

place, as you walk the Fen Rivers Way. Non Gulon Nonk Jonkney through this special around us in this fascinating landscape. We hope reflect on times past. The story of the Fens is all As you walk the Fen Rivers Way take time to

also hire your own boat. trips run out of Cambridge and Ely, and you can clubs offer day passes to visitors. Summer boat There are many peaceful places to fish and

way to travel in the swampy fenland. link back to the past when punts were the best Cambridge where the river is shallower. This is a competition is fierce. Punting is popular in Each college has their own crew, and see the rowers of Cambridge University training. Cam above and below Baits Bite lock you may The rivers are now important for leisure. On the

see one as they are mainly active at night. years of absence, although you are unlikely to river bank. Otters have returned after many qnzk you may see a barn owl hunting along the seen drying their wings in the sunshine and at wealth of ducks and geese. Cormorants can be Scientific Interest. In winter they support a flooded land designated a Site of Special Cam lie the Cam Washes, areas of occasionally still fascinating for wildlife. Alongside the River Though much of the wetland is gone the area is

walls increase and decrease with the changing One owner said that the cracks in her house peat has shrunk and the buildings have moved. yonzes which have been abandoned because the Littered across the Fens are old barns and

fascinating landscape. water may be allowed to reclaim some of this the cost will outweigh the agricultural value, and valuable tarmiand in the UK but perhaps one day banks protect some of the most fertile and bank repairs are needed every 30-50 years. The settlement and rising sea levels mean that major The combined effects of peat shrinkage, bank maintenance of most flood banks in this area. The Environment Agency is responsible for the

systems lie below high tide level. surrounding the River Cam and Ely Ouse and flood banks. Some 500 square kilometres landscape relying on a system of drains, pumps The Fens today are an artificially maintained

The Fens today

needed to work each farm. have led to larger fields and fewer people are improvements in tarm machinery and drainage cattle still graze river banks and washes. and livestock farming has virtually gone. Beef onions are the most important crops on the Fens Today cereals, sugar-beet, carrots, potatoes and

the 1950s when cheap tertiliser came in from which are old workings. This trade died out in valley you can see small coprolite pits or ponds



provided a valuable fertiliser. Along the Cam and molluscs, became important as this Quarrying for coprolite, fossilised dinosaur dung the emphasis changed to growing root crops. livestock. Iowards the end of the 19th century grew pears, bears and cereals and raised On this rich agricultural land farmers originally although now the best land is the wettest. The Mott family still farms the land today,

the surface £8.00 per acre, where the horse rested on

£4.00 per acre, where the horse sank up to

£2.00 per acre, where the horse sank up to

method of land valuation using the horse: horse and cart. They devised an interesting was thick with mud and the going difficult for view the land before selling. The access route Dairy Houses, Welney. The owner decided to Thomas John Mott wished to buy some land at land steadily became more valuable. In 1864 Farming became increasingly important and the

today. Peat was still cut for fuel in the 1930s. fishing and fowling are little more than hobbies number of licensed eel catchers, but basketry, are still trapped and sent to market by a small Sedge cutting is still done at Wicken Fen and eels progressively drier these trades gradually died out. duck per week to London. As the Fens became peak in the 1700s wildfowlers were sending 2,500 markets, basketry, fishing and fowling. At their thatching, eel trapping to supply the London industries were reed and sedge cutting for Two centuries ago the most common wetland

Working the land

Saptist Chapel near Upware. worshippers from Waterbeach to services in the Bank, a chain ferry was used to ferry road bridges, others ceased working. At River along the route. Some have been replaced by There were many chain ferry crossing points

demise of the fen lighter. competition from rail and road brought about the lasted until after the First World War, when barley and rye were shipped out. This trade pitch and tar from Scandinavia. Wheat, oats, Newcastle, wine from Portugal, and wood, iron, mort leop shew segoes were coal from

new type of craft, the fenland lighter. traffic in 1651. This led to the development of a large dam at Denver effectively stopped coastal the Cam into Cambridge. The construction of a cargo sailed with the tide up the Great Ouse and transport routes. In 1649, ships with 40 tons of The rivers that cut through the Fens were important

Working the rivers



examples, the best of which is Wicken Fen. marshland and all that remains are isolated wildlife habitat of reedbeds, alder carr, and rivers and lodes. The new land replaced a unique ot easy to work black peat, and a network of Draining the Fens created a rich agricultural soil

raised for servicing. bnubs are situated under water and can be nearby. Even this is only a standby. Modern then by electric pumps in a small brick building The engines were first superseded by diesel and

And the Destroyer by Itself destroy'd. The powers of Steam she said shall be Science a remedy for Water found

These Fens have offimes been by Water

Station, built in 1830 on One Hundred Foot Drain: visible on the New Bedford River Pumping proud of their steam that they wrote a verse, still mediaeval field systems. The engineers were so drained, and large new drains cut across the drained. Soham Mere, an inland lake, was huge increase in the area of land that could be wind pumps and was more reliable, resulting in a One steam driven pump could do the work of 40

year, but with steam it was eight times as much.

best syrinkage was about a quarter of an inch per sprinkage problems increased. With wind pumps waterlogged land was exposed to the air, the first steam pumps in 1819. As more Micken Fen. The wind pumps were replaced by rivers. A fine example of a wind pump survives at pumps were built to lift the field water into the drainage was impossible. Thousands of wind conduct the rivers away. By 1700 natural sea. Raised channels had to be constructed to increasingly difficult for the water to drain to the shrank below the level of the rivers it became were declared drained in 1652. As the peat mercy' for those who tried to escape. The hens them easily identifiable and it was 'death without were dressed in coarse white kersey to make was rife and mortality was high. The prisoners diverting rivers was back breaking work. Malaria only spades and shovels, digging ditches and Were Scotlish and Dutch prisoners of war. With It wasn't much fun for the navvies, many of whom

to save the wild Fens. Tigers' who vandalised and destroyed their work confinuously disrupted by groups known as 'Fen USANIGS MUO MOLKGO OU LUG SCUGIUG MGLG enclosure of previously common land. The fowling, reed and turf cutting, and led to the as it threatened their livelihoods of fishing, Many local people were opposed to the draining

today retain the name of Adventurers' Fen. acres of newly drained land, and parcels of land Fens. The reward for the speculators was 6,000 Dutchman, Cornelius Vermuyden, to drain the they 'adventured' their money, commissioned sbecniators, known as 'adventurers' because Francis, Earl of Bedford, and a number of other the peat follows its original channel. In 1630 its tributaries, nor any river that flows through modern engineering. Neither the Great Ouse nor The river system of the Fens today is due to

drain the Fens Fen Tigers and the fight to



because of their skin colour. beobje were often known as 'Fen Yellow Bellies' common, as was opium smoking. Fenland swallowed alive. Jaundice and malaria were cnked, or the spider was wrapped in pastry and skonuq s sick beksou, s ueck nutil tugy were spidery cure. A live spider was nung in a bag off evil spirits. Sickness was treated by the bigeou, 2 yeart with pins stuck through it to ward a glass bottle under their hearth containing a superstition. It was common for houses to have The Fens were isolated and awash with

Hen Kivers Way. broduce. Monasteries were founded all along the Mediaeval communities made use of the Fens' improve the drainage for some 1,200 years. After the Romans left Britain little was done to

The Wildemess Years

crosses the Fen Rivers Way. centuries. Kiln Lane footpath in Horningsea kilns thought to date from the second and third excavations in Horningsea have revealed pottery The Romans were skilled potters, and

River Witham at Lincoln. from the River Cam near Waterbeach to the transport, and dug a canal, known as Car Dyke, farmland. They appreciated the value of water causeways to exclude the sea and create more The Romans built a series of dykes and

The Roman Fens

using their advanced engineering skills. came and began to drain sections of the Fen Life in the swamps was difficult until the Romans

between fen islands. as Stuntney Causeway, to link higher ground people built trackways on long oak piles, such The Bronze Age was warmer and drier and the

arable fields show where their settlements were. or to islands within the Fens. Scattered flint tools in communities moved away to the drier ten edges an inhospitable swamp and Stone Age depositing clay on top of the peat. The Fens were About 5,000 years ago the sea invaded,

by farmers today. in the peat. These bog oaks are still ploughed up wet conditions and the trunks became preserved Debris from these trees could not decay in the became waterlogged and the trees collapsed. sea levels began to rise. The majestic forests About 6,000 years ago the climate changed and and pine, living on wild boar and fish.

basin, gradually creating land. Stone Age people huge amounts of glacial debris in the Fenland As the ice began to melt the waters deposited

walked through a primeval forest of oak, yew

The Fens before the Romans

the end of the Ice Age. this we must look back 12,000 years to need to understand its history and to do But to understand the Fens today we places is several feet below sea level. have created a landscape which in many Fens dry. Amazing feats of engineering have battled the elements to keep the landscape. For centuries Fenland people faced by farmers in this artificial The Fenland blow is one of the problems

of his crop would survive. that there was little chance that even half were beaten and smothered and he knew the wind passed over his fields the crops and carried them, like a sand storm. As sbeed, it picked up the dry fine peat soils darkened, and as the wind gathered planting. While he watched, the sky miles away which lay bare between well. What worried him was the land two weeks but his salad crops were growing began to strengthen. It had been dry for was a haze on the horizon. A light breeze gathering storm. In the distance there The tarmer looked on in dismay at the



A Fenland Journey

Things to see and do along the way

The rivers provide a fascinating back drop to this area and there are also lots of things to see and do either on the river, on the bank and indeed beyond.

Here are a few suggestions but do explore further!

Stourbridge Common, Cambridge

The site of what was once the largest medieaval fair in Europe and now a very popular place to enjoy the open air. Grazed by cattle and popular amongst cyclists, walkers, young and old.

The Leper Chapel, Cambridge

One of the oldest buildings in Cambridge dating back to the reign of Henry I C1125, and hosts many and varied events throughout the year. www.leper-chapel.24to24-

hosting.co.uk/history.html

Denny Abbey and Farmland Museum, Waterbeach

Said to be haunted by the happy ghosts of nuns, this English Heritage site now provides a base for the farmland museum with lots of activities through the year.

www.dennyfarmlandmuseum.org.uk

Anglesey Abbey, Lode

A National Trust tearoom with garden and house attached. Drifts of snowdrops in the winter, dazzling dahlias in the autumn and lots more in

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/anglesey-abbey

Wicken Fen. near Upware

Leave the main route at Upware at the Five Mile, No hurray pub and marina to explore this National Nature Reserve, one of the oldest remaining pieces of traditional fenland owned and managed by the National Trust. A Visitor Centre and Café provide interest and refreshment. Boats trips and bikes are for hire in the summer. www.wicken.org.uk

Stretham Engine, Stretham

The oldest surviving steam engine that used to pump water off the land to create the agricultural landscape we see today. Now maintained by local volunteers and occasionally open to the public. www.strethamoldengine.org.uk/history.htm

Cam and Ouse Washes

The washlands beside the river Cam and Ouse flood in the winter and are home to many traditional fenland wildfowl as well as fen skaters. In the summer, the lush grazing meadows attract insects, mammals and birds making these washlands a haven for wildlife.

Extra information

This leaflet is one of a series produced by Cambridgeshire County Council to encourage the use and enjoyment of some of the many public rights of way in Cambridgeshire. We hope you have enjoyed the walks and would appreciate any comments you may have.

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www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/ countrysideandrights

www.visitcambridge.org

Follow the Countryside Code – why?

Because 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 boundaries; 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!

Access for all

The Cambridgeshire countryside is there to be enjoyed by EVERYONE. This route follows grassy droves and river banks which although muddy in winter are firm if uneven underfoot in summer. There are no stiles and access to sections of the route from the road is good. More information is available on the Cambridgeshire County Council

Come and enjoy it!

How to get there

Stagecoach in Peterborough 01733 554575 Stagecoach in Cambridge 01223 423578

Cambridgeshire County Council Passenger Transport Inquiries 0345 045 0675

Stations in Cambridge, Waterbeach and Ely National Rail Inquiries 08457 484950

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be a **Fens Adventurer!**

The Fen Rivers Way

A long-distance walking route using fenland rights of way linking the historic centres of Ely and Cambridge



Welcome to the Fen Rivers Way!

The Fen Rivers Way follows public paths along the well drained flood banks of the Rivers Cam and Great Ouse, linking the cities of Cambridge and Ely. Initially developed as a partnership project between all the Parishes along the route, it is waymarked with the eel logo which you will find on signs at the roadside and on wooden markers across the fields. Yellow arrows indicate public footpaths, blue for bridleways and red for byways.

The route is well served by public transport making a long day's walk, or a 2 day trip with an overnight stop at one of the campsites or bed and breakfast stays en route.

The route goes through farmland where stock may be present and farming operations continue throughout the year. Keep dogs under close control, especially where stock are present and when passing through nature reserves. Farmers will be cultivating the land so please be aware of and respect these operations. The Towpath (Hayling Way) between Waterbeach and Cambridge is particularly attractive and well –used so do watch out for cyclists, fisherman and others who may be enjoying the riverbank.

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk

17 miles

