

The Wicken Way

Visit Wicken and Soham

be a **Fens Adventurer!**



Wicken wildlife

Wicken Fen is one of the country's major sites for wetland ecology with many important scientific studies having been carried out here since coming into the care of the National Trust in 1899. In total over 8020 species of plants, fungi and animals have been recorded making Wicken Fen one of the most species rich nature reserves in Britain.

Admission to the Fen is by ticket available from the visitor centre at the end of Lode Lane. There are displays about the history and ecology of the Fen, a cafe and shop.

Whilst Wicken Fen undoubtedly presents the most diverse collection of wildlife in the area, the green droves that run across the surrounding cultivated land are of interest in their own right. Horsefen Drove, to the north of No-Ditch-Field between Wicken and Soham, is bordered by mature hedges which create a distinctly wooded atmosphere. Alder, hawthorn, blackthorn and ash provide cover for birds, and ground flora include such woodland species as bluebells, mosses and wood anemones. Bracks Drove is of a more open nature. The ground is drier and the hedge along the south-east side gives some protection to the grasses, flowering plants and teasels, which are very attractive to finches and butterflies.



Fenland farming

Wicken lies in the centre of a landscape which is both old, and new and totally artificial. Historically, Wicken Fen, Wicken Poor's Fen and St Edmunds Fen all formed part of the common land of Wicken Parish. They remained undrained and uncultivated for many years and, instead, were retained for peat (for burning) and sedge (for thatching). These various uses of the fen created the mosaic of important habitats of today.

In the 17th century the fen land was divided up into strips called 'dolvers' and allocated to the inhabitants of the village to farm. The strips meant each farmer had a mixture of rich and poor land. The National Trust now owns Wicken Fen and St Edmunds Fen and a regime of cutting, mowing and grazing is continued to preserve the great variety of flora and fauna.

Commoners rights still exist on Wicken Poor's Fen and these are administered by the Parish Council, together with the remaining strip farming on No-Ditch-Field. Any individual may have more than one strip, but no two strips together; in this way the ancient field pattern is retained.



Monk's Lode starts as a chalk spring at Landwade Hall, Newmarket. Many of the Lodes in the area were thought to be constructed by the Romans and used for transport. It is believed that Monk's Lode is so-called because it was used by the monks of Spinney Abbey, to the west of Wicken, for fishing and transport.

The open fenland landscape gives excellent views of Ely Cathedral.

Wicken's mills

There are two wind engines in Wicken, one on Wicken Fen, which was reconstructed there in 1955, and one on Back Lane in the village. This mill, constructed in 1813, became derelict after milling ceased in the 1930s. In 1987 the Wicken Windmill Preservation Group bought the mill and have restored it to working order. Wicken Mill now grinds flour at weekends throughout the year.

The wind pump on Wicken Fen once used wind power to pump water out of the cultivated land. It is the only working wooden wind pump remaining in the Fens. Today the land is drained by electric pumps and pipes under the fields carry water away to drainage ditches. These under-field pipes can be seen emptying into the drains alongside Bracks Drove. Drainage makes it possible to grow a wider range of crops and to increase yields, but when land is drained the peat shrinks and the surrounding land sinks. This is why Wicken Fen is higher than its surroundings and rivers in the area have to be banked to stop them flooding the lower-lying land. Ironically, the pump on Wicken Fen can now be used to raise water up into the Fen to maintain the wetland habitat.



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 and 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.



The Cambridgeshire countryside is there to be enjoyed by *everyone*. This route follows farm tracks and grassy field edge paths. The surface is uneven.

The Public Rights of Way and Access Team is endeavouring to replace stiles with gates where a barrier is necessary. More information about other walks is available on the Cambridgeshire County Council website at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights and www.visitcambridge.org

Come and enjoy it!



This project is supported by the Fens Adventurers Local Action Group (LAG) who deliver the Rural Development Programme England in Cambridgeshire and West Norfolk through the Leader approach. The LAG is managed by Cambridgeshire County Council & Cambridgeshire ACRE and supported by EEDA, Defra, Local Authorities and the EU's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas.

Web Link: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm

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.

Public Rights of Way and Access, Box CC1305, Cambridgeshire County Council, Castle Court, Castle Hill, Cambridge CB3 0AP
Tel 0345 045 5212

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights

www.visitcambridge.org

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Design by 2dgraphic.com

The Wicken Way

Route **7 miles**
Allow approximately **3 hours**

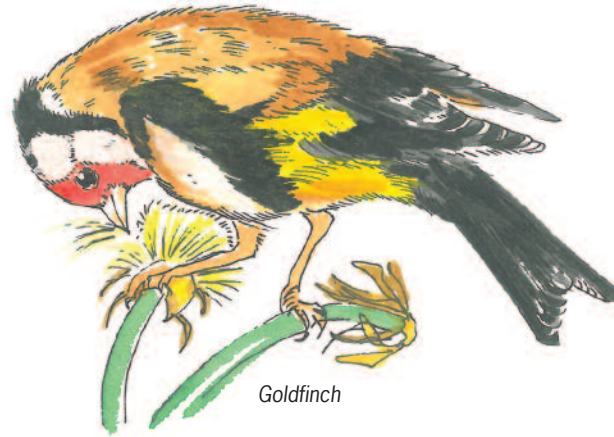
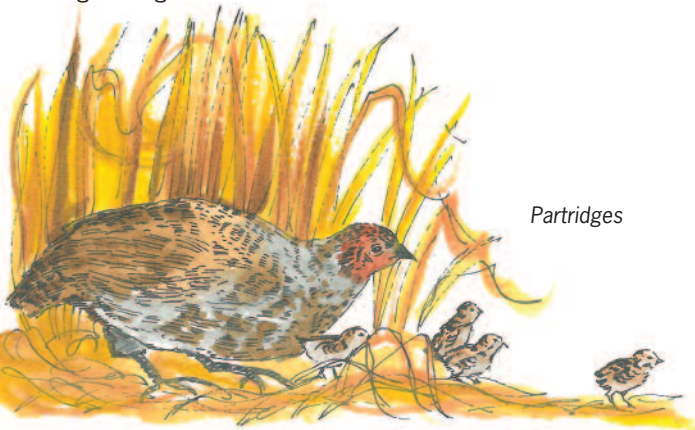
'Our boat turned up Wicken Lode. Here we could see shoals of red-finned, green scaled roach glide past us in the clear water and, on the banks, young partridges running among the tall grasses and Meadow-sweet; in the water the green leaves and white, gold hearted cups of the water-lilies over which hovered dragon-flies'

Rider Haggard

Soham's wide variety of local shops can be found clustered around the beautiful St. Andrews Church, part of which dates back to Saxon times. Another unique feature of the Parish are the extensive Commons. The route passes through Soham Horse Fen, now protected for its special flora and fauna.

This walk passes through a Fenland landscape which encompasses hundreds of years of farming history. Wicken Fen, now a National Nature Reserve owned and preserved by the National Trust, retains most of the characteristics of undrained fenland, while green lanes are reminiscent of the post drainage fens. Strip farming, unbroken since Medieval times, is still practised on No-Ditch-Field, while only a mile away on Soham Mere (drained in the 1800s) the most modern farming methods are used.

Enjoy a walk around Wicken and Soham and see at first hand some of the finest examples of Cambridgeshire's farming heritage.



Starting from Soham

From the car park next to the church, walk across the recreation ground, right along Clay Street, left at Mill Corner, then over a bridge over Soham Lode into Mill Drove.

Starting from the Maids Head Public House

Cross over the Green and turn left along Butts Lane to walk towards Soham or right to cross High Street and follow the 'Public Footpath' signpost past houses and south towards Monk's Lode

Further information

Footwear: Most of the route follows grassy droves which can become muddy in winter, particularly after heavy rain. Strong waterproof footwear is essential.

Maps: The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey 1:50000 Landranger Sheet 154 or on 1:25000 Explorer Sheet 226.

Waymarking: Green signs indicate the route through Wicken and also where path leave the tarmaced road. Smaller waymark arrows indicate the route in open country.

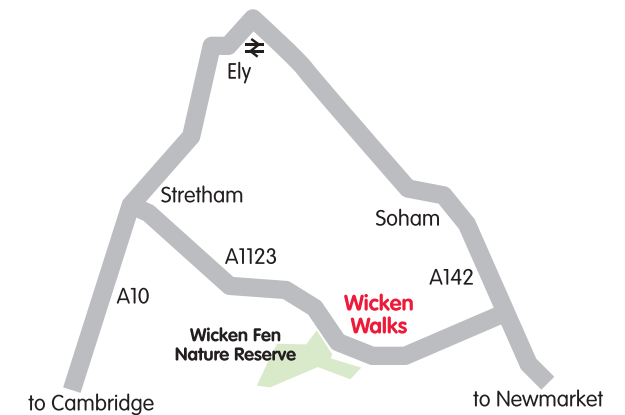
How to get there

By train Nearest station is Ely
National Rail Inquiries 08457 484950

By road A10 north from Cambridge, then A1123 east at Stretham

By bicycle Wicken is on National Cycle Route 11 Ely-Downham Market www.sustrans.org.uk

Inquiries Cambridgeshire County Council Passenger Transport Inquiries **tel 0345 045 0675**



Refreshments: Plenty of cafes, pubs and shops in Soham. Tea-room and pub in Wicken. However, it's a good idea to take a snack with you for when you stop to rest and enjoy the countryside.

Detailed information from:
www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights
www.wickenmill.co.uk
www.wicken-village.org.uk
www.nationaltrust.org.uk
www.soham-tc.gov.uk