

Walks Around Walsham – Into the Nether Regions

Also known as the Hundred Walk, this short walk of 2½ miles falls at the furthest reaches of the parish. It starts where footpath 1 meets footpath 22. You can park on the grassy verge outside Botany Farm. Look for a marked byway just to the right of Botany Farm. Through the gap in the hedge you find yourself immediately on a raised track between two ditches. The track is ancient, it goes back to Anglo-Saxon times and marks the ancient boundary of the Blackbourn and Hartismere hundreds. Today it is still the boundary between Walsham and Westhorpe.

The track is lined to the north with hawthorn. To the south the hedge was cut down to the ground, no doubt in part because it enabled the farmers to clear the ditches, but also because it will encourage wild flowers and dense new growth that will spring up close to the ground, all food for pollinators so essential for food production. It will also provide cover for nesting birds and foraging for small birds and mammals. There were sheep grazing the tops off a cover crop here during the winter. This was not a dabbling in livestock but part of a concerted effort to increase and improve the natural soil eco-system and reduce the input and subsequent runoff (pollution) of chemicals. To avoid losing all the benefits gained these fields are not ploughed before drilling. The new crop germinates and grows up through last year's stubble. Skylarks nest there too.

At a sharp left corner there is a pond and its surroundings given over to wildlife. Continue towards the Finningham Road. In winter be sure to wear tall wellies, this part can be spectacularly wet and muddy.

At the road turn left and head towards Walsham for almost ½ mile until you find the finger post on the righthand side. It is currently lying on the ground beside the hedge, you might have to search for it! From here the path goes diagonally across the field to the far corner on the right. At this point go through the hedge, cross a ditch via two planks and join another ancient route, the Nether Way, which used to be the main track between Walsham and Gislingham. The track is wide here, intentionally so as part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme to restore habitats and to provide food and nesting places for birds, insects and other animals. It also allows wild flowers and their pollinators to thrive. The stream is delightful, the tree cover affords a sheltered oasis for creatures in a hot summer.



The Nether Way - through the hedge, across the planks and on towards Gislingham

Red deer, roe deer, stoats, green finches, yellow hammers, hares, kestrels, buzzards and red kites might all be seen on a good day. This end of the village is farmed and managed to help wildlife thrive and you will always see something of interest. Just make sure that your dog doesn't flush out nesting birds. Keep them under control in the nesting season.

After two more fields you join the road, turn right and head south towards the Finnigham Road once more, passing a pond on the corner and everywhere the sweet smell of cow parsley and hawthorn. Turn right, then left back onto the hundred lane and head back along the path that you came along earlier, back to Botany Farm.

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