

The
British
Horse
Society

Assarts Ride

9 miles from Old Warden



Explore Greensand Country on horseback

Greensand Country

An area of distinct, beautiful and loved countryside

Assarts Ride

This route explores a largely arable farming landscape, with mature, botanically rich hedgerows, remaining fragments of ancient woods. Although there is some road work, these are generally quiet lanes though popular with cyclists.

Assarting involved the clearance of woodland to create more agricultural land, though in this case it was possibly also to create a site for Warden Abbey. Assarting during the Middle Ages has influenced much of what we still see today along either side of much of this route.

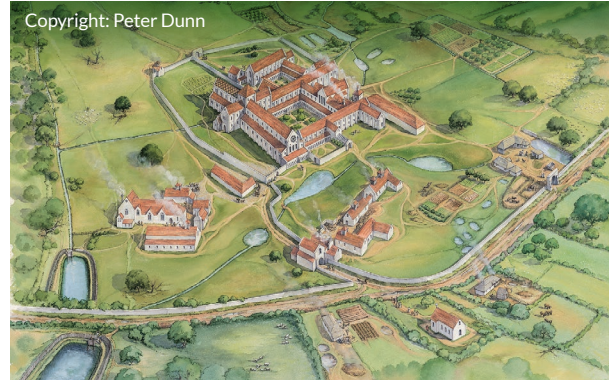
Parking is at Shuttleworth College Equine Unit, SG18 9HF (w3w: ///shifts.signed.rural). Please note that the Equine Unit is not at the main College so ignore road signs to the College. Please phone in advance and observe any safety instructions provided. 01767 627469. At present parking is free but a small charge may be implemented.

On weekend afternoons there may be air displays taking place – if your horse is likely to be anxious about low flying airplanes then please check the events at www.shuttleworth.org. On air display days there are also some road closures that may make access to the start tricky – especially from the east.



Points of interest near the Assarts ride

Warden Abbey (about a mile south west of the start point) was originally known as Sanctae Mariae de Essartis (i.e. St. Mary of the Assarts) - hence the name of this route. An Assart referred to a piece of land converted from woodland to arable use, and it is possible that the monks were responsible for extensive clearance locally during the Middle Ages.



The Abbey was founded in 1135 and little survives except substantial earthworks. A picture reconstructing an aerial view of the claustral complex based on exceptional geophysical survey results and other available evidence has recently been unveiled (above). The site is nationally protected as a Scheduled Monument and is private with no public access.

Palmers Wood and Sheerhatch Wood are ancient woodland survivors, fragments of a once continuous wood which occupied the top and northern slope of the ridge here at the edge of several parishes. Assarting brought new enclosed fields bounded by hedgerows carved directly from the woodland, with new farmsteads established, such as Wood End Farm.

The main building of Shuttleworth College was originally built in 1876-7 as a country house for Joseph Shuttleworth and is Grade II* listed building.

It is now home to an Agricultural College, part of Bedford College, and in its grounds is the Shuttleworth Collection and the Swiss Garden.
www.shuttleworth.org



Moggerhanger Park is a Grade I listed Georgian Historic House set in 33 acres of parkland and woodland.

It is recognised as the most complete surviving example of John Soane's work. The stylish grounds and woodlands were sculpted, at least partly, by Humphry Repton. The gardens are open to the public every day and house tours are offered.

www.moggerhangerpark.com

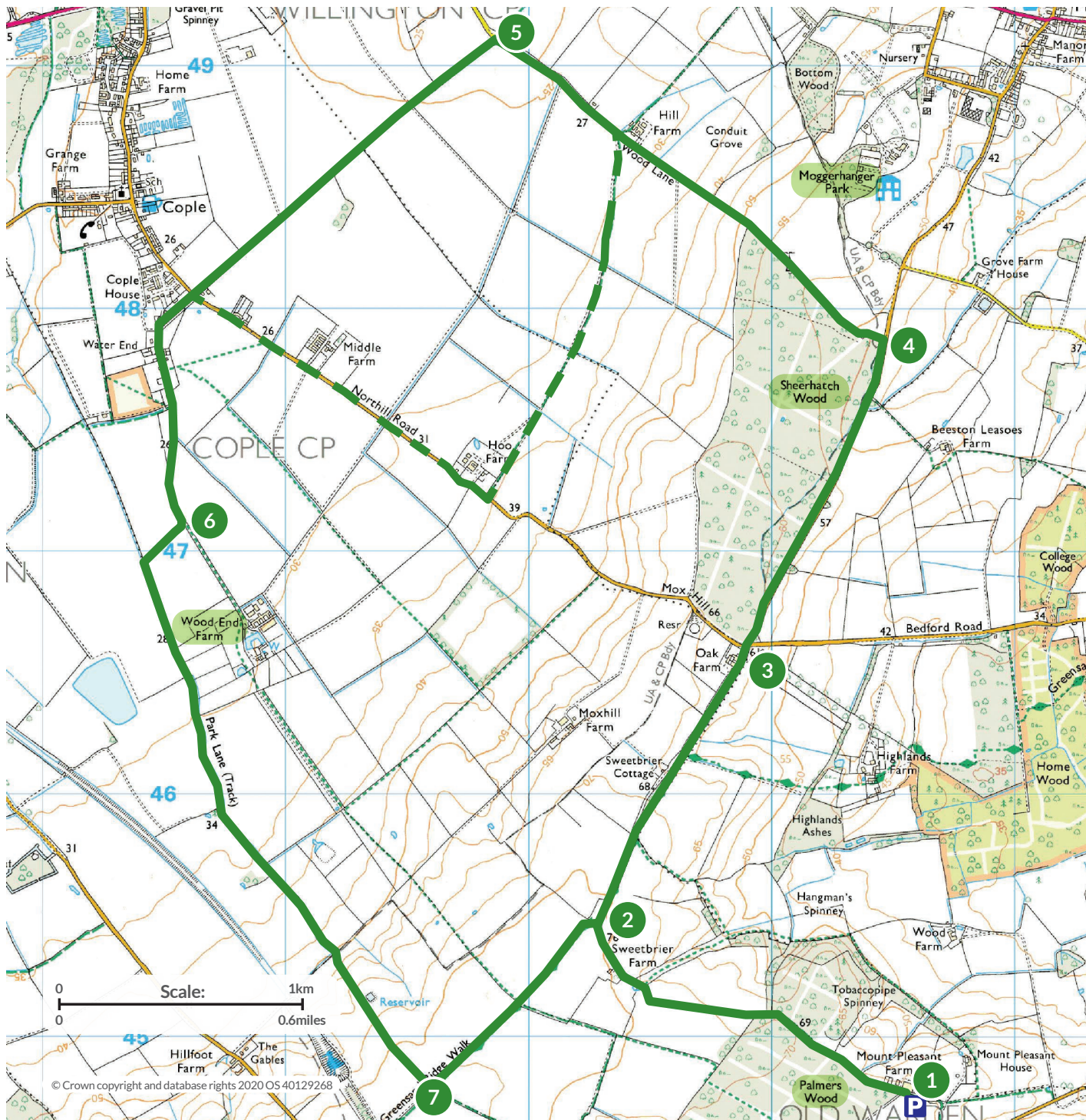
Oak Farm is a substantial rendered but timber framed house dating from c.1600. At the crossroads, a tree known as 'Deadman's Oak' stood until 2008 – it was believed to be 600 years old and a gallows site, in a typical prominent location where three parishes meet.



In spring and summer you will almost certainly see yellowhammers in the hedgerows – this popular bird is now regarded as a 'Red list' species due to its recent population decline. The male is unmistakable with a bright yellow head and underparts and white outer tail feathers that show in flight. The distinctive call is often represented as "A little bit of bread and no cheese."

Off-road cyclists

This route is also suitable for off-road cyclists but please remember that cyclists should give way to walkers and horses. Please pass other users slowly and with consideration. Be nice, say hi!



Assarts Ride 9 miles from Old Warden

- 1 Keeping the indoor arena on your right exit the Equine Unit along a cinder track past the wood on your left. Follow this track to the end past Sweetbrier Farm.
- 2 The cinder track goes into a grass path with trees on both sides. Follow straight ahead along this tree lined track along the Greensand Ridge Walk until you reach Oak Farm livery yard (the last bit of this track can be muddy in wet winter conditions). At the end of the track, go straight over (not into the livery yard) and you will shortly come to the road.
- 3 Cross the road, with the livery yard directly behind you and with Sheerhatch Wood on your left. It is a generally quiet country road but beware of occasional agricultural vehicles and groups of cyclists. It is sadly a popular fly tipping area so please be careful on the verges.
- 4 In a mile, at the end of Sheerhatch Wood you will come to a bridleway on your left. Follow this past a communications mast on top of the hill and down towards Hill Farm. Go straight on past the farmhouse and onto Wood Lane (single track public highway).
- 5 Along the lane on the left you will come to a gas compound with a bridleway alongside. Take this bridleway (through a gap by the metal gate). At the end of the first field, turn right crossing the ditch then immediately left continuing on bridleway on the other side. Follow this bridleway to Cople where you will cross the road into Water End.
- 6 Ride along Water End road past the houses and past first bridleway and onto second bridleway located just before metal barrier in the road. Turn right along this grass track bridleway with hedges on both sides (beware there is a ditch on your left hidden by the hedge). At the end of this narrow section follow the path to the left. Keep going along this track for well over a mile, then it will take you uphill through a narrow section of wooded area (be mindful of holes and depressions either side of this track).
- 7 Emerging from the wooded area you will go up a wide grassy track with a hedge on your right to the top of the slope and cinder track. Here there is a crossroads of bridleways. Take the left bridleway so that the hedge is on your left. Follow this bridleway until the end where it turns right just before going back into the tree covered BW. Turn right back towards Sweetbrier Farm and along the cinder track back to Shuttleworth Equine Unit.

Note: in summer (typically May to July) there may be large scale watering systems operating alongside this bridleway, which has a deep ditch alongside. You may wish to use the alternative route shown (as a dotted line) on the map – this alternative route is not marked but is easy to follow, turning left by Hill Farm to Hoo Farm then right onto Northhill Road until you rejoin the route by turning left to Water End.

Horse Riding Routes in Greensand Country

The dry, sandy soil of Greensand Country is ideal for horses and hacking and the landscape is covered with grassy paddocks and riding stables. There's a good network of bridleways many of which, especially on the top of the ridge, are dry and mud-free even in the middle of winter.

More Information

We have also prepared an overview leaflet about the Horse riding routes in Greensand Country which includes

- Information about the other routes
- Tips to help you keep yourself and your horse safe and to make the most of your ride
- Places for you and your horse to stay in Greensand Country

This information, together with the other route leaflets and .gpx files of the routes, can be downloaded from the website www.greensandcountry.com/explore/horse-riding



Look out for these signs as you ride the route – the route is marked only in the direction described and not in the reverse direction.

What3words: Download this app to your smartphone to help you find locations and to tell others (vets, emergency services, friends) where you are. Each 3m square in the world has been assigned a unique 3 word address that will never change.

Emergency Vet contacts:

Please note that out of hours you may be directed to call another number

Buckingham Equine Vets, Maulden **01525 861995** (8 miles from start)

Ballinger Equine, Weston, Hitchin **01462 414008** (18 miles)

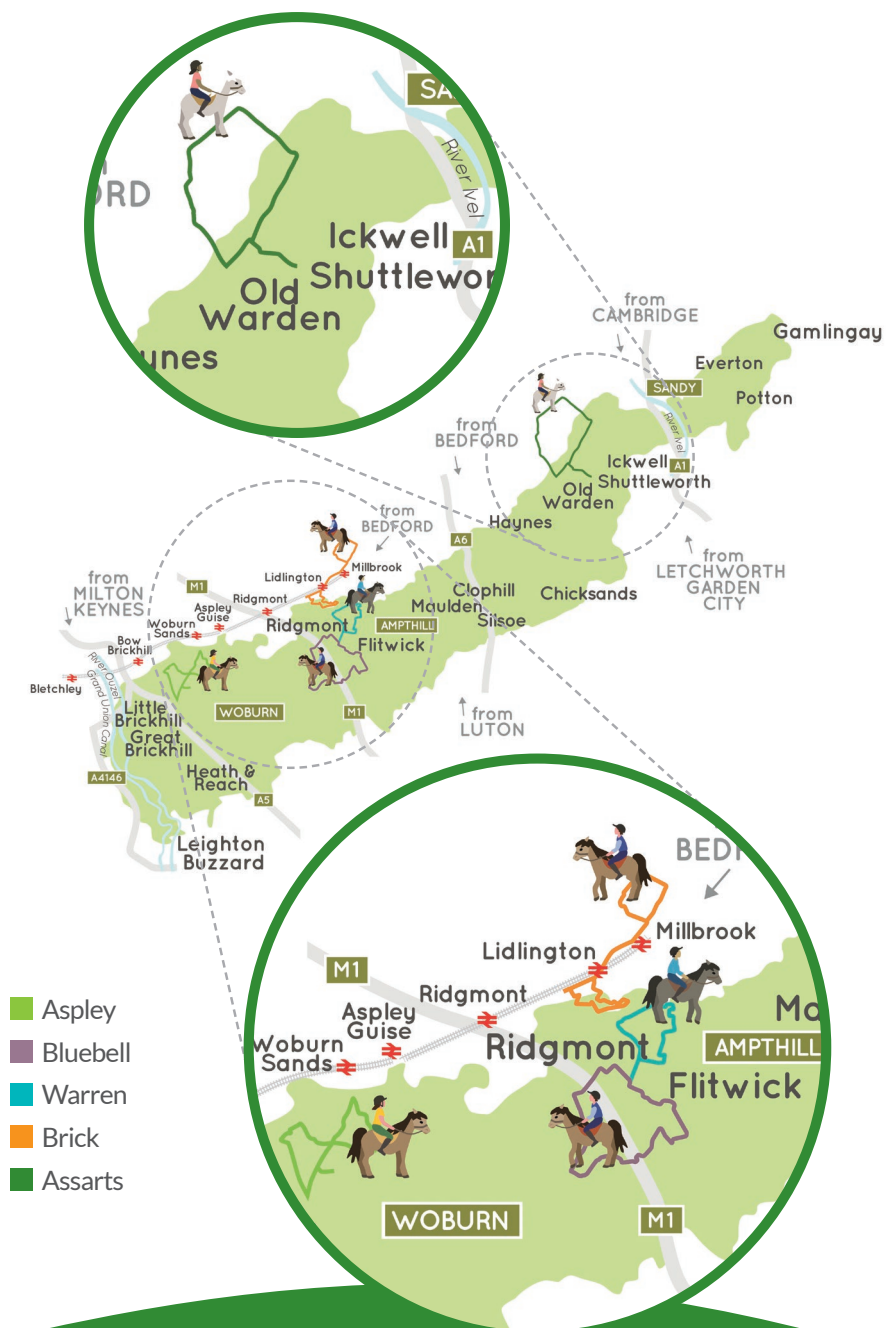
Meadowbrook Equine Clinic, Luton Hoo **0845 296 6675** (20 miles)



All distances are approximate
Cover photo: PJB Photography

Version 1

Charity number:
210504



Get involved: greensandcountry.com

