



COMMON ground

Jody Vaughan heads to a Bedfordshire market town this month to lead you on a gentle stroll around a natural area of common land

Biggleswade is, perhaps, best known as the home of the famous Shuttleworth Collection, a museum that houses 50 historic aircraft – some of which are the only airworthy aeroplanes of their kind in the world. A visit here is a must for anyone, young or old, enjoying a stay at Ashridge Farm Caravan Club Site.

Another must, just down the road and minutes from the Biggleswade junction of the A1, is a 300-acre natural area of

common land (known as Biggleswade Common) that sweeps around the northernmost edges of the town. Mainly grassland with a smattering of woodland, and flanked by the River Ivel, this little oasis is perfect for a relaxing dog walk. It wasn't always so peaceful here, though – the Ivel was once a working river, and was heavily modified in the 18th century to allow easier passage of horse-drawn barges. It's hard to imagine this today, as the river is now the preserve of wildlife and the occasional wading fisherman.

Here, I lead you on a simple, short stroll that takes in river, field and meadow, and passes 16th-century Shortmead House. Also, with no stiles to climb over, it's an easy route for those members who have elderly dogs. Wellington boots are advisable as our route can get rather muddy in places.

If you're looking for a variation on our trail, simply log on to letsgo.org.uk/walk/BiggleswadeCommon.aspx for details of a number of circular walks ranging in length from one to six miles.





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The Caravan Club Magazine recommends the use of Ordnance Survey maps – your ideal passport to navigating Britain

DIRECTIONS

1 Exit the car park in its far left-hand corner, where there are two staggered gates marked with a yellow arrow (‘C1 – Kingfisher Way’). The river should be on your left.

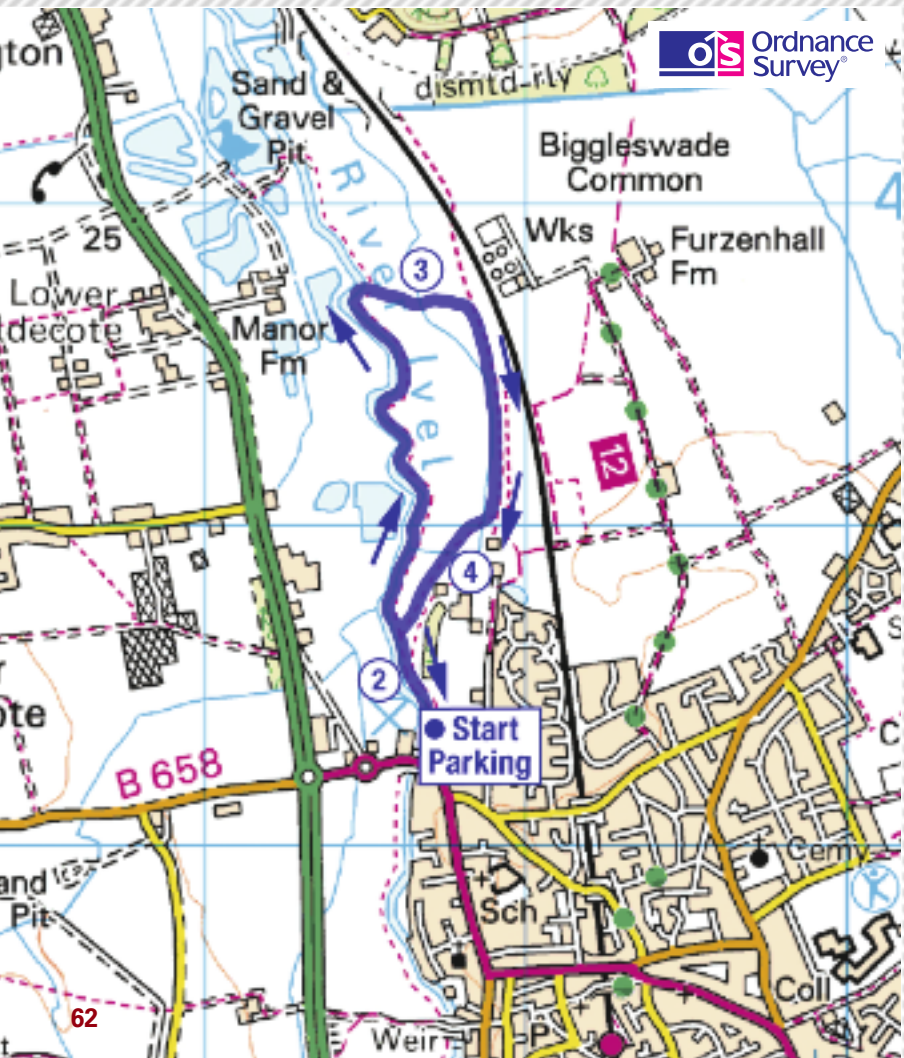
2 Continue through a kissing gate and keep to the left-hand path. Walk along the riverside for a while before crossing a wooden bridge marked with a yellow arrow. Continue for a short distance until you reach a sharp left-hand bend in the river – just before this, turn right on

to an unmarked footpath, towards a bridge you can see on the other side of the field. Note: if you follow the river around to a copse of trees on your right, you’ve gone too far.

3 Cross this bridge, passing through two heavy wooden gates and then veer right towards a house up ahead. Very soon there’s an unmarked fork in the trodden grassy field – veer right again, keeping to the right side of the field and the house. Continue where the path narrows with hedgerows on both sides. Move around to

the right again beside a big, rotten log. Then, just before you return to the big open field, veer left to walk through an avenue of trees and scrub.

4 You’ll soon pass more farm buildings on your left, behind a barbed wire fence. Where the fence bends sharply round to the left, keep straight ahead to join a more major track (if you reach the floodlights beside a kissing gate, you’ve gone too far). Very soon you pass through a kissing gate (beside a ladder stile) – go straight ahead and return to the car park.



INFORMATION

Club site: Ashridge Farm Caravan Club Site, Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 5QF. See p62 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14* for full details. Open all year. To book, call 01342 327490 or see caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook.

Distance: 2.5 miles

Terrain/level of difficulty: grassy paths/very easy

Number of stiles: none

Essential equipment: Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 208

Refreshments: none

Toilets: none

Directions and parking: from the site, head to the A1 and go north for a short distance until you reach the junction with the B658. Head east towards Biggleswade town centre, passing over a roundabout. Then drive over a bridge and the car park is immediately on your left (just off Royal Oak Close). The car park has a height barrier (that is sometimes left open), but motorhomes can park in residential streets nearby or the local supermarket car park.

