



The Offords

LITTLE PAXTON - OFFORD

(4.75 miles) - O.S. Pathfinder Series Sheet Nos. 980 and 981

This section of the Ouse Valley Way starts at Messrs. Samuel Jones Ltd. factory, a prominent building standing at the northern tip of Islands Common, St. Neots, on the bank of the River Great Ouse. There are car parking and refreshment facilities available at Little Paxton.

The Ouse Valley Way leads off along a footpath at the northern end of the road bridge over the river. This path is called Hayling Way, a reminder of former times when the riverbank path was used by horses hauling barges. Continuing along the path, the track passes water-filled pits which were created by gravel extraction.

The next two gravel pits, and the intervening rough meadow on your left, are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This is one of two areas of Little Paxton Pits managed as a Local Nature Reserve. Part of this area has also been designated as an Ancient Monument following the discovery of artifacts on the site during excavations in the 1930s.

The countryside between Little Paxton and Offord Mill is receiving considerable attention in efforts to harmonise the often disparate interests of agriculture, gravel extraction, landscape, nature conservation, and formal and informal countryside recreation, such as angling, sailing, water-skiing, bird-watching and walking.

A free "Recreation Footpaths" leaflet indicating both the riverside and inland public footpaths in the area is available, together with a leaflet describing two marked Nature Trails (the Meadow Trail and the Heron Trail) in the Paxton Pits Nature Reserve.

A major wildlife feature of the area is the very wide variety of bird life that can be observed. Over 130 species have been recorded and around 70 varieties breed regularly. If weather conditions are right, the site can become important for over-wintering wildfowl. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is playing an active role in developing wildlife habitats in the Nature Reserve, in conjunction with the District Council.

Continue along the gravel track and keep a careful look-out for the waymark just past the second lake which indicates the point where the Ouse Valley Way leaves the gravel track to run alongside a field edge down to the riverbank.

Follow the riverbank path. After about 0.5 mile the path skirts an attractive copse and runs along another gravel track. Follow the waymarks into a narrow grass field with boats moored along the river-bank.

At the northern end of the field, climb the stile and wend your way through the bushes to come to a track giving excellent views over the larger lakes and the nearby river.

Walk along the path, veering off the gravel track to follow the waymarks down to the riverbank. You are now unlikely to get lost, as the Ouse Valley Way runs uninterrupted along this secluded hedge-lined riverbank path for about 2 miles.

On the far side of the river, the main London-Edinburgh railway line reminds one of the speed of modern travel.

The path gives fine views along the river. As you continue walking, you will see ahead of you on the opposite side of the river the twin

villages of Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy. A prominent landmark is provided by the spire of the redundant Church of St. Peter, built around 1613, standing alongside Offord D'Arcy Manor House.

On your left, you will pass the large Water Intake Works and Pumping Station. When conditions are right, water is pumped from the river into Graftham Water Reservoir, nearly 4 miles away.

Continue along the riverbank until the waymarks indicate that the path strikes inland alongside a meadow, to cross a footbridge over a backwater. From this point, walk northwards along the backwater and at a point near its junction with the river, look ahead for a footbridge over a small stream. Cross this bridge and you will see a stile standing alongside the field gate leading onto the road near Offord Mill.

To continue along the Ouse Valley Way, you should now follow the road westwards (towards Buckden) for about 250 yards until you find the waymarks indicating the start of the next section of the path.

Car parking and refreshments are available at the nearby villages of Buckden, to the west; and Offord Cluny, to the east.

