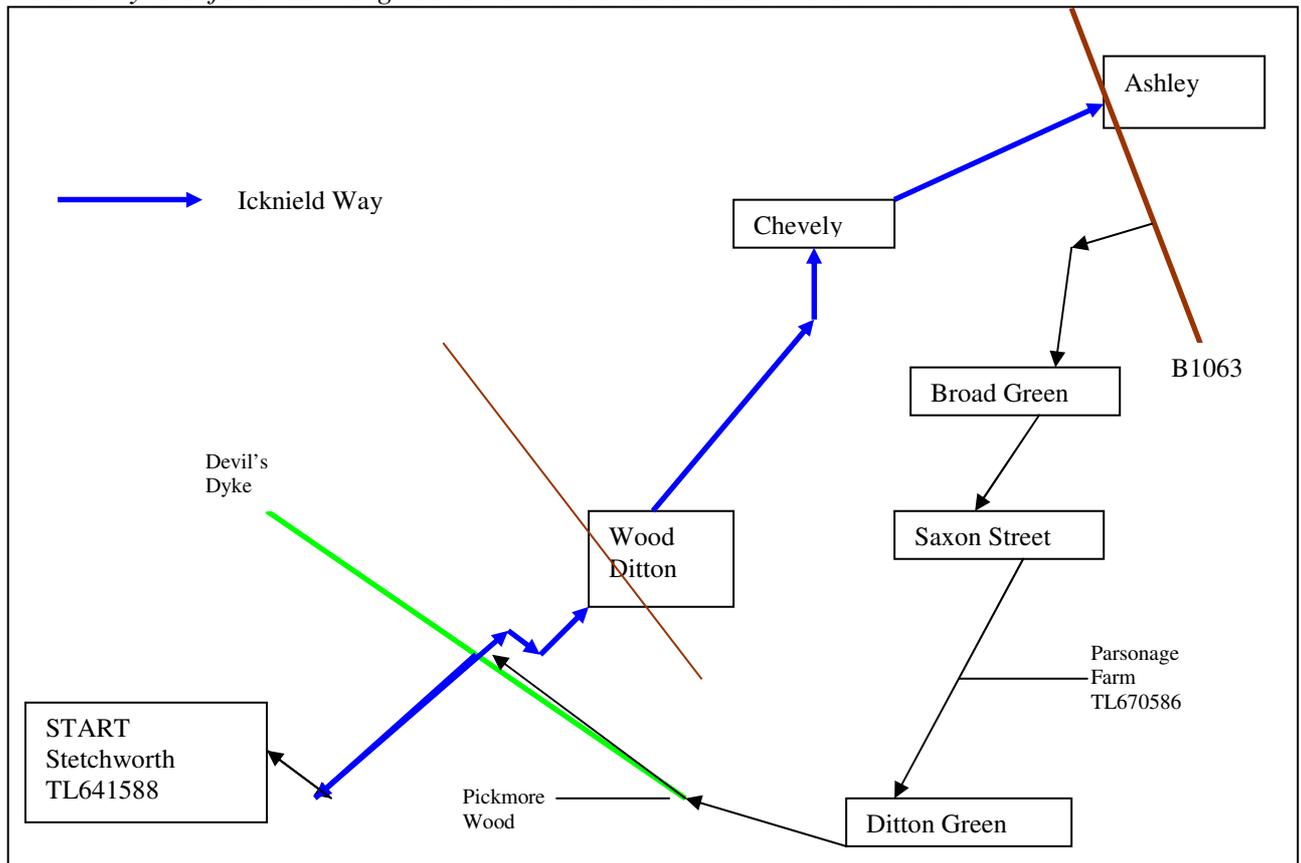


The Icknield Way. Part 19 from Stetchworth to Ashley, 8 August 2010

Map OS Explorer 210. This section is a longish circular stroll through some fairly horsey country (more studs than a Harley Davidson's panniers) from Church Lane, Stetchworth (TL641588) to The Crown at Ashley (TL697616). The return is a southern loop through Broad Green, Saxon Street and Ditton Green, regaining the Devil's Dyke before returning to the war memorial at Stetchworth. 15 km.



From the war memorial in Church Lane in Stetchworth, the first section is a footpath heading SE to connect with the Icknield Way and travel NE to Devil's Dyke. This chalkland masterpiece was constructed 1400 years ago¹ by the Anglo-Saxons and it was the boundary between the fens to the N and woodlands to the S. It would have had the purposes of controlling trade and access and having military and defence attributes. It would also have divided two Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and may have reduced bloodshed by keeping them apart (the bellicosity gene seems to have survived well into modern times). It is well worth while to make a diversion here and walk



**Bell flowers and upright hedge
parsely abound on the Dyke at
this time of year**



¹ <http://www.devilsdykeproject.org.uk/histarch.html>

along the Dyke (Ditch on the OS map) to ponder the monumental effort expended in its construction and to enjoy the chalkland flowers (for example: nettle-leaved bellflower – *Campanula* spp. and upright hedge parsley). Chalk-hill blue butterflies also flutter about the knapweeds and trefoils. There should also have been a photo showing the depth of ditch but operator error gave a poor (not to say non-existent) result.

The Way now passes through Dane Bottom – where the flowers of cultivation catch the eye – to reach the road at Woodditton. Past Woodditton church, a relic of a mill and so to Cheveley. Cheveley church² has a curious (Victorian) octagonal tower and



Red admiral and hover fly....Sun spurge

Dwarf mallow

Common poppy

it's worth looking inside to see how the Victorians energetically 'restored' their churches when fund-bearing patrons could be found. The Way leaves the Cheveley high street and heads E towards Ashley. More evidence of the horse business is all around in this area. A brief sojourn at the Crown in Ashley gives refreshment to the spirit as we now leave the Way and return, by a southern loop, to Stetchworth. The B1063 runs S out of Ashley and after 500 metres arrives at the footpath heading SW towards Broad Green. The path is kept in meticulous (if not militaristic) condition – the grass is cropped, the hedges trimmed and the fences creosoted. The butterflies don't seem to mind and we are surrounded by clouds of gatekeepers, blues, meadow browns and ringlets. The occasional red admiral and comma also makes an appearance as do hungry common hawker dragonflies. The path turns S and follows a tree belt, with its resident woodpeckers, to the road which leads to Broad Green and Saxon Street. Here, just before reaching the pub, the path continues SW, past (many) more paddocks before reaching Parsonage Farm and then on to reach the road at Ditton Green. After passing a dog-leg in the Dullingham road, we take the second of two path options to head NW and reach the beginning of Devil's Dyke at Pickmore Wood. There is now a climb to the top of the Dyke and an enjoyable the stroll back to the point where it is traversed by the Icknield Way. Turn to the SW on the Way here and reach the grassy track which led us out of Stetchworth some five hours previously. On this track there was a group of toadstools, which the fungi forum of Wild about Britain³ helped to identify as White Brittle-heads (*Psathyrella candolleana*).



² St Mary's and the Holy Host of Heaven – or 'Maria y sus muchachas' as some long-forgotten joke had it.

³ <http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk>