

The Hereward Way

FOLLOW THE COUNTRY CODE?—WHY?

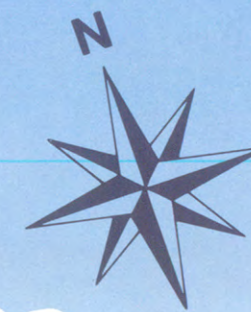
B

ecause the countryside is a place to be enjoyed by all; do protect wildlife, plants and trees, don't leave rubbish behind, don't disturb others with unnecessary noise.

Because the countryside is a place of work; do keep to paths and use stiles

and gates to cross fences. Don't let your dogs disturb stock and don't interfere with crops or machines.

Enjoying the countryside means respecting its life and work. If you don't you won't!



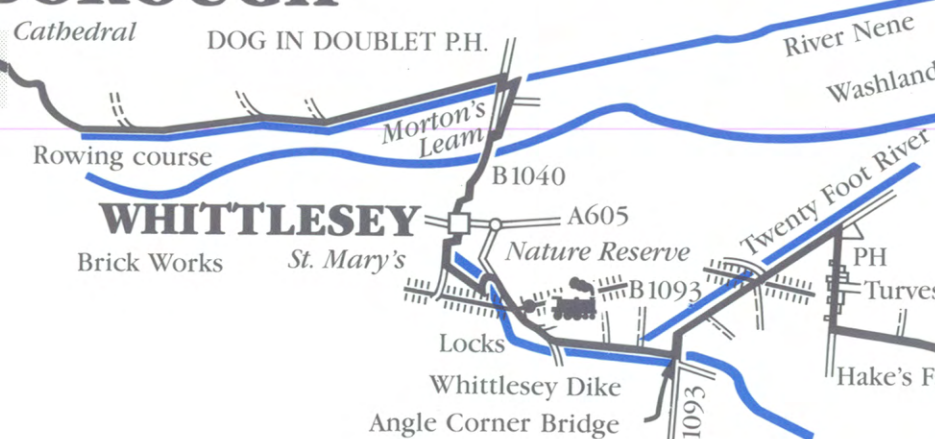
Viking Way

OAKHAM

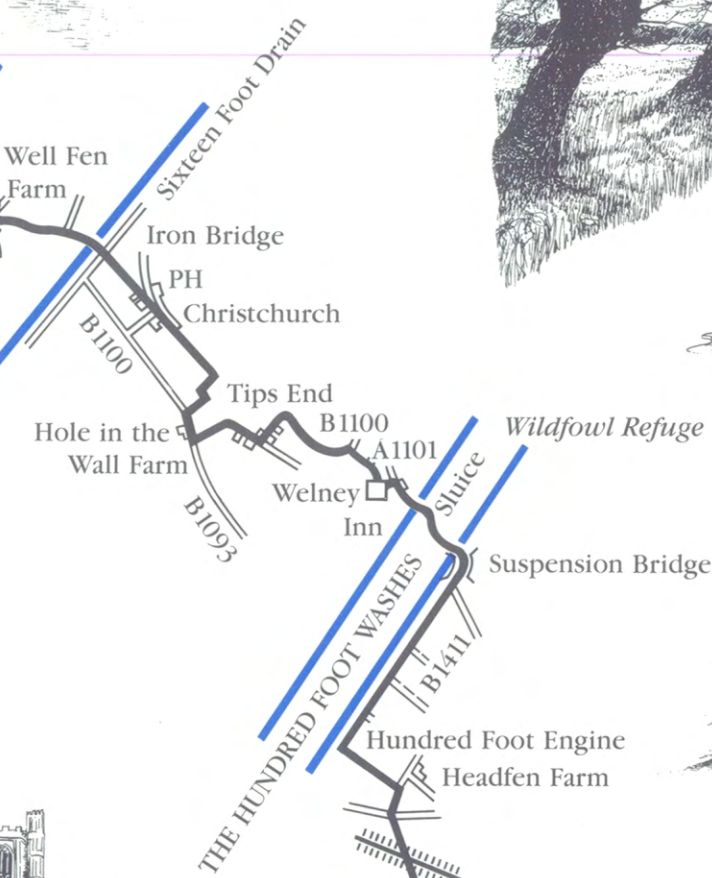


STAMFORD

PETERBOROUGH



MARCH



ELY

THETFORD

Peddars Way



THE HEReward WAY

H

ereward the Wake was an outlawed English Nobleman who, in 1071, made a final stand against William the Conqueror on the Isle of Ely.

As the Normans lay siege to the island, Hereward gathered together the English barons at Ely, protected by the surrounding marsh. He held out for eight years before the Normans finally took his stronghold and Hereward vanished with his men into the marsh.

Today his name is given to a long distance footpath across the land he knew so well as both outlaw and fugitive. The path follows ancient tracks through the Cambridgeshire fens. The landscape now is quite different from that which Hereward knew, but it is still an exhilarating wilderness of big skies, beautiful

sunsets and absolute tranquillity. Expanses of still and open water merge into ever changing and dramatic skies. A unique fenland experience is open to anyone willing to follow in the footsteps of Hereward.

Public footpaths link The Hereward Way from Peterborough to join the Viking Way at Oakham in Leicestershire, and from Ely to the southern end of The Peddars Way near Thetford. But at present only the fenland stretch is fully signposted and waymarked. The Hereward Way also links into two circular walks published by Cambridgeshire County Council, The Bishops Way near Ely and The Woodman's Way near March. Leaflets are available in local libraries.

Countryside
COMMISSION

For further information contact: Department of Property.

Cambridgeshire
County Council
Rural Strategy

Cambridgeshire County Council
Shire Hall
Cambridge
or
Ramblers Association
(Peterborough Group)
8 Welmore Road, Glington
Peterborough

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THE HEReward WAY

a walking route across the Fens

Oakham to Thetford

also

part of European Route E2

Ely to Oakham

The Hereward Way starts in the rolling landscape of Rutland, amid grass fields and stone villages. It passes Rutland Water, a new and large addition to our water resources. It continues to Stamford, and then Peterborough, through an increasingly level landscape - part of the River Nene basin. The route to March, Ely and beyond, is through the flat fen country, to strangers uninteresting, but to those who spend a day walking the paths, it is an area of peaceful beauty and hidden surprises. To the east of Ely, the character of the walk changes again as it enters the Brecklands of Norfolk, now mostly developed as forestry.

The Hereward Way is based around the East Anglian rail/bus network with convenient stations or buses at regular intervals of

MARCH to ELY - 35 km - 21m

Rivers and horizons old and new, and endless peat fields

Can be walked in two separate days of 18kms and 17kms stopping at Welney, (or taxi to the train at Manea.) Irregular bus services connect Christchurch, with March and Welney and Little Downham with Ely. Pubs en route are: The Dun Cow, Christchurch; Lamb and Flag (open all day '07), Welney; The Plough, The Anchor Little Downham; some may not be open lunchtime

To continue on the Hereward Way, follow the north side of the river, Nene Parade, eastward, pass The Ship, to the iron bridge across the old River Nene on the right. Cross this bridge (fp-), turn left and follow the south bank of the river, either on the fisherman's path on the edge, or on top in an area of green, under a railway bridge and, keeping on the river bank, cross a grass field and stiles, then alongside cultivated fields, to a hard track beside the river. Follow this track alongside the river.

Follow the river bank past a road leading to Andrew's Farm on the right and past the old Reed Farm to the new pumping station on the right at the river end of a broad drain.

What a place to celebrate the half distance - the openness and endless horizons are a fitting backdrop to consider that reasons for doing the walk in the first place. However, a new sight and sound had encroached into the open vista - wind turbines - a cash crop for landowners, but not so appealing as far as solitude is concerned.

Continue alongside the river for another 1km and turn south at the second shallow dyke just past but nearly opposite another pumping station on the opposite river bank. Follow this dyke southwards for 1500m, around slight right bends in the field edge; follow the grass track to the north edge of Well Fen Farm.

The raised section of the Fen Causeway, is thought to be roman or earlier and part of a route across the fens from Peterborough to near Hockwold. Large sections were built on brushwood bundles, and traces of the roadway are still clearly marked in the flat fen country. One section can be seen to be clearly higher than the surrounding fields between Rodham and Well Fen Farm. Part of the old Causeway surface can be seen at the Flag Fen excavations near Peterborough.

The name Rodham Farm is derived from the word roddon, and indicates that it was built on one of the many river beds in the area - the Fen Causeway likewise.

Turn left before the farm and follow the side of a dyke then cross a bridge. Continue, and at an old field boundary turn right for 25m, then left onto a grass track (Fen Causeway). Follow this track past the old farm buildings to a bridge (-fp). Cross the wide drain and the main road into Crown Drove (by-) and follow this drove, tarmac and then grass, and then tarmac again (-by-), to Christchurch.

Continue into Christchurch main street. Pass The Dun Cow, if you can, and continue straight on into another grass drove (by-).

Continue on this drove to where it turns right, follow the drove and turn left and then right to the B1100 road (-by). Turn left and follow the roadway for some distance to Tipp's End.

The water courses are subject to a number of local descriptions, drain, dyke and cut.

The drove leaving Christchurch is the Norfolk and Cambridgeshire boundary.

Go through Tipp's End, and out into the country, and just before a small bungalow on the left on the outskirts of Welney, turn left into a grass drove (public path) (rb-) and follow the drove in a wide right hand arc to an old cottage on the right (-rb). Turn left (fp-) and follow the ditch edge to a tall hedge on the left of a barn. Go through the neat gap between the barn and hedge and out onto the main road A1101 (-fp). Cross the road, turn right and follow the main road pavement to Welney village.

Nearest railway station is at Manea, 5 km to the south. There is no convenient public transport between Welney and Manea, the hire of a taxi or offer of transport, may be the best solution. (To reach Manea station from Welney by road, follow the fen roads on the 1:50000 or 1:25000 OS maps. It is not one of the best journeys on foot). A shop and post office is down the Christchurch

Road on the right.

A stop must be made at the Lamb and Flag in Welney (open all day, every day in 2007) to celebrate the 100 km distance. There used to be two more pubs in '83, one, The Old Three Tuns, practically still a beer house on the Level bankside, but now sadly closed.

During the winter, the washes are often flooded and therefore boots may have to be taken off for 2 km !!, or a lift arranged from a tractor or other high vehicle.

Continue through the village, cross two bridges (Old Bedford & Delph) across the fresh water Rivers of the same names, and follow the road across the washes to the next bridge across the tidal level.

The first bridge you cross next to Welney is the drain for the surrounding fields, the next is the drain for the washes in the centre of the Levels, the third is tidal - up to Earith, a necessary engineering feature to prevent the flooding of the area around the Wash by the sea. All this work was carried out in the mid 1600s, a marvel to the engineering skills at the time.

To the north of the tidal bridge lies the Wildfowl Trust Washes - in winter a haven for migratory wildfowl, especially Berwick and Whooper swans.

In the spring and summer the same washes ring to the sounds of nesting waders, eagerly awaiting the abundant insects provided by the annual flooding of the washes in winter.

Over the third bridge, turn right and follow the southern bank (100 foot) (br-) (-br) (fp-) of the New Bedford River for some way. In summer the grass on top is often high, and so it may be easier to follow the road at the bottom, but be careful as the road is busy.

The Bedford Levels run for 25 miles between Denver Sluice in the north and Earith in the south. Straight as an arrow they hold vast quantities of flood water from the Ouse, preventing the flooding of the upper reaches of the river.

There are distant views of Ely Cathedral, floating on the skyline, from the top of the Level banks. Hence the name commonly used for the cathedral in the past - The Ship of The Fens.

Follow the bank for some distance, to the Hundred Foot Pumping Station, on the left. Just before the pumping station (-fp), cross the road and go through a gap to the right of a bungalow, into a field (fp-) and to the edge of the dyke feeding the pumping station. Follow the edge of this field across small bridges to Headfen Farm (-fp). Turn right and follow the access road to the cross roads and continue straight across down a drove "A Furlong Drove" (by-).

Many of the old drove roads are now public rights of way. Prior to 1972 they were not included on the Definitive Map of the old Isle of Ely, but under a review of the Map in 1983 they have all become definitive. Most are very wide - 50 feet or more. In summer they are a haven for wildlife; in winter heavy tractors turn them into quagmires.

The fields around Head Fen Farm, in the fens towards Ely, are typical of those to be found in the black peat areas of the fens. Flat fields of peat are divided by deep dykes keeping the water table at the correct levels. Intensive agriculture is the norm with practically all the growing being carried out in an applied soup of chemicals. It is not advisable to fall into the drains, their colour shows that the water is not particularly safe.

In a number of fields, "bog oak" is still being removed. These remains of old trees, not always oak, are remnants of an ancient forest, which was eventually choked and covered by vegetation - now the peat of today. Just before the railway crossing the fields either side of the drove are some of the last fields still with deep peat. Many of the others have now only inches of peat left, exposing the clay sub-soil. Many farmers are now deep ploughing to mix what is left of the peat with the clay to try and reduce the loss of good farmland.

Cross the railway and continue on a wide grass drove to a road at the end (-by). At the road turn right, and cross over a small road bridge and immediately turn left (fp-) and follow a dyke edge to a narrow footbridge; cross this footbridge and follow the field edge keeping the dyke on the left. At the bottom of

the hill there is an overgrown lane ahead, (Ram's Horn Lane); cross into the lane, cleared in the centre, and continue up the hill towards Little Downham church in the distance. Turn left into the playing fields and follow the right hand side fence towards the village. At the playing field entrance turn right onto a path, follow this onto a lane at the back of houses, turning left at the end, into an estate road; follow this road to Little Downham High Street.

There are magnificent views again of Ely Cathedral on a clear day from the top of Chapel Lane in Little Downham. After crossing the flat fenland all day the undulating ground around Little Downham comes as a surprise.

Tower Farm, to the west, was the summer palace of the bishops of Ely.

Cross the High Street and nearly opposite go down Chapel Lane, to the bottom of the hill, continuing straight on into a lane called Hurst Lane (Drove)(by-) leading southwards towards Ely.

Continue along this wide lane to a green drove. Follow this drove, to the Coveney Road (-by). At this point, turn left, cross the bypass and continue along the pavements alongside West Fen Road uphill into Ely. At the old A10 turn right and then left to the green in front of the Cathedral; past an old cannon and across the green to the west door.

(To walk to the station, turn down the road to the south of the west door of the Cathedral and follow the roads south eastward to the bottom of the hill. The Station is on the right before reaching the railway and bridge across the River Ouse).

Ely is dominated by it's Cathedral which must be visited, even if you now have to pay. The money is well spent, it will ensure that this magnificent building is preserved for all to see as a beacon for miles around. The name Ely may well have come from the number of eels caught in the rivers and drains. For years tithes were actually paid in eels. The city also contains many other interesting buildings, mainly associated with the ecclesiastical dominance.

Although a City by virtue of the magnificent cathedral, the real atmosphere is one of a busy market town. Serving the agricultural villages around it contains all the appropriate services without the modern addition of chain stores and the like in the centre. Down at the bottom of the hill next to the river are a number of fine buildings, especially the old maltings, now a meeting place and hall.

Tarry awhile alongside the River Ouse, now busy with pleasure boats, but still able to retain that peaceful calm no doubt influenced by the cathedral high above on the hill.

There are many places eat, drink and stay in Ely, to suit most tastes.

There are regular railway services from the Station to Cambridge, Peterborough and Norwich. There is also a regular bus service to most surrounding towns and villages.