

# The Fen Edge Trail Walk: Ramsey to Wistow

4.9 miles (7.9 km)

in partnership with

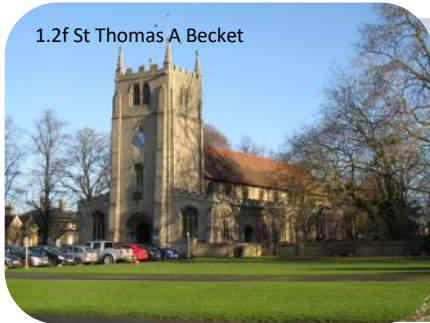


**Warboys Archaeology Group**

*'My favourite area on this walk is at the start - the Church Green and Abbey Green - it's an attractive place to be on a sunny summer's day.'*

Mike, Warboys  
Archaeology Group

*a journey across a  
landscape and time*



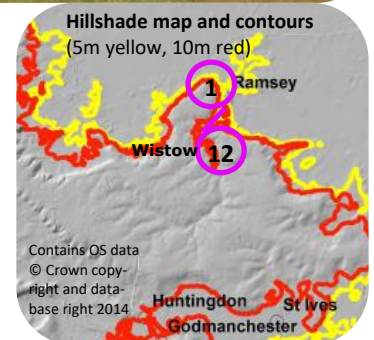
1.2f St Thomas A Becket



10.3f Looking back towards Bury from Shillow Hill

## The route: 'follow the ancient brook'

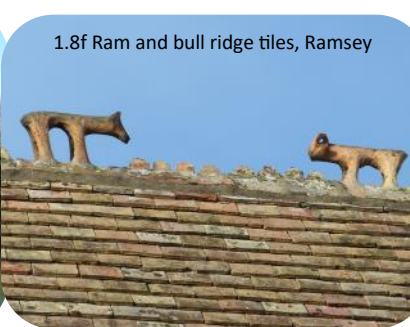
Having travelled across from Sawtry in the west, the Fen Edge Trail turns south to link the historically important town of Ramsey and the picturesque, riverside town of St Ives. This walk, from Ramsey to the village of Wistow is the first part of this journey. Optionally, you can begin by exploring Ramsey itself, following one of the walks through the town ([www.discoverramsey.co.uk](http://www.discoverramsey.co.uk)). A significant religious centre developed on the remote 'island' that extends out into the fen. The location of the town was fundamental to its growth, being on the edge of a peninsula of higher land in a strategic position between the extensive wetlands to the north, east and west, and more hospitable, dryer land to the south. Ramsey Mere, to the north east, was a rich source of food and other resources, and the town's value increased when it became a fen edge port connected to the River Nene. **Starting at the Ramsey Abbey Gatehouse**, the walk follows **Bury Brook**, a tributary of the old Nene, before crossing low lying fenland to reach Bury and the brook again. Passing over low hills, it **finishes in Wistow**, further up the valley, with the next walk continuing up to Broughton before going on to Warboys.



10.4f Ridge on Shillow Hill



4.3f Bury Brook, south of Ramsey



1.8f Ram and bull ridge tiles, Ramsey



3.1f Trail (right) passing the golf course



**Practicalities** As with all of the Fen Edge Trail, you can complete the full length of any walk using transport one way or choose a short or long round trip option, or just visit some of the places on the route. The walk is divided into numbered parts as shown on the two maps. Photo numbers refer to the part they relate to and the order they are seen e.g. *ph3.1f* is the first photo relating to part 3 (*f* = on this front page). Those in Ramsey, before the walk, are in the order in which they are mentioned in the text.

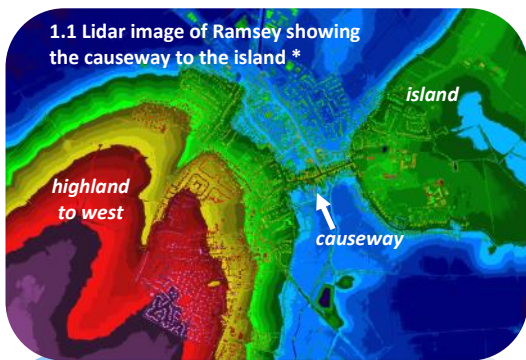
**Length of walk** (one way) approx. 4.9 miles (7.9 km). Walking guide time 2hrs 20mins minimum plus stops. Grid references and the GPS track can be downloaded from the website. Postcode for start PE26 1XA. Maps O.S. Explorer 227. BGS Geology Map 172 Ramsey (1:50,000 New Series). Free, easy to use online geology map viewer (and phone app) on [www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology). The walk from Bury to Wistow follows the route (but in reverse) of the **Rothschild Way** ([www.greatfen.org.uk/visit/Rothschild-Way](http://www.greatfen.org.uk/visit/Rothschild-Way)).

**Transport and services** Ramsey has **buses** from Huntingdon, Peterborough and St Ives. Bury and Wistow have buses from Huntingdon (see [www.stagecoachbus.com](http://www.stagecoachbus.com) and [www.go-whippet.co.uk](http://www.go-whippet.co.uk)). There are **train services** at Huntingdon (12 miles) and Peterborough (13 miles). On-street **parking** (unlimited time) in Ramsey: near St Thomas A Becket church, e.g. High Street (B1096) PE26 1XA, and at north end of Great Whyte PE26 1HP. In Wistow, avoid parking in narrow streets on the circular bus route around the church. Please only park where permitted and in consideration of others. Cafes, pubs and shops in Ramsey and Bury. The website has links to places of interest, services and local organisations.

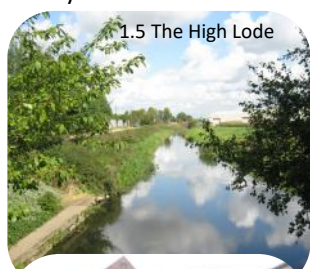
**Safety** Please be aware of any risks that you may encounter and take note of any warnings given by landowners or on pathways. Take particular care with uneven terrain, when near water, on soft or slippery ground, in the presence of livestock or when walking onto or along roads where there is traffic.

## Places of interest along the Trail

**1** Before the fens were drained, much of Ramsey, including the Abbey buildings, stood on what appears to have been a seasonal **island on the fen edge**. It was joined to the 'mainland' via a **causeway**, built by the Abbey, which ran towards Bury but whose location was not recorded and was once lost. Recent studies using LIDAR data (*ph1.1*) strongly suggest that it ran along the course of the present main road between Ramsey and Bury. The island extends to **Ramsey Forty Foot** and is made mostly of **gravels** ('March Gravels') that are likely to have been deposited by water during the most recent glacial stage (the Devensian) when rivers were much more powerful than today. You may wish to look around the town before starting the walk. **Ramsey Rural Museum** ([www.ramseyruralmuseum.co.uk](http://www.ramseyruralmuseum.co.uk)) is a good example of an independent, local museum. Among its many exhibits is a noteworthy collection of farm machinery, Implements and vehicles. Nearby is the **Ramsey Walled Garden** ([www.ramseywalledgarden.org](http://www.ramseywalledgarden.org)). \*Lidar plot by Richard Cushing (range 0-25m)



By 1087 Ramsey Abbey was the fourth wealthiest religious house in England. Its wealth came from 40,000 acres of land, which included most of Huntingdonshire, and many other 'rights'. The small market town of Ramsey grew up around the Abbey and until recently, relied on an agricultural economy. The parish church of **St Thomas a Becket** (*ph1.2f*), between **Church Green** (*ph1.3*) and the **Abbey Gatehouse** (*ph1.4*), appears to have been built as a hospitium (guest house), without the west tower, and not as a church. It would have been used to accommodate visitors, merchants or pilgrims who were not allowed to stay in the main abbey with the monks. The hospitium was founded about 1180 and was dissolved after 1291.



Reflecting their importance, the Abbey buildings and the church were built with good quality building stone, a **Jurassic limestone** quarried at **Barnack, near Stamford**. This was brought along the fenland waterways via **Whittlesey Mere** and the **River Nene**, the course of which used to run past Ramsey and was connected to the town by the **High Lode** (*ph1.5*). A waterway that branched off the High Lode and ran up what is now the **Little Whyte** was used to carry stone to the Abbey itself.



The waters from **Bury Brook**, draining higher land to the south, flow through the town and feed into the High Lode. A wharf was built along its course, now replaced by the wide street called the **Great Whyte** (*ph1.6*). The High Lode was important in medieval times, being the main highway into Ramsey for heavy goods and enabling Ramsey to become a significant Fenland port. Bury Brook was used as the town sewer and was culverted over in the 1850s when outbreaks of typhoid and cholera were attributed to it (*ph1.7*). The culvert was repaired in 2014 due to traffic damage. The only other access into Ramsey in medieval times was the **causeway**. The original High Street ran from St Thomas a Becket church to the Bury Brook, which it crossed via a one-arch bridge at what is now the junction with the Great Whyte. Most of the buildings in Ramsey are built of locally-made bricks using the **Oxford Clay**. Local roof tiles are also used, some decorated with figures such as the **Ram and Bull** that occur in historical stories of the town (*ph1.8f*).



**2** In 1140-1144, during the Anarchy, Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex, expelled all the monks from the Abbey, used it as a fortress and stabled his horses there. He also built a moated timber fort nearby at **Booth's Hill**, possibly to protect the south side of the Abbey. Booth's Hill is 430 m down **Hollow Lane** (*ph2.1*) with public access at the junction with the school entrance in Abbey Road. In the 1830s, the de Ramseys built an **ice house** on the island to store ice taken from local lakes and rivers (*ph2.2*).



Further along the lane, if you look out over the low lying fenland to the south, you will see **Wistow Wood** on the higher land on the fen edge in the distance (*ph2.3*). This **Wildlife Trust** nature reserve is a valuable remnant of the ancient woods that used to cover much of the fen edge as well as other areas of lowland England. It has a diverse flora and fauna that is characteristic of the ash-maple woods that grow on the Oxford Clay and Glacial Tills of the area ([www.wildlifebcn.org/reserves/wistow-wood](http://www.wildlifebcn.org/reserves/wistow-wood)).

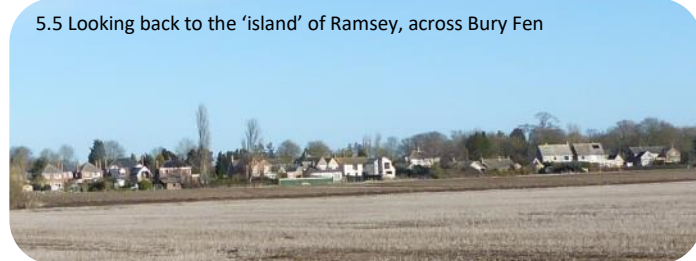
**3** **Alluvium** (fine material such as silt and sand) has been deposited along the valley by frequent flooding of the brook onto adjacent floodplains. It often creates flat areas such as that now forming the golf course (*ph3.1f*). The view back along the brook shows it disappearing under a building on the High Street to run in the culvert under the Great Whyte (*ph3.2*).



**4** Once over the footbridge (*ph4.1*), the route along the brook (*ph4.3f*) is also part of **Ramsey's Waterways Trail**.

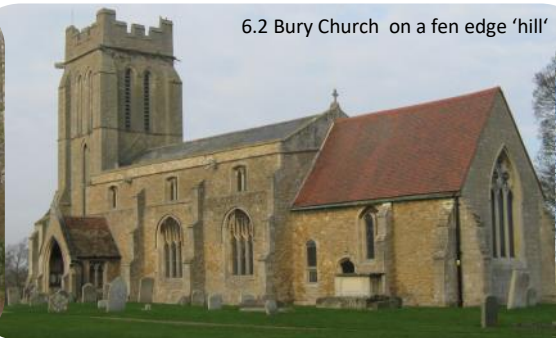


**5** Leaving the brook, the walk turns east (*ph5.2*) crossing **Oxford Clay** before turning south across land covered by Alluvium (*ph5.4*). The low lying land of **Bury Fen** (*ph5.5*), on the edge of the huge fenland basin, is still mostly covered in **Peat**, whose black soils can be seen, in the distance to the left, in contrast to the nearer dark brown soil of the Oxford Clay (*ph5.6*). Lighter still are the silty soils of the Alluvium to the right (*ph.5.7*). Oxford Clay forms higher land in some places on the fen edge in comparison to the alluvium and peat. This is a good area in winter for spotting small flocks of finches and buntings, such as yellowhammers, feeding in the trees along the fen edge.

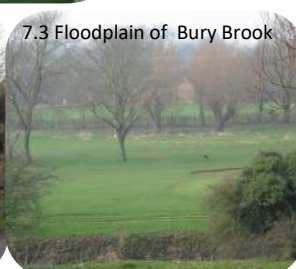


**6** The route takes you up the hill to **Bury Church of the Holy Cross** (*ph6.2*), which sits on a remnant of Glacial Till elevating it above the fen (*ph6.3*). The church dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and is of stone rubble with dressings of Barnack Stone. Other fine quality stone can be seen in the graveyard. The ruined remains at the west end of the tower are those of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century west chapel, which disappeared at some later point in history. Of note in the church are the late 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century font and the early 14<sup>th</sup> century lectern.

The monks at Ramsey objected to townsfolk worshipping in the Abbey church and in 1139 a papal bull stated the town's people could use **Bury Church** for masses. However, if they wanted to get married they had to go to **Wistow Church**, which was senior to Bury at that time. **Bury** and **Hepmangrove**, under the name of **Bury-cum-Hepmangrove**, appear to have originally been separate manors but were united for certain purposes before the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538. **Bury Brook** appears to have been the boundary between the two manors – Bury being on generally higher land to the west and Hepmangrove on mostly lower ground to the east.



**7** The **Manor House** on the opposite side of the road from the church is a late 16th-century half-timber building with a tiled roof. The **Old School House**, just across the brook, has walls made of an **orange-coloured sandstone**, probably of Jurassic age and originating in Northamptonshire or Norfolk (*ph7.1*). Bury Brook has eroded the glacial deposits along its route and left alluvium and gravel on the Oxford Clay. After crossing the brook, the walk follows the valley upstream (*ph7.3*). This part of the walk follows (in reverse) the Rothschild Way, which connects two National Nature Reserves: Wicken Fen to the east and Woodwalton Fen to the west.



**8** Here, you are walking very near the 5m contour, with higher land to your right and the brook to the left. Along the valley sides the Oxford Clay is at the surface covered by alluvium, deposited from the river (particularly in times of flood) and also gravels forming a flat River Terrace.

**9** As you take the footpath towards the belt of trees, to the left is a mound on the skyline (*ph9.1*). It is not a barrow burial but the mound for a post-medieval windmill.



8.1 Grassy footpath



9.1 Mound for a post-medieval windmill



10.1 Bridge over Bury Brook

10.2 Signpost left across field leading up onto hill



**10** The walk uphill takes you onto higher land formed by the Glacial Till deposited by the last glaciers to reach the area. Less easily eroded than the softer Oxford Clay, it now forms low hills (*ph10.4f*) with a 'hummocky' surface.

**11** From **Shillow Hill** there are views down over the fens to the east (*ph11.1*).



11.1 View from Shillow Hill over the fens



11.2 Path through hedge line



11.3 Start of path downhill

**12** On arrival at **Wistow** the bridge crossing the brook gives some idea of the amount of water that periodically surges down the valley during periods of flash flooding when water drains off the adjacent farmland. **Wistow Church** (*ph12.3*) has some impressive building stones. The inhabitants of both Bury and Ramsey had to get married in the more senior church at Wistow until 1178, when the monks in Wistow moved to Bury and the seniority reversed. This changed again when the church in Ramsey was consecrated in 1222. The village can be explored by taking the **Historical Village Walk** (see [www.wistovillage.info](http://www.wistovillage.info)).



12.1 Copse with footpath to left



12.2 Wistow Bridge

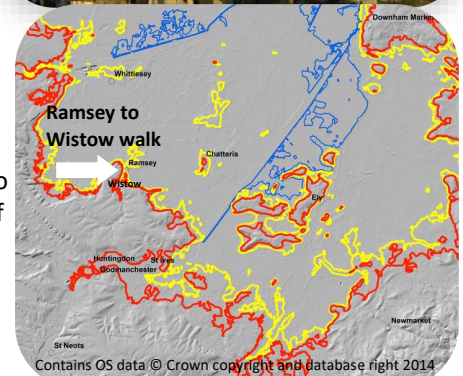


12.3 Wistow Church

## About The Fen Edge Trail

Linking the landscape of the Fen Edge to the local geology, history, culture and wildlife

The **Fen Edge Trail** is a walking route around the Cambridgeshire Fens, roughly following the 5 metre contour (the land that is 5 m above sea level), where the low-lying fenland meets the surrounding higher land. From the Lincolnshire border near Peterborough in the north west, to the Suffolk border at Isleham in the south east, it will also extend to include the 'fen islands' of Ely, Whittlesey, March, Chatteris, Thorney and Wisbech. The Fen Edge Trail is an initiative set up by the **Cambridgeshire Geological Society** as part of their **Geosites** work which aims to identify and protect local sites of landscape and geological value, and share their importance and interest with local people and visitors to the county. We are working with several community organisations who are each exploring their local landscape to help develop the Trail. **This section of the Trail has been developed in partnership with Warboys Archaeology Group.** Information on the Trail, and points of interest along it, are gradually being added to the website together with the walk guides.



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**Cambridgeshire**  
Geological Society

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

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



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[www.fen.land](http://www.fen.land)

# The Fen Edge Trail Walk: Ramsey to Wistow

Directions map (4.9 miles / 7.9 km)



**1** Start at the remains of **Ramsey Abbey Gatehouse** (*ph1.4*), on the other side of the Abbey Green from the parish church of **St Thomas a Becket** (*ph1.2f*).

**2** Option: to see building stone from the Abbey, which is now used in the present site's perimeter wall, walk south along **Hollow Lane** (*ph2.1*). Further along the lane are the remains of a moated site, **Booth's Hill** (*ph2.2*) and a view across to **Wistow Wood** (*ph2.3*).

**3** Walk 45 m along the **High Street** with your back to the church and turn left into **Abbey Rooms Lane**, signed "Public Footpath to Bury Church". Follow it round to the right and take the footpath between the hedges (with the arrow marker). Ignore tracks to right and left (*ph3.1f*).

**5** Follow the footpath alongside **Bury Brook** and turn left over the brick twin-arched bridge at the end (*ph5.1*). At the corrugated-iron gate a little further on, take the footpath between the hedges straight ahead (*ph5.2*), ignoring paths to left or right. Continue along this path until it emerges onto **Bury Fen** (*ph5.3*), where you turn right to follow the track with the dyke on its left (*ph5.4*). Follow this track around the field and turn right at the end by the power lines to go uphill towards **Bury Church**.

**4** Cross over the **footbridge** with metal railings (*ph4.1*) and then immediately turn left and through a kissing gate (*ph4.2*).

**6** Follow the track past the electricity power sub-station into **Meadow Lane** and turn right at the top onto the B1040, **Bury High Street** (*ph6.1*). After a few yards, take the 2nd gate on the right into the churchyard and follow the path, passing to the left of **Bury Church** (*ph6.2*).

**7** Exit the other end of the churchyard and re-join **Bury High Street**. Cross the bridge over the **Bury Brook**, go past the golf course before taking the footpath on the other side of the road, opposite the **Old School House** (*ph7.1*), signed "Wistow 2" (*ph7.2*). Go through the kissing gate, through the recreation ground and out through the kissing gate at the other end.

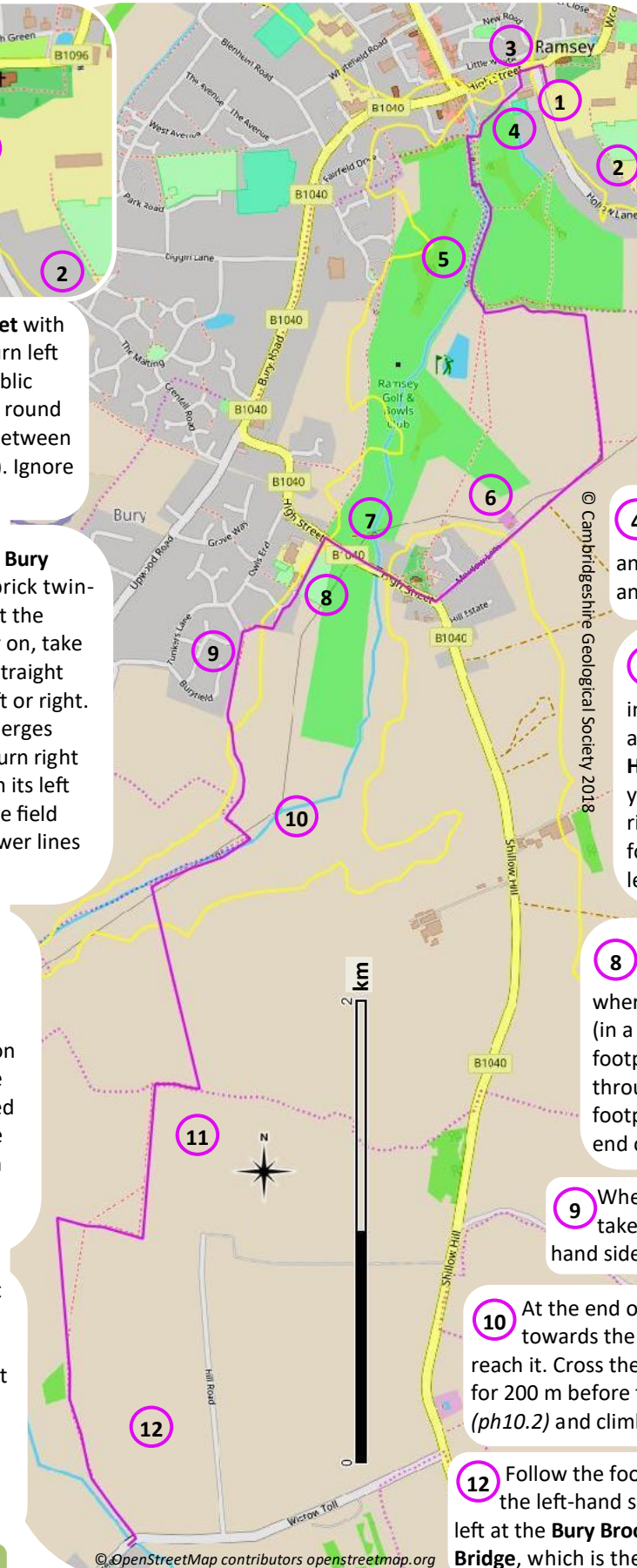
**8** Keep straight ahead and pass between the two houses where part of the road swings left (in a short cul-de-sac) to reveal a footpath. Turn right immediately through the gate, follow the grassy footpath (*ph8.1*) and turn left at the end onto a grass track.

**11** At the top of the hill, turn right and follow the hedge line for 115 m, turning left through the gap in the hedge (*ph11.2*). Carry straight on until you reach the hedge at the other end of the field, where you turn right (arrow sign). Follow the hedge and turn left at the next arrow (*ph11.3*) to go downhill.

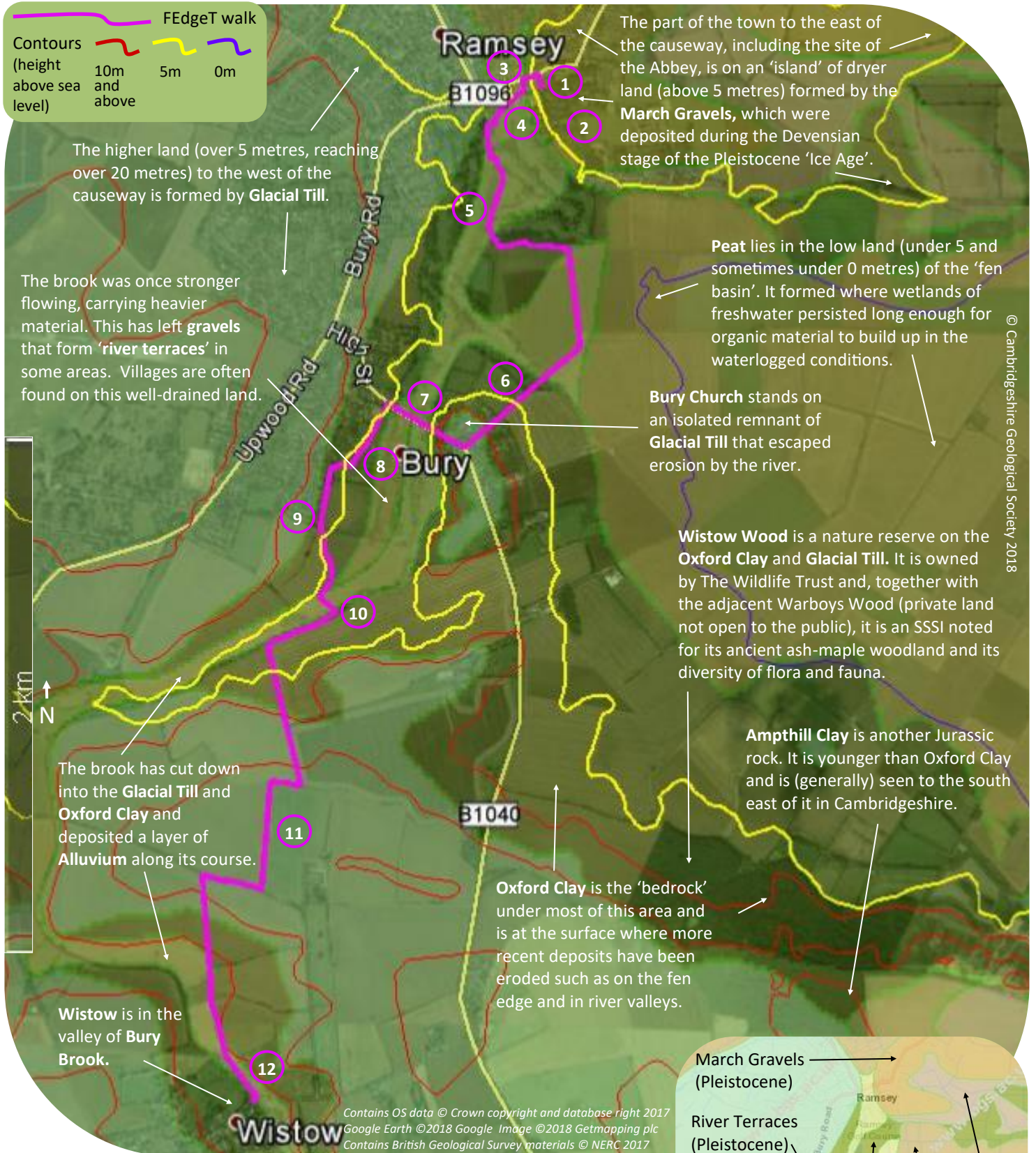
**9** When the track ends at the fields, take the footpath towards the left-hand side of the left belt of trees ahead.

**10** At the end of the belt of trees turn left towards the **Bury Brook** and right when you reach it. Cross the bridge (*ph 10.1*) and turn right for 200 m before turning left at the signpost (*ph10.2*) and climbing up **Shillow Hill** (*ph 10.3f*).

**12** Follow the footpath downhill, heading towards the left-hand side of the copse (*ph12.1*). Turn left at the **Bury Brook** and follow it to **Wistow Bridge**, which is the end of the walk (*ph12.2*).



# Walk: Ramsey to Wistow - geology and contours map



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## Landscape and Geology (see website for more details)

In this area there are four general types of 'rock' currently at the surface. The oldest is the **Oxford Clay**, which is about 160 million years old (from the **Jurassic** Period, famous for its dinosaurs). An extensive sea covered this part of Britain at the time and the clay formed from material on the sea floor - it is famous for the fossils of huge marine reptiles such as Pliosaurs and Ichthyosaurs. There is also a small area of **Amphill Clay** (Jurassic but younger than Oxford Clay). The other surface 'rocks' are much younger, all being from the current 'Ice Age' which started 2.6 million years ago. The first are glacial, river and slope deposits (including gravels and finer 'till') from the **Pleistocene** epoch (which ended 11.7 thousand years ago), the second are river deposits (**Alluvium**) left during the **Holocene** epoch (the last 11.7 thousand years) and, finally, there is **Peat**, which formed in the last few thousand years in the fenland basin.

