

Barton-le-Clay walk

With **Andrew Clark**

In September, the Chiltern Society will be launching a new long-distance path called The North Chilterns Trail. It will be created by combining the original and extended routes of The Chiltern Way as the basis for a 41 mile circular route through some delightful Chiltern countryside in Bedfordshire and north Hertfordshire. The walk below links both old and new, as well as allowing the walker to enjoy some of the most spectacular views to be found in the area.

START: The Chequers, Sharpenhoe Road, Streatley LU3 3PS.
Grid ref: TL 070 286. The landlord has given permission to use the car park and would be delighted to serve you refreshments. The walk can be shortened by using the car park by the allotments in Church Road

DISTANCE: 6.25 miles, with c185m of ascent

TERRAIN: A moderate walk, with one steep descent and ascent

MAPS: OS Explorer 193 and Chiltern Society 25

REFRESHMENTS: The Chequers in Streatley and pubs in Barton-le-Clay

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Bus 79, Luton to Meppershall and Bus 81, Luton to Bedford both stop in Streatley and Barton-le-Clay.

Route

From the entrance to the pub car park, cross over the road to a bus shelter, turn left and then right into Church Road. When convenient, cross to the left-hand pavement and walk along it, past the optional start point, to the junction with the A6.

1. Cross carefully to the central reservation and then over to the pavement on the other side. Turn right and then left up a lane towards Lilley. Watch out for fast moving traffic.
2. After c1km, turn left on a bridleway between two concrete blocks. Follow the track between the hedgerows for c600m then turn right through a gap to emerge in the corner of a field. Follow the hedge on the right to a fence at the end. Turn left, then immediately right through a gate into Barton Hills National Nature Reserve. Go ahead to the Reserve noticeboard, bear right and then through the next gate. Follow the hedgerow uphill, then round the top of the ridge to reach a gate and information board on the right.
3. Continue along the ridge for a few paces, then go left down the steep path to the valley. Near the bottom, take the steps on the left to reach Barton Springs. Cross the stream to the left bank and follow it through the woods for c800m. On the way there are two metal bridges on the right. Take the second one to emerge at the edge of a field.
4. Turn left. Follow the field edge past a cemetery, through a gate and on to St Nicholas Church, Barton-le-Clay. Take the path on the left opposite the church entrance. Follow it through a gate and into a playing field. Bear half right past the tennis courts to the left-hand corner and continue into Old Road. Turn right down to the junction with Hexton Road. Cross it and continue along the pavement to the road junction opposite the Royal Oak pub.



5. Cross to the pub, turn right and then left into Sharpenhoe Road. When safe, cross to the opposite side and continue along the pavement for c500m. At a small green stey with the main road and cross the road bridge over the bypass.
6. Just after the barrier ends, turn right down the steps to a stream at the bottom. Carry straight on to the edge of a field, then cross it to the right-hand corner. Go over the access road and through the gate opposite. Bear right over the field to the next gate at the right-hand corner. Follow the path through a small wood to emerge at the edge of a large field. Cross straight over it following the line of the overhead wires to a footbridge on the other side. Go over the bridge and turn right to rejoin the main road. Turn right and walk along the grass verge past the sign for Sharpenhoe and cross to a lay-by on the other side.
7. A few metres after the lay-by begins, turn left uphill on The Chiltern Way Extension. Ahead are a steep flight of steps. Climb to the top. Go through the first line of trees, turn immediately left and keep to the edge of the wood as the path winds its way round the hill. After c300m the path bends uphill to the right. Do not follow it, but drop down to the left over tree roots to the bottom. Stay on this path as it leaves the wood and continue to a gate.
8. Go through this gate and the one on the left. Follow the path round the hill for c300m to rejoin the main path at a gate. Go through it and turn left to a T-junction. Turn left on a bridleway and stay on it for c2.4km as it winds round the ridge. The track then passes allotments to reach a car park and a road. Turn right to return to the pub.

Points of Interest

- A Streatley:** The name means 'the clearing by the street', which indicates that an important road or track (possibly Roman) may have passed the village.
- B Barton Hills NNR:** This Reserve has been designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It's a chalk downland site with a large population of rare flowers, including the pasque flower, greater pignut and fleawort. There are also large numbers of chalkhill blue, marbled white and grizzled skipper butterflies. The Barton Hills are also thought to have been the inspiration for Bunyan's Celestial Mountains in *Pilgrim's Progress*. This walk uses a very small section of the John Bunyan Trail.
- C Barton-le-Clay:** Until the 1960s it was known as Barton in the Clay and got its name from its position on a ridge of gault clay. The manor is mentioned in the Domesday Book as being under the ownership of Ramsey Abbey and was assessed at 11 hides, worth £10. St. Nicholas Church is a Grade I listed building that has played a central role in the life of the village for 800 years.
- D Searchlight Field:** At point 6 the walk crosses a field towards Brook End Green Farm. In WWII it was known as Searchlight Field and was

part of the defences of nearby RAF Barton-le-Clay. The airfield was first established in 1935 and was used by Luton Aircraft Ltd for the manufacture of aircraft, and The Dunstable Sailplane Company for the building and repair of gliders. It later became an RAF flying school. The airfield itself has disappeared. Some of the buildings are now part of an industrial estate.

- E Bury Farm:** Previously known as Sharpenhoe Manor, it dates back to 1197. The moat is a scheduled ancient monument. The Manor's most famous owner was Thomas Norton and he was married to Margery, the daughter of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. Norton had a reputation for persecuting Catholics under Queen Elizabeth I's reign and it earned him the title of 'rackmaster-general'. He died in 1584 and bequeathed £10 to pay for a schoolmaster to educate the local children.
- F Sharpenhoe Clappers:** An ancient woodland and chalk downland owned by the National Trust, the name Sharpenhoe comes from 'sharp spur of land'. There seems to be some debate over the name 'Clappers'. Some think it derives from the medieval Latin term 'claperius' meaning a heap of stones or rabbit hole, others the French for rabbit warren. The site contains an Iron Age hillfort and is covered in beech trees.