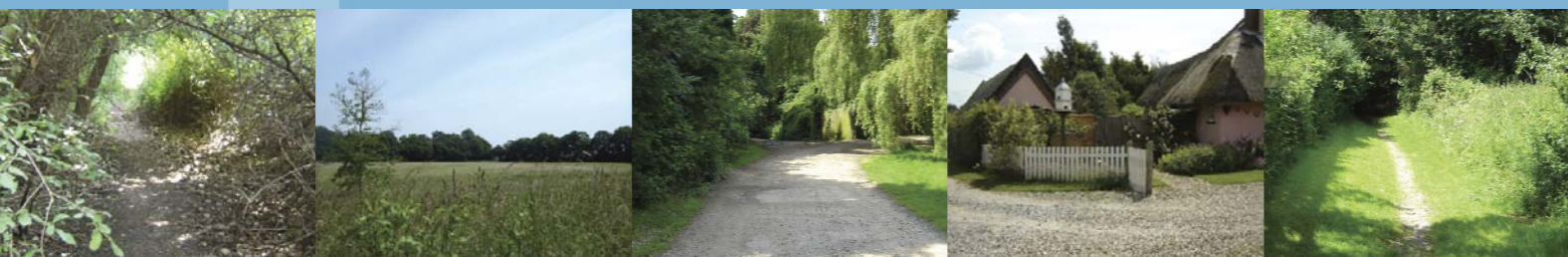


# ROMAN RIVER VALLEY

Take time to explore the rolling countryside of the Roman River Valley and enjoy the wildlife of the wooded streams and marshland. The woodlands you walk through are mostly ancient and Bluebells and Yellow Archangel can be seen flowering in the spring. Look out for the globular white flowers of Small Teasel in late summer, but most of all, make sure you bring a wildflower identification book!



## Distance and time taken

2.8 miles (4.5 km) – 2 hours.

## Going

Undulating countryside and can be wet in places. Wear strong shoes, boots or Wellington boots. There is a well surfaced cycle track running down the west side of Chest Wood.

## Transport

For details of public transport for this walk contact the Travel Line on 0870 608 2608.

## Habitat types

Old woodland, marsh, farmland, open countryside.

## Ordnance Survey Map

Explorer 184.

## Parking

The best place to park is in New Cut Lane off High Road.

## Refreshments

Visit The Layer Fox for drinks and bar snacks.

## Dogs

If you take your dog with you, please keep it under control, preferably on a lead.

## More about the Roman River Valley Nature Reserve

This Essex Wildlife Trust Reserve is a fragment of traditional river valley landscape, part of the Roman River Valley Conservation Zone. The historic Roman River is a narrow stream through most of the Reserve and meanders through marsh and woodland, mostly old.

The marshy areas found on the area are fed by springs filtering out of glacial gravels, and is full of aquatic plants including one that is unusual – the Small Teasel, which has globular white flowers in late summer. The woodland is part of Needles Eye Wood, and has a variety of trees including standard Oaks, Coppiced Hornbeam and several old Yews. Its flowering plants include Yellow Archangel and Moschatel. Like most wetland sites it has a rich insect life as well.



## Crab Apple

As you wander along Leas Lane look out for Crab Apples in the hedgerow in late summer. These small fruits are extremely sour and Crab Apple wine is reported to be potent. You have been warned!

## Dragonflies

The Roman River supports many dragonfly species including the iridescent Banded and Beautiful Demoiselles. Males of the Banded Demoiselle can often be seen aggressively defending their territories or courting females with a fluttering display flight. The luxuriant vegetation along the Roman River is extremely important for dragonflies, for instance, submerged plants may be used for egg-laying. Many species of dragonfly are also important indicators of clean water. The Emperor, Britain's largest dragonfly is particularly sensitive to water pollution and can be seen along the clean water of the Roman River.



## Dog's Mercury

Under the dense canopy of the woodland you may find Dog's Mercury, a sombre green plant with square stems and unobtrusive yellowish green flowers. The plant is dioecious which means that the male and female flowers are on separate plants. The whole plant is considered mildly poisonous, particularly at the time of fruit ripening; however there are no reports of poisoning in humans. Wash your hands if you touch this plant to be on the safe side!

## Layer-de-la-Haye

Layer, as its known locally, is thought to have been founded in Saxon times, with its original name, Legra, meaning 'lookout'. The elevation of Layer made it an ideal vantage point for the Saxons in spotting raiding parties from the Essex coast. Its name changed to Leire or Leger in later years which means 'mud'. Leger is a Norse word, which is likely to have referred to the marshland surrounding the settlement.

## Otters

The otter was quite common in Essex in the 1940s and 50s but suffered a rapid decline in numbers in the 1960s and unfortunately became extinct in the 1970s due to the poisoning from agricultural chemicals which ran off into the rivers and streams from surrounding farmland. However, the otter has since recolonised many of its old Essex haunts.