

# OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

## OPT circular walks

Since its foundation in 1926, Oxford Preservation Trust has sought to protect the city's beautiful green setting. Over the years, by purchase and through gifts, it has become the owner of 650 acres of land, some let to tenants and some maintained by the Trust as a public amenity. In the case of tenanted land, wherever compatible with agricultural use, public access is preserved, and these routes through Trust-owned land and on public and permitted footpaths have been devised to encourage everyone to enjoy a walk in the countryside.

Please be careful to shut gates and to keep dogs under control, particularly where there is livestock.

### **A walk from Seacourt Park and Ride to Grandpont**

This circular walk is about 5 miles and  
takes about two hours to walk at a steady pace.

#### Getting to the start

If setting out by car, park at the Seacourt Park and Ride car park in Botley Road.

By bus, the Park and Ride 400 bus and many other buses including any number 4 bus from Castle Street and Brookes buses to Harcourt Hill campus, will take you down the Botley Road where there is a stop near the Park and Ride.

There are two stops for refreshments – The Fishes at North Hinksey and The Punter at Osney.

Without stops the walk will take about 2 hours. The flood plain meadows through which you pass may at times be wet, and are occasionally flooded.

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## The route

Leave the Seacourt Park & Ride car park and turn right onto the Botley Road. Cross the road and take the footpath on the left about 50 metres on and go through the gate marked 'Seacourt Nature Park'. The path runs parallel to the Seacourt Stream and follows the line of some pylons. Where the line of pylons turns away to the left, carry straight on into Hinksey Meadow which was purchased by OPT in 1997.

Hinksey Meadow has been a traditional hay meadow for a thousand years. Located between the Seacourt and Bulstake streams, it can be flooded in both winter and summer. Flood water comes from surface water in the streams which is augmented by considerable lateral underground water movement.

From early documents, we know this flower-rich field was part of St. Thomas's Parish in Oxford when it was granted by Henry I to Abingdon Abbey between 1102 and 1110. Later it was taken over by Christ Church College after the dissolution of the monasteries. After enclosure in 1853, the flood meadows in the area were divided amongst private landowners. OPT bought the meadow to protect the rural feel of North Hinksey village.

Since becoming the owner, OPT has reintroduced traditional management to Hinksey Meadow with a hay cut each July followed by aftermath grazing by cattle. As a result of this careful management regime, the vegetation has improved, becoming richer in species, particularly flowers, as demonstrated by the increasing number of snake's head fritillaries counted every April.

Follow the path by the line of trees on your right along the edge of the meadow. You will leave the field by a kissing gate and a footbridge into Willow Walk. Willow Walk was developed by the Harcourt Estate around 1880 as a route from Oxford to their home on Harcourt Hill. It was opened to the public in the 1920s.

Turn right into Willow Walk and cross the old stone bridge over the Seacourt Stream. Many years ago this small stream was the main channel of the Thames and it used to be the boundary between Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

At the end of Willow Walk, go left along North Hinksey Lane and bear left opposite St Lawrence church, following the lane down to the The Fishes pub. Opposite the pub is Ruskin Cottage with its plaque recording John Ruskin's

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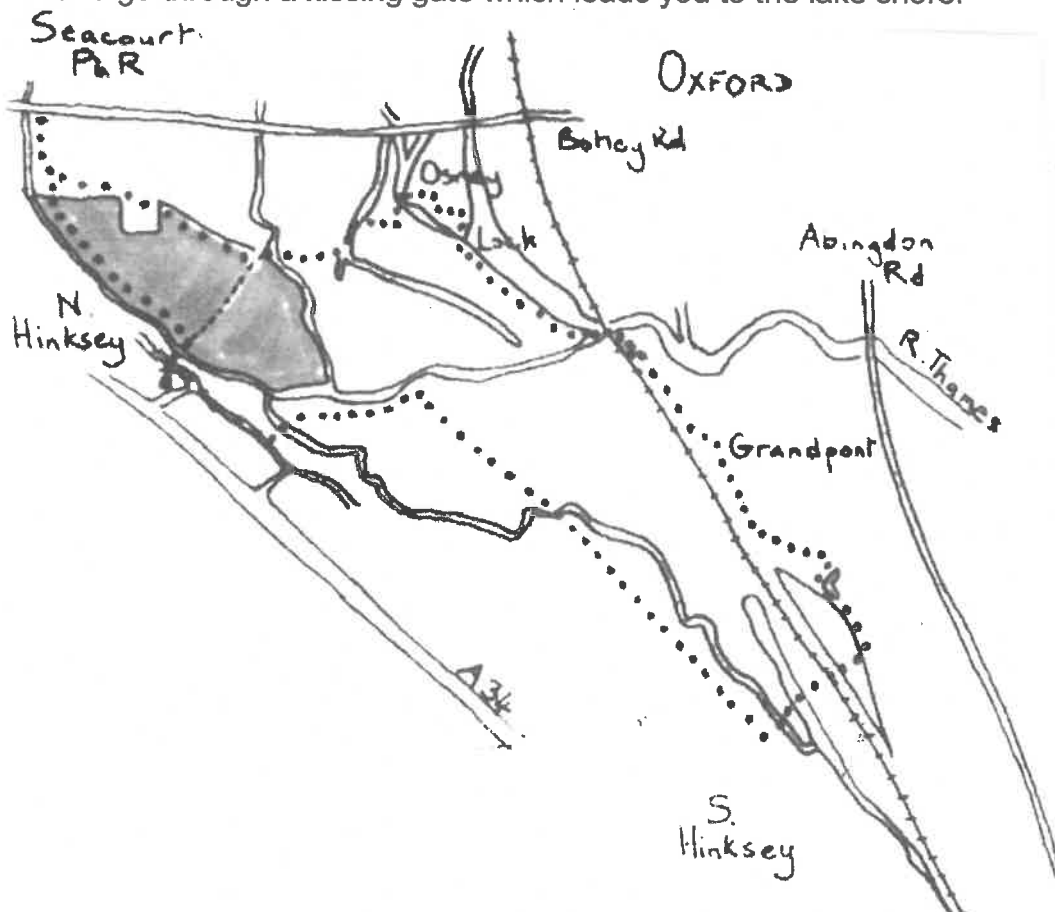
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encouragement of undergraduates, who were working on improvements to the road through the village, to 'feel the pleasure of useful muscular work'.

Continue past The Fishes and the next field before turning left over a stile. Walk straight ahead over a bridge with stiles crossing the Hinksey Stream. The path then turns diagonally right towards a line of small pylons and a gap in the hedge where there is a footbridge over the Hogacre Ditch. Continue with the hedge and stream on your left until you reach the old electricity service track (electric road), where you turn right. Follow the track for about one mile. As you near the end of the track you may glimpse the spires of Oxford through the trees. Finally, you pass through a metal gate onto the Devil's Backbone, a slightly raised path at right angles to the track.

Turn left on the Devil's Backbone and, after a few yards, you will cross a railway bridge with Network Rail's 'virtual quarry' in the sidings and then a bridge over Hinksey Lake. Turn immediately left when you have crossed the lake and go through a kissing gate which leads you to the lake shore.



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The lake was formed following the extraction of gravel in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to create the embankment for the Great Western Railway. Following a cholera outbreak in 1854, the Corporation of Oxford bought the lake and built the water pumping station by the lake to provide two million gallons of clean water to the people of Oxford every day. The pumping station is now the South Oxford Community Centre.

Continue to follow the lake shore, past some brick buildings and the open-air swimming pool, formerly the water treatment works filter beds, built in 1883. Turn right between the boating pond and the tennis courts and leave the park through the metal kissing gate. Bear left to immediately cross a wooden bridge and then go left again into the open ground behind the Marlborough Road houses.

Follow the left edge of the field near the stream until, where the path curves to the right, you go straight on towards the hedge and go through a white 'squeeze'. The path crosses a bridge over a ditch and then snakes through some vegetation, bearing right where it divides. You then come to a tarmac path. Cross this path and cross the playing field to the far side. The path then enters the Grandpoint Nature Park. Follow the path keeping the railway to your left until you come to a clearing from which you can see the river diagonally to your right. Walk to the river and turn left on the Thames Path.

Follow the Thames Path upstream until you come to Osney Lock. As you emerge from the lock you will see The Punter pub on the corner of West Street and South Street. Walk down to the end of South Street and turn right into West Street. About 100 metres along West Street turn left into Swan Street.

The part of the walk from The Punters takes you through part of the Osney Conservation Area, a suburb developed in the mid-nineteenth century and known then, because the surrounding land was frequently flooded, as Frog Island. Cross the bridge at the end of Swan Street and follow the footpath around a school playground onto Ferry Hinksey Road.

Turn left towards the Osney Mead Industrial Estate and near the small roundabout turn right onto the tarmac track which is Willow Walk. A bridge crosses the Bulstake Stream and OPT fields lie on either side of Willow Walk. Turn right immediately through a kissing gate into Hinksey Meadow. Follow the path along the edge of the field where you may spot the spire of 'Botley Cathedral'. The path brings you back into the Seacourt Nature Park and onto the path you started out on, which leads you out onto the Botley Road and Seacourt Park and Ride.

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