

E

**NJOY** exercise and fresh air? Got some spare time? Then why not "get on your bike" and discover the hidden delights of the Cambridgeshire countryside!

At a leisurely pace, you can enjoy this unique landscape by taking the cheapest, most "environmentally-friendly" form of transport. There are few steep hills in the area, cycling is good for your health and bikes are easy to start in the mornings! Whilst pedalling along you can appreciate the sounds and smells of the countryside, see the detail of the hedgerows and the panoramic views of the wider landscape. What better way could there be to spend a few hours! Before you set off, there are one or two things you should remember . . . .

- Most of the routes follow quiet country lanes, but roads around the towns will be busier. Always use cycle lanes or dual purpose footways where indicated.
- Give clear hand signals and take great care at road junctions. Do not be afraid to get off your bike and wheel it across busy roads or up steep hills (there are a few!) Never cycle with more than two abreast and go to single file when traffic is coming.
- Some of the routes follow byways and bridleways – generally these are surfaced but they may become boggy in wet weather. Footpaths should not be used.
- Wear bright, fluorescent clothes with reflective strips where possible. A cycling helmet is a good idea.
- Always test brakes and tyres before setting out. Carry a small tool and puncture repair kit, a pump, front and rear lights and a first aid kit.
- The routes can be cycled in either direction, but generally if you go anti-clockwise, there should be less right turns. To help you plan your day, most riders cycle 8–10 miles per hour.

● The routes are not marked on the ground and you are advised to take the appropriate Ordnance Survey Landranger maps (1:50,000) with you.

● If you wish to start from a railway station, British Rail do allow you to take your bike free of charge on many trains, providing it is labelled with the destination, origin and name and address of the owner. However, there are restrictions and charges on some trains and you should consult "The Rail Travellers' Guide to Biking by Train", available at all major stations.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

If you wish to find out more about cycle routes, bicycles, equipment and touring holidays, please contact Cambridgeshire's Cyclists' Touring Club on (0223) 243684.

Leaflets are available on cycle routes in other areas of Cambridgeshire – around Cambridge, the Ouse Valley, and Peterborough. These can be purchased at Tourist Information Centres, libraries and local shops.

For information on what there is to see and do in the fens, visit the Tourist Information Centres in Ely and Wisbech, tel: Ely 662062 and Wisbech 583263, or contact Cambridgeshire County Council (address below) for a free copy of 'Enjoying the Cambridgeshire Countryside'.

This leaflet is produced by Cambridgeshire County Council's Rural Group with grant aid from the Countryside Commission. We hope you have enjoyed these cycle routes and would appreciate any comments you may have. For more information please contact:-

Rural Group  
Department of Property  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Shire Hall  
Cambridge CB3 0AP  
Tel: Cambridge (0223) 317445.

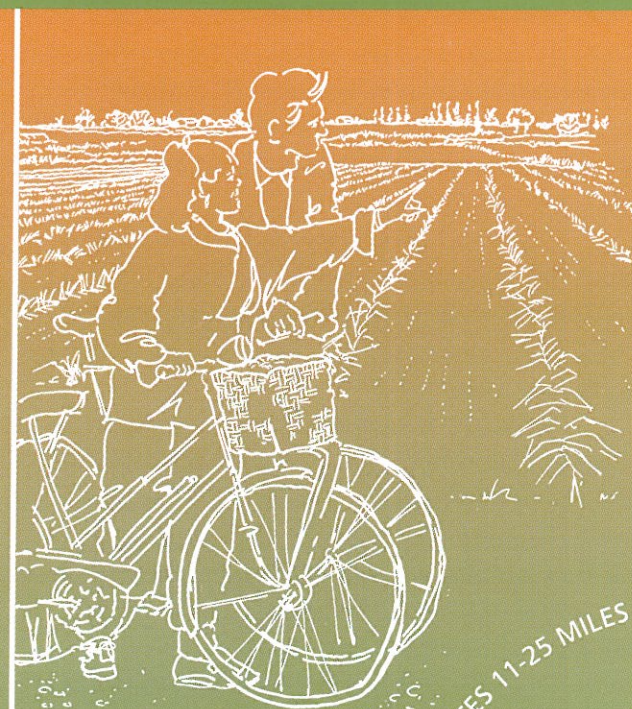


Cambridgeshire  
County Council  
Rural Strategy

**COUNTRYSIDE  
COMMISSION**

Designed by Coral Design Management Published 1992 PRINTED ON ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY PAPER

## CYCLING IN THE FENS



10 CYCLE ROUTES 11-25 MILES  
**£1.50  
per pack**

**around Ely, March  
and Wisbech**



F

## ENS

Cycling in the Fens can be a rewarding experience particularly when the wind and weather are in your favour. The feel of fresh air and the wide open spaces can be exhilarating. The Fens are surprisingly diverse. Patterns and colours vary with the seasons of the farming year and with the time of day. The area is noted for its long views and stunning skies.

There are two distinct areas of Fenland – the silt fen north of Wisbech and the “black” peat fen to the south. The black fen around Ely and March is dotted with “islands” of higher ground on which the area’s towns and villages were built above the marsh. Many of the place names reflect island origins, such as the suffix ‘ey’ or ‘ea’ in Coveney and Stonea. Before the Fens were drained in the 17th century by the Dutchman Cornelius Vermuyden, they were marshy, bleak and almost inaccessible. The land was used for summer grazing, fishing, and fowling, or left to produce reeds, sedges or willows.

Today the Fens provide an abundance of different produce. The main crops in the peat fen are cereals, sugar beet, carrots, celery and onions. The silt fen is particularly suitable for orchards, bulbs, roses, nursery stock and strawberries as well as vegetables and wheat.

Water has dominated the history of the fens, a past now etched across the landscape. The drains and ditches needed to keep the fen soil fertile are now the dominant features, many stretch for miles, often lying above the surrounding fields and roads. But a closer look will reveal historic features like old water courses that pre-date the modern landscape. There is much more to this area than immediately meets the eye.

The three leaflets on Ely, March and Wisbech feature ten routes to help you explore and enjoy some of the variety and subtleties of the fens.

## MAPS

All the fenland routes can be followed on Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger series sheets 131, 142, 143.

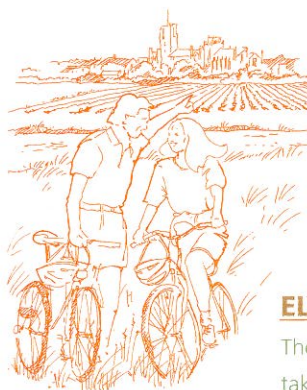
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cambridgeshire County Council would like to thank the following for their help in researching these cycle routes: Roger Sharp, Sue Beel, Ely and District Cycling Club.



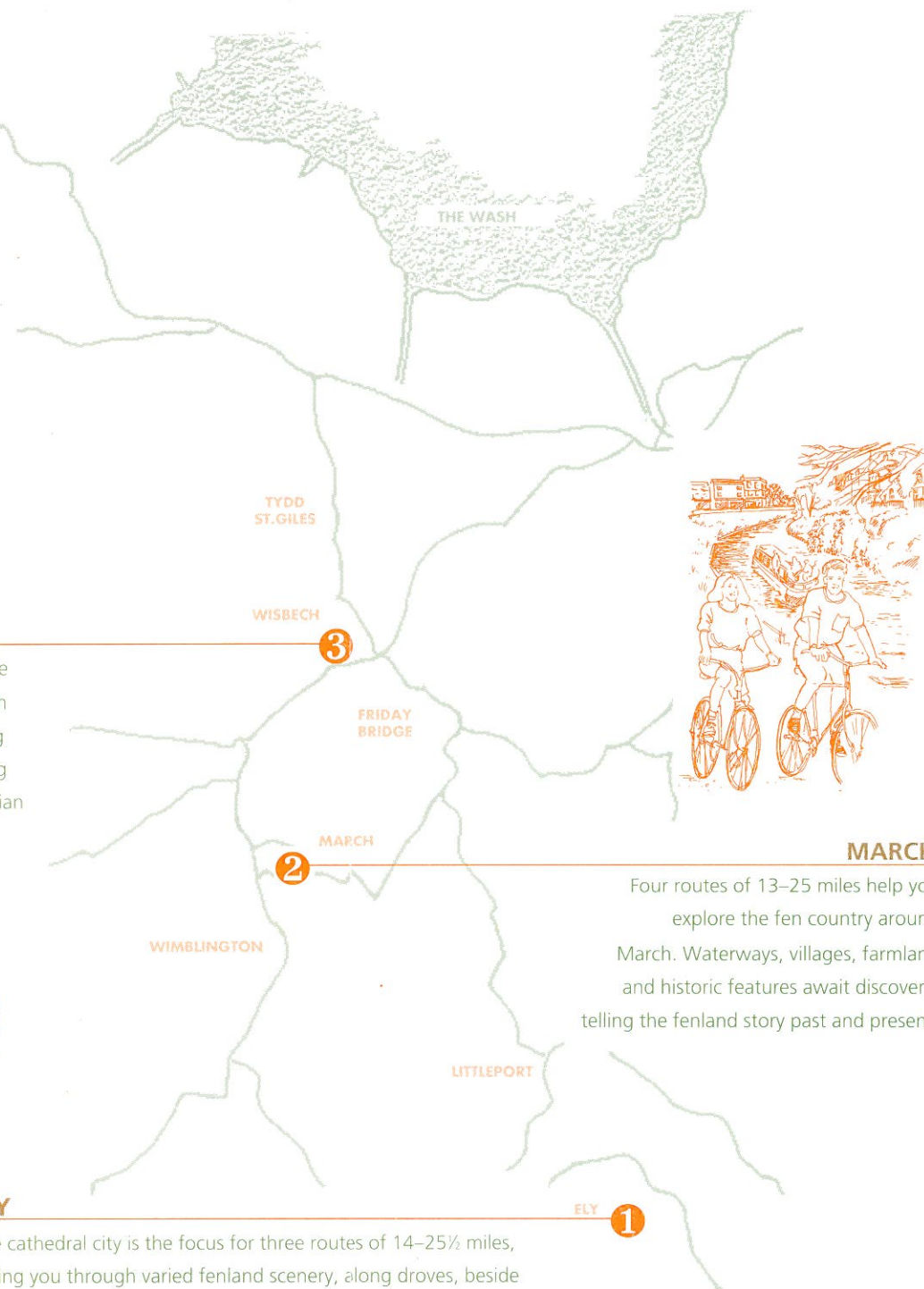
## WISBECH

Four routes of 17–20 miles radiate from the historic town of Wisbech taking you into Norfolk and along the Lincolnshire border. Charming villages, fine churches and Georgian buildings stand majestically in a landscape dotted with orchards.



## ELY

The cathedral city is the focus for three routes of 14–25½ miles, taking you through varied fenland scenery, along droves, beside waterways and through the ‘island’ settlements.



## MARCH

Four routes of 13–25 miles help you explore the fen country around March. Waterways, villages, farmland and historic features await discovery, telling the fenland story past and present.



This route explores the area south and west of Ely. The settlements of Prickwillow, Soham and Isleham have many fine buildings. Apart from the Ely to Prickwillow stretch which can be busy, the route is quiet. Care should be taken crossing the Soham bypass.

Distance: 25½ miles, 41 kms

### ROUTE 3

A varied route through fenland countryside and along waterways. The track from Ely to Downham can be wet at times – an alternative route follows the road which can be busy. The road from Littleport to Queen Adelaide and back to Ely can be used particularly along the B1382. The Ely to Littleport road can be used to vary this route but is not much quieter.

Distance: 14 miles, 22 ½ kms

### ROUTE 2

Distance: 17 miles, 28 kms with shorter option of 11 miles, 17½ kms. A quiet route through fen island villages in the Isle of Ely passing varied farmland. The villages were built on 'islands' of higher ground above the once marshy fens. Two sections follow grass tracks which may be wet at times so you may need to push your bike along some parts. Alternatives to these sections follow busy roads and particular care should be taken if using the A142. The route may be shortened by returning at Coveney.

### ROUTE 1

busiest roads although care must still be taken particularly when crossing the Ely bypass and using the "B" roads. Whilst the area south-west of Ely has many interesting villages it is not easily accessible on quiet roads. All routes start from the Market Place, Ely.

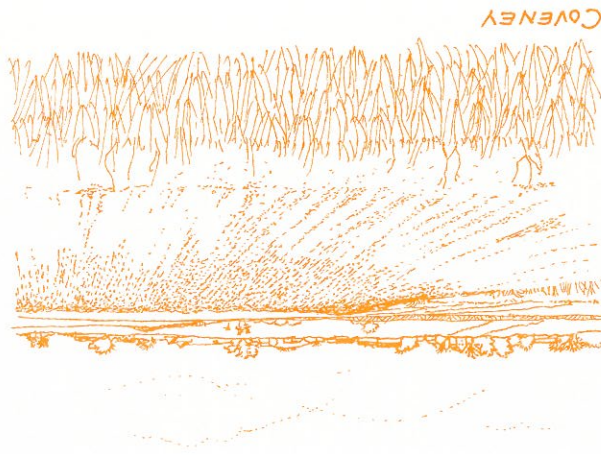
## I

### INTRODUCTION

The main roads out of Ely are fast and busy limiting opportunities for cycling. These three routes avoid the



ELY CATHEDRAL



COVENEY

Downham prospered in the middle ages as the summer retreat of the Bishops of Ely. Remains of the 15th century Bishops Place can be seen at Tower Farm. Downham meaning "settlement on a hill" was surrounded by marshes. Fruit used to be grown around the village but now the orchards have gone. If you have time, stop to explore the wildlife area at Chettisham Meadows, using the public paths.

## B

### LITTLE DOWNHAM

Ely has a wealth of historic buildings many dating from the middle ages. After fenland drainage it became a centre for farming. The quayside was once a busy trading area used by river barges and is now a popular mooring for holiday cruisers. Ely provides an excellent base for exploring the surrounding countryside by cycle, boat or on foot or horseback. For advice on walks and places to visit contact the Tourist Information Centre at Oliver Cromwell's House, St Mary's Street, Ely Tel: Ely 662062

## A

### ELY

### PLACES OF INTEREST

fenland skyline for miles around. The city was built on an island above the fens. The name Ely, meaning 'eel island' refers to the large number of eels caught in the surrounding waterways, and the area is still known as the "Isle of Ely".



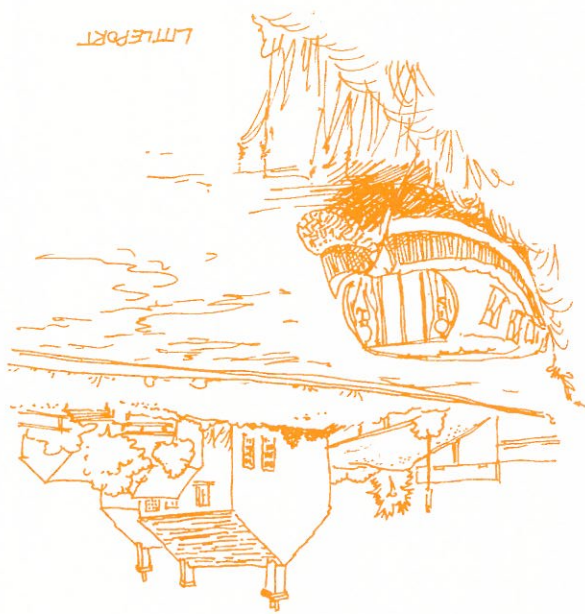
ISLEHAM PRIORY

**CYCLING IN THE FENS** – This is one of a series of three leaflets featuring cycle routes in the Fens. Leaflets are also available on cycling in other areas of Cambridgeshire. These can be purchased at Tourist Information Centres, libraries and local shops.

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Village industry is still largely based on agriculture – packing and transporting vegetables grown on the surrounding fens. Burberry also have a factory here. At the turn of the century Littleport was nationally renowned for ice skating. The fens near the railway station were flooded in winter and excursions were run from London.



LITTLEPORT

Legend has it that King Canute founded this fishing village on the Ouse and named it Littleport. Until recently it provided dock and warehouse facilities serving barges from Kings Lynn. Now a modern marina has replaced the cargo port.

## D

### LITTLEPORT

These two small villages rise above the fen. Coveney means "island in the bay" and Wardy Hill comes from "warden's hill" or look-out. At Coveney near the village sign, the village pound and lock-up can be seen. The pound was used to impound cattle that had wandered away from the common grazing areas.

## C

### COVENEY AND WARDY HILL

**PRICKWILLOW**  
Before fen drainage people came to Prickwillow to cut "prickets" or skewers of willow for holding down thatch.

In 1830 the River Ouse was straightened between Queen Adelaide and Littleport and the loop that came out to Prickwillow became redundant. Main Street is part of the Old Ouse River bank which explains why it is so much higher than the houses either side of it.

The Drainage Engine Museum was originally a steam engine and pump. It now has a collection of diesel engines from pumping stations in the area.

**QUEEN ADELAIDE**  
In 1944 the Oxford and Cambridge boat race was held on the Ouse between Queen Adelaide and Littleport bridge, away from the London bombing.

**SOHAM**  
Until the draining of the fens a large mere existed between Soham and Ely, local people relying largely on fishing for their food and income. Soham has a wealth of old houses, some dating back to the 17th century.

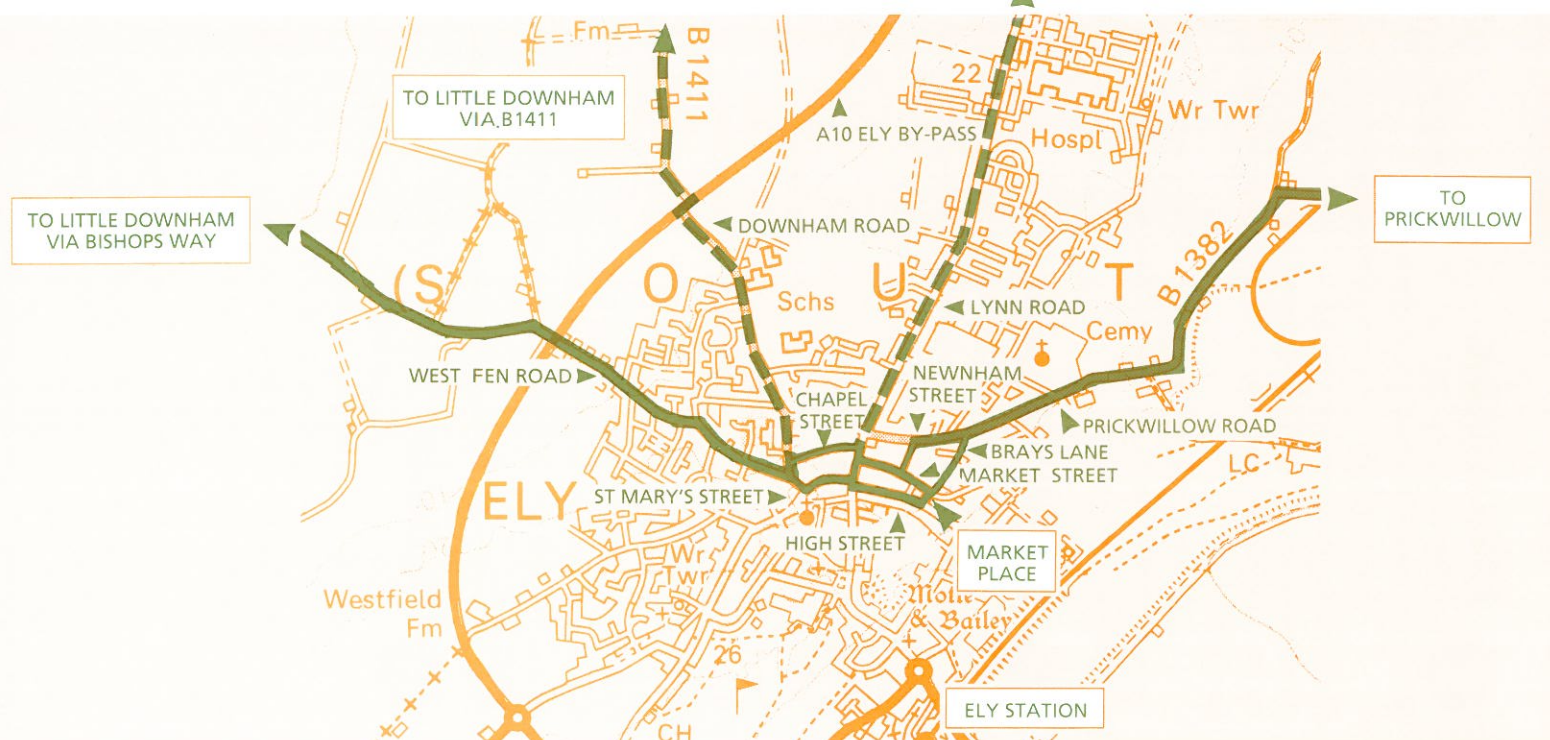
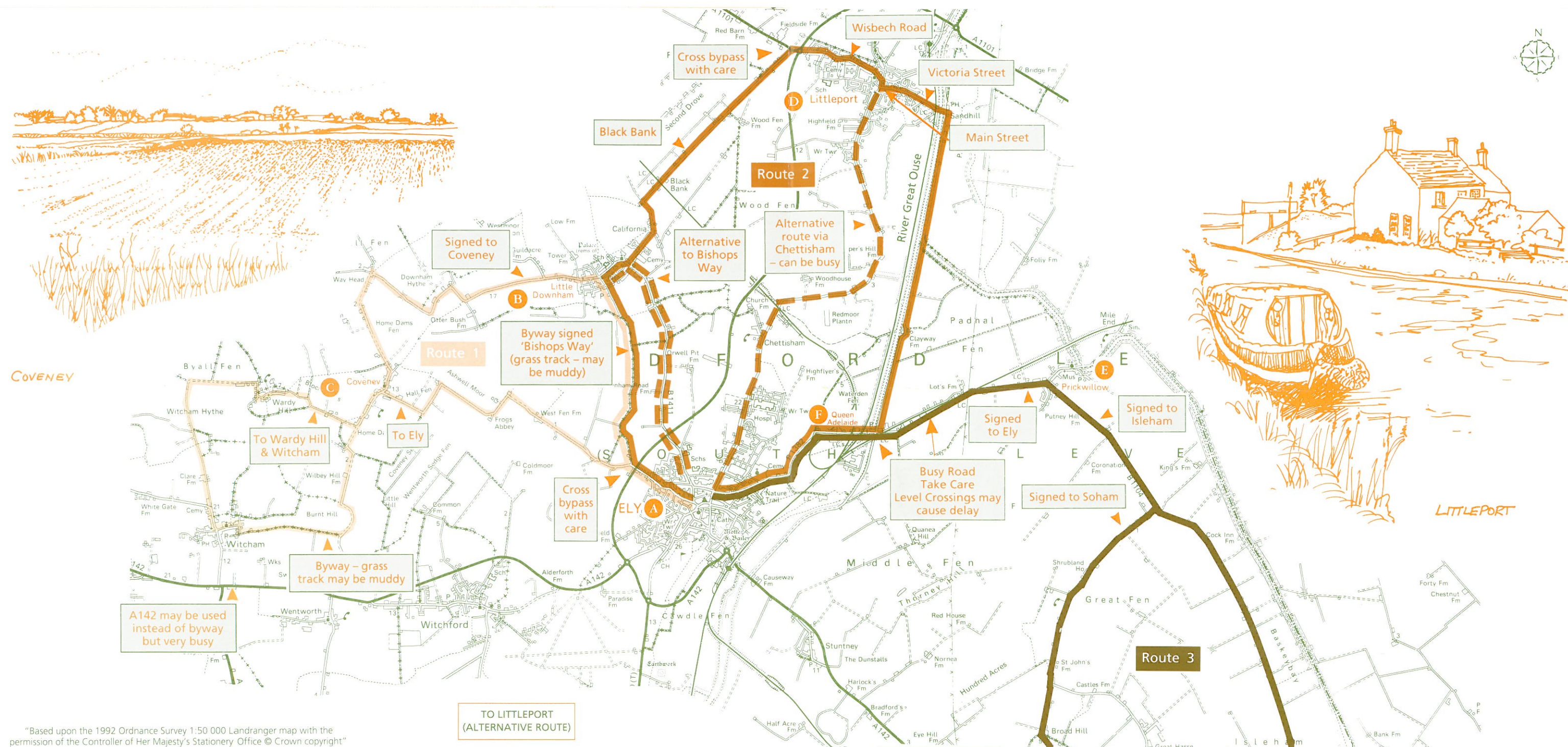
There are two windmills, Downfield Windmill on Fordham Road and Shade Windmill to the north of the village. Both are open to visitors. On the eastern edge of Soham, Qua Fen and East Fen Commons provide attractive grass areas where you can rest awhile.

**ISLEHAM**  
Isleham lies on a low spur of chalk in the fen country, close to the border with Suffolk along the River Lark.

It is a very attractive village with many old and charming buildings including the Norman Priory, Church of St Andrews, many Elizabethan houses, a Tudor warehouse and almshouses.

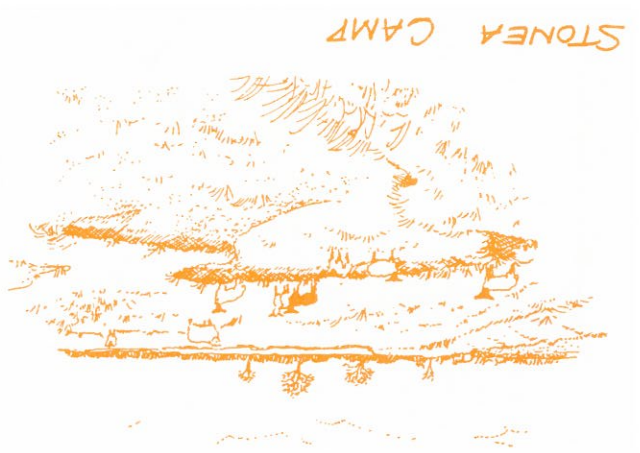
Until 1939 Isleham was largely isolated with only one poor road. Residents relied on droves and waterways. A railway came and went and the old cutting south of Isleham has been conserved as a local nature reserve.







The lowest 'hill-fort' in Britain, Stonea Camp was built in the Iron Age as a military focus for inter-tribal conflicts. It was also used as a defence against the Romans. Standing on a gravel outcrop above the fens, the site was well-suited to defence. The earthworks were levelled and ploughed in the 1960s but have recently been re-constructed. Interpretation boards explain the site's history and wildlife.



Doddington Pocket Park, an area of old grassland and new woodland, provides the perfect rest stop for cyclists. The hospital just north of the village was once a workhouse.

In the middle ages Doddington was one of the most important places in the Isle of Ely – wealthier and larger than March. The Bishop of Ely had one of his palaces here. Look out for the remains of an early 19th century tower windmill, the village cross, the clock tower, the weaver's cottage with a pond where plague victims were buried, and the unique "Round House"

Now a large village Wimblington once comprised a few small dwellings belonging to the manor of Doddington. Many buildings date from Georgian times. Wimblington grain store is a dominant feature.

There was once a bridge here over the Elm Leam, an ancient waterway. The Leam no longer flows and the bridge now lies as an archway beneath the road and gardens near the clock tower. The entrance to it has been sealed.

St Marks Church was built on peat in 1860 and started to lean soon after. The decorative water tower looks more like the keep of an old castle – its 100,000 gallons of water supplies the March, Wisbech, and Chatteris areas with fresh water.

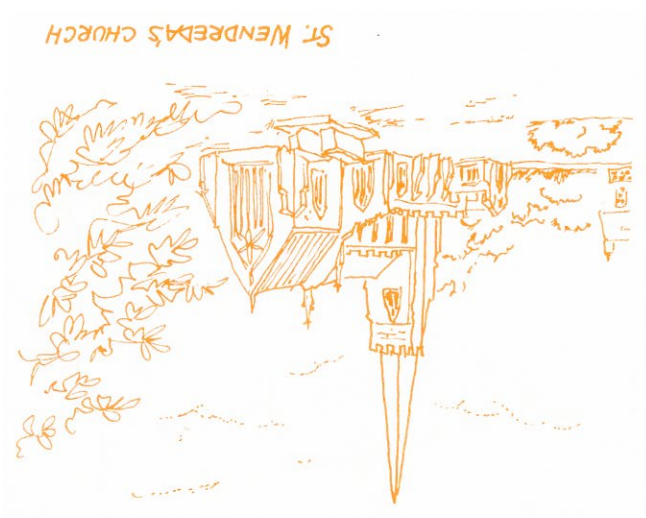
The droves and fens around Friday Bridge with names like Laddus, Maltmas and Waldersea, speak of earlier times when the shepherds and herdsman drove their sheep, cattle, goats and geese along the trackways to graze on the open fen. Drainage of the Fens brought an end to stock rearing as vast areas of flat, fertile land were cultivated for fruit and vegetables, wheat, potatoes and sugar beet.

Stagsholt Farm Park south of Friday Bridge is open to the public.

Cycle along a section of the old March to Spalding railway line; this is a good place for a rest with views across the surrounding countryside. Work is continuing on the site to create an area for informal recreation and conservation.

In medieval times Upwell and Outwell were important ports along the River Nene. The Nene was diverted but its old course still flows through the villages. The River is joined at Outwell by the Well Creek also once a busy waterway. The Mullicourt Aqueduct carries the Well Creek over the newer Middle Level Main Drain.

Both villages have fine churches and many attractive buildings along the river. Behind St Peter's Church in Upwell stands Welle Manor with its spring waters, the main ingredient of 'Norfolk Punch'.



The River Nene flows through the town making March a popular stopping place for boats navigating between the Rivers Nene and Ouse. There is a marina and narrow boats can be hired.

The original village was to the south of the present town at Town End, around St Wendreda's church. The parish church reflects the medieval prosperity of the town and has a spectacular roof which, according to John Betjeman is "worth cycling forty miles in a head wind" to see. The town expanded northwards when the railway came in 1846. The railway marshalling yard built in the 1930s is reputed to have been the largest in England.

March is a pleasant fenland market town. It was once an island rising above the marshes but drainage of the fens allowed it to prosper as a trading place, religious centre, small port, and railway and administrative town.

The B1101 from March to Friday Bridge can be busy but the rest of the route follows quiet roads. The stretch from Stagsholt Farm Park to Friday Bridge provides an attractive and quiet alternative to the B1101 but the sections on grass track can be muddy at times.

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Distance: 25 miles, 40 kms with shorter options  
This route provides a variety of options north of March. It includes the attractive riverside villages of Upwell and Outwell, Rings End railway park and remoter droves and tracks.

Distance: 14½ miles, 23½ kms  
This route takes in the villages of Wimblington and Doddington. Apart from the sections along B roads, the route is very quite providing varied views of Fenland farming. There is a choice of routes at Doddington.

Distance: 13 miles, 21 kms  
This route includes the impressive iron age settlement at Stonea Camp and follows the Sixteen Foot Drain, one of the most important fenland drains which have shaped the landscape. In dry conditions you can avoid the B1101 March to Wimblington road by using the permissive bridleway following the disused railway line. This brings you out on the B1093. Stonea Camp is signed from the road and is well worth a visit. To avoid retracing your tracks back to the B1093 you can wheel your bicycle along the public footpath which joins the B1098. The return route to March is open and can be exposed in strong winds.

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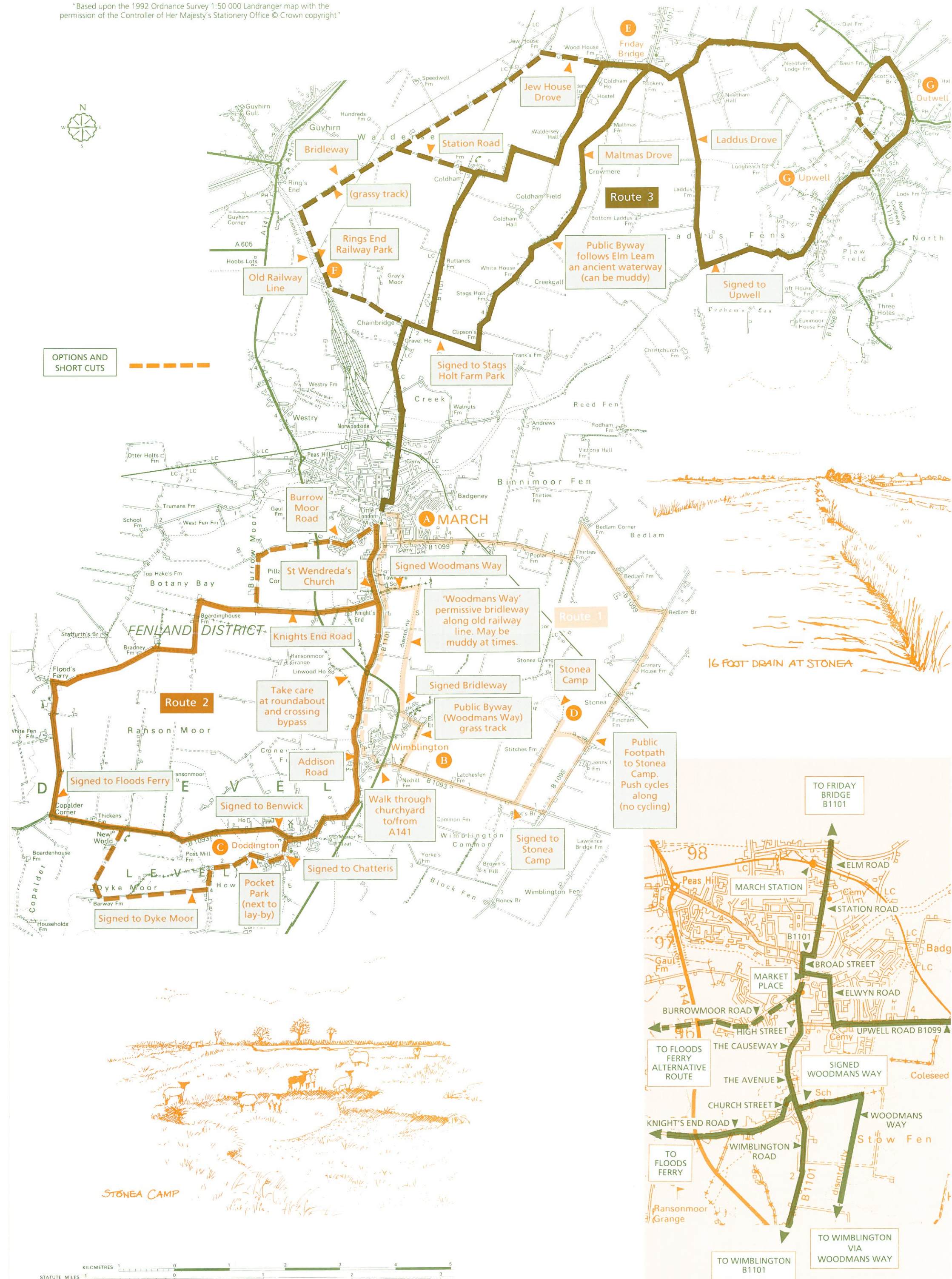
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the section from Elm to Wisbech can be busy.

architecture. The route mainly follows quiet droves and roads but Upwell and Outwell with their fine eighteenth century Norfolk. Of particular interest are the twin riverside settlements of This route spans the border country between Cambridgeshire and Distance: 19 miles, 31 kms

**ROUTE 3**

Wisbech to West Walton which can be busy.

this countryside. The route is quiet except for the road from strawberries, bulbs and nursery plants bring a special variety to the old Roman sea bank give the area its character. Orchards, Marshland". Long droves, impressive churches, fine buildings and This route takes you into Norfolk and the area known as "The Distance: 20 miles, 32½ kms with shorter options

**ROUTE 2**

entering Wisbech and along the Leverington to Gorefield Road.

is generally quiet though care should be taken leaving and blossom. The old sea bank can be seen at Leverington. The route countryside is particularly attractive when the orchards are in past villages with impressive churches and fine houses. The This route takes you through the silt fens north-west of Wisbech Distance: 17½ miles, 28 kms

**ROUTE 1**

**I**

**NTRODUCTION**

Wisbech is an ideal cycling centre and the four routes radiate from the historic town through varied and diverse scenery of farmland, waterways, villages and historic features. The routes mainly follow minor roads though some stretches particularly near Wisbech can be busy. All routes start at the Market Place, Wisbech.

**OLD ROMAN SEA BANK**

**PLACES OF INTEREST**

**WISBECH**

Wisbech grew up around its port which brought prosperity to the town. In the middle ages Wisbech was an important local market and trading centre shipping farm produce to the continent and other parts of Britain. The period 1700–1850 was the most important for Wisbech and many fine buildings, including the National Trust's Peckover House on North Brink which is open to the public, date from this time.

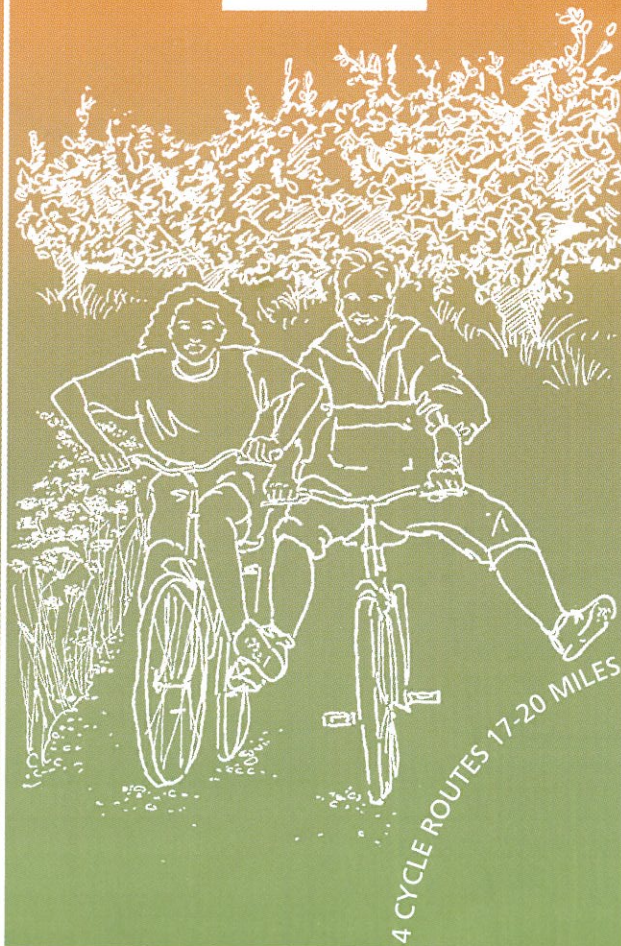
**PECKOVER HOUSE**

Wisbech was once four miles from the sea but in the 1300s the Burgbers of Kings Lynn diverted the Ouse which was forever silting up and left Wisbech eleven miles inland. The old sea bank can be seen along routes 1 and 2.

A series  
of cycle routes  
around the Fens

WISBECH

Number 3



Designed by Coral Design Management Published 1992 PRINTED ON ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY PAPER

The chapel of Ease built in 1960 is a fine example of Puritan architecture with no embellishments. The cramped pews prevent kneeling in prayer which was forbidden by the Puritans.

**E**

**GUYHIRN**

The village sign shows a woad plant grown in Newton until the end of the last century and probably pressed in the woad mill at Parson Drove to produce a blue dye. This is reflected in the village pub "The Woadmans' Arms". It is worth turning off the main road to explore the village.

**D**

**NEWTON**

The village sign shows a woad plant grown in Newton until the end of the last century and probably pressed in the woad mill at Parson Drove to produce a blue dye. This is reflected in the village pub "The Woadmans' Arms". It is worth turning off the main road to explore the village.



**C**

**TYDD ST GILES**

The road west of Tydd St Giles follows the Shire Drain, an old bed of the River Nene which also marks the county boundary between Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. Tydd St Giles church is very unusual in having a bell tower that stands apart from the main building. The village also has several fine old houses.

**B**

**LEVERINGTON**

Leverington Hall and St Leonard's church are impressive features of this village. There is an excellent view from the top of the church tower. The old sea bank can be seen along the public footpath near the school.

As you leave Leverington on the way to Gorefield look out for Park House on your right with its fine parkland and trees. Rumour has it that Oliver Goldsmith wrote "She Stoops to Conquer" whilst staying there.

**TYDD ST GILES CHURCH**

## F RINGS END RAILWAY PARK

Cycle along a section of the old March to Spalding railway line; this is a good place for a rest with views across the surrounding countryside. Work is continuing on the site to create an area for informal recreation and conservation.

## G FRIDAY BRIDGE

St Marks church was built on peat in 1860 and started to lean soon after as the peat dried out and shrank. Stagsholt Farm Park south of Friday Bridge is open to the public.

## H UPWELL AND OUTWELL

In medieval times Upwell and Outwell were important ports along the River Nene. The Nene was diverted but its old course still flows through the villages. The River is joined at Outwell by the Well Creek also once a busy waterway. The Mullicourt Aqueduct carries the Well Creek over the newer Middle Level Main Drain.

Both villages have fine churches and many attractive buildings along the river. Behind St Peter's Church in Upwell stands Welle Manor with its spring waters, the main ingredient of 'Norfolk Punch'.

## I ELM

This peaceful village still centres around its fine church of All Saints much as it did 600 years ago. The Wisbech canal and tramway once passed Elm but both have now gone. The tramway was featured in the "Thomas the Tank Engine" books by Rev. Audrey who lived and worked in the area.

## J EMNETH

Emneth church is one of the famous Marshland churches reflecting the former agricultural prosperity of the area.

## K THE WALPOLES AND WEST WALTON – The "Marshland" Villages

Cycle route 2 takes you into an area of Norfolk known since the 1400s as "The Marshland". This is a band of fertile silt which, until reclamation was an area of marsh. The salt marshes provided valuable grazing, fowling and fishing. The sea was once much

closer than it is today. The "Old Roman Sea Bank", still survives as a broad high bank along the fields; at Walpole St Andrew it is now followed by the road. The prefix 'wai', found in the Walpoles, West Walton and Walton Highway denotes villages along the sea bank.

The Marshland villages prospered in the middle ages when land was drained increasing its value for growing corn and grazing. This medieval wealth is symbolised by fine houses and grand parish churches. The parishes radiated from an area to the south known as Marshland Fen and The Smeeth. Droveways 200 yards wide led down from the parishes to this area to provide grazing for cattle. Two sections of the cycle route follow the lines of these droves.

Walpole St Andrew was the daughter parish of Walpole St Peter – the division of parishes in this way was common in the Marshland area of Norfolk where parishes extended with prosperity and reclamation of surrounding land. The Walpoles are a tangle of lanes reflecting the piecemeal reclamation of marshy land behind the protection of the sea bank.

**CYCLING IN THE FENS** – This is one of a series of three leaflets featuring cycle routes in the Fens. Leaflets are also available on cycling in other areas of Cambridgeshire. These can be purchased at Tourist Information Centres, libraries and local shops.

**OTHER INFORMATION** – This leaflet is produced by Cambridgeshire County Council's Rural Group with grant aid from the Countryside Commission. We hope you have enjoyed these cycle routes and would appreciate any comments you may have. For more information please contact:-

Rural Group  
Department of Property  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Shire Hall  
Cambridge CB3 0AP  
Tel: Cambridge (0223) 317445.

Cambridgeshire  
County Council  
Rural Strategy

COUNTRYSIDE  
COMMISSION





OPTIONS AND SHORT CUTS

