

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

The 7 mile (12 km) branch line 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 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 for a leisurely walk or ride, or to appreciate wildlife. Additionally, a number of circular routes may be enjoyed incorporating public footpaths that cross the Line (*contact Friends of the Nickey Line for more information*).



### 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 include 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](http://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. 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 sparrow hawk 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 for Boxmoor to Hemel Hempstead Railway   |
| 1866              | Act 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  |
| 1929              | Bus service replaced some trains   |
| 1947              | Passenger service withdrawn, goods service continues   |
| 1950's and 1960'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              | Opened as a footpath and cycleway, becoming National Cycle Network <b>Route 57</b>             |

**Key**

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

1 kilometre  
1 mile  
scale 1:11,500 approx  
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# walking & cycling The Nickey Line



When the Nickey Line was built in the 1870s the Roundwood area was agricultural, but in the early 1900s 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



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 230 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 ambition. Golf, cricket and football clubs lease space for their pursuits, while the public has unimpeded access to it all. Ancient rights still permit traditional showman fairs on the Common.

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

### History

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

### Walking & Cycling

- Hertfordshire County Council: [www.hertsdirect.org/libleisure](http://www.hertsdirect.org/libleisure) & 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.



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**7 mile green route between Hemel Hempstead, Redbourn & Harpenden**