



THE ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

Therfield (Hertfordshire)

The Fox and Duck.

Each leg of this walk reveals its own views and has its own special interest, from open farmland to heathland, from golf courses to horse gallops, from ancient barrows to nature reserves.

A route map is available at: www.walk4life.info/walk/icknield-way-therfield-circular

Therfield is not far from Royston, which has a museum and a unique man made cave, open to visitors throughout the summer.

The Fox and Duck faces the village green and is an all too rare example of a 'born again' pub! Once closed, but now refurbished both inside and out, it has re-opened for business to the vast relief of all concerned –for it's a poor thing, a village that has lost its pub. Inside the Victorian, red-brick building, wooden settles and a flagstone floor create a country style. Past the end of the long, L-shaped bar is a very comfortably furnished restaurant serving such dishes as home-made soups and pies, grilled steaks and modern British food. Traditional Sunday lunches plus home-made puds make this inn especially popular at weekends. There is a vegetarian menu and meals are served throughout the week. Children are welcome in the restaurant and have their own play area in the large garden behind the building. Dogs are allowed inside. The Fox and Duck is a Greene King pub with guest real ales. There is a wide selection of wines.

Opening times are Tuesday to Friday from 12 noon to 2.30pm and 5.30pm to 11pm (11.30pm on Fridays).

Telephone : 01763 287246. Website: www.thefoxandduck.co.uk

How to get there: Therfield lies between the A505 and the A10(T), 2 miles south-west of Royston. The village is well-signposted off either the A505 or the A10(T). The pub is at the centre, to one side of the village green.

Parking: There is a car park behind the pub.

Length of the walk: 6.7 miles (10.8km) (short cut available).

Map: OS Landranger 154 Cambridge, Newmarket and surrounding area (inn GR 336373).

The Walk

The walk follows the Icknield Way Path up the right-hand side of the pub. Clear of the buildings it goes over a field to a footbridge, from where it crosses the corner of another field to a gap in the hedge. Here it bears right on a track heading east, which dips down before continuing ahead across open countryside for about a mile. Eventually, where the track bends sharply right, the walk follows a footpath which continues ahead to a metal stile next to a gate. Over the stile, the path leads to the top end of Therfield Heath, one of the richest areas of Chalk grassland in East Anglia.

Wide views open up across the heath as the walk bears left, on a path down the length of a small combe and one-time rifle range. Further on, the path keeps to the right of a rugby pitch before arriving at the Therfield Heath Sporting Club. Here, information boards give full details of the heath and its history, whilst a café/bar, open to the public, provides the opportunity for a half-way break.

From here, the Icknield Way Path continues down to the road and turns right, through Royston. The circular walk, however, turns left and goes through the carpark above the clubhouse before heading uphill aiming for a mound surmounted by a memorial seat. Past the seat, the walk continues uphill, across the upper half of a golf course. Panoramic views to the north extend well



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beyond Cambridge on a fine day, whilst nearby, on the fairway, is a rare example of a Neolithic long barrow which itself makes a good viewing point for a cluster of Bronze Age round barrows.

At the tree line the walk bears right, along the upper edge of the golf course. At a corner to the left of a green it follows a path under the boughs of overhanging beech trees to a graveled path. Here, it turns left, and follows the path round to the right before turning left, through trees and down to a road. At this point a short-cut can be taken by turning left and following the road for over a mile, back to the pub. The main walk, however, crosses straight over the road and follows a path which leads ahead through two nature reserves in which path-side information boards give details of local wildlife. After passing through Fox Covert Nature Reserve, the track bears left, through the beeches, then right to emerge back in the open. From here the walk runs along the top of a mini-ridge, Church Hill, where Pasque flowers are seen around Easter, and down to a track, along which it turns right. At the next junction it turns left, on a track which bears away from this end of the golf-course to an open gateway. Without going through the gate the walk turns right and follows the fence to a high hedge through which it turns left, along the hedge-line. Below, to the right are the horse-gallops used to train racehorses from local stables which, in recent years, have been winners of many races, including the Derby and the Caesarewitch.

After about ½ mile King's Ride racehorse stables are passed on the left. Between 1945 and 1980 Willie Stephenson trained in Royston and had winners in the Derby and Grand National. John Jenkins is trainer here now. The stables were previously in Royston, where Princes Mews is now. The walk turns left on a farm road through the yard of Thrift Farm. Past the barns, it follows a good track across wide fields, aiming for the distant water tower on the ridge ahead. Where the track turns left, the walk continues ahead on a field-edge path past a small rifle range. Over a track, a finger-post indicates the Therfield path which leads up to the corner of a wide arable field. From here the sunken path climbs to meet a road on the top of the wooded ridge along which the walk turns right, for about 50 yards, then left along a track. Past an ancient, thatched manor house on the left, it passes the water tower seen earlier in the walk as a distant landmark. At St. Mary's Church it turns left, through the churchyard, to join a narrow lane leading to a road along which the walk again turns left. Within a short distance the road runs up to the village green, opposite the pub.