

Ouzel Valley Meander

4 ½ miles. Location: Leighton Linlade



Explore Greensand Country on Foot

Greensand Country

An area of distinct, beautiful and loved countryside

Ouzel Valley Meander

This new 4 ½ mile circular route aims to help local residents, including those new to the area, to explore the landscape on their doorstep. It can be walked in either direction and is easily accessed directly from housing areas to the north of Leighton Buzzard. The route takes walkers through a variety of urban and rural scenery including a flat section along the Grand Union Canal towpath and up short but steep climbs out of the river valley. The Ouzel Valley Meander passes The Globe Inn, and continues through grasslands, fields and woodland. A very pleasant 1.2 mile 'there and back' extension into Rushmere Country Park can also be taken and would pass through established woodland to the visitor centre and Tree Tops Café.

Please observe the Countryside Code. The full Countryside Code provides advice for the general public and land managers. Please visit

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code for details.

Find out more and explore walking, cycling and horse-riding routes in Greensand Country

www.greensandcountry.com

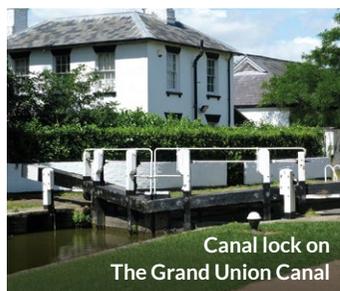


Points of interest around the Ouzel Valley Meander

The Leestone Park estate occupies the site of Chamberlain Barn's quarry, one of many huge sand pits that helped to bring jobs and prosperity to Leighton Buzzard. J. Arnold and Sons Ltd worked this and other nearby quarries from about 1860 until 1989. The sand was plentiful and dug from beds that were brown, red or silver. Each type had different properties that led to its many uses in construction and other industries. It was smelted to produce iron from ancient times and door hinges on the town centre's magnificent church were made from this by Thomas of Leighton in 1293-4.



Along Heath Road, the greensand rock occurs in many garden walls and a particularly impressive example can be seen fronting the grounds of Heath Lodge and the White House, where it is displayed in a 'giraffe-skin' pattern.



The Grand Union Canal links the Midlands with London. It was built in 1805 and takes advantage here of the easy gradients along the river valley, with water from the Ouzel topping it up.

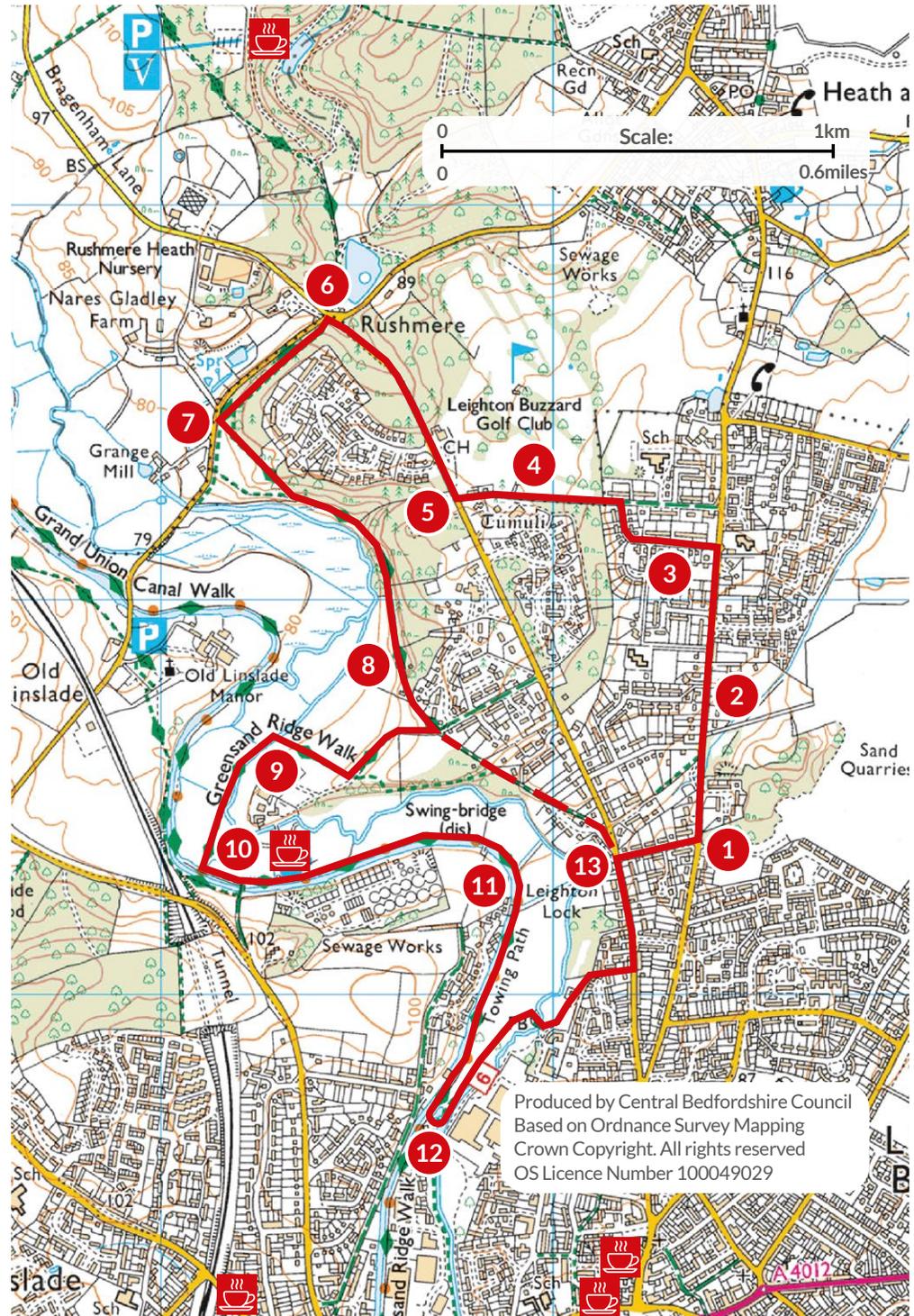
The canal traditionally carried a lot of freight but lost some after the railway opened in 1838. The arrival of London and North Western Railway helped the local economy thrive and the population expand.



The well-watered lush vegetation in the River Ouzel and along its valley is a good place to spot wildlife. Birds that feed from the river include Kingfishers and Little Egrets and dragonflies are common in summer. Traditionally, cattle grazed these pastures.

The grand entrance gates, which formerly welcomed visitors to Rushmere Park, are 250 metres to the left of the current entrance on Linslade Road. Now known as Rushmere Country Park, the 400-acre site is jointly owned by The Greensand Trust and Central Bedfordshire Council, is managed by The Greensand Trust and is open to all.





Ouzel Meander

4 ½ miles. Location: Leighton Linlade

- 1 Your walk starts on Heath Rd at the junction with Kemsley Rd and Greenhill. This route takes you through the leafy north of Leighton Buzzard and into the beautiful valley of the River Ouzel.
- 2 Heath Road connects Leighton with the village of Heath and Reach. Briefly enter the Recreation Ground where you'll see that the road bridge was constructed above a base of irregular brown rocks made of well-cemented sand. Despite its colour, this stone is called Lower Greensand because it was similar in some ways to the noticeably greener Upper Greensand. Lower Greensand gives its name to Greensand Country, a narrow belt of higher ground where it's found that stretches from here to Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire. Beyond Row Riddy, Heath Road crosses a former heathland. As you continue up Heath Road, the greensand rock occurs in many garden walls. Past Heath Park Drive, look right to see the White House where it is displayed in a 'giraffe-skin' pattern.
- 3 The entrance to Heath Park Road (originally Park Road) features an impressive stone gate post. Originally, it had guarded the entrance to one of the grand early houses until the grounds were sold off for housing.
- 4 In 1812, John Dollin Bassett was one of five Quakers who founded a Leighton Buzzard bank (later part of Barclays). His wealth enabled him to buy much of Leighton Heath where he planted many exotic and native trees. Some of them now form part of Knolls Wood.
- 5 Your route skirts three sides of the plantation of tree belts surrounding the grounds of the Heath, a large house built for the Bassetts on the former heathland. The Heath has not survived and the modern housing in Heath Court replaces it.
- 6 Across the road junction are the now redundant grand entrance gates to Rushmere Park. This is now called Rushmere Country Park, open to all and managed by The Greensand Trust, working in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council. The entrance now is 250 metres to the right along Linlade Road.
- 7 You come into the open briefly at Heath Field which falls away towards the River Ouzel. The view continues across the valley into Buckinghamshire where the ridge of Greensand soon peters out. Your path soon returns beneath the trees of the Plantation.
- 8 After turning sharply to the right, you descend along the surfaced track and take the footpath on the right where the ground flattens out.
- 9 The well-watered lush vegetation in the River Ouzel and along its valley is a good place to spot wildlife.
- 10 The Grand Union Canal links the Midlands with London. Glass was made from the high-quality silica sand found locally and much of this glass was required to build Crystal Palace in London to house the Great Exhibition in 1851. Horses pulled the barges that took sand to the glassworks near Birmingham and brought the finished glass sheets back to London. Look at thesandmuseum.org for more information.
- 11 Leighton Lock is one of many along the canal that allows barges to negotiate undulating terrain. Along this stretch, the canal copes with the gradual drop from its passage through the Chiltern Hills near Tring to where it crosses the River Ouse near Milton Keynes.
- 12 Your route takes a sharp left turn into Ouzel Meadows which are liable to flood when the river level rises.
- 13 Turn right into Greenhill, the steep climb takes you out of the Ouzel valley and back to the start.

Walking Routes in Greensand Country

Greensand Country is a beautiful and loved landscape. It is defined by the Greensand Ridge, a band of higher ground stretching from Leighton Buzzard to Gamlingay, which rises out of the surrounding vales to create a locally unique environment. Greensand Country contains all of Bedfordshire's remaining heathland, more than half of its woodland and greater concentration of historic parkland than any other part of England.

Walking is an ideal way to get to know Greensand Country and experience what it has to offer. When on foot you are closer to nature and able to take in the views, soak up the landscape and enjoy the physical health and mental wellbeing benefits associated with exploring the great outdoors. Many routes have been created by the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership to help you explore the history, heritage and rich culture of Greensand Country. Other routes include Katherine's Walk and Weneslawe Walk.



What's On?

Places to Stay and Food and Drink in Greensand Country

Plan a great day out in Greensand Country. There's something for everybody with idyllic villages to explore, home cooked food to eat, adventures to be had, unique handmade crafts to buy and history to discover.

There are many stunning views in Greensand Country. The ridge itself is a prominent feature in the landscape and provides a dramatic backdrop to the views from the lower lying countryside. The ridge is accessible from many of the surrounding villages and towns. Woodlands often frame views on lower ground, whilst landmark churches and other historic buildings provide focal points in the landscape.

Whether you're looking for somewhere to stop for tea and cake or lunch during your walk, or thinking about things to do, places to visit or somewhere for friends and family to stay locally, the Greensand Country website has everything you need to plan your next exciting outdoor adventure.

Support local businesses, enjoy great experiences and discover unique products in Greensand Country. Stop off at a pub or tearoom after a day of walking to enjoy locally sourced, home cooked food. Or shop for antiques and unique handmade crafts in one of Greensand Country's picturesque villages.

With walking, cycling and riding routes available to view and download on our interactive map, you can search for facilities, including toilets, points of interest, car parking and much more on your chosen route.

Simply click on the QR Code and start exploring today.

