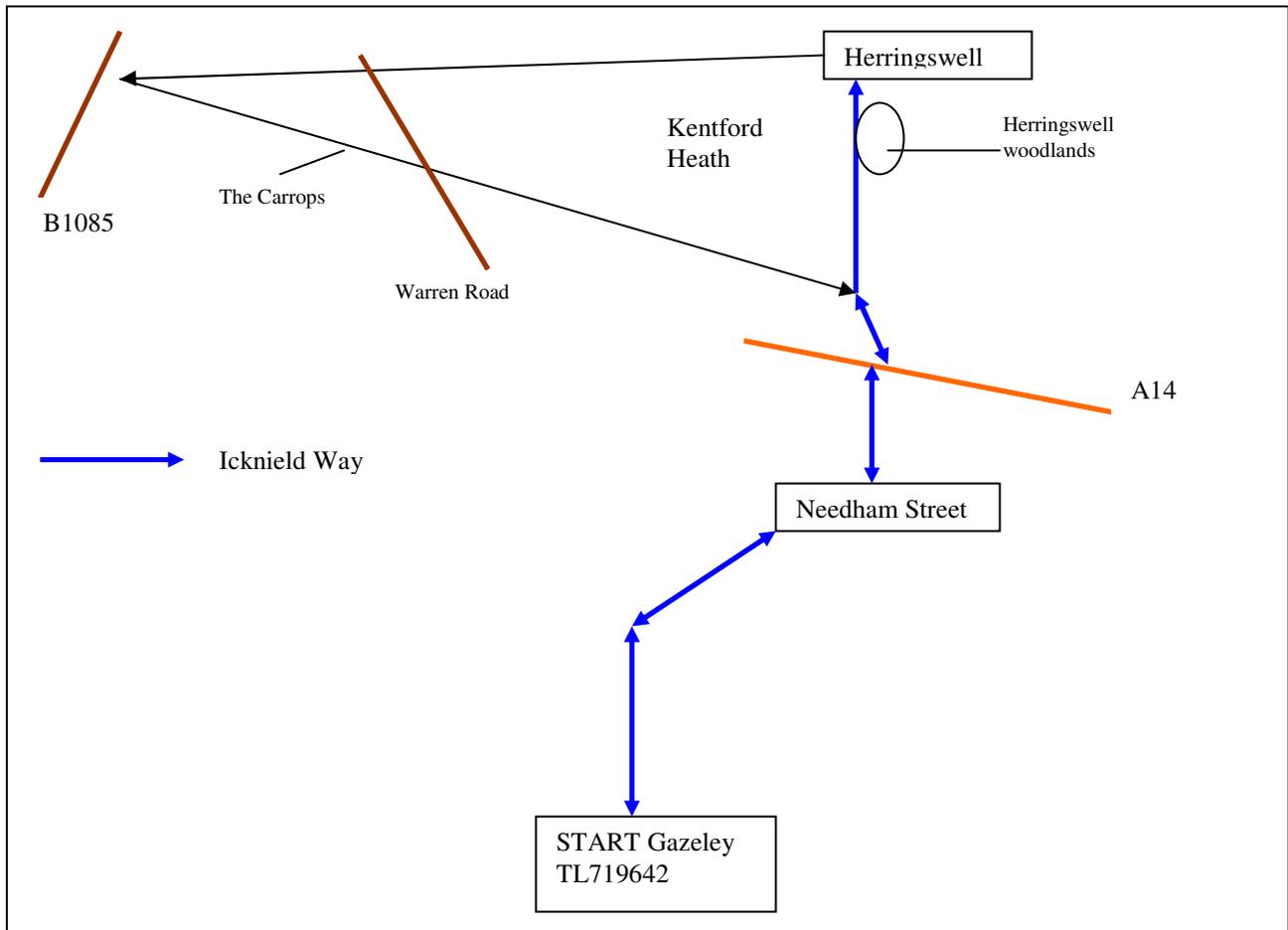


The Icknield Way. Part 21 from Gazeley to Herringswell. 2 October 2010

Map: OS Explorer 210. This section of the Way takes us North from Gazeley (TL719642) to Herringswell (TL718699), going under the unlovely A14. There is an industrial air to the walk, starting with the road building materials site near the A14 at Slade Bottom and continuing as the return route takes in the outskirts of Red Lodge with its housing estates (whose commonplace designs could have been plucked from almost anywhere in Britain) and its industrial recycling plant. The return rejoins the Way (at TL718677) and the return to Gazeley follows the outward leg. The route takes in the Brecklands of Kentford Heath. 15 km.



Starting from The Chequers in Gazeley, the Way heads N up the Kentford Road, past the church and to the junction near Gazeley Windmill (which we never actually saw). At this point the Way branches off to pass through the hamlet of Needham Street, with a suggestion of previous settlement in the track leading off into the fields?



Remains of a mediaeval settlement in Needham Street?

The lane here is bordered by flowering ivy – a magnet for comma butterflies at this time of year. The bees also seemed to find the nectar to their taste – and there are still small white butterflies making the most of this sun-filled day after a period of torrential rain. Late-summer flowers embellish the road banks and field margins; enough to take one’s mind off the distant roar from the, ever closer, A14. The Way passes potato fields and woodland margins before passing under said trunk road, and the railway to its N.



Ivy is now in flower and will sustain insects through the winter, yellow chamomile and meadow cranesbill still add life to verges and margins

The Way now takes us due N over the Brecklands¹, some cultivated and some not, of Kentford Heath. The Brecks cover 940km² on the Norfolk –Suffolk borders. They comprise a chalk bedrock (hence the presence of Weld on the walk today) covered by wind-blown sand (explaining the cultivation of potatoes and onions). Pine tree ribbons from the 1920s are a modern feature. Ancient heathland was the predominant vegetation, reputedly created by prehistoric farmers and their sheep. From the 12th Century, the action of rabbits helped to exacerbate the erosion of the fragile system which was, in 1667, described as ‘drie, barren and miserably sandy’¹. The Way continues through the Herringswell Woodlands, where a short diversion at this time of year will yield some magnificent fungi.



Beefsteak fungus
(*Fistulina hepatica*)



Common Puffball
(*Lycoperdon perlatum*)



Serrated Bonnet
(*Mycena pelianthina*)



Golden-green shield-cap
(*Pluteus chrysophaeus*)



Jew’s ear
(*Auricularia auricular-judae*)

¹ www.brecks.org/shared/pdfs/Historicoutside.pdf



Some fungi defied immediate identification, for example is this a milk cap (*Lactarius* spp.) or maybe a scale-head (*Pholiota* spp)?². In fact, subsequent guidance from Wild about Britain led to the suggestion that it may be Common Funnel-cap (*Clitocybe gibba*) because of the strikingly white gills.

But we digress, Herringswell does not boast a PH and so we did not tarry there for long. The church was rather shut but a peacock butterfly basked on the (Norman) flint wall in the afternoon sun. The Way heads NE from here, while the return route for today strikes out W passing mixed woodland and more pine shelterbelts. A buzzard's mewling cry (to its offspring?) penetrated the sound of go-carts as it wheeled above a plantation. The path passes to the S of new-build estates at Red Lodge. Houses that are depressingly similar to green belt building to be seen these days across the land. On (nearly) reaching the B1085 the green lane veers to the SE and heads back over Kentford Heath to rejoin the Way at TL718677. The Brecklands here show off some of their late-summer colours, Vipers Bugloss abounds and a giant puffball (already unattached I hasten to confirm) gives rise to an 'Alas poor Yorick' moment. The brecklands are not only being cultivated (the sandy soils are ideal for root crops) but are also home to pigs apparently having a whale of a time digging for Suffolk truffles (?).



And so back due S retracing the outward bound steps to Gazeley. To complete the day a flock of long-tailed tits cheeped in unison as they flitted from tree to tree along the hedge line above the still fruit-laden brambles.

² It has been posted on the Wild about Britain site to see if some experienced fungi watcher can help with (much) better identification.