

The

# Earthworks Way and Devil's Dyke Walks

Reach • Swaffham Prior • Burwell

be a **Fens Adventurer!**

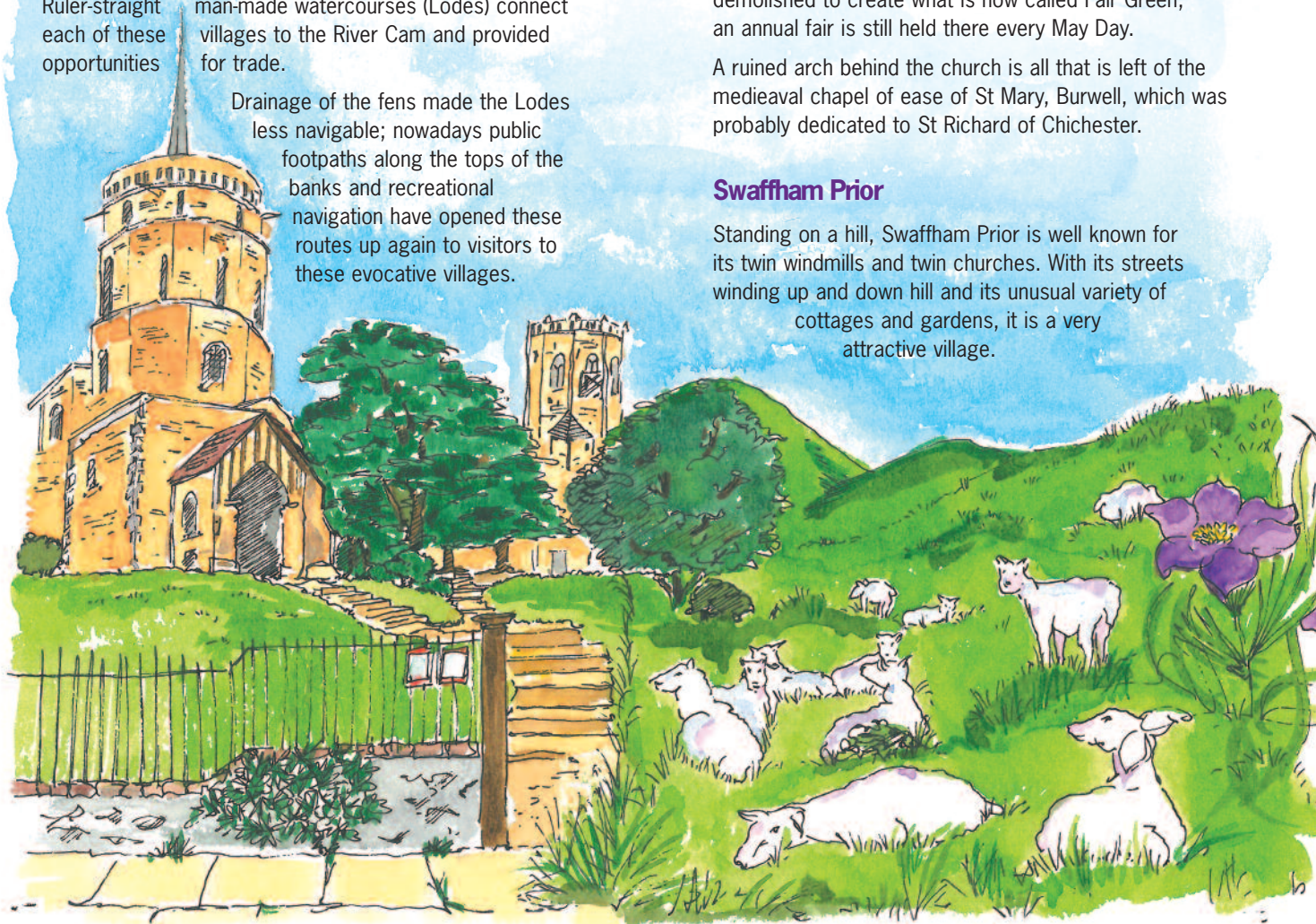


## Three fen-edge villages

Reach, Burwell and Swaffham Prior have the characteristic shape of many fen-edge villages, being long and narrow, crossing three types of soil – sandy boulder clay, chalky loam and fen. In early times only the middle third, on which the village stood, would have been laid out in fields. The upper third was forest, used for timber, and the lower third fen, which provided marshy summer grazing for cattle as well as reed for thatching, and plenty of fish and fowl. These fen-edge communities were largely self-supporting and, except for occasional fairs and markets, had no cause to go beyond their parish boundaries.

Ruler-straight man-made watercourses (Lodes) connect each of these villages to the River Cam and provided opportunities for trade.

Drainage of the fens made the Lodes less navigable; nowadays public footpaths along the tops of the banks and recreational navigation have opened these routes up again to visitors to these evocative villages.



### Reach

Now a peaceful hamlet huddled round its green, Reach was once an important port and later a town holding a famous fair. In mediieval times foreign merchants sailed up the Cam and along Reach Lode to trade at wharves and quays in the village. Chalk pits supplied rubble for roads and foundations and 'clunch' for building stone.

The Devil's Dyke once ran right up to Reach Lode to extend the defensive barrier. However, before the start of the thirteenth century the end of the Dyke was demolished to create what is now called Fair Green; an annual fair is still held there every May Day.

A ruined arch behind the church is all that is left of the mediieval chapel of ease of St Mary, Burwell, which was probably dedicated to St Richard of Chichester.

### Swaffham Prior

Standing on a hill, Swaffham Prior is well known for its twin windmills and twin churches. With its streets winding up and down hill and its unusual variety of cottages and gardens, it is a very attractive village.

## Chalk grassland

This walk passes by Foster's Mill, built in 1857 and standing on the site of an earlier post mill. It is believed that there has been a mill on this site (one of the highest points locally) since the Domesday Book. Although mothballed in 1946, the mill is now restored and producing flour again and is open to the public monthly.

Why two churches? In 1086 the Prior of Ely held only one third of Swaffham Prior, another third was held by Hardwin de Scalers and the last third by 'three of Count Alan of Brittany's Knights'. With Hardwin being an absentee landowner, that left the village divided between two sets of owners each wishing to establish their influence by building their own church.

### Burwell

The name 'Burwell' means 'fort by the spring' and the village follows a line of springs where the chalk meets the fen. The castle was built by King Stephen in the mid-twelfth century to control rebellious Geoffrey de Mandeville who had marched into the fens and seized the Isle of Ely. Mandeville was mortally wounded at Burwell and therefore the castle was never finished.



Burwell is a very long village that began life as several small settlements, gradually converging into one. Local industries have always been very important. Before the draining of the fens, reeds and sedges were cut for thatch, osiers were used to make baskets, wattle and hurdles and fishing, eel catching and game snaring were important activities.

A memorial in Burwell Churchyard commemorates a tragic fire in 1775 when a puppet show held in the great barn ended in disaster after the hay in the barn loft was set alight by accident and everyone in the barn died as the barn burnt to the ground.

This is how E A R Ennion describes the Devil's Dyke in his book 'Adventurer's Fen':

*'The grey-green groundwork of the leaves and grasses, enlivened by a myriad points of colour, has a quality of Jacobean needlework. Purple of knapweed and bellflower, pink sainfoin, blue of scabious and harebell, lemon rockrose, golden lady fingers, white of meadowrue and milfoil – each and every tint subdued by the veil of shadow and haze of maidenhair'.*

Devil's Dyke is now designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of the chalk grassland flowers. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, grassland was important because the price of wool increased and landowners



concentrated on rearing sheep. The animals close-cropped the grass, maintaining the traditional downland turf. With the demise of sheep-grazing, thickets of hawthorn, sloe and dogrose have developed along the Dyke; these bushes provide regular nesting sites for birds such as white throats and yellowhammers but they shade and kill the flowers. The remaining short turf patches on warm south facing slopes are ideal for butterflies, with as many as twenty species breeding.

The Devil's Dyke Restoration Project set up in 2002 worked to protect and enhance the remaining good quality chalk grassland and the associated species. Scrub clearance, re-seeding and a new mowing regime have been taking place and sheep now regularly graze certain sections.

### 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](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights) and [www.visitcambridge.org](http://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](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](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights)

[www.visitcambridge.org](http://www.visitcambridge.org)

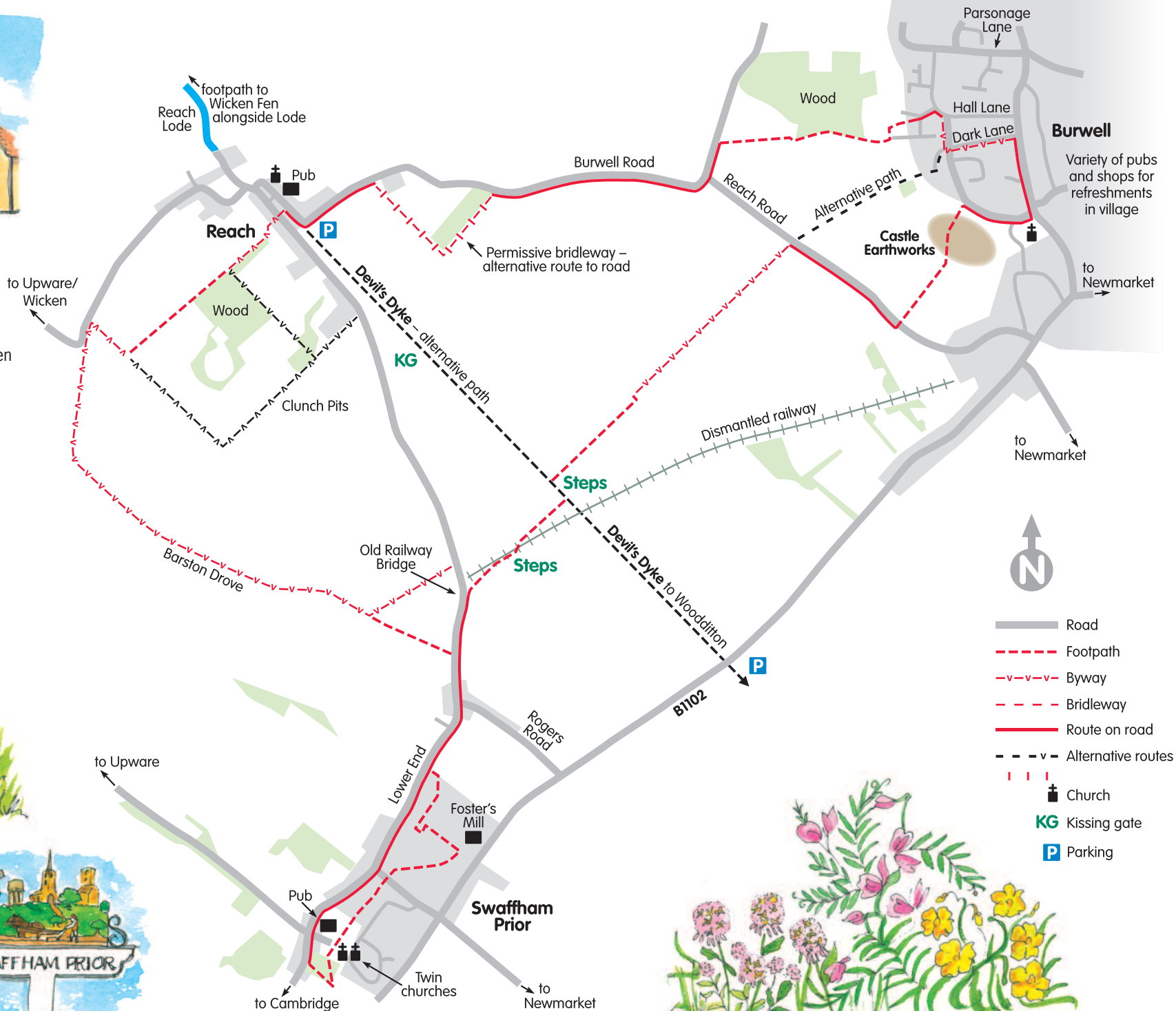
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The Red Lion pub in Swaffham Prior

### Dismantled railway

The Cambridge-Mildenhall Line was constructed by the Great Eastern Railway Company and operated between 1884 and 1968. The section of line crossed by the walk is privately owned and managed as a nature reserve.

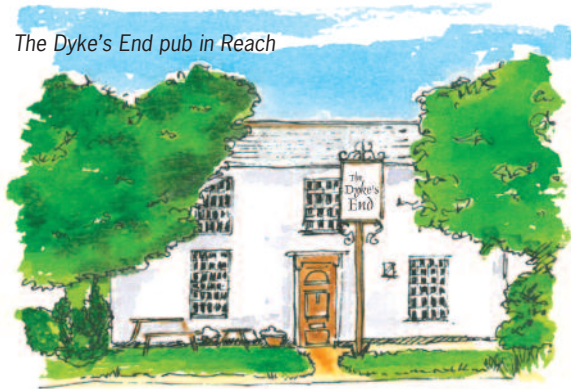


# The Earthworks Way

Route **8 miles**  
Allow approximately **4 hours**

Take a walk through time from Roman to modern times on this pretty corner of the Cambridgeshire countryside. This walk takes you from the Roman waterway of Reach Lode, via the remains of mediaeval quarries, churches and a castle, to a working Victorian windmill and a railway line disused since 1968. An attractive network of rights of way connect the fen-edge villages of Reach, Swaffham Prior and Burwell. This walk of up to 8 mile (a shorter alternative is available using the footpath along the Devils Dyke) explores the history and hospitality of an area rich in archaeology, history and wildlife.

There is a village car park in Reach. Start the walk by crossing Fair Green then follow a byway – Clunch Lane – around the community wood to view the dramatic mediaeval clunch pits.



The Dyke's End pub in Reach

## Clunch Pits

Clunch is a hard chalk that is easily worked and extracted with hand saws. Much of Reach Hill has been removed for building stone, used to construct the great churches of East Anglia, such as the Lady Chapel at Ely Cathedral constructed in the 14th Century. The stone was transported via Reach Lode to the River Cam at Upware and thence the wider inland waterway network of the Fens. The remaining cliff-like quarry walls give a lingering sense of the scale of this almost forgotten industry.

# The Devil's Dyke

The Devil's Dyke is a fine Anglo-Saxon monument, which runs for 7.5 miles from Reach to Woodditton. The impressive earthwork reaches to around 4 metres below present ground level and up to 6 metres above present ground level.

The Devil's Dyke is the last in a series of defensive linear earthworks that stretch south-west, including Fleam Dyke, Brent Ditch and Bran Ditch, and is the biggest and best preserved of these. These earthworks were constructed to control trade and access as well as having a military purpose. Archaeologists believe the Devil's Dyke was constructed in the sixth or seventh century by the East Angles to defend themselves from the Mercians who frequently attacked from the south-west.

One local legend is that the Devil came uninvited to a wedding at Reach church and was chased away by the guests. In anger the devil ran away and formed the groove of the Dyke with his fiery tail. However, during the mediaeval period it was regularly known as 'St Edmunds Dyke', because it marked the limit of the jurisdiction of the abbots of Bury St. Edmunds.



## Further information

**Footwear:** Much of the route mainly 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.

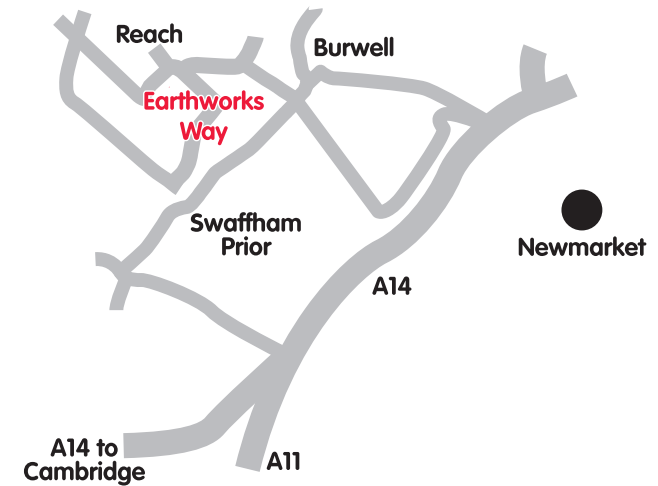
# How to get there

**By bus** Stagecoach in Cambridge 01223 423578

**By road** B1102 north-east of Cambridge

There is a car park in Reach and on road parking in Burwell and Swaffham Prior. Please park considerately and respect the needs of residents

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



**Waymarking:** Green signs indicate the route where paths leave the tarmaced road. Smaller waymark arrows indicate the route in open country.

**Refreshments:** Pubs in Swaffham Prior, Reach and Burwell. Shops in Burwell. It's a good idea to take a snack with you for when you stop to rest and enjoy the countryside.

**More information:** [www.devilsdykeproject.org.uk](http://www.devilsdykeproject.org.uk)  
[www.burwellparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.burwellparishcouncil.gov.uk)  
[www.reach-village.co.uk](http://www.reach-village.co.uk)