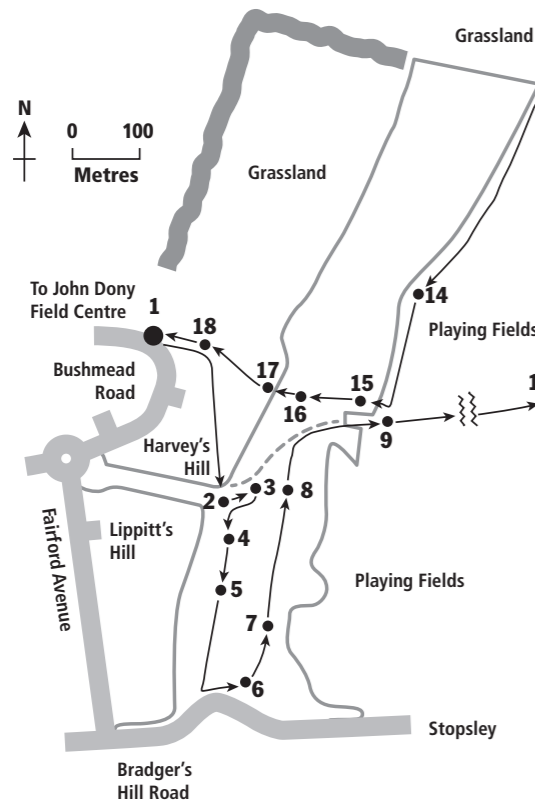




Getting started



Start and Finish Point

Leaving the main entrance of the centre, the start of the trail can be found by either returning along Bushmead Road past the old farmhouse to the finger-post marking the Public Footpath, or by passing the Bird and Bush public house, crossing the road and following Kilmarnock Drive to the bottom, turning right into the passage that leads on to Bushmead Road. The finger post is a short distance to the left.

How to get there

By Public Transport

BUS – Bushmead is served by Arriva buses 24, 24H & 25 from the town centre. Telephone Information Line on 071 200 2233 for further information.

TRAIN – Luton station is on the Thameslink & Midland Mainline routes and is served by Thameslink and East Midlands services.

For timetable information, please telephone National Rail Enquiries 08457 484950.

By Car

From the A6 north of the centre of Luton, turn eastwards into Kingsdown Avenue, carry straight on into

Bushmead Road. Bear left at the roundabout, past Bushmead School and continue until you reach Hancock Drive where you will find the Community Centre next to the church.

Access and information

Surface Types: You can expect to walk across varied surfaces ranging from a hard, firm surface with stones no larger than 5mm to grass or uncultivated earth paths.

Linear Gradient: The steepest linear gradient is steeper than 1:6 as part of the walk is up the hill.

Cross Falls: The steepest cross fall is 1:9 or steeper. There are also crossfalls of between 1:10-1:15.

Width Restriction: There is no width restriction less than 1000mm.

Steps: There are 28 steps with a maximum step height of 200mm between points 2 and 3. There is another flight of 16 steps at point 6, and 22 steps between points 17 and 18.

Barriers: There are three kissing gates with a restriction less than 1000mm.

Refreshments: There is a pub (The Bird and Bush) and several shops near to the Community Centre.

Public Toilets: Located in the Community Centre.

Picnic Tables: None on route.

Seats: There are benches between points 10-11, 13-14 and 15-16.



Facts & figures



The hill is the smallest recognized unit of chalk downland in Bedfordshire.

The southern part of the hill is a Public Open Space, owned by Luton Borough Council.

The northern part of the hill is privately owned land, although there is no restriction of access.

This private land is open to visitors, by courtesy of the Trustees of The Old Bedford Road Estates.

It is said that this is the longest continuous set of lynchets in Bedfordshire.

The term lynchets or linchet is defined as 'A slope or terrace along the face of a chalk down'.

It is believed that the lynchets were cultivated until about 1914.

The site is designated as a County Wildlife Site (CWS) and is being considered for national designations for both archaeological and wildlife value.

Luton Borough Council's Local Projects team manages the site as a Nature Reserve, with help from the Wildlife Trust and Luton & Dunstable Conservation Volunteers.

Conservation of the downland of Bradger's Hill and parts of the Common are funded by the Environmental Stewardship scheme.

The Country Code

Please follow the Country Code when visiting the hill. Walkers are asked to keep dogs on leads if there are sheep present, to close all gates and to take litter home. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

Written by Trevor Tween and designed by halcyon-uk.com
Produced by Local Projects Team, Luton Borough Council,
Town Hall, Luton, Beds. LU1 2BQ 01582 547095

BRADGERS HILL

The Lynchets Walk

Introduction

The walk begins at the Bushmead Community Centre, Hancock Drive, LU2 7SF where the John Dony Field Centre was formerly housed from 1990 to 2012.

The complete walk will take about 2 hours; shorter walks can be easily devised by leaving out some sections. Good outdoor clothing and stout footwear is advisable, suitable for the weather conditions. Owing to the terrain, some sections of the walk may not be suitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs.



For details and enquiries:
Facebook 'Friends of Bradgers Hill'
Twitter @bradgershill
Mobile 07841 514953
www.bradgershill.org





Route Guide

1 The finger post marks the first point of the trail, where a Public Footpath leads off to the north. This was once the Hexton Highway and is bounded by hedgerows mainly of hawthorn, with only a few elder, blackthorn and way-faring tree. This suggests the hedge is not ancient and probably dates from the enclosures of the late eighteenth century. Sycamore is also present, having seeded from the fine mature tree on the other side of Bushmead Road. This is known locally as Dobbins' Tree after a horse which once was often tethered there. Hazel, ash and field maple grow close to the base of this sycamore.

Follow the pavement but turn left at the next finger post beside the houses and follow the short section of path towards the hill. Then turn right behind the houses and follow the field edge until you pass through the gap in the hedgerow at the far end. Turn left towards the hill, until you reach point 2.

2 The hedge marks the southern edge of a large arable field that has now been partly built upon. It consists mainly of hawthorn and elder, and was last laid in about 2011. The grass here is frequently mown, like a lawn, and only a few wild flowers, such as daisies, clover, buttercups, plantains and dandelions can survive. The clumps of trees are all native species, such as ash, field maple and wild cherry and were planted as landscaping for the estate in the late 1980s.

Follow the surfaced path and climb the two flights of steps until the path levels out onto flat ground.

3 The mature bushes here support a range of climbing plants such as ivy, bittersweet and old-man's-beard. Look too for the wild dog rose, black bryony (a member of the yam family) and white bryony (a member of the gourd family). These climbers and scramblers need the support of the trees and bushes to reach the light. Some twist their way around the host stems, some have tendrils, while others have special structures to attach to their hosts. A small patch of grassland at the top of the steps contains several species. The nationally scarce great pignut has been seen here. The bushes on the bank include spindle, which is rare on this site.

Retrace your steps down the first flight of steps, and turn left into the broad path enclosed by vegetation leading southwards.

4 The older, mature scrub to the left of this path has developed on the steep slope of the lynchet. Shade tolerant plants like ivy thrive here, but there is no grassland. On the right side of the path the younger scrub has destroyed much of the grassland by shading, and a few shade-loving species have colonised the ground. Patches of the original downland only survive where the canopy is not too dense, and a clearing has been made to reduce the shade and preserve the fragments of grassland before they too are overwhelmed. These different areas show the damaging effect of uncontrolled scrub growth on downland and its traditional communities of plants.

Continue along this track until you reach the prominent evergreen tree on the left.



5 This is a yew tree, probably the most mature specimen on the hill, although many younger examples may be found. Yew is very poisonous, but birds eat the flesh of the fruits leaving the seeds untouched. In this way the yew is spread, and those on Bradger's Hill may well have come from Stopsley churchyard, where yew was planted in Victorian times. Garden plants have also spread onto the hills in this area, while wild flowers will often grow in local gardens. This interchange of native and domestic plants is a feature of the botany of urban areas.

Continue along this track until you reach the steps which climb steeply off to the left, and climb these up to the edge of the overgrown chalk pits. Pass through the gate and follow the edge of the pit to your right.

6 These old pits, known locally as the lime-kilns, were small chalk quarries active in the late Victorian times. The chalk was used to make lime for the mortar used in local building or to spread on the fields. They were later abandoned, although it is said that the soldiers in World War 1 used them for practicing trenching skills before they were sent to France. Local children have called the largest the Devil's pit, which is now very overgrown, and the bare chalk is obscured by soil, bushes and trees. Clearing this area would greatly benefit the wildlife, as open chalk pits are often excellent sites for flowers, butterflies and other animal life.

Turn away from the pit and take the main path onto the expanse of open grassland through an area of stumps from recently cut hawthorns and continue for a short distance.

7 The path crosses an area that was dense scrubby growth dominated by dogwood, which can be identified by its attractive reddish twigs, and hawthorn. Although recently cleared, the regrowth has to be controlled by cutting. It is an area rich in wild flowers including kidney vetch, which is the only food plant of the caterpillars of the small blue butterfly sometimes called the Bedford blue owing to its local abundance in the past. It may still be seen on this part of Bradger's Hill.

Continue along the path as it broadens into a wide area of chalk downland.

8 This hillside is the richest part of the site for wild flowers. You can find the common spotted, pyramidal and bee orchids here, and many other wild flowers typical of chalk grassland, including autumn gentian, eyebright, fairy flax, rockrose, yellow-wort and harebell. The butterflies include the chalkhill blue, green hairstreak and marbled white, together with many more common species. Many different grasses occur, including the beautiful quaking grass, along with glaucous sedge. A few rabbits live in this area, which helps to keep the turf short, but in the absence of grazing, an annual autumn hay cut is needed to protect this valuable area.

There are excellent views over the town towards Warden Hill, Dunstable & Dallow Downs. Stopsley Common Farm below now lies surrounded by houses. The older mature ones have gardens rich in trees and bushes, while lichens grow abundantly on their roofs. Since 1987 the newer houses of Bushmead have provided new habitats as their gardens and trees have matured.

Follow the main path along the downland until you see the laid hedgerow at the far end. Take the small path to the right leading up through the scrub and through the kissing gate under an apple tree and turn right onto the main track. Go through the second kissing gate on your right onto the meadow.

9 This field was once part of the close-mown playing fields, but has been developing as a meadow since 1992 when the site entered the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. A strip of land adjacent to the hills was left out of the regular mowing regime to allow recolonisation of wild flowers and provide a buffer zone for the hill itself. It has to be either grazed or cut for hay each year, and knapweeds meadow vetchling and wild carrot now grow here. In 1994 it was described as "practically devoid of wild flowers". A new hedge was planted in 2015 along the boundary fence.

Follow the Public Footpath following the hedgerow and across the playing fields to the corner of Hay Wood.

10 Hay Wood is a small relic of ancient Chiltern woodland of ancient character that was felled in the early years of the 20th century, but was allowed to regrow again. The soil here is underlain by clay and is more acidic than the chalky lynchets of Bradger's Hill, so different species can grow, such as oak, rowan and gorse. Wood anemones, bluebells and brambles carpet the ground.

Follow the edge of the wood to your right and turn left through the kissing gate.

11 Although smaller than it once was, Hay Wood remains as a remarkable wildlife haven amid the barren sports pitches of Stopsley Common. However, the long-term plan is to extend the wood to its original size, and new areas were planted in 2004 and 2014. It is a good place to look for galls, where insects have caused deformities to the tissues of the young trees; oak apples, spangle galls and oak marble galls can usually be seen.



Follow the mown path alongside the new planting, past the rest of the wood and follow a newly-replanted hedgerow (in spring 2014) to the yellow-topped post.

12 The meadow to your left was once known as Cocks Croft, and was harrowed and seeded with wild flowers in late 2014. It has been part of the conservation area since 1992, but to encourage diversity wild flower seeds from Warden Hill were spread here and it is hoped they will provide an interesting and attractive display in years to come.

Follow the main path around the meadow until you reach a wet hollow beside the fence, which is the site of a pond.

13 The pond at this point has become dried out, except in wet winters when it does hold water, but is due for restoration in 2015. It was probably a former farm pond for livestock and may be similar to the dew ponds of the southern downs, fed only by rainfall and the condensation of water vapour. Beyond the pond lies a shaw or a narrow woodland belt. There is much English elm present here, re-growing from diseased trees, with few other species. It is linked back to Hay Wood with another restored hedgerow replanted in 2007 and again in late 2014.

Continue along the worn path around the perimeter of the common until you get back to the boundary of Bradger's Hill and follow the path until you reach a kissing gate.



14 Most of the grassland around the northern edge of the common is managed with an annual cut, but this little paddock was created for cattle grazing in 2004. Grazing is the best option, but it is important that the summer growth is either eaten or removed. In that way, wild flowers are encouraged to grow amongst the grasses as their vigour is reduced. The birds also benefit, and a number of interesting species can be seen on Bradger's Hill and in the fields and hedgerows around. They include skylarks, grey partridges and corn buntings, while kestrels, buzzards and red kites have become much more common.

Continue along the path through the paddock and leaving through the kissing gate, turn right and follow the Public Footpath through the kissing gate in front of you, with the wooded area with mature trees to your right.

15 There are few mature trees on Bradger's Hill itself. However, in this area may be found oak, ash, beech, field maple and hazel. These trees provide an important source of nuts for small mammals, and seedlings of many of the trees can be found elsewhere on the hills. Mice and voles are common on the hill, although seldom seen, and along with the grey squirrel are responsible for the spread of the trees. The knopper gall can be found on the cups of the acorns. The trees were probably planted originally for their timber value on the edge of what were once cultivated fields.

Continue down the Public Footpath down the steep hillside until the path opens into a more open area, where two grassy terraces are visible, with a steep slope between them.

16 These terraces are known as lynchets or lincs and are the remains of cultivated strips of land along the hillside. They are of great archaeological significance, and probably date from the Medieval period. The upper terrace once had good quality grassland, with some scrub regrowth, while the lower terrace was dominated by a coarse, invasive grass, chalk false-brome or tor-grass. Both lynchets are now dominated by this serious weed species, and few other species can survive. An important exception is the rare great pignut, which can still be seen here.

Keep to the Public Footpath descending the hill past a further lynchet to your left, while on your right are the remains of a hedgerow which once ran down the hill and across the field to Dobbins' Tree. At the foot of the flight of steps is a gap in the fence-line; pass through this and into the field.

17 An arable field until the autumn of 1991, this area was then put down to grassland under the Countryside Premium scheme. This protected the hillside from potentially damaging agricultural practices, such as spraying, while increasing the area available to wildlife. However it was ploughed once again in February 2007, destroying what had become an attractive and flower-rich meadow. It is now regularly cropped once more, although a wide headland strip is left each year for walkers and wild flowers alike.

Follow the Public Footpath across the field towards the finger-post where the walk started, past the edge of the houses and onto the triangle of rough grassland.

18 Cultivation of this area ceased with the building of the Bushmead estate, and it has reverted to a more natural grassland typical of a lowland meadow, although brambles and other coarse species are becoming established in some places. Bee orchids, twayblade and common broomrape have been seen here in recent years, and it has been added to the protected area of Bradger's Hill. Such areas provide food and shelter for many species of birds and animals, especially in urban areas, and it is vital that they are protected and properly managed.

Continue along the edge of the area to the finger-post where the walk ends.