

Chalk River Pilgrimage

Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve, Baldock to All Saints Church, Radwell

Length: 1.5 miles, time approximately 1 hour (3 miles return)

The River Ivel is only one of 250 rare chalk streams in the world. The pure waters of chalk streams should be home to rare plants, fish and animals and are the equivalent of England's Amazon rainforests or coral reefs in their rarity.

The Upper Ivel River – which once supported four mills, a trout fishery and a watercress industry – is today bone dry in places.

This short pilgrimage includes six stations for pilgrims to pray for the revival of this chalk stream.

The RevIvel Association believes the Ivel is dry due to over abstraction by Affinity Water. The RevIvel has hired a consultant who has identified a simple solution: stop extracting water and pump water from a reservoir using a pipe which has recently been built.

The Pilgrimage

The walk begins in the car park of The Arena, Norton Road, Baldock.

[Please check your route on your satnav before you set out. The Arena's postcode of SG7 5AU is likely to send you to the A1(M). An alternative postcode that may work is SG7 5AW, which takes you near The Orange Tree Pub. From here, with the pub on your left hand side, take the first left turn onto Norton Road and then a right into our carpark after passing under the railway bridge. If you are coming from Stotfold, drive out on the Norton Road, turn left again on the Norton Road just before Bickerdikes Garden Centre and left into the car park.]

Take the path out of the car park and turn left with the green metal fence and railway embankment on your right.

At the wooden Ivel Springs sign, turn left and continue for 200 yards/180metres.

Turn right onto path between tree on your left and two telephone poles on your right.

Continue on path past bench on your left to steps and wooden railing to boardwalk/bridge.

Prayer point 1: Giving thanks for Ivel Springs

God of vast oceans and tiny streams, we give you thanks for the gift of water that sustains all life. You are the God who in the desert taught our ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to dig out wells from the rock and to drink water from them. Teach our generation how to protect, restore and revive these springs, that they may sustain both nature and humans in harmony.

Return back past the wooden bench and turn right to re-join main path.

Continue for 200 yards/180 metres, ignoring the path off to left with low wall made of tyres.

At the T junction turn right. Continue for 380 yards/350 metres, ignoring minor paths to the right.

When you reach a right-hand turning in the path, take it and stop by wooden railing overlooking a dry riverbed and culvert.

Prayer point 2: Asking forgiveness at the dry riverbed

Oh God the author of life, whose spirit hovered over waters at the time of creation, we confess that we have been irresponsible in our use of water, wasting it to satisfy our comfortable lives. Water sources have been drained or polluted, causing risk to flora and fauna. We acknowledge the lack of cooperation between different companies, authorities and organisations to manage water resources fairly. We ask you to inspire us to be challenged to preserve and use water prudently.

Return to main path and turn right.

Continue for 140 yards/130 meters until you reach wooden stairs and go down them.

At the bottom of the stairs, turn left, pass through the metal kissing gate and turn right, with woods on your right and horse paddock on your left.

Continue for 100 yards/90 metres and walk under the wooden bar or use the stile to climb over it.

Continue straight ahead and at the end of the field pass through the wooden gate. Follow the path as it meanders through the woods, until you reach a straight section, continue alongside the A1M for 100 yards/90 metres. When you can see two bollards at the end of the road, stop at the wooden railing on your right.

Continue along the path. At the bollards, turn left, walk a few feet and stop at the entrance to the tunnel under the A1M, on Norton Mill Lane. Carefully check for traffic and cross over Norton Mill Lane to the other side of the road where there is a footpath under the bridge.

At the bend in the road, follow sign "Public Footpath 5. Radwell." The woods will be on your left and fields on your right.

Continue for 350 yards/320 metres and stop at a point when you can see water in the river in gap in the trees on your left and a round blue "Revivel" sign on a fence post. Stop by this part of river which usually has water.

Prayer point 3. Hoping by the waters of the river

A vision of heaven by the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel. (47.7-9, 12)

Then he (God) led me back along the bank of the river. As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on one side and on the other. He said to me, 'This water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-gedi to En-eglaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh

fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.'

Ignoring the blue Revlvel marker, continue along the path for 90 yards/80 metres. At the signpost with the yellow public footpath arrow, turn left and continue to metal bridge.

Prayer Point 4. Blessing the river from the bridge

(There is a Celtic tradition of make a Saint Brigid's Cross, woven from rushes or reeds, and dropping it in a river to bless it.)

A reading from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (17.7-8)

*Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

(A woven cross is dropped into the water.)

Help us to better protect the pure waters of this chalk river so that once again it can be a life-giving source for mayfly, water shrimp, minnows, brown trout, the birds of the air and animals that drink from its waters. Bring healing to our lives and our environment.

Cross the metal bridge, ignore the gate on the left and continue ahead, through a gate. Take the right fork and follow the path with the hedge and the fence on your right and the field on your left.

Cross a first wide wooden bridge, cross a second wide wooden bridge, cross a narrow wooden bridge through some trees.

Take right fork .

Walk with field on left and hedge on right, with campground behind the hedge.

After 300 yards/275 metres, as you enter the woods, and turn right and go over wooden bridge. (At certain times of the year there is a Radwell Mill Café sign)

Continue on road past a house and past a low wooden shed with a metal roof. With the red, campground toilet block in front of you, turn left.

When you reach the 90 degree bend Radwell Lane, turn right.

Stop at the red metal fence for the mill pond for the former Radwell Mill.

Prayer point 5. Promising to work with nature at mill pond

As we look across the pond at this former mill, we give thanks for those times when humans can work with nature in harmony. Heavenly Father, guide us as we seek to live simply and sustainably and to not exploit scarce resources.

Walk up the road 260 yards/240 metres and stop at All Saints Church on your left

Prayer point 6. Committing the church

We confess our failure, as faith communities, to address water justice and seek forgiveness for not speaking out. Lord, inspire us to work towards water justice. Transform our lives so that we may be channels of justice - not just in what we preach, but in our daily practice. Let your churches be role models within our communities in conserving water and preserving life in all its fullness. Bring churches together to work in unity so that justice will prevail and water will be available for our generation and future generations.

To return reverse the journey.