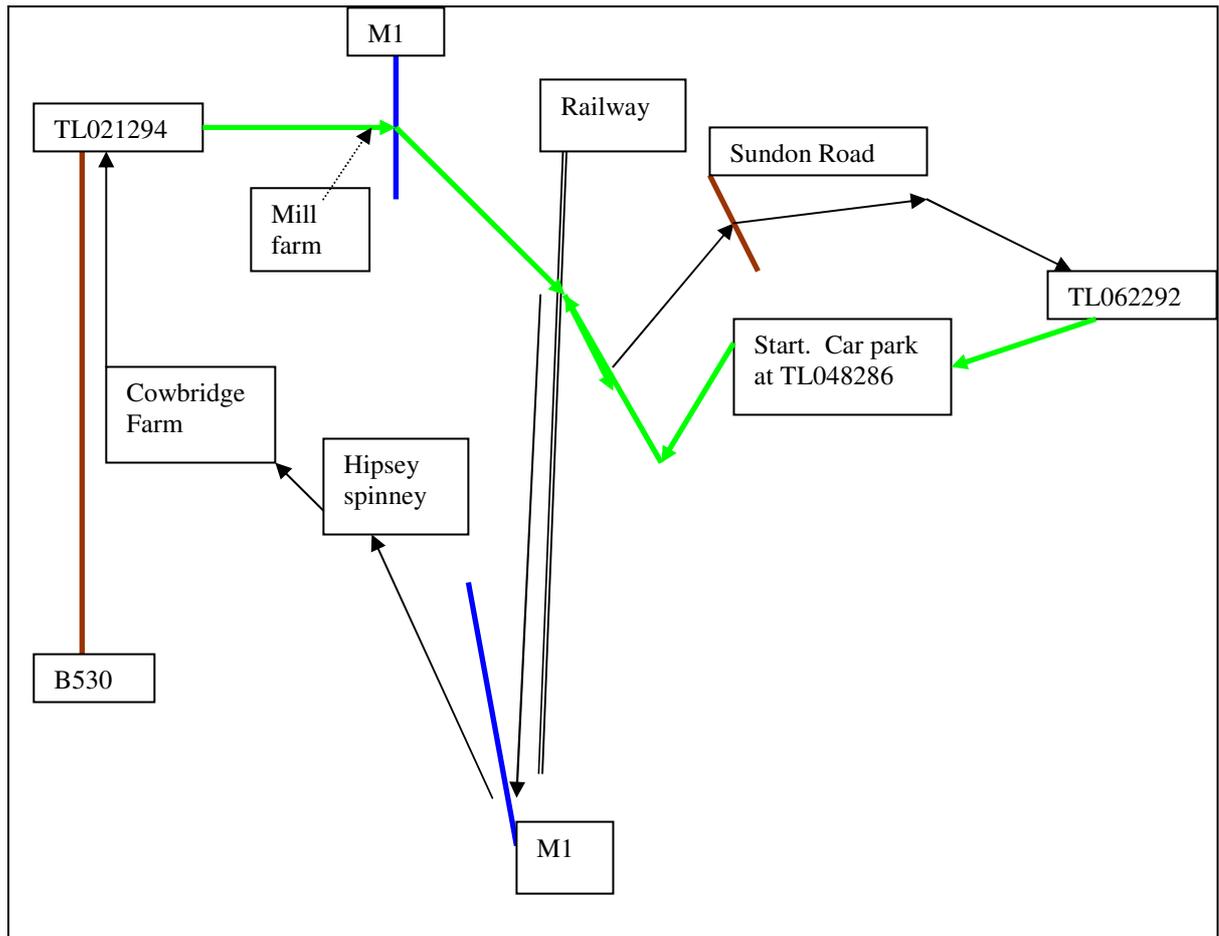


The Icknield Way. Part 5 from Sundon Country Park TL 048286 (backtracking and advancing to TL 062292). 28 March 2010

Map: OS Explorer 193. This was a 'cut and stick' walk which backtracks to where Part 4 left the Way and then moves forward to high up in Sundon Country Park. From the car park at Sundon Country Park (TL047286) the walk strikes SW on the Way, crosses the M1 and then heads NW towards Toddington before reaching the Section 4 finish point on the Way (on the B530). The walk then returns E on the Way, eventually skirting the Country Park to its N and returning along the top of the escarpment to the starting point. Total distance 12 km.



Spring is now in the air and was refreshingly noticeable after my recent sojourns in South America and southern Africa. Starting from Sundon Country Park picnic site (blue P on the map at TL048286) the Way heads SW along the top of an escarpment giving wide vistas towards Harlington. It then skirts a less pleasant recovering landfill site. There is evidence that Nature has started the slow healing process at the site as arrays of spring flowers are returning to colonise. The early-bird coltsfoot splashes the rubbish-lined brook with yellow flowers and, further into the elder wood, dog's mercury, primroses and wood anemones are flowering ahead of the bursting arum lilies.



Colonising coltsfoot by the landfill site



Anemones and primroses amongst the dog's mercury



The Way now starts to display its 'braided' nature. It seemed, at times, that paths going off in any direction were either Icknield Way footpaths, bridleways or permissive paths. This led to our downfall as we passed under the railway line. Turning S the Way is clearly signalled and leads rather tediously – except for the rabbits – to today's bridge number 1 over the M1. Here we left our particular 'braid' and headed NW towards Hipsey spinney, the River Flit and Cowbridge (aka Yapping Dog) Farm on the B530 which will be recalled from Part 4. A swing N up this road brings the route back to TL 021294 – the end of the walk (hunger march?) on the Way on 14 February. At this point the Way heads E past Mill farm and Old Park farm and back to the M1 to the point where we had been previously misled, by multiple Way signs.

After a couple of hundred metres of backtracking the Way now takes a braid NE, past clear babbling chalk stream waters lined with flowering goat willows (sallow), to the Sundon Road. Now views open up of a future destination, Sharpenhoe Clappers, and the wide swathe of the beech topped escarpment of Sundon Park leads the eye to the right.



River Flit



Sallow (*Salix caprea*)



Dog violet



Sharpenhoe Clappers

This was a day of busy spring activity. The birds were magnificent in their attraction-clad new finery. A proud (even arrogant) great tit posed on a branch turning to show all his good sides. And a flash of bright yellow in the hedgerow proved to be a male yellowhammer, stunning in his lemon plumage. The air was also alive with the hum of pleased industry of *Bombus* spp. female bumble bees. They emerge from hibernation at this time of year, fertilised and ready to find a suitable hole in the ground for a nest site. They must then actively forage for nectar and pollen to feed the next generation and continue a process that has long preceded Man's destructive emergence on the planet.