

Greensand Country Cycling Heritage



Explore Greensand Country on your bike

Have yourself a Greensand Country cycling adventure

Greensand Country is a beautiful and loved landscape. It is defined by the Greensand Ridge, a band of higher ground stretching from Leighton Buzzard to Gamlingay, which rises out of the surrounding vales to create a locally unique environment. Greensand Country contains all of Bedfordshire's remaining heathland, more than half of its woodland and more historic parkland than any other place in England.



Cycle in the tracks of previous generations

Cycling has been popular in the Greensand Country since the mid 19th Century and Bedfordshire has been in the forefront of cycling development on a number of occasions.

A pioneer of bicycle and tandem manufacture was based in Biggleswade.

The Great North Road (A1) played a major role in the development of time-trialling in the UK.

In the 1930s several high-quality cycleways were built parallel to main roads in Bedfordshire. This was a condition of government funding. Most of these cycleways have since been lost or forgotten. Further cycleways were built in the 1950s and they are still in use.

In more recent times the National Cycle Network has provided several routes in the County (6, 12, 51) often making use of disused railway lines.

The Greensand Cycleway parallel to the Greensand Ridge Walk was signed in 2013.

When you cycle in the Greensand Country you will be cycling in the tyre tracks of previous generations.



Cyclists' House, A5, Hockliffe, looking south © Peter Bate



Two proud bike owners from Bedford in 1907 © Peter Bate

1899 Cycle route-map starting in Leighton Buzzard

There was a bicycle boom at the end of the 19th Century and Bedfordshire was a part of this. The bicycle provided independent transport to a wide group of people. People cycled a long way on crude, heavy bikes. In July 1899 the Leighton Buzzard Observer published a guide to 28 routes (available via <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> The British Newspaper Archive is available free via Bedfordshire Libraries) which were then serialised weekly. The route from Leighton Buzzard to Cambridge via Shefford is very similar to the Greensand Cycleway.

Cycling maps continued to be a part of town guides for many years.

1930s cycleways

Between 1934 and 1940 hundreds of miles of cycle tracks were built next to trunk roads as a condition of government funding. Three of these schemes were in Bedfordshire:

- A1 south of Biggleswade. Probably lost to later widening.
- Deadmans's Hill, Clophill. May still exist beneath the very wide verge.
- Parallel to New Bedford Road in Luton. This one still exists as a service road.



Example of a 1930s cycletrack next to the Totton Bypass, Southampton © Peter Bate

People

Though there have been many people involved in cycling in Bedfordshire, two names stand out with an influence at national level: Dan Albone and Frederick Thomas Bidlake.

Dan Albone (1860-1906), Bicycle manufacturer, Biggleswade

Dan Albone was a pioneer bicycle manufacturer based in Biggleswade. He created the Ivel Safety cycle weighing 27lbs/12 ¼Kgs which was popular with sports cyclists. He also designed and manufactured the first practical tandem.



© Wikipedia Commons



No. 33. "Ivel" Racing Safety Bicycle, 1886.

© Grace's Guide to British Industrial History

Frederick Thomas Bidlake (1867-1933)

FT Bidlake was a pioneer of timetrialing. This type of race, where riders set off at intervals and race the clock, aimed to overcome objections to races on public roads. Bidlake was also the Vice President of the Cyclists' Touring Club (now Cycling UK) and held many tricycle racing records.

When he died, in a road accident on his tricycle, a memorial fund was established and a memorial garden built at Girtford Bridge near Sandy. This was the destination for rides for the North Road Cycling Club, of which he was a member and which still exists.

The Bidlake Memorial Prize is given annually for outstanding contributions to cycling. You can read more about the Bidlake Memorial Trust at: www.bidlakememorial.org.uk/index.htm



© Bidlake Memorial Trust

Clubs & Campaigns

The Greensand Country is well suited to cycling and there are a number of cycling clubs, many of which have a long heritage.

Bedfordshire Road Cycling Club

Founded 20th October 1923 at the Sun Hotel, Biggleswade.

Runs regular social rides, time trials and mountain biking.

The club has an attractive and distinctive club house in Cardington built as a memorial to five members who had died in WW2.

<https://www.bedsroad.org/>

CTC Bedford District Association

Founded in 1926.

Meets at the Friends Meeting House in Bedford.

Runs regular group rides.

<https://www.cyclinguk.org/local-groups/bedfordshire>

Ickniel Road Club

The Ickniel Road Club is long established having been founded in 1933 as a racing offshoot of the Bedfordshire District Association of the Cyclist Touring Club (CTC). It relinquished its formal ties with the CTC in 1959 to widen its objects to provide cycle racing, touring and social facilities for its members. It is based in Ampthill.

<https://www.ickniel-roadclub.org.uk/>



© Bedfordshire Road Cycling Club

Remember when cycling:

- If possible start your ride from your front door
- If you do drive to the start point then please park with consideration
- Please DO NOT cycle on footpaths.
- Always keep to the waymarked routes and do not enter private land.
- Always ride in single file when roads are narrow and never ride more than two abreast.
- Make sure you are visible to others.
- Always use lights after dark or in poor visibility.
- Plan your route according to the weather and daylight hours.
- Be aware of animals, other cyclists, pedestrians, horse riders and car drivers when cycling.
- Keep your speed down and give way to walkers and other path users.
- Be polite and considerate towards landowners and farmers.
- Keep away from farm machinery or farm/forestry operations.

