

# Marsworth waterside walk

With **Andrew Clark**

**What better way to get some fresh air into your lungs than to enjoy a crisp winter walk exploring the waterways near Tring?**

**START:** Startops End car park, Marsworth, Tring HP23 4LJ. Grid ref SP 919 141

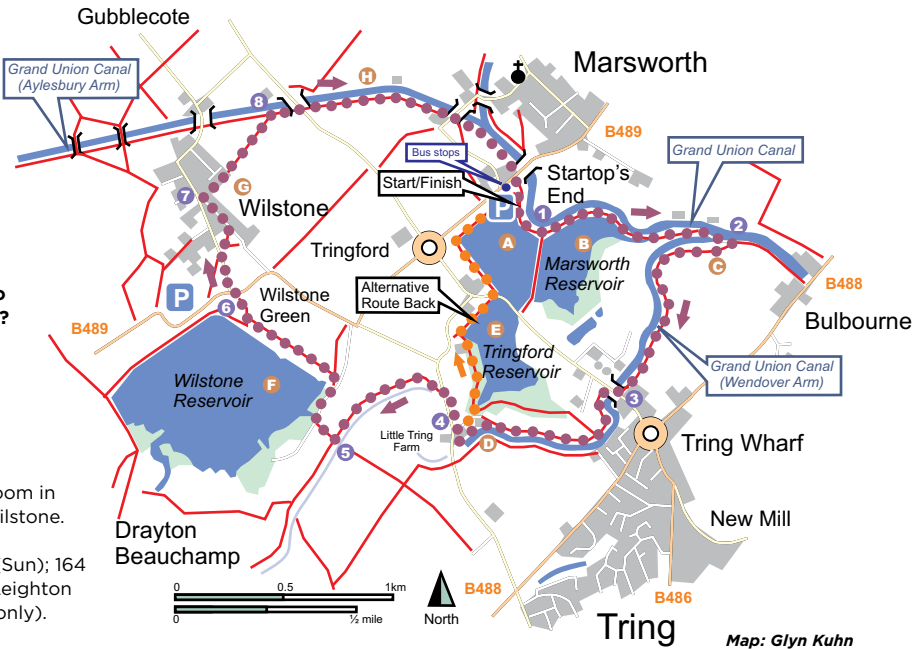
**DISTANCE:** 4.7 miles with 160ft of ascent. There is also a shorter 3 mile option

**TERRAIN:** An easy waterside walk

**MAPS:** OS Explorer 181 and Chiltern Society 18

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Anglers Retreat pub and Bluebells tearoom in Marsworth. The Half Moon pub and the Community Shop in Wilstone. Mead's Farm Shop tearoom at point 6 of the walk

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Buses – no.50 Aylesbury to Marsworth (Sun); 164 Aylesbury to Leighton Buzzard (Mon to Sat); 167 Ivinghoe to Leighton Buzzard (Tue only); 207 Hemel Hempstead to Marsworth (Fri only).



## Route

**Go through the gate at the far end of the car park. Stay on the wide path between the canal and reservoir to a path junction at the top.**

1. Turn left and follow the canal for over 1km to its junction with the Wendover Arm at Marsworth Top Lock.
2. Cross the footbridge, then turn immediately left at the bottom. Go back under the footbridge and proceed along the left-hand side of the Wendover Arm. After 1km go through a gate and up to a road bridge.
3. Taking care, turn right over the bridge and then immediately left to continue along the right-hand side of the canal for 1km to Little Tring Bridge. Just before the bridge, the path narrows behind the historic Tringford Pumping Station. Bear right up to a road at Little Tring Bridge. Turn right to the access track for the pumping station. (The shorter option starts here – see below).
4. Do not turn right but continue straight ahead between a hedge and fence on a path that runs parallel to the road. At a path junction, bear left to the road and then right along it for a few metres. Turn left onto a wide footpath and go past a gate. Turn right through the next gate and follow the canal bank for c600m to a bridge. Have a look at the dedication plaques on the supporting structure.
5. Go back a few paces, turn left through a gate in the hedgerow and follow the path down to the bottom. Turn right on a wide path and, at the end of the wood, turn left to reach the edge of Wilstone Reservoir. Walk straight along the top of the bank for c450m and look carefully for a set of steps that drop down to the right. Take them, go through the gate at the bottom and bear left across the corner of a field. Go

through the next gate, cross a footbridge and follow the path ahead. Where this swings to the right, fork left to a road.

6. Cross into Tring Road and continue past the sign to Wilstone village. Just after the entrance to New Road, turn right through a gate and bear diagonally left across the field. Pass through the gate in the corner and turn left through another gate to enter New Road. Walk along the pavement to the War Memorial.
7. Turn right along Rosebarn Lane and continue ahead as it becomes a surfaced path. Where the path bears to the left, walk in the same direction on a wide grassy track. Pass the allotments on the left, follow the field edge round to the left, then go through a gap in the hedgerow on the right. Walk straight across the field and down a set of steps to reach the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union Canal.
8. Turn right along the towpath. Go under two road bridges and pass five sets of locks to reach the junction with the Grand Union Canal. Follow the towpath round to the right and stay on it to climb up to a road. Cross it and walk along to Bluebells Café. Take the path on the nearside of the café to return to the car park.

## Shorter option

Turn right down the access track towards Tringford Pumping Station. Where the track sweeps to the right, continue ahead through a gate. Ignore the path on the right, and walk straight ahead towards a reservoir. Follow the left-hand edge of the reservoir all the way to a road. Cross the road with care to the path opposite. Follow the left-hand edge of the next reservoir all the way back to the car park.

## Points of Interest

The Grand Union Canal runs for 137 miles from the Thames at Brentwood to the junction with the Digbeth Branch Canal in Birmingham. It was not built as one canal, but is an amalgamation of a number of historic waterways. The section through Marsworth was known as the Grand Junction Canal and was fully opened in 1805. One of the main problems for the builders was the lack of water to feed the canal, especially for the summit between Marsworth and Tring. Fifty thousand gallons of water are lost every time a lock gate opens, and there wasn't enough water from local watercourses to meet this demand. To solve this, a number of reservoirs and pumping stations were built (see below). They attract all kinds of wildlife; especially birds. In winter there are plenty of wildfowl, while in summer the reed beds are home to warblers and buntings.

**A Startops End Reservoir** was opened in 1815 to feed the Aylesbury Arm and take surplus water from the summit of the Grand Union Canal.

**B Marsworth Reservoir** was built in 1806 to cater for the increase in canal traffic. It supplied water to the Marsworth flight of locks. It was fed by a spring near the Bulbourne and surplus water from the summit of the Grand Union.

**C Wendover Arm:** The 6.7 mile long Arm was constructed in 1799 to carry water from the springs and streams in the Wendover area to feed the Tring

summit locks. From the outset there were problems with leakage and before long it was losing more than it was supplying. The middle section became dry, so the water was piped. The Arm is currently being restored by the Wendover Arm Trust.

**D Tringford Pumping Station:** The Grade II listed pumping station was built in 1818 to pump water from the reservoirs into the Wendover Arm. For over 100 years water was pumped using a beam engine. It was eventually replaced by diesel engines and they, in turn, by electric ones.

**E Tringford Reservoir** opened in 1814 in tandem with Startops End. The shorter route follows its banks.

**F Wilstone Reservoir** is the largest and was the first to be built, opening in 1802. Its primary purpose was to store water for later use and to feed the Wendover Arm. It's regarded as one of the best bird-watching sites in the south of England.

**G Wilstone village** developed with the building of the Grand Union Canal and the reservoirs. New houses were built for construction workers, along with pubs, a chapel, a church and shops.

**H Aylesbury Arm:** The 6.2 mile Arm was completed in 1815. It has 16 locks and passes under 19 bridges. The original plan was to connect the Grand Junction Canal with the Thames at Abingdon, thereby forming a link with the Kennet & Avon Canal and the Wilts & Berks Canal. The Arm was used to transport grain, timber, coal and building materials until the 1960s.