

CIRCULAR WALKS TO WAPPENHAM

There are several choices for walking on public footpaths between Helmdon and Wappenham but all involve some use of narrow roads at Astwell, where special care is needed. This leaflet describes a figure of eight route, which can start from the Bell in Helmdon or the Church in Wappenham. Ordnance Survey map number 207 in the Explorer series of 1:25000 scale leisure maps covers this area.

Distances and times for the two legs of this walk are:

Helmdon to Wappenham 3.19 miles,

Wappenham to Helmdon 3.4 miles

Allow 2-3 hours for the full circuit

Some of the paths can be muddy and uneven so stout footwear is needed, as well as sensible clothing. Please respect the countryside and keep to the public paths, fasten all gates behind you, leave livestock, crops and machinery alone, keep your dogs under close control and take your litter home. There are some stiles that dogs may have to be lifted over.

Starting from Helmdon

From the Bell Inn, Church Street, turn right. After the next-door cottage turn right onto a short path to a field gate; go through the small gate on the right. Head across the grass field to a kissing gate, where the hedge ahead drops down. Our path goes diagonally to the left across a grass field to a bridge over a wide stream. The path crosses the line of the former Banbury to Northampton railway; on your left Jeffs Coaches now occupy the old station yard. Go ahead a few yards and through a gap in the hedge into a small paddock; continue across to a gateway and then through the kissing gate on your right. The path runs diagonally up across the next field to a gate in the fence, then to the right of the stables in front of the thatched house.

From a small gate at the corner of the stables, the path continues over a stile into a horse paddock, and straight on to two stiles at the corners of a garden. Now go straight ahead across a meadow to a kissing gate, which has a chain for extra security, shut this gate! A well-used path goes ahead down through this long meadow to a gate and short plank bridge into another field.



From here our path goes straight on across the lower parts of three large fields; the line of trees about 100 yards away to your right hides more of the former railway that you crossed a few minutes ago. A plank bridge, with a handrail on one side, crosses the ditch between the field you are leaving and another large field that is mainly to your left but has a narrow piece extending back to your right.

From here you go diagonally to the left towards the dense hedge in which is hidden a wooden bridge with metal field gates on either side. Cross the stream and enter an old grass pasture where the uneven ground conceals remains of a landscaped garden. Head straight up to a wooden fence to the left of the buildings of Astwell Castle farm. Use the large gate to enter the horse paddock, and make sure to close it securely behind you, skirt the boggy ground to continue across to a stile into another small paddock and then go to the left to a gate onto the road.

Go left past the redbrick cottages and down the road to a fork where you turn right towards Syresham, as shown on the signpost. After about 300 yards along the road, a green footpath finger-post on the left indicates where to go through the thick hedge into a meadow. Keeping close to the hedge on your right, walk down into a dip in the corner of this field, and then through the open gateway. Continue up the slope, still with the hedgerow on your right, following the bends in it. Take time to enjoy superb views across the valley to the village of Weedon Lois. Near the top of this field the hedge turns away to your right, then continues to a corner. From here you go left about six yards to an opening in the hedge, where a fallen post with a black arrow points the way.

Go through and walk along the field edge, with the hedge on your left; pass three old trees and continue on this path which, as it is well used by horses and walkers, can be quite muddy, or rough in dry weather. At the end of the field, look for the tower of Wappenham Church in the distance to your left. You are now facing a large grass field.

Keeping the church tower in view, walk directly across the middle of this square field to a gap in the hedge opposite. At the wide gateway take the left fork and go diagonally, across an open field, heading for the Church in front of you and a marker post near a gap in the hedge on your left. From this post go down the field edge to a wooden fence with two small gates side by side. Go through the iron kissing gate into the churchyard and follow the path round to the front of the Church.

From Wappenham

Leaving the Church, cross the road and turn left to walk down to where the road bends sharply to the left. You will see a small children's play area and a green finger-post indicating the next path. Cross the play area to a stile into a small enclosure of newly planted trees, which you leave through a gate into a grass field. Stay close to the wire fence on your left. After about 150 yards, at the top of the rise, you will see an opening on your left where there is a stile with two black arrow path direction markers. Take the line of the one pointing diagonally to the right across the grass field; the ground slopes up but soon you will see a wooden fence and gate ahead. From this stile continue diagonally to the right, heading for the tall tree and going away from the farm buildings on your left.

Passing the tall tree to your right, continue down along some tractor tracks and go through the gateway. Turn left up to the hedge running away from you. Now go along with the hedge on your left until you see a black path direction marker leading into a narrow path between a high hedge and a wire fence. This path runs along the side of the grounds of Radmore Farm to the drive to that property. This path can be quite wet and boggy in places particularly at the end near the drive! Cross over the drive as the black arrow indicates, and continue alongside the hedge on your right for about 50 yards.

At the wide gateway go through but continue in the same direction so that there is now a hedge on your left and you cross sloping rough ground to where a tall tree with an owl box stands on the end corner of this hedge. Go slightly to the right, across the lower open grass field, keeping the hedge on your left. You are aiming at a stile in the far hedge ahead and Astwell Mill in the distance.

From this stile the path runs diagonally to the right down across a meadow, to pass close by a new barn to the field corner where a wooden gate opens onto the road opposite Astwell Mill House.

Here you could shorten the walk by turning right and walking along the road to Helmdon; care is needed on the bends but this could be a good choice on a wet day, if you are tired of mud and long wet grass!

Continuing our figure of eight walk you now turn left, cross the road and walk past a stable up to a T-junction where you go right into a narrow road between two large ponds; continue straight ahead up to the red brick houses. [Those who started from Helmdon will recognise this short road section because they walked down here sometime ago!]

Ignore the fingerpost on the right pointing towards Helmdon and continue up past the driveway into Astwell Castle Farm. At the end of a short wooden fence there is another finger post and a high stile to climb. From here go diagonally to the corner of the paddock and through a gate, taking special care to secure it behind you as there are often livestock in these fields. From the gate go diagonally to your left, down the sloping field passing a clump of trees to your right; just visible in the grass is a track down to a gateway.

Go through into a flat meadow, with a water channel to your right, and walk about 150 yards to a wire fence where a footboard will help you climb over into an arable field. Start along a straight path across to a footbridge into a large arable field. Continue in the same direction across this big field, over another little ditch bridge and through the middle of two more large arable fields. When crops are growing the path will have been 'sprayed out' by the farmer but some vegetation may remain and will be a tripping hazard; be careful also of cracks in the ground in dry weather.

From the last arable field a high stile takes you into a sheep pasture, cross straight over to a v-shaped stile and a bridge into a field with long grass. Turn left and follow the well-worn path up to a kissing gate; go through and bear sharp right up a slight slope then down to a gate into a gravel drive between houses. At the road turn right and take a well-earned rest at "The Bell".

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HELMDON PARISH PATHS CIRCULAR WALK No 4

Helmdon to Wappenham and return



Astwell Mill

The 2004 Parish Plan found that people wanted more information about the footpaths around the village. A working party was formed to survey the network of paths and to promote their use; it has prepared this leaflet. A grant from Helmdon Parish Council has funded the production costs.