

## How to get there:

You may join the Trail anywhere along its length. For easy access or parking, try joining at one of the following locations:

Markyate or Flamstead villages can be found off the A5813/Watling Street, between St Albans and Dunstable. There is a public car park in Hicks Road, Markyate or in Friendless Lane, Flamstead. The villages are served regularly by buses from St Albans and Dunstable.

Redbourn has a large common and village museum. There are a handful of pubs to choose from for refreshments. Redbourn is four miles north-west of St Albans on the A5183 or 5 miles east of Hemel Hempstead. There is a public car park at the cricket pavilion on The Common. Redbourn is served regularly by buses from St Albans, Harpenden, Hemel Hempstead and Dunstable.

St Albans boasts the Abbey and two museums plus Roman remains at Verulamium Park are visible from the Trail. There are plenty of pubs and restaurants. St Albans is close to both the M1 and M25. Public car parks close to the Trail are at Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre and Verulamium Museum, both in Verulamium Park. Public transport links are good with numerous buses in addition to the City Rail Station on the Thameslink line to St Pancras and the Abbey Station with trains from Watford Junction.

Frogmore is on the A5183/Park Street between St Albans and Radlett. There is a public car park for the Frogmore Pits at Hyde Lane. Trains from St Albans Abbey and Watford Junction stop at Park Street Station which is a couple of hundred yards from the Trail as it heads down Park Street before turning into the Frogmore Pits.



Parts of this walk can be muddy or wet underfoot.



For the 8 circular Ver Valley Walks in the series go to [www.riverver.co.uk](http://www.riverver.co.uk). You can also use the OS Explorer map 182 to find your way around the valley.

The Ver Valley Society exists to protect and promote all aspects of the River Ver and its valley. We have over 300 members and are always pleased to welcome new ones. This Trail was originally developed by the Ver Valley Society working with the Countryside Management Service in 2011. The River Ver Trail and the Ver Valley Walk leaflets were revised and updated and waymarking refreshed by members and friends of the VVS in 2021. We hope you enjoy them.

For lots more walk routes, photos, memories, information on membership and working parties visit the VVS website: [www.riverver.co.uk](http://www.riverver.co.uk)

Photos: Melanie Woods, Gillian Thornton, Alison Debenham (Roman Wall), John Pritchard and Fernando Casanova Ricaldoni. Illustrations: Ernest Leahy

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# RIVER VER TRAIL

*Explore the beautiful rolling countryside of this river valley*



A 17 mile (27km) linear walking route starting from the source of the River Ver at Kensworth Lynch, Bedfordshire and ending at the confluence with the River Colne in Bricket Wood, Hertfordshire.



[www.riverver.co.uk](http://www.riverver.co.uk)

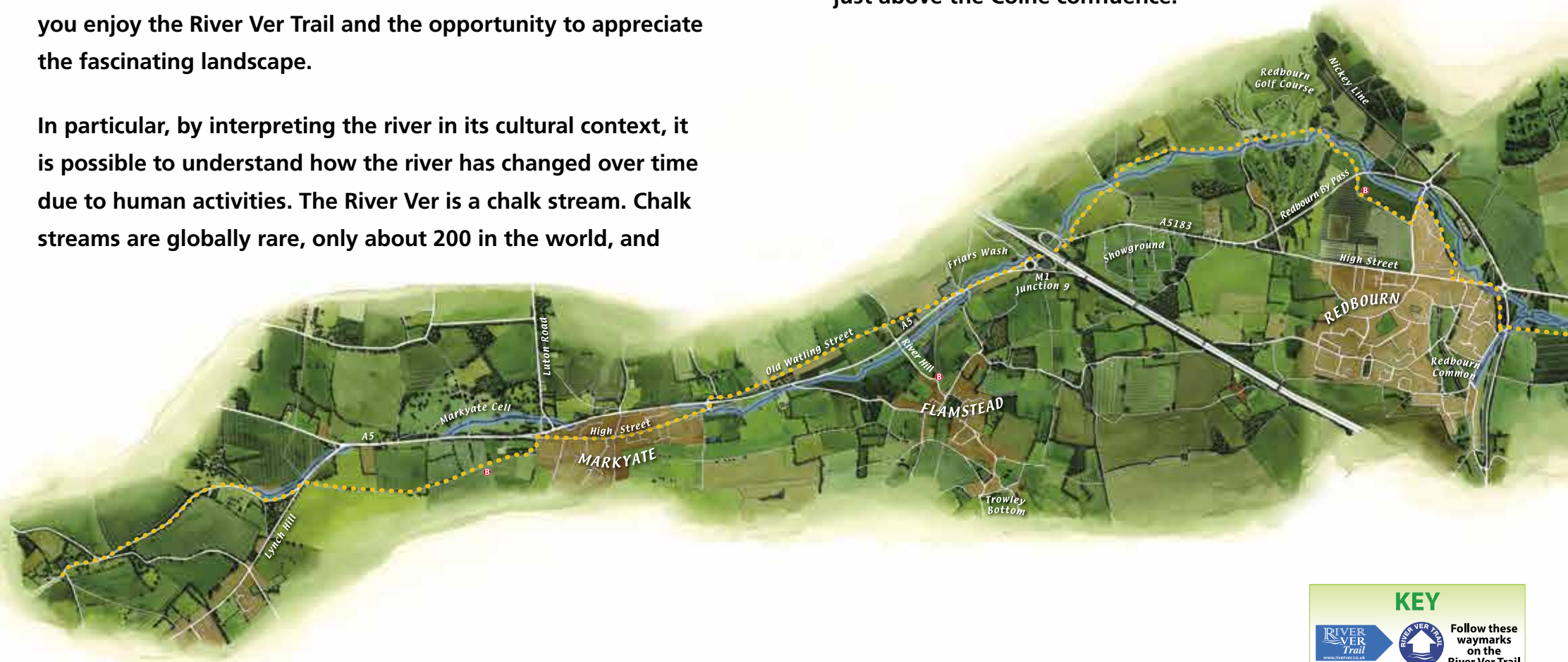
**KENSWORTH • MARKYATE • FLAMSTEAD • REDBOURN  
ST ALBANS • PARK STREET • BRICKET WOOD**

# The River Ver

The River Ver has been flowing through its valley in Hertfordshire for hundreds of thousands of years since the last Ice Age. This series of eight circular walks and a linear River Ver Trail were originally developed by the Ver Valley Society (VVS) working with the Countryside Management Service in 2011. The walk leaflets were revised and updated and waymarking refreshed by members and friends of the VVS in 2021. We hope you enjoy the River Ver Trail and the opportunity to appreciate the fascinating landscape.

In particular, by interpreting the river in its cultural context, it is possible to understand how the river has changed over time due to human activities. The River Ver is a chalk stream. Chalk streams are globally rare, only about 200 in the world, and

with their pure alkaline waters they support a very particular mix of flora and fauna. Most of them occur in the south and east of England and the River Ver is one of them. It runs for 28 kilometres from its sometime Source at Kensworth Lynch to Bricket Wood where it joins the Colne passing through several County Wildlife Sites and some valuable historical sites notably in St Albans and its surroundings. It is joined by two small tributaries, the River Red at Redbourn and the Hanstead Brook just above the Colne confluence.





Over the centuries man has developed the river and made use of its power, constructing a dozen watermills and associated mill-channels, which have modified the water course over much of the river's length. Many of the buildings still exist and some wheels still operate.



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Commissioned as part of the Discover the River Ver Project, these benches interpret the local area on the carved backrests as well as provide a perfect resting spot to enjoy the view.

**B** Position of Ver Valley Bench.



## The Upper Reaches

The top of the river above Redbourn up to Kensworth is now considered to be the winterbourne section, only flowing when it is being fed from the underlying chalk aquifer in times when groundwater levels are high, usually at the end of wet winters when significant aquifer recharge has occurred. OS maps put the source at Kensworth Lynch and others consider it to be Markyate Cell but in recent years it is usually the outfall from Markyate sewage works, in Redbourn at the end of summer or even in times of severe drought south of St Albans.



Many springs feed into the Ver as it moves down the valley. At Friars Wash, near junction 9 of the M1, several springs and now dry valleys meet. This has been found to be a nationally important site of Roman temples and other finds have indicated it as a site of worship since prehistoric times. Roman remains have been discovered all down the valley but of course Verulamium itself (St Albans) is the most significant historical location.

## Influences on the Flow

The chalk aquifer of the Ver Valley was laid down over millennia as countless billions of small prehistoric crustaceans died and sank to the floor of the prehistoric seas. Chalk is porous and absorbs rainwater from above, which soaks down through the rock rising periodically as springs which feed the river. As

it has been filtered through the chalk, the water is very pure, mineral rich and emerges at a constant temperature. The flow in the River Ver is dependent on rainfall to recharge this aquifer.

Recharge largely happens in the winter and early spring; any rainfall during the summer has little effect as surface water evaporates and is used up by growing vegetation. Although after heavy rains, at any time of year, the run-off can cause short-term improvement in flow, it takes many weeks for any effect to be measured in aquifer levels or to have any long-term effect on the river.

Nowadays much of the groundwater is pumped up to supply the needs of the district. Affinity Water is licensed by the Environment Agency to abstract over 20 million litres of water per day from the Ver aquifer by pumping water up from deep underground using several pumping stations the length of the valley. Friars Wash Pumping Station near Flamstead has been on stand-by status since 1993 (as a result of pressure by the Ver Valley Society). However, it is still used to abstract over 250 million litres a year to keep the works in a state of readiness, and was used in the drought summer of 2006.

Bow Bridge Pumping Station was closed in 2016 and further abstraction reductions are scheduled for St Albans in 2024. Nonetheless the Ver Valley will remain highly abstracted with a large percentage of 'effective rainfall' taken for public water supply. The VVS will continue to pursue further changes to the abstraction regime in the valley. As a general measure of the aquifer situation the Ver Valley Society uses groundwater figures measured by Environment Agency at Ballingdon Farm in the upper part of the valley. These figures and the rainfall figures from Rothamstead Research Station are published regularly on the Ver Valley Society web site ([www.riverver.co.uk](http://www.riverver.co.uk)).





# Wildlife

## Plants

Many of the wild animals and plants of the Ver and its banks are increasingly scarce in today's intensively managed countryside and towns. The white flower drifts of water crowfoot 'ranunculus' in the river in early summer are characteristic of healthy chalk rivers and their fan-shaped tufts of aerial leaves and submerged mats of thread-like leaves provide shelter for young fish and invertebrates all year. In some reaches submerged green mats of Water Starwort can be found. It is in the water margins and water meadows that we find the greatest variety of flowers.

In early spring, flower spikes of Butterbur begin to appear accompanied by the bright yellow Marsh Marigold and pale pink Lady's Smock. As summer approaches, yellow Flag Iris, white Common Comfrey, blue Brooklime and yellow Celery-leaved Buttercup come into bloom. Reeds and sedges along with Watercress growing in the stream can make water in the river hard to see later in the summer. Himalayan Balsam provides a bright pink display on the banks in the lower reaches but this invasive species is a real problem crowding out smaller native plants and spreading rapidly by firing its seeds into the stream. Japanese Knotweed, another invasive weed that can be seen along the river, also smothers native plants and can cause bank erosion.



*Badgers*

## Animals and Fish

Bats are often seen in the warmer months feeding over the water at dusk. There are rich pickings here as insects congregate over the water. Daubenton Bats are particularly known for feeding over water, they are distinguishable by their cream coloured bellies.

Other mammals using the valley are Brown Hares, which can be seen in the spring chasing each other around the fields. Moles are often very active near the river and Foxes, Squirrels and above all Rabbits are common with a few Badgers also about. If you are lucky, you might just catch sight of a Water Vole along the Ver or hear the familiar 'plop' as it dives for cover.

After disappearing from the river in the 1980s, mostly due to predation from North American Mink which escaped from fur farms, Water Voles were reintroduced to the Ver in 2021. With a Mink control programme in place, there's every chance that the Voles will thrive.



*Grass Snake*

## Birds

A sight that everyone loves is the brilliant blue flash of a Kingfisher over the water and there is a good chance of this on a Ver Valley Walk. The Grey Wagtail is often seen with its canary yellow breast, busily feeding in shallow water. This is not to be confused with the Yellow Wagtail which is yellow all over and only an occasional seasonal visitor. There are numerous Grey Herons to be seen working the valley from their large roost on the island in Verulamium Park lake. Also in the Park and in Frogmore Pits, Great Crested Grebes are lovely to watch especially displaying in the spring and there is a wide variety of ducks, geese and other birds, recently including Cormorants. You may catch sight of Little Grebes in the quieter stretches of the river and Reed Buntings and Sedge Warblers do visit reeds at the edges of the river. Buzzard and Red Kite are a common sight over the valley and of course most familiar small birds frequent the hedges and bushes by the river.



*Kingfisher*

Another foreign invader, the American Signal Crayfish, has had a devastating effect on the native White-Clawed Crayfish not only by crowding it out of its territory but also by bringing in disease to which the native species has no resistance. Grass Snakes can sometimes be spotted swimming across the river. Quite a variety of fish are found in the Ver to indicate it as a healthy chalk stream. Sticklebacks and Minnows are common, scarcer are Brown Trout, Chub and Roach; occasionally Gudgeon and Bullheads are seen.

## Insects

Many species of insects and other creepy crawlies can be found in or near the river. Many like dragonflies, Caddisflies and Mayflies live under water in the larval stage appearing above the water as adults. Water beetles, water snails and water boatman spend their whole lives in the water. Damselflies such as the Banded Demoiselle are a spectacular sight in summer. The males perform elaborate display flights with their purple-tipped wings over the river. Dragonflies such as the Broad-bodied Chaser and Southern Hawker can also be seen, patrolling the margins in search of prey. Damselflies can be distinguished from dragonflies by generally being much smaller and resting with wings closed, dragonflies rest with wings held open. Of course butterflies often brighten a walk by the river. Quite early in spring on a sunny day over-wintering Peacocks, Brimstones, Tortoiseshells and Orange Tips appear, soon to be followed by Holly Blues, Commas, Painted Ladies migrating in and Red Admirals usually the last to appear. Along the paths Meadow Browns and Speckled Woods often flit along accompanying walkers and in the fields Gatekeepers and Skippers can be seen.



*Orange Tip Butterfly*