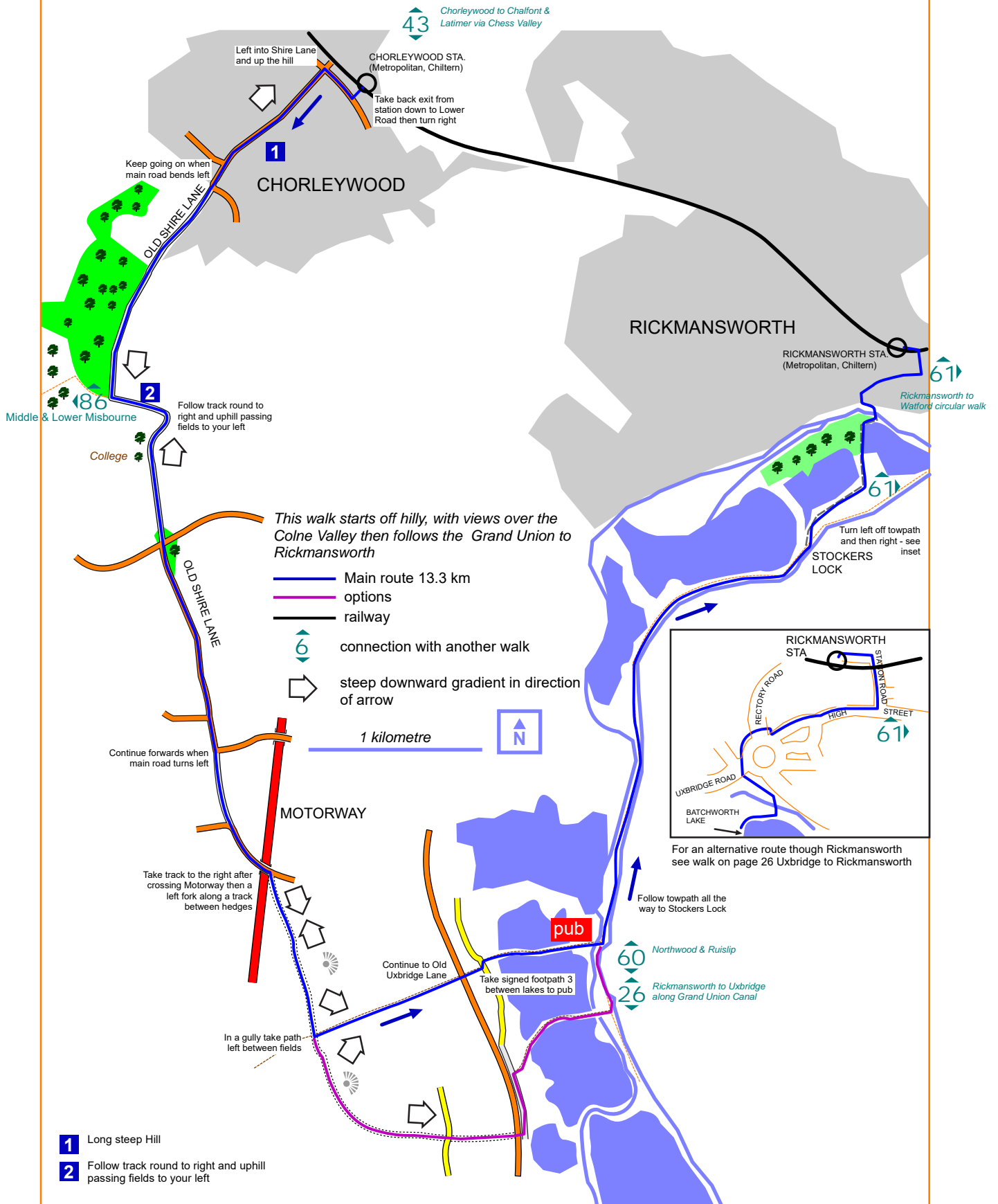


Chorleywood to Rickmansworth via Old Shire Lane



walk notes

Chorleywood to Rickmansworth via Old Shire Lane

This 13.5 km circular walk goes out along the tops with views over the Colne valley and returns along the Grand Union Canal. Initially there is a boring uphill drag out of Chorleywood before entering countryside and passing woodland; Philipshill Wood is owned by the Woodland Trust and can be visited.

Old Shire Lane

Old Shire Lane was the boundary between Wessex and Mercia and now divides the counties of Hertford and Buckingham. Much of the way along this ancient route is between two species rich hedgerows. After moving onto a foot path, there are several 'switchbacks' to negotiate before descending to the valley floor, crossing between reservoirs and returning along the canal.

Colne Valley Regional Park

The Colne Valley regional park is a 27,500 acre (43 square mile) area of parks, green spaces and reservoirs alongside the often multi-channel River Colne and the parallel Grand Union Canal. The formation of the park was initiated in 1965. The boundaries were drawn to include all the open land visible from the valley floor between Rickmansworth and Denham, rounded off to conform to recognisable features. Former gravel pits have created a string of over 60 lakes running through the park from Batchworth Lake, Rickmansworth to Staines.

The Canal

The Grand Union Canal is the longest canal in the UK at 286 miles. The canal was never constructed as an entity, but is the result of amalgamations between 1894 and 1929 of several independent waterways — the oldest being the navigations around the River Soar in Leicestershire; part we walk along was the Grand Junction Canal, built between Braunston (between Daventry and Rugby) and the River Thames to improve the communications between Birmingham, the Midlands and London. It

was fully opened in 1805. Branches were added: to Paddington (opened 1801), Buckingham (1801), Northampton (1815) and Aylesbury (1815). The Slough Branch was one of the last to be built (1882).

In 1894 the Grand Junction then bought the canals comprising the 'Leicester Line', and in 1929 the Regent's, Grand Junction and the two Warwick Canals merged to create the 'Grand Union Canal'.

The new company embarked on a large-scale modernisation programme completed in 1937. Traffic increased in the short term, but after the war the long-term downwards trend was relentless. Today, the Grand Union Canal is alive with pleasure boats, walkers, cyclists and day trippers.

Harefield Mills

Crossing between two former gravel pits the walk arrives at the Canal and a former industrial centre. A corn water-mill stood in 1559 and there were two water-mills by 1601. By 1674 there was also a 'lately built' paper mill. Two mills seem to have existed at least until 1710. The paper mill was said to be still there in 1777 and during the 18th century to be producing white paper. In 1781 the paper and corn mills were let to the Mines Royal Company who converted them into copper mills in 1803. In 1845, however, there were also paper and corn mills in Harefield, and millers continue to appear in the directories. The flour mill was situated at Jack's Lock and was still in use in 1897. The copper mills ceased working in the 1860's and were reconverted in 1870 into a paper mill, which was still there in 1876. By 1890, however, these mills had been converted into an asbestos works which survived until the 1920's. In 1959 they were occupied by three rubber firms.

Rickmansworth

Rickmansworth has been inhabited since the stone age and the manor was in the possession of the abbots of St. Albans before the Conquest. The parish church tower is said to date from c14 William Penn lived in the High Street.