

# St Paul's Walden walk

With **Louis Upton**

**A circuit around the village of St Paul's Walden passing through some of the finest woodland in the north Chilterns and the picturesque parkland surrounding the grand houses of Stagenhoe and St Paul's Walden Bury. The bluebells in Hitch Wood are spectacular.**

**START:** Hitchwood Lane car park SG4 7RW. Grid ref: TL 197 239. The car park is at the junction of Hitchwood Lane and the B651 Whitwell Road. Alternatively you can park in Whitwell or St Paul's Walden and start the circuit at another point

**DISTANCE:** 6.5 miles/10.2km, with 475ft/145m of ascent

**TERRAIN:** A moderate walk with steady ascents and descents. Paths are generally good, but the sections through woodland can be very muddy in wet conditions

**MAPS:** OS Explorer 193, Chiltern Society 29

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Strathmore Arms in St Paul's Walden and The Bull or The Maiden's Head in Whitwell. There is also a local shop and a tea room in Whitwell

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Bus 304 Centrebus South runs between Hitchin and Colney Heath (Mon-Sat) and stops in Whitwell and St Paul's Walden.

**NOTE:** This walk uses three sections of permissive path to improve access to Hitch Wood and Stagenhoe Park. Should they be closed in future, please take the diversions detailed below under P1 to P3.

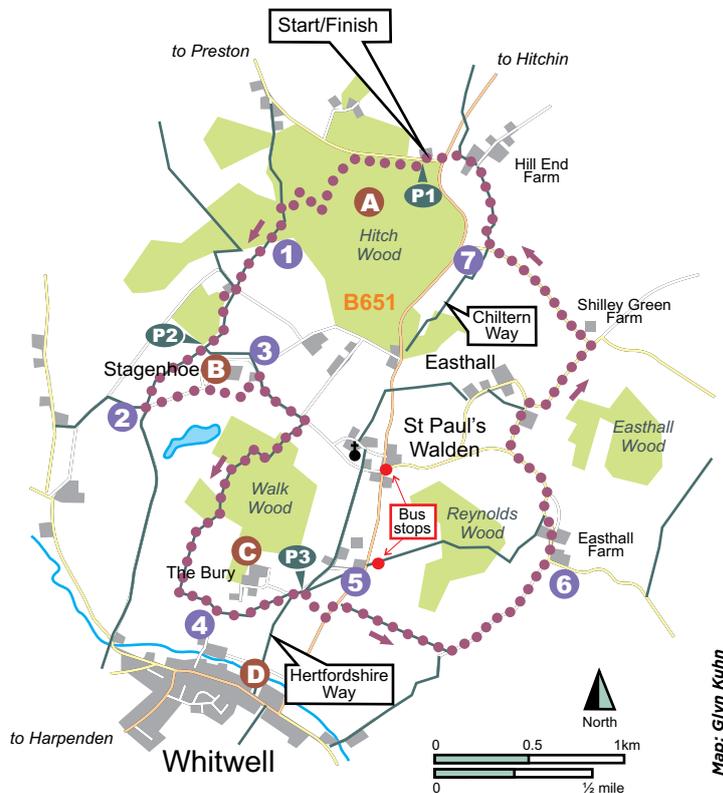
## Route

Enter the woods opposite the car park. Follow a marked permissive trail through the wood (P1). Initially the path runs parallel to the road just inside the woods. Ignore paths off to the left until, after 400m, you come to a signed fork in the path. Take the left fork. Keep following the signed route for 350m as the path climbs through the wood. As it starts to level off, you come to a signpost indicating a sharp right turn uphill. Take this turn for a few metres and turn right to climb up for 130m to a signpost. Turn left for 130m to reach a broad track. Turn left onto it and follow it to the edge of the wood.

1. Take the path running diagonally to the right across the field heading for the right-hand corner of Pinfold Wood. Turn left where you meet a stony track and right onto a footpath immediately after passing a red-brick house. After passing through the end of Foxholes Wood views start to open up to the west and you'll see a footpath signed off to the left (P2). Keep straight on. The path descends and, after passing Park Wood, has extensive views across the valley.
2. Where you meet a broad stony track, turn sharp left and follow this permissive bridleway uphill towards Stagenhoe House. At the edge of the formal gardens follow the track to the right skirting the edge of the gardens, with fine views of the grand house.
3. Turn right at a larger track and follow it uphill. At the brow of the hill, by the walls of the Lodge garden, turn right on the next footpath. Go past two gates and on through the middle of a narrow strip of trees. Continue through Chalkleys Wood. When you emerge from the woodland, go through a gate into a field and continue in the same direction with the hedge on your right for 400m through two further gates. Follow the hedge line as it turns left. After 200m the path curves right, down some steps and through a kissing gate. Turn left after the gate and you'll soon meet a broad track. Turning right takes you to Whitwell.
4. The route heads left up the track, with fine views across the valley to Whitwell. Where the track turns sharp left, take the footpath to the right through a kissing gate and across a field with views of Bury Farm and The

## Points of Interest

- A Hitch Wood** is one of the finest woods in the north Chilterns and is a mix of oak, beech and chestnut trees. There are fine displays of bluebells in spring. Look out for the timid muntjac and small herds of fallow deer.
- B Stagenhoe Park:** A grand c18th century mansion with c19th century additions, the house has changed hands many times in the last 200 years. For a period it was rented by Sir Arthur Sullivan. He wrote *The Mikado* here and entertained 'as many as thirty young ladies' at weekends, causing scandal among the locals until they realised he was merely giving the chorus girls a pleasant weekend in the country! The mansion later became a school and is now a Sue Ryder Care Home.



Bury in trees to your left. Pass through a metal kissing gate onto a tarmac drive and take the lane to the right down to the B651 (P3). Cross the road and turn left through the gap in the hedge opposite. Walk along the edge of the field, parallel to the road, until you come to the grand avenue of lime trees.

5. Turn right on the footpath up the middle of the avenue. As you climb you get fine views back to The Bury along the 1km avenue. At the top of the hill keep left where you meet a dirt track and, shortly after, turn left on the byway. After 700m you come to a lane - keep straight ahead.
6. The next 2km of this walk is on quiet country lanes. Bear right at the first junction, signposted Langley, and right again at the next junction, still heading for Langley. Take the next road left, and just before you come to the buildings of Shilley Green Farm, turn left. The lane starts to descend and as it curves left you take a bridleway off to the right.
7. The bridleway snakes along the edge of some trees and after 100m emerges onto a track at the edge of a field. Keep straight ahead along the right-hand edge of the hedge. Follow the bridleway through trees and down to a tarmac road. Turn left downhill on the road, and where the tarmac ends keep straight ahead onto a broad stony track. Keep left at the fork to leave the Chiltern Way and you soon come to the B651 opposite Hitchwood Lane.

### Permissive route alternatives:

- (P1)** If the woods are closed, walk up Hitchwood Lane. Turn left after the first houses onto a lane. This becomes a footpath running along the western edge of Hitch Wood to point 1.
- (P2)** If the access agreement with Stagenhoe has finished, take the left fork. Keep to the left of the trees ahead of you and you'll shortly be walking on the left of the metal fence round the formal gardens of Stagenhoe Park to point 3.
- (P3)** Take the lane straight ahead. After 50m take the footpath that runs diagonally across a field to a gatehouse by the walled garden and turn right on the 'B' road to point 5.

- C St Paul's Walden Bury:** This grand 18th century mansion has been the home of the Bowes Lyons since 1725 and was the childhood home of the late Queen Mother, who was christened at the nearby church. The Bury has a nationally important French-style formal garden, and is set in fine parkland with many large old trees and a long avenue of limes leading to the house.
- D Whitwell** is a village in the parish of St Paul's Walden. It contains a number of early brick and half-timbered houses, several of which are 18th century. The River Mimram runs through the village and has been noted since Roman times for the production of prime watercress - you can still see watercress beds to the northwest of the village.