

HUNGERFORD MARSH

Who's for a Game of Pooh Sticks?

This peaceful ramble takes you through two beautiful nature reserves. As you are always by water, it is an ideal walk for a hot summer's day, although the wonderful variety of birds that live here gives this pretty circuit year-round interest. Children will love following the shallow river round the nature reserve, with little bridges along the way that are perfect for Pooh sticks. St Lawrence's church tower is always visible on the horizon and the marsh is a picturesque mix of water meadows and reedbeds, with yellow iris and southern marsh-orchids in the summer, marsh-marigold and ragged-robin in the spring.



BACKGROUND NOTES

Hungerford dates back to Saxon times and is well worth a visit. There are small independent shops to explore, including an old-fashioned sweet shop and toy shop, as well as many antique shops. Hungerford Arcade is filled with curios that children will find fascinating, ranging from old telephones and coins to medals and Corgi cars.

In 1688, during the 'Glorious Revolution', William of Orange stayed at the 13th-century **Bear Inn** in Hungerford as he travelled from Devon to London. William was the Protestant husband of Mary, King James II's eldest daughter. Upon the birth of a Catholic son and heir to the unpopular James II, William was invited by disgruntled Protestant nobles to invade England. William met with James II's commissioners at the Bear Inn and, days later, James fled to France, throwing the Great Seal of England into the River Thames on the way.

1½

LENGTH OF WALK (MILES)

DURATION (HOURS)

1

GETTING THERE Follow the A4 into Hungerford and at the roundabout by the Bear Hotel turn into Bridge Street. Turn right at the next roundabout into Church Street then right onto Parsonage Lane. This narrow lane leads you under a railway bridge to St Lawrence's church. From Hungerford train station, walk to the bridge, turn left and follow the towpath until you reach the church and the start of the walk.

TERRAIN Easy walking on flat, grassy paths and towpaths.

START/PARKING On the roadside in front of St Lawrence's church (GR: SU 334687).

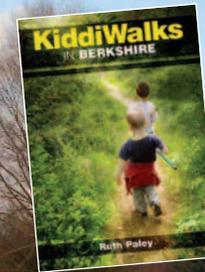
MAP OS Explorer 158 Newbury & Hungerford.

REFRESHMENTS Hungerford has plenty of tearooms and pubs. The Tutti Pole by the bridge sells delicious ice creams and there are benches by the canal where you can sit and watch the ducks. Alternatively, bring a picnic and eat it by Ash Pool.

FUN THINGS TO SEE AND DO The narrow footbridges in the nature reserve are perfect for **Pooh sticks**. Get a twig and line up on the bridge, then all at the same time drop your twigs into the river. Whip round and see whose twig races under the bridge first. The shallow waters of Ash Pool are perfect for **paddling and pond dipping**. Bring a net and bucket and see what you can find. Make sure you empty the bucket back into the pool when you've finished.

THE WALK

1. Follow the public footpath by the left side of the churchyard, which is filled with snowdrops in early spring. The path leads to the towpath by the Kennet and Avon Canal. Cross the wooden bridge directly in front of you and go through a kissing gate into Hungerford Marsh Nature Reserve. There is a short path to another swing gate and a narrow footbridge over the fast-flowing River Shalbourne, a perfect spot for Pooh sticks.
2. Cross the bridge and go through another gate to follow the path left, with the clear waters of the River Dun on your right. In summer there are reeds either side of the path. Continue straight on and through a kissing gate into Freeman's Marsh. There is an information board here with a map and notes on the wildlife and history of the area.
3. Follow the path, with Ash Pool on your left, to another narrow footbridge. Cross and go through the swing gate. The River Dun becomes wider along this stretch and is fenced off from the path to protect the banks from the cattle; look out for wild brown trout in the water. You can see a public footpath sign ahead of you. At this point turn left, leaving the river behind you and follow the grassy path half left across the marsh to a narrow iron footbridge. Cross the bridge, then follow the path right to cross the bridge at Marsh Lock. Be careful here as there is deep water in the lock.
4. Turn left and go down the grassy slope to follow the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath back towards the church. There is a railway track on your right, and although you can't see the track, children will enjoy spotting the occasional train hurtling past on the London to Bristol line. Pass another information sign about Freeman's Marsh and go through the gate, leaving the nature reserve behind you. There are often fishermen sitting along this stretch of the canal, with tubs filled with wriggling bait, as well as colourful narrowboats to spot. Soon you will recognise the bridge you crossed at the start of the walk and turn right, back through the churchyard.



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