

HISTORY tells us that King Offa of Mercia created a religious settlement near the River Hiz in Hitchin. This was the land occupied by the Hicca tribe 'the people of the horse'. When Danish invaders settled on the confluences of the Rivers Hiz and Ivel at Etonbury in Arlesey, the Hicca were forced to pay a regular 'Danegeld' tax to save their land from attack. In this instance the tax is thought to have been bread rather than silver.



We can imagine these Saxons following the river valley as they carried their payment into Viking territory.

The Hicca Way reminds us of this piece of forgotten history. Whilst Etonbury has long since been abandoned, Hitchin grew and thrived as an important town in the region.

NATURE The River Hiz is a high quality chalk bed stream. Like many, it has suffered in the past from excessive water extraction at its source causing the springs to dry up, but recent efforts have been made to limit this impact. The surrounding area is also classed as nitrate sensitive and managed to ensure water runoff from the fields does not contaminate the river.

Many sections of the original river remain in good condition, supporting a diversity of water plants, including Yellow Flag Iris, and Watercress which used to be grown commercially at Ickleford. Willow trees are common along the bank, with a fine example of pollarded willows at Glebe Meadows, Arlesey.

If you are lucky, you may spot a Kingfisher, Water Vole or even an Otter. In the riverside meadows a rich variety of wild flowers can be found including Cowslip, Black Knapweed and Marsh Valerian.



WALKING THE HICCA WAY

The route has been designed so it can be walked in 2 (or more) sections. The linear section from Hitchin to Arlesey (8 miles) allows for the return trip to be made by train (or other public transport). From Hitchin out to the river source at Charlton, the partial loop adds interest, and a chance to see more of both town and country.

For the most part, the route is clearly marked with the special Hicca Way discs, alongside standard footpath markers. The arrow points in the direction to follow. Through Hitchin itself, you will be following mostly roads – an information map is available from "Hitchin Initiative", 27 Churchyard (N of St Marys).

EATING OUT

ARLESEY
The Old Oak PH.
(A café is planned for Henlow Bridge Lakes in 2013.)

ICKLEFORD
Plume of Feathers PH | The Old George PH
Ickleford Stores (snacks / drinks)

HITCHIN
Numerous around town centre

CHARLTON
The Windmill PH

DOG WALKERS

Keep dogs under close control at all times. Use a lead where livestock are grazing (including the Commons), through crop fields and nature reserves. Always clean up after your dog, as a courtesy to other walkers and the landowners.



ARLESEY The village of Arlesey lies south of the A507 and to the east of the Eastcoast Mainline. Three footpaths connect the village to the Hicca Way. Do look at the medieval river bridge opposite the station as well as St Peters church dating back to 1180. There are a couple of pubs nearby. The footpath around Henlow Bridge Lakes is the furthest point north on the Hiz which can be publicly accessed, before it joins the River Ivel. It is here that the Hicca Way meets the Kingfisher Way, a walk along the River Ivel from its source at Baldock to its meeting with the River Great Ouse at Tempsford.



The Glebe Meadows and The Old Moat are Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves, offering a rich variety of habitat. There is permitted open access in the Mill Pits - but following the river bank is recommended. From Arlesey Common, our route leaves the river for a while, crossing arable fields of New Ramerwick Farm, passing between the old farm buildings.

ICKLEFORD A delightful village, and well worth the short detour to visit the 12th Century church, old school buildings dating back to 1848 and perhaps have lunch at one of the traditional old pubs. During the summer months, why not take time out from your walk to visit Cadwell Farm, home of the renowned Hitchin Lavender?

Both Ickleford and Whitsun Commons are still grazed by cattle and sheep, but are also managed by the Common Holders who retain their traditional grazing rights for the benefit of wildlife.

In the village, we cross the famous east-west Icknield Way walk. Nearby, Gerry's Hole is now a conservation area, managed by the owner and volunteers as one of the most important ponds in the area, for a variety of amphibians.



HITCHIN Still an important 'Market Town' to many of the surrounding villages. The old Corn Exchange (now a bar) overlooking Market Place was a hub for the grain trade in the 19th & early 20th Centuries. A thriving outdoor market is held nearby on Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Several of Hitchin's historic buildings can be found in Market Place, Sun Street, Bucklersbury, and Tilehouse Street.



The River Hiz enters the town through the private grounds of The Priory, passing under Bridge Street.

Through the centre the river has rather been swallowed up as the busy town has expanded. However an ornamental section of river with a fountain can be seen behind St Mary's Church. The Hiz re-emerges north of Hermitage Road, passing Bancroft Gardens and Ransoms Recreation Ground.

CHARLTON Home to around 50 people, this tiny village has some interesting history and features – the best known of which is its riverside pub The Windmill. The pub sits near the site of a former windmill (destroyed in a storm in 1895). An Ale-house since the 1850s, many old photos are displayed on the pub walls.

Opposite the pub is Charlton House with its blue plaque commemorating the birth place of Sir Henry Bessemer (1813 – 1898) who developed a process for the inexpensive mass-production of steel.

There was also once a watermill in the village, recorded in the Domesday Book, and you will pass the now derelict site of the Mill and the surviving Mill Pond as you carry on to the spring source.



TRANSPORT

BY CAR: At Arlesey, a new commuter car park should be available west of Glebe Meadows from 2013. Hitchin has a number of pay car parks – check on-line (e.g. en.parkopedia.co.uk) for details. A small car park in Nightingale Rd allows 3hrs free. Parking is very limited in Charlton – take care not to cause an obstruction.

BY TRAIN: Generally twice an hour through the day between Hitchin and Arlesey – see www.nationalrail.co.uk or call 08457 484950.

BY BUS: See www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or call 0871 2002233. There are no buses to Charlton.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Hicca Way

Following the River Hiz Valley



Arlesey | Ickleford | Hitchin | Charlton

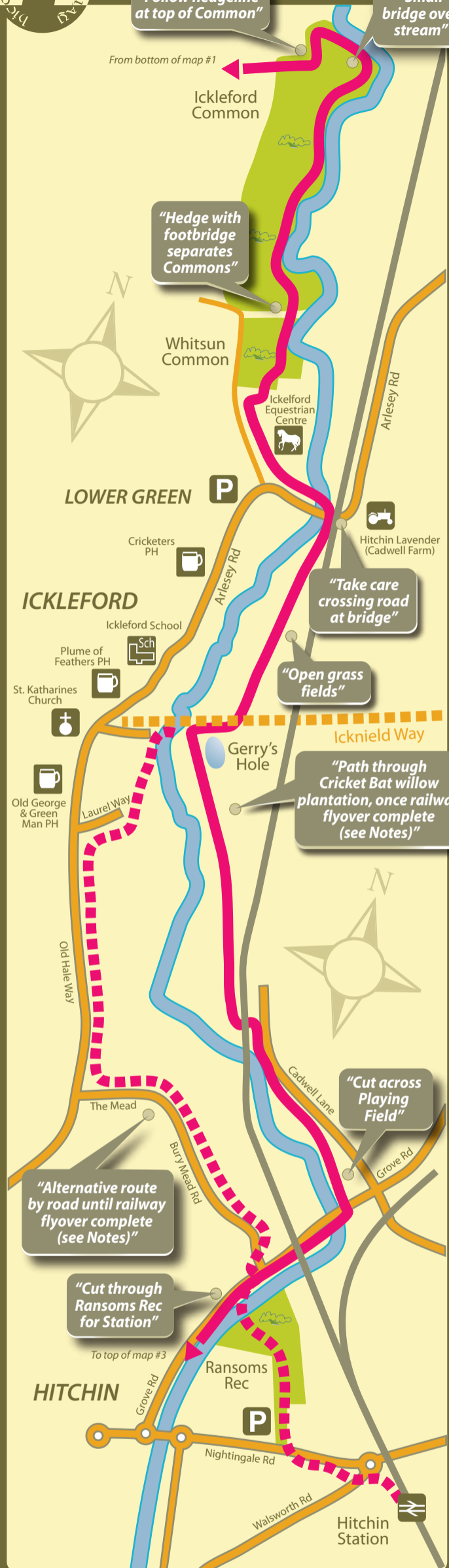
The Hicca Way

Following the River Hiz Valley

1



2



3



NOTES ON ROUTE

The section of footpath from Ickleford (Gerry's Hole) down to Hitchin (Cadwell Lane) will be closed until 2014/15, due to construction of a railway embankment. Until then, follow the alternative (dotted) route by road as shown.

Alternative links to Hitchin Station are shown, depending on which direction you are approaching from.

Take care to follow the established path where it cuts across the arable fields north of New Ramerwick Farm.

Key to symbols

Parking	Station	Camping	Museum	Monument	Bridge	School	Farm	Church	Public House	Accessible Toilets	Toilets
Byway	Road	Hicca Way	River	Railway	Meadow	Woodland	Gap	Nature Reserve	Equestrian	Compass	

0 Approximate scale 500m