

The Prae Wood Arms and Verulamium Park

St Albans, Hertfordshire



Easy Terrain

7 miles
Circular
3.5 hours

170716



Access Notes



1. The walk has several gentle climbs and descents throughout.
2. The majority of the route follows surfaced driveways and paths, with just a one-mile stretch along unmade woodland and grass paths within the park (which can get a bit soft or muddy).
3. There are no stiles, steps, kissing gates or livestock on route, just a handful of single pedestrian gates. With this in mind the route would be suitable for a rugged pushchair.
4. **The paths through Gorhambury Estate (at the start and end of the route) are permissive paths that are open from 8am to 6pm for the majority of the year. These paths are closed every Saturday from 1 September to 31 January (whilst private game shoots take place) and also on a few days for special events (check www.gorhamburyestate.co.uk for any planned closures). When the estate paths are closed, the walk can still be completed by using the alternative route on the pavements alongside the main road.**

The Prae Wood Arms is a lovely spacious pub, with a tempting menu made from fresh, local produce.

A 7 mile circular pub walk from The Prae Wood Arms in St Albans, Hertfordshire. The walking route leads you through the beautiful meadows of the Gorhambury Estate before touring Verulamium Park, the former site of the Roman town that predates St Albans. You will have chance to visit the Verulamium Museum and St Albans Cathedral along the way, whilst enjoying impressive Roman remains and the idyllic chalk stream, the River Ver.

Getting there

The walk starts and finishes at The Prae Wood Arms pub on the A5183 Redbourn Road. The pub has its own large car park.

Approximate post code **AL3 6JZ**.

If you are coming by bus, the Pre Hotel bus stops on the A5183 are directly outside the pub. If you are coming by train, St Albans Abbey rail station is just a few minutes' walk from Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre (Waypoint 5) so you can adjust the walk to start and finish there.

Walk Sections



Start to Hertfordshire Way



From The Prae Wood Arms, head back along the vehicle entrance drive. As you walk, you will have your first glimpse of the cathedral in St Albans, which we will be visiting later on this walk. You will come to the T-junction with the main A5183 Redbourn Road, at which point you have two choices:

OPTION A: This is the main and prettiest route, however it follows a daytime permissive path which is closed for a few days per year, including every Saturday from 1 September to 31 January and a handful of other days (details of planned closures can be found at

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www.gorhamburyestate.co.uk). If you are walking on a closure day or between 6pm and 8am, use the OPTION B directions in brackets at the end of this section, otherwise continue following the directions in the next paragraph.

Turn left along the pavement and follow it for about 0.7 miles (passing the pub through the trees on your left) to reach the second pair of bus stops. A few metres later turn left through the gate to join the woodland path leading you into Gorhambury Estate. You will eventually emerge to a junction with a tarmac lane alongside Pre Mill (now just a small brick sluice house). Turn right along the lane leading you over the River Ver.

Stay with the tarmac drive across the river and then leading you between beautiful fenced water meadows and pastures. Within these pastures you are likely to see the estate's herd of cattle, the ancient and rare English Longhorn Cattle with their red and white coats and distinctive horns. At the end of this stretch you will come to a T-junction with another drive, part of the Hertfordshire Way. Glance ahead and you will see the neo-Palladian Gorhambury House (more about that in a moment).

[OPTION B: Turn right along the pavement, with the main road running on your left, and follow this all the way to the roundabout. Use the raised island in front of you to cross ahead to the far pavement - taking care - and turn right into Bluehouse Hill. Follow this left-hand pavement along Bluehouse Hill for 0.3 miles and then turn left into St Michael's Street. Now skip to the directions in the section called St Michael's Street to Lakeside Junction.]

1 → 2 Hertfordshire Way to St Michael's Street



Turn left along the tarmac avenue, Gorhambury Drive, which is lined with a collection of mature trees. Follow this drive for about a mile, taking time to enjoy your peaceful surroundings. Now is also a good time to understand the history of the estate...

The medieval manor here was owned by St Albans Abbey and was home to the Gorham family, but after the Suppression of the Monasteries it was bought by Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. Sir Nicholas built the house known as Old Gorhambury and this was visited by Queen Elizabeth in 1572 and 1577. Old Gorhambury eventually passed to Sir Nicholas's son, Sir Francis Bacon, the celebrated philosopher and Chancellor to James I. In 1784, Old Gorhambury was replaced by the present Gorhambury House, the house that you saw a little earlier. It is one of the largest houses completed by the architect Sir Robert Taylor, who is known for his work on The Bank of England and smaller villas surrounding the City of London. The house has been lived in by the Grimston family from construction to present day and the current Viscount and Viscountess Grimston live at Gorhambury with their young family.

The beautiful old pastures each side of you are grazed by sheep and rare-breed cattle. Keep your eyes peeled (and ears pricked!) for large flocks of starlings in the trees and meadows, song thrushes shrilling their tunes from the treetops and red kites or buzzards soaring overhead.

Just before the end of the driveway you will pass the site of the

first Roman remains, the Roman Theatre (entrance fees apply) on your right. Go ahead through the green pedestrian gate (to leave the estate) and continue ahead, passing the ticket office and then the impressive flint lodge, to reach a junction with the road. Turn right along the pavement for a few paces, cross over via the pedestrian crossing and at the far side turn left for a few paces then right into St Michael's Street.

2 → 3 St Michael's Street to Lake Junction



Follow the right-hand pavement along St Michael's Street, with a beautiful old flint wall running on your right. Where the main road swings left, bear right into a side road (passing a school on your right and the original entrance for Verulamium Museum on your left). Follow the access lane which swings left to reach the current entrance for the museum on your left.

Beneath this glorious park lie the remains of the third largest city in Roman Britain, Verulamium. The buried streets and buildings tell a fascinating story dating back two millennia. On our journey through the park you will discover large sections of the Roman city wall still intact as well as the foundations of a large gatehouse, but should you wish to learn more, feel free to visit this museum (entrance fees apply).

Follow the pavement, leading you past the museum building on your left. Where the pavement ends, simply keep ahead on the tarmac drive which leads you past the half-timbered Grebe House (home to the Wildlife Trust) and into the parkland. At the T-junction, turn left (signed to the cathedral). Keep ahead passing the splash park and then a lake both on your right. Just beyond the lake you will come to a T-junction.

3 → 4 Lake Junction to Cathedral



Turn right and follow the path with the River Ver running on your left and the lakes running on your right. At the end of the lake you will come to another T-junction. We will be turning left here, but first it is worth turning right for a few paces to see the pretty section of the River Ver as it runs down the stepped weir.

The River Ver is special; it is a chalk stream, one of only about

200 in the world and its pure alkaline water supports a very particular mix of flora and fauna. Humans have used the river for navigation, for milling, for mineral extraction and for food production and these processes mean the river is much changed from its original state, including several diversions and weirs like this one.

Return back to the junction and go ahead (the equivalent to having turned left originally) and cross the river via the bridge. Immediately afterwards, turn right onto the paved path which leads you past Abbey Mills on your right. Stay with the paved path which swings left to become a tarmac path leading you through another section of parkland. This path leads you directly to St Albans Cathedral.

The cathedral, also known as St Albans Abbey, claims to be the oldest site of Christian worship in Britain. It gives the town its name, being home to the shrine to St Alban. Entrance to the cathedral is free and dogs are welcome so take more time to explore should you wish. Highlights include the shrine of St Alban, the longest nave in England, medieval wall paintings and a beautiful rose window.

4 → 5 Cathedral to Leisure Centre



When you have finished exploring, stand with your back to the cathedral, facing the path from which you came. Take the path to the left of this (at about 11 o'clock) which follows the line of a flint wall running on your left. In the bottom corner, turn left onto a narrow path passing a primary school on your left. At the end you will reach a junction with Grove Road. Cross over to the far pavement, turn right along this and follow it to a T-junction with the main road (A5183).

Turn right along the pavement and soon this swings right over an arched footbridge. Do NOT enter the park ahead, instead turn left to continue along the pavement. At the next junction, go ahead over the access road and turn immediately right along the pavement (signed St Albans Green Ring) passing Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre on your left.

5 → 6 Leisure Centre to London Gate



Follow this surfaced walkway, crossing several zebra crossings over the entrances for the leisure centre car parks on your left. Beyond the last zebra crossing, continue ahead along the surfaced path which continues with parkland on your right and the athletics track on your left. Just after the athletics track, keep left at the fork and you will come to a crossroads within the heart of the park.

Turn left and about 80 metres later you will come to the remains of London Gate on your right. This was one of the four entrance gates for Verulamium, this one serving Watling Street which ran from Chester to Dover. The remains were excavated in the 1930s.

6 → 7 London Gate to Museum



Continue along the surfaced path (a shared cycleway and walkway) with a beautiful section of old Roman wall running on your right. These boundary walls around the town are 2 miles long and more than 2 metres thick.

Towards the top of the slope (just before the path swings left over a footbridge) turn right up the dirt bank to join an unmade path with the walls still running on your right. A short way along, dog-leg right (up the small bank of tree roots) and then immediately left to continue on the main woodland path. As you emerge from the woodland, keep ahead along the grass path, staying close to the line of trees on your right.

When the tree line on your right ends, continue straight ahead on the mown grass path, passing another entrance board for the park across to your left. As you reach the tree line ahead, turn right to join the grass path leading you steadily downhill, with a line of trees to your left and beautiful views of the cathedral and the St Albans skyline across to your right. Follow the tree line all the way down through the park, eventually merging with a stone path which leads you into the car park for the museum. Walk ahead through the car park and cross the access road to reach the pavement directly in front of the museum.

7 → 8 Museum to End



From this point (assuming you began your journey at The Prae Wood Arms), you will be retracing your steps back to the start point. Turn left along the pavement and follow it as it swings right, passing the old entrance door for the museum. Swap to the left-hand pavement and turn left at the T-junction. You will come to the T-junction with the A4147 Bluehouse Hill. As with the outward leg, you have two choices for the return (depending if the permissive paths through Gorhambury Estate are open – see introductory paragraphs for details).

OPTION A: For the Gorhambury route, turn left for a few paces, cross the road via the pedestrian crossing, turn right for a few paces and then turn left into the entrance drive for Gorhambury Estate. Pass through the green pedestrian gate (to the right of the vehicle gate) and keep ahead along Gorhambury Drive for about one mile (until you see a side branch on your right). Turn right here and follow the smaller lane between pastures and over the bridge to reach the sluice house. Turn left and join the woodland path leading you out of Gorhambury Estate. Turn right along the pavement for about 0.7 miles and then turn right into the entrance drive for The Prae Wood Arms for some well-earned hospitality.

OPTION B: For the alternative route, turn right to join the pavement alongside Bluehouse Hill and follow this for 0.3 miles to reach the roundabout. Cross over Bluehouse Hill with care to turn left into Redbourn Road. Follow this pavement for 0.4 miles and then turn left into the entrance drive for The Prae Wood Arms for some well-earned hospitality.

Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.

