

Walking & Cycling The Nickey Line the green route from Hemel Hempstead via Redbourn to Harpenden

The Nickey Line was a 7 mile (12km) branch line that once linked the Midland Railway at Harpenden to Boxmoor, near Hemel Hempstead. Passenger services ended in 1947 but a section of the line carried freight until 1979. Much of the track bed still remained intact when it was bought by Dacorum and St Albans councils in the early 1980's and opened for walking and cycling.

The route now forms a pleasant green corridor with a rural aspect along much of its length - providing attractive countryside or woodland walks as well as generally traffic-free access to school and work. Although there are steep embankments or cuttings and several bridges have been removed there is level access for cyclists and wheelchairs along most of the route (*steps are shown on the map*).

The Nickey Line forms part of Route 57 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network which continues through Harpenden to Wheathampstead and Welwyn Garden City. From Harpenden, Route 6 goes south to St Albans & Watford, and north to Luton & Milton Keynes.

Enjoy the route as a relaxing journey to work or school away from the road network. Alternatively, take a leisurely walk or ride looking out for the abundant local wildlife. In addition, a number of circular paths can be enjoyed incorporating rights of way which cross the Line.



Gadebridge Park

Relax in the beautiful surroundings of Gadebridge Park, Dacorum's principal park. Unwind by the River Gade or admire the glorious flower display in the historic Walled Garden with views of St Mary's Church, regarded as one of the most complete Norman churches in Hertfordshire. Activities including bowls and crazy golf are available during the summer, with a play area and skate park for young people, open all year. See www.dacorum.gov.uk for details of special events.

Hemel Old Town

Hemel Old Town is steeped in history providing a glimpse of days gone by with its attractive Victorian, Georgian and Tudor architecture housing many excellent pubs, cafes, bistros and restaurants. You will also find a diverse selection of specialist shops including antiques, quality giftware, furniture and bicycles! The Old Town High Street is home to the Old Town Hall Theatre with art, music and theatre productions.

Yew Tree Wood

Yew Tree Wood has the characteristics of an ancient semi natural woodland and is particularly noteworthy for the group of yew trees *Taxus baccata* that give the wood its name. The yew is Europe's longest lived tree with some individuals estimated to be up to 4000 years old.

Wildlife along the Line

The Nickey Line is a green corridor for wildlife linking the woodlands and fields along the track. Foxes are regularly seen and if you are really lucky you may glimpse a badger on its dusk patrol or a sparrowhawk flying at speed. In spring the warblers arrive from their winter quarters and blackcaps, chiffchaffs and whitethroats can be heard singing as they establish territories and seek mates.

Look out for orange tip and brimstone butterflies in early spring. Peacocks, marbled whites, commas and small tortoiseshells are also fairly common in the summer sun. In this picture left, a speckled wood warms itself on a bramble bush in the midday sunshine - they need warm still days for flight and as they bask they merge well into the dappled light of a clearing on The Nickey Line.

History of the Nickey Line

1863	Act of Parliament passed for Boxmoor to Hemel Hempstead Railway
1866	Act of Parliament passed extending line to Midland Railway at Harpenden
1877	Line opened between Hemel Hempstead and Luton
1888	Harpenden Junction south curve opened, taking trains to Harpenden Station
1905	New Halts built at Redbourn, Cupid Green and Heath Park
1927	New Halt built at Roundwood, Harpenden
1929	Bus service replaced some trains
1947	Passenger service withdrawn, goods service continues
1950's and 60's	Line gradually cut back for New Town construction
1968	Hemelite Company bought the Line to transport materials for the manufacture of building blocks
1979	Line closed
1985	Line opened as a footpath and cycleway, becoming National Cycle Network Route 57

Hemel Hempstead

Hemel Hempstead

Hemel Hempstead's award winning town centre boasts a tremendous range of shops and services specifically designed for its many visitors within a family friendly pedestrianised area. Stroll through the town centre or adjacent Water Gardens and admire the display planting and works of art, a tradition begun in the early days of the New Town.

National Cycle Network Route Number	Museum	The Nickey Line (traffic free)	Track	Fields/Open Land
Pub / Restaurant	Toilet	The Nickey Line (on road)	Bridge	Parks/Woodland
Supermarket / Shop	Football Ground	Cycle Routes (signed on quiet road)	Street / Minor Road	Residential area
Cycle Shop	Leisure Centre	Cycle Routes (signed on quiet road) proposed	Main Road	Commercial area
Tourist Information	Children's Play Area	Cycle Routes (traffic free)	Motorway	
Railway Station	School / College	Steps on route, access steps off route	Railway	
Bus Station	Hospital A&E	Footpath	River / Lake	
Car Park	Bridleway	Building		

walking & cycling The Nickey Line



Redbourn village sits astride Watling Street, the old Roman road to Chester, now thankfully by-passed. Its compact High Street features several hosteleries and a variety of shops, while its spacious Common provides a free car park beside the local cricket pitch, close to the village Museum.

Redbourn

Redbourn village sits astride Watling Street, the old Roman road to Chester, now thankfully by-passed. Its compact High Street features several hosteleries and a variety of shops, while its spacious Common provides a free car park beside the local cricket pitch, close to the village Museum.

The Ver Valley Walk
The Walk traces the river from its source near Redbourn to its conjunction with the Colne close to Watford. A free leaflet is available from local Information Centres.

Redbournbury Mill

Powered by the River Ver - and latterly by a Crossley diesel engine - the 18th century Mill worked well into the 20th century. It was restored after a disastrous fire in 1987 and now produces stoneground flour and bread. The Mill is open, with teas served, typically on Sunday afternoons and special weekends. (See back cover for contact details to check opening times).



When the Nickey Line was built in the 1870's the Roundwood area was agricultural land, but in the early 1900's the first houses were built, and as more followed there was an increasing demand for a Halt. Roundwood Halt was opened 8 August 1927. The signal and platform are two of the best surviving reminders of the former Line.

Roundwood Halt

Roundwood Halt was opened 8 August 1927. The signal and platform are two of the best surviving reminders of the former Line.



The Jacobean Manor House at Rothamsted was the home of John Bennet Lawes who began agricultural experiments in 1843, ultimately leading to the establishment of Rothamsted Research. The House provides student accommodation and the Drawing Room is a popular venue for recitals. Public rights of way cross the estate, and a permissive path allows a view of the 17th Century south facade of the house.

Rothamsted

The local council purchased the 238 acre Manorial Common from the Rothamsted Estate in 1929, for the benefit of the townsfolk. An annual horse racing event ceased in 1914, and The Silver Cup pub recalls past triumphs. Golf, cricket and football clubs lease space for their pursuits, while the public has unimpeded access to the whole Common. Ancient rights also still permit traditional showman fairs.

Harpenden Common

Harpenden

Lying on the Chiltern dip slope between the valleys of the rivers Ver and Lea, Harpenden was destined to become a commuter town with the coming of the Midland Main Line in 1868. It retains its village character though, thanks to its large Common, its tree lined High Street and period cottages.

Information

- Dacorum Borough Council: www.dacorum.gov.uk
- Redbourn Parish Council: www.redbourn.org.uk
- Harpenden Town Council: www.harpenden.gov.uk
- St Albans City & District Council: www.stalbans.gov.uk
- Countryside Management Service: www.hertsdirect.org/cms
- Sustrans: www.sustrans.org.uk
- Friends of the Nickey Line: www.nickeyline.org
- St Albans Cycle Campaign: www.stacc.org.uk
- Ver Valley Society: www.riverver.co.uk
- Redbournbury Mill: www.redbournmill.co.uk

History

- Books available on The Nickey Line:
 - The Harpenden to Hemel Hempstead Railway - The Nickey Line* by Sue and Geoff Woodward, 1996, The Oakwood Press
 - Branch Line to Hemel Hempstead - The Nickey Line* by Sue and Geoff Woodward, 2006, Middleton Press

Walking & Cycling

- Hertfordshire County Council: www.hertsdirect.org/libleisure and click on 'Enjoying the Countryside'
- Further free maps & leaflets in this series:
 - The Great North Way, The Ayot Greenway, The Alban Way, The Cole Green Way, The Ebury Way, available from Libraries, Tourist Information or Councils listed above.



The Ordnance Survey mapping data included within this publication is provided by Hertfordshire County Council under licence from the Ordnance Survey in order to fulfil its public function to provide information relating to its activities, services and plans. Persons viewing this mapping should contact Ordnance Survey copyright for advice should they wish to licence Ordnance Survey mapping for their own use. Such mapping is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright 100019606 2006. Cartography, photography, leaflet design and cycling by Stephen Wragg - Wragg Art House: www.wah.co.uk © WAH 2006 Printed on environmentally friendly paper



7 mile green route between
Hemel Hempstead, Redbourn
& Harpenden