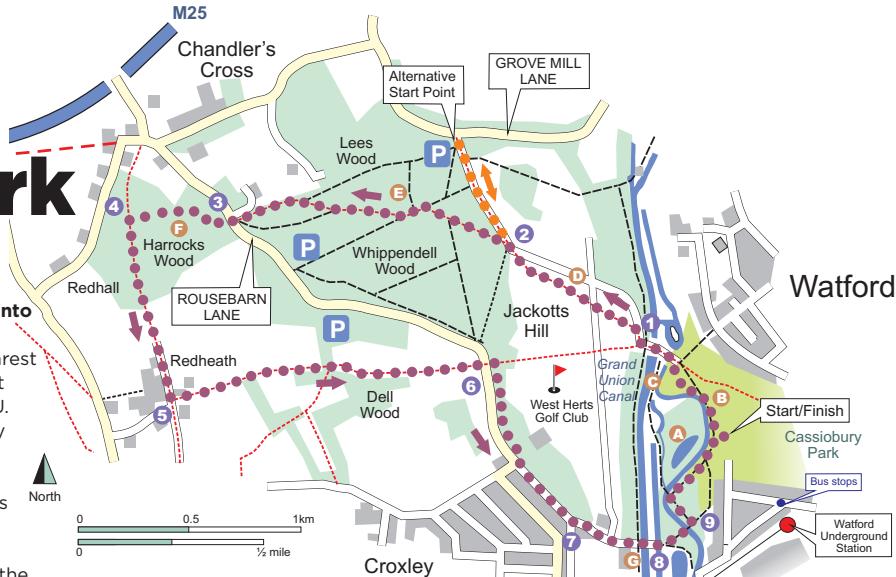
D Lime Walk: There are still remnants of an avenue of 296 lime trees planted between 1672 and 1720.

E Whippendell Wood: The name comes from the Anglo-Saxon name Wippa denu, meaning 'Wippa's valley'. The site comprises 165 acres of ancient woodland owned and managed by Watford Borough Council. Since 1954 it has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its diverse flora and fauna. In times past it was managed for timber, firewood and game. Most of the trees are oak, beech, ash and silver birch. In 1995 a very rare fungus, *Crepidotus cinnabarinus*, was found, only the fourth example of this species recorded in Europe.

F Harrocks Wood and the nearby Merlins and Dell Woods are all classified as ancient woodlands and are managed by the Woodland Trust. In spring there's a magnificent display of bluebells and the Wood is also well known for some important flora, including wood sorrell, red campion and the rare coralroot bittercress. In the 18th century Harrocks Wood was part of the Redheath Estate. The house, built for Charles Finch, is now York House Preparatory School, and is passed at point 5 on the walk.

G Gade Bank: The houses in the row were built c1924 by the Metropolitan Railway for their workers.

These notes have been compiled with the assistance of Bob Clarke, Arboricultural Officer for Veolia on behalf of Watford Borough Council.



Map: Glyn Kuhn