

Cambridge Club Site The Backs and colleges walk

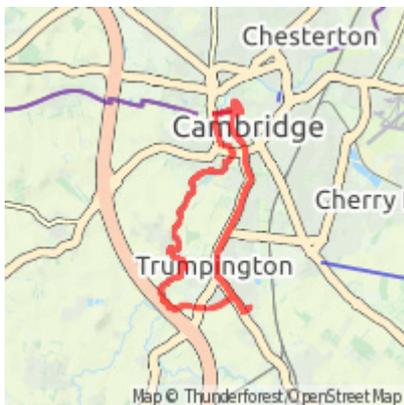
Camping and Caravanning



Route Summary

A walk of approximately 15.6km/9.7 miles taking you along the River Cam into the heart of Cambridge via the world-famous Backs. The return leg passes some of the city's colleges, museums and other historical sights, with the opportunity to make detours to many other interesting landmarks.

Route Overview



Category: Walking

Rating: Unrated

Surface: Smooth

Date Published: 21st September 2018

Difficulty: Easy

Length: 15.540 km / 9.71 mi

Last Modified: 21st September 2018

Description

This walk takes you from the seclusion of the Camping and Caravanning Club Site on the outskirts of Trumpington to historic and beautiful Grantchester, following cycleways and pathways. It then ambles along meadows at the side of the River Cam into the city centre, passing through The Backs and into the bustling small lanes and alleys around the colleges. The return journey shows the other side of the colleges, with museums and other places of interest to enjoy along the route back.

Before reaching the beautiful setting of Grantchester a small weir is passed, part of a local nature reserve. It is alleged that the romantic poet Lord Byron swam in the river at this spot. Hence it now goes by the name Byron's Pool.

There has been a settlement in the area called Grantchester since pre-historic times, but the greatest influence on the village has been from the Cambridge Colleges from the 1300s onwards. Corpus Christie and King's College have been the most influential, with the latter being Lord of the Manor. As with most villages near rivers, Grantchester had mills on either side of the river, and the Trumpington one is mentioned in The Reeves Tale by Chaucer. The mill on the Grantchester side burnt down in 1928.

It's said that more Nobel Prize winners have lived (or still live) in Grantchester than anywhere else in the world, and it's

also a notable location for poets such as Lord Byron and Rupert Brooke. Brooke lodged at Orchard House and later lived in the adjacent Old Vicarage, now the home of novelist Lord Jeffery Archer. The TV series Grantchester is set and filmed within the village with the church providing the backdrop to many scenes.

The path through the meadows from Grantchester towards Cambridge is also known as the Grantchester Grind and gave its name to the comic novel by Tom Sharpe.

Having negotiated the suburb of Newnham Croft you enter an area of tranquillity surrounded by the City of Cambridge, namely Coe Fen, Sheep Green and Lamma Land. Together these three provide a green space within easy reach of the city centre, forming a local nature reserve and flood management option. The area is managed in semi-traditional ways with cattle being allowed to graze on the meadows between April and October. They provide diverse habitats with some magnificent old willow trees. It is possible to see Heron, Kingfisher, Egret and Water Vole. The variety of flora and fauna was so good that Charles Darwin chose to study beetles here.

The world-famous Cambridge Backs were named because the colleges on the other side of the river face the opposite way. It was originally another area of pasture land and orchards, but gradually converted for more recreational purposes. St John's College consulted the landscape architect 'Capability' Brown to create a 'wilderness' near the Queen's Road side, which still exists today, and the area has now been designated a Grade I listed Historic Park. There are many beautiful bridges spanning the river such as the Bridge of Sighs, built in 1831 and named after the one in Venice. The Mathematical Bridge, built in 1749 is the oldest on the river, although it was rebuilt in 1905. The red brick building on the opposite bank is apparently the oldest building along the river, dating from 1460.

If your visit coincides with early spring, then you will enjoy the crocus and daffodils that blanket The Backs.

There has been human activity in this vicinity since pre-historic times, but it was the Romans who built the first settlement in the area – now known as Castle Hill. The nearby St Peter's Church contains pieces of Roman tiles within its walls. The settlement's location was chosen due to the ease of defending the position and it is close to the point where the river reaches the end of its navigable length. A port developed with links to continental Europe helping to bring prosperity to the area. The river was bridged by King Offa in 750 to 790 AD, later replaced by Magdalene Bridge. At the time it was the last crossing of the river prior to King's Lynn.

In 1209 a group of students from Oxford moved to the city, which led to the founding of Peterhouse College in 1284. Despite its age, this college remains the smallest in Cambridge. Although not the oldest college, St John's does boast one of the oldest buildings in the School of Pythagoras, which started its life as a townhouse in the mid-12th Century.

During his reign Henry VIII moved control of the university colleges away from the religious bodies that had previously controlled them. This period also saw a large amount of building including many of the gatehouses still standing today.

Finally, a somewhat gruesome fact. Oliver Cromwell studied at Sidney Sussex College prior to becoming an MP and eventually Lord Protector. After his death Charles II had his head displayed as a traitor, and it is now apparently buried somewhere within his old college grounds.

Waypoints

1 Start at Camping and Caravanning Club site Reception

(52.16495; 0.12402)



Leaving the calm of the Camping and Caravanning Club site the initial part of the route has contrasts throughout going past modern buildings then along the side of the River Granta. This section takes you past Byron's Pool and a small local nature reserve. Cross the bridge to enter the tranquil setting of Grantchester, worthy of a small detour to explore the various delights. There are a number of places to cut back to the river path and re-join the plotted route.

2 Grantchester

(52.17424; 0.10141)



Once on the riverside path north of Grantchester you can choose between the tarmac cycleway or footpath adjacent to the river, which join prior to Newnham Croft. Once through this small section of suburbia join the path through Paradise Nature Reserve and then on to Sheep Green and Coe Fen. Again, it is possible to go along the path adjacent to the river, or alternatively use the paths and cycle ways closer to the road.

3 The Backs, Garret Hostel Lane

(52.20575; 0.11185)



Prior to using the cycleway to cross the river into the lanes around the colleges, it's possible to continue exploring The Backs and colleges to the west of the river. Once within the lanes and streets surrounded by the hallowed halls of the colleges you can remain on the plotted route or opt to explore the numerous famous landmarks of this historic city. Trinity College, the largest within the University, is also home to the magnificent Wren Library. Designed in 1676 by Sir Christopher Wren, it has limited opening times so please check their website for details.

The Round Church, Bridge Street

(52.20842; 0.11847)



The Church of The Holy Sepulchre is one of only four round Norman Churches in England, built by The Knights Templar.

Sidney Sussex College is the final resting place of Oliver Cromwell's head!! Already seen at its best from The Backs is Kings College Chapel, built between 1446 to 1515 and one of the sights of Cambridge known around the world. Almost impossible to miss is the extremely impressive Corpus Clock set into the Taylor Library. For further details a book is available at the Porters Lodge. Going slightly away from Trumpington Street you will find St Benedict's Church, which has a Saxon tower and is the oldest building in Cambridge.

Returning to the route you will soon pass the oldest college in Cambridge. Peterhouse College was founded in 1284

and is the smallest within the University. A little further along is the very impressive Fitzwilliam Museum and Art Gallery, admission is free of charge, but check their website for opening times.

5 Hobson's Conduit Memorial, Trumpington Road

(52.19803; 0.12209)



Hobson's Conduit is a man-made waterway constructed in the early 1600s. It was built to improve sanitation by bringing fresh water from the chalk springs at Nine Wells (now a nature reserve) into the city of Cambridge. A short walk along Lensfield Road will get you to the Polar Museum where admission is free, it is open from Tuesday to



Saturday from 10:00am to 4:00pm.

You can access Cambridge Botanic Gardens at the junction of Trumpington Road and Bateman Street. With more than 8,000 species within the gardens and hot houses it is well worth a visit.

Finally, you will arrive in the centre of Trumpington, where there has been human activity since the Bronze Age. As will be seen from the building styles, the oldest part is along the High Street, Church Lane and Maris Lane. Agriculture was the main activity of the village until the 20th Century, after which its residential population grew, as did many other places close to large towns and cities. Trumpington Hall was built in 1710 with the parkland being landscaped during the 19th Century.

