



The Fen Edge Trail

Walk: Stow cum Quy to Swaffham Bulbeck

5.5 miles (8.8 km)

The route: 'the chalky fen edge - coprolites, clunch and Darwin'

'One of my favourite riverside walks of the area - along the Quy Water - and there are four pubs!'

Reg, Cambridgeshire Geological Society Geosites team

a journey across a landscape and time



5.1f Quy Water view

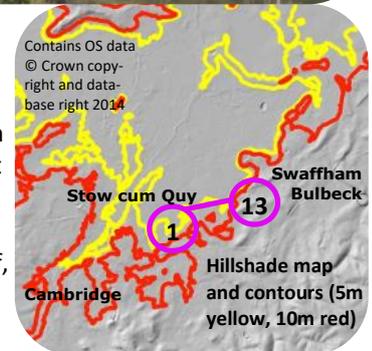


6.2f Autumn: Anglesey Abbey



5.2f Old coprolite workings near route

Having travelled across from Cambridge, the Fen Edge Trail curves northward along the south eastern edge of the Fens, paralleling the Chalk escarpment which marks the beginning of the Chalk plateau. This walk, from **Stow cum Quy** to **Swaffham Bulbeck**, is the first on the part of the Trail that joins **Stow cum Quy to Reach**. The walk connects three villages that owe their existence to the combination of watery fenland and higher, drier ground. Each village has its own history and will reward time spent looking around. The walk begins at Stow cum Quy church, on an ancient terrace of the River Cam and follows the **Harcamlow Way**, a long distance path linking Harlow and Cambridge, along Quy Water. Passing near **Anglesey Abbey (National Trust)**, which has impressive gardens as well as the house itself, it then continues over the Marly Chalk, characteristic of the local fen edge, to the village of **Lode with Longmeadow**. The walk finishes in **Swaffham Bulbeck**, on the lower slopes of the Chalk hills.



11.2f Tudor houses Swaffham Bulbeck



4.1f Duck pond, Station Road Stow cum Quy



2.2f Flint gate house of Quy Hall

Practicalities As with all of the walks along 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. *ph5.1f* is the first photo relating to part 5 (*f* = on this front page). Those in the Geology descriptions are numbered in the order they are mentioned (e.g. *phg.2*).

Length of walk (one way) approx. 5.5 miles (8.8 km). Walking guide time 2hrs 30mins minimum plus stops. Grid references and the GPS track can be downloaded from the website. Grid ref for start TL517599. Maps O.S. Explorer 209 and 226. BGS Geology Map 188 Cambridge (1:50,000 New Series). Free, easy to use online geology map viewer (and phone app) on www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology. The walk from Stow cum Quy to Anglesey Abbey follows the route of the **Harcamlow Way** (www.ldwa.org.uk).

Transport and services There are **buses** from Cambridge to Stow cum Quy and Swaffham Bulbeck www.stagecoachbus.com (but limited times only). There are **train services** at Cambridge (5 miles). Parking available along some streets in Stow cum Quy and Swaffham Bulbeck. Please park only where permitted and in consideration of others. Pubs and shops in Quy, Lode and Swaffham Bulbeck. Anglesey Abbey (National Trust) has a café (check opening times -charge to visit the House and Gardens unless NT member). The website has links to other places of interest, services and local organisations.

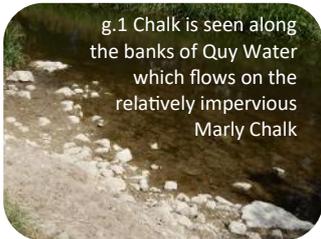
Safety Be aware of risks you may encounter and take note of warnings given by landowners or on pathways. The terrain is generally flat, with some muddy ground. Take particular care with uneven terrain, when near water, on soft or slippery ground, in the presence of livestock or walking along or crossing roads. Ensure your dog is kept under control as needed. All Fen Edge Trail walks are on publicly accessible routes.



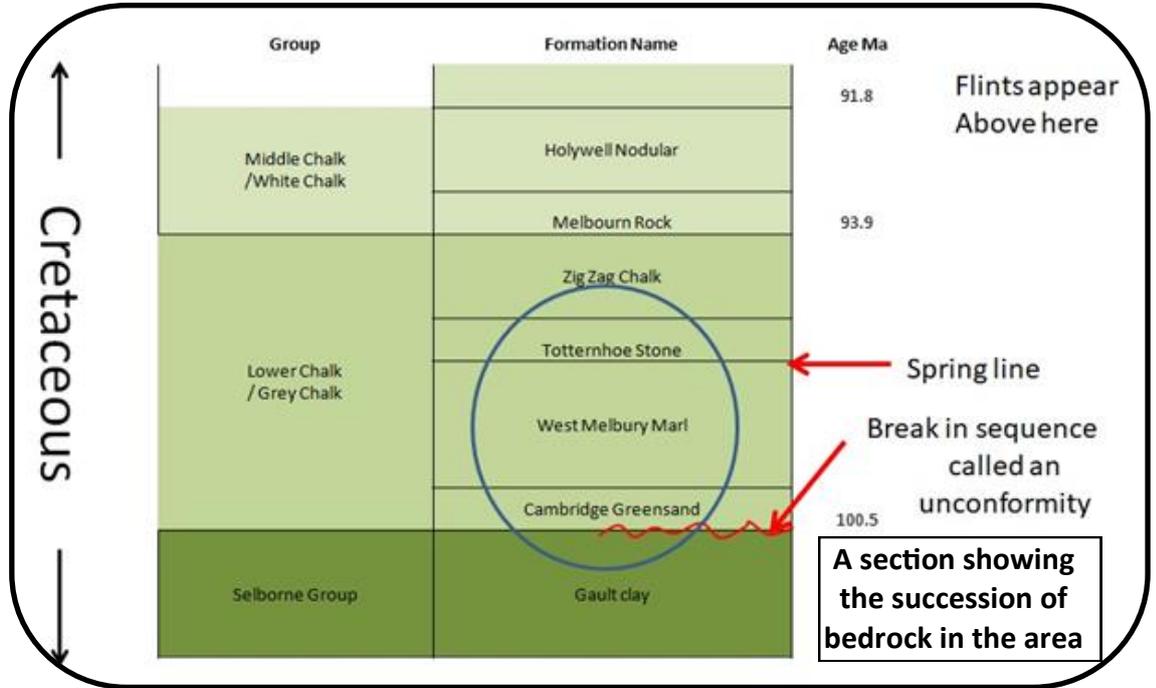
Places of interest along the Trail

Geology This part of the Fen Edge Trail is a good example of the **transition from the fenland** of north and central Cambridgeshire to the **Chalk hills** that are characteristic of the south of the county. The 5 metre contour roughly marks the edge of the Chalk escarpments to the south east. To the north east of the contour are the low lying peat, silt and river deposits of the fenland.

The **lodes** (man-made waterways) in the area are partly fed by water from **chalk springs** that arise where there is a change in the permeability of the Chalk layers. An example is the Temple Spring at Wilbraham, a village to the south of the walk, which feeds the Wilbraham River, flowing into Quy Water (*phg.1*) and then Bottisham Lode, finally reaching the River Cam.



g.1 Chalk is seen along the banks of Quy Water which flows on the relatively impervious Marly Chalk



The chalk is of **Cretaceous** age and that which is at the surface in this area is about 94-101 million years old. It belongs to the Grey Chalk Group, the oldest being the **West Melbury Marly Chalk**, and as we move north east below the ridge, the **Totternhoe Stone** above it forms a marked visual geomorphologic feature behind Swaffham Bulbeck. The younger **Zig Zag Chalk** forms the hills of the ridge. The edge of the fenland is underlain by the **Gault Clay** and **Cambridge Greensand** (source of **phosphate nodules phg.2**).

The Gault and Greensand are mostly still covered by the West Melbury Marly Chalk and, in places, peat and river deposits are also still present, remnants of a time before drainage when many water channels existed and much of the lowland would have been flooded, at least seasonally. The **river deposits** are much younger than the bedrock with the oldest (in this area) being the gravels of the **Cam's 4th River Terrace** that form a ridge of higher land on which Stow lies. Brought by a river that was much more powerful than today, dating is difficult as they have been eroded and moved by subsequent ice and water but they are less than 400,000 years old (**late Pleistocene**) and a significant example of the few remaining 4th Terrace deposits. These areas of gravel form important



g.2 examples of local phosphate nodules

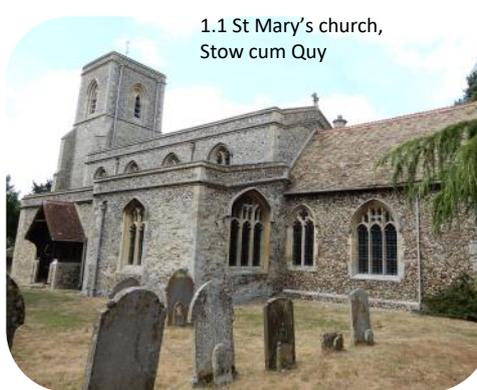
refuges of dry land in the fenland and are often the sites of settlements. The **peat** is younger still (less than a few thousand years old, of **Holocene** age), having formed in areas where freshwater remained long enough to enable a build up of vegetation remains.

Wildlife As with most of the county, the natural history of the landscape in this area has been greatly affected by man and there are now only a few remnants of semi-natural habitats. **Stow cum Quy Fen** is an important wildlife site in the area and, although not on the walk, can be visited by a detour from Lode. It is a protected site (**SSSI**) due to its areas of floristically rich pasture. In addition, a number of pools have formed on the Marly Chalk due to its relative impervious nature. These support a range of aquatic plants including some uncommon species.

Both the grassland and open water habitats present are now **rare in the British Isles**. Fragments of the natural grassland that occur on the Marly Chalk here are characterised by herbs such as purging flax (*Linum catharticum*), cowslip (*Primula veris*), salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) and quaking grass (*Briza media*). The pools have a good range of emergent and aquatic plants including common reed (*Phragmites australis*), unbranched bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*), mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*) and bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*). The open water habitats are attractive to dragonflies including the emperor (*Anax imperator*).



1 **Stow cum Quy church (St Mary's) is the start of the walk (ph1.1).** It deserves some mention as the oldest parts date from the 12th century. The nave and chancel were built around 1340. The two Anglo-Saxon settlements of **Stow** and **Quy** (the 'uy' pronounced as in 'eye') were probably located on the sites of Roman hamlets. **Stow** was around the present parish church, built on higher land underlain by River Terrace deposits of gravel from the Cam, whilst **Quy** was around the The Swan public house at the eastern end of the village. They were already joined by 1066, although they had separate manors. They became a single ecclesiastical parish by the early 13th century.



1.1 St Mary's church, Stow cum Quy

2 The route follows the **Harcamlow Way (ph2.1)** until the Mill at **Anglesey Abbey**. Where the track turns off into Quy Hall land, the flint gate house (*ph2.2f*) is on the right. **Flint** buildings start to appear on this south east fen edge - the flint brought from further south as it is not present in the Chalk in this area.



2.2 Quy village sign on Main St

As with Stow, Quy (*ph2.2*) was on the 'summer' road to **Reach**, but was on lower land toward the fen, its name originating from 'cow island'. **2a**

3 The walk passes through land belonging to **Quy Hall** (*ph3.1*). In the late 1800's the owners tried to resurrect the coprolite (phosphate nodule) mining in the Fen area, financing infrastructure and a labour force - but it was not economic and little trace is left. There was a Manor recorded from the 1160s and the current building (further north along Station Road but not open to the public) was mostly created in the 1870's.

4 **Quy Water** passes under a **stone bridge** at the village duck pond (*ph4.1f*).



3.1 Quy Hall at its height (image on village information board on Main St)

5 The walk then meanders along the **Harcamlow Way** following the river downstream to **Lode** (*ph5.1f*). The escarpment to the east is much shallower in this part of the walk and gradually slopes up to **Bottisham** in the distance, underlain by the soft, clayey West Melbury Marly Chalk. The area around **Quy Fen SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest)**, lying to the north, was a centre for coprolite mining in the mid/late 1800's (*ph5.2f*). A condition of the concession was that the land was returned to its previous levels for agriculture - so apart from better yields from the phosphates, little sign is left of the extensive workings apart from some shallow ponds, which are now a haven for wildlife. **Quy Water** is edged with marsh marigolds and other aquatic plants (*ph5.3*). Very often, raptors can be seen hunting in the fields alongside. One of few remaining areas of **peat** lies to the right of the walk.



5.3 Wild flowers along Quy Water

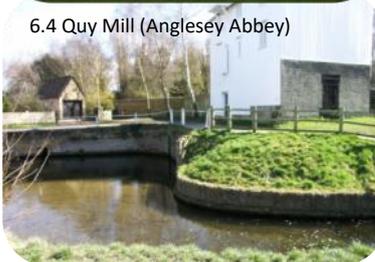


6.1 Anglesey Abbey, Lord Fairhaven's House

6 The track runs behind **Anglesey Abbey**. The extensive grounds include Lord Fairhaven's house (*ph6.1*) and gardens (*ph6.2f*) **6a** that give a visual treat in all seasons (*ph6.3*). The walk crosses the river (that becomes **Bottisham Lode**) by **Lode water mill** (*ph6.4*) which still grinds wheat (flour sold in Abbey shop). It also once ground locally mined phosphate nodules, and clunch (for agricultural limestone). A large pond, visible in the grounds, is the remains of coprolite mining.



6.3 Anglesey Abbey is world renowned for its huge collection of snowdrops



6.4 Quy Mill (Anglesey Abbey)

7 **Lode** (*ph7.1*) is named after the man-made fenland channels constructed (some before Anglo-Saxon times) for water transport and to prevent flooding of the fen edge by water draining off nearby 'highland' - water flows from the Chalk hills to the Cam. The **church** (*ph7.2*), dating from the mid 19C has a chapel built of Totternhoe Stone from **Burwell** and a porch repaired with **Ketton Stone**, a high quality, Jurassic limestone from Northamptonshire.



7.2 Lode church

8 Continuing across open fields towards the linear hamlet of **Long Meadow**, lots of small flints can be seen (from the path) in the soil: these were probably washed out by glacial rivers from further to the east.



7.1 Village sign south end of Lode Rd

9 **Cow Bridge** passes over **Swaffham Bulbeck Lode** (*ph9.1*), one of the main channels that drain the area, flowing north into the **River Cam**. The band of peat to the west, which runs through Swaffham Bulbeck, shows that the land was much wetter here in the relatively recent past.



9.1 view north along Swaffham Bulbeck Lode from Cow Bridge

10 **Commercial End** (originally Newnham End), as its name suggests, functioned as an important port since Medieval times, although evidence of its use goes back as far as the Romans. The road up to the village is margined by an impressive clunch wall (*ph10.1*) - presumably hewn from the Totternhoe Stone quarries to be seen at the end of this walk. The arrival of the railway in the early 1800s supplanted river transport.

Commercial End is the northern extension of **Swaffham Bulbeck** and is the site of a **Priory** (now a private house, only visible from the road at the eastern end of the village, *ph10.2*). Only fragments of the 13th century undercroft remain from the original **Benedictine** building. The hamlet is well worth a short detour to view the picturesque cottages (*ph10.3, 10.4*). Following the road through Commercial End, some of the spurs to the right, now populated by houses, lead down to the lode, navigable until around 1850. The walk now cuts through some private land on a Public Right of Way and ends in the playing fields of Swaffham Bulbeck. Behind the pavilion are the remains of a **medieval moat**, now an Ancient Monument (but view overgrown).



10.4 Patterned brickwork, Commercial End



10.1 Clunch wall, Commercial End



10.2 Priory, Commercial End



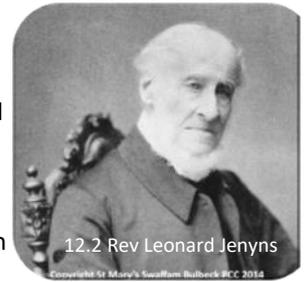
10.3 Old Maltings, Commercial End



11.1 Centre Swaffham Bulbeck

11 Looking around from the village green, older houses (*ph11.1*) can be seen clustered from the pub up towards the church - many are **timber framed** and centuries old (*ph11.2f*). The name of the village refers to local manorial lords, the Bolbecs, and possibly to 'home' of the 'Swaife', also known as Swabians, originally from southern Germany.

12 The **Church of St Mary's** (*ph12.1*) is of interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, the **Rev Leonard Jenyns** (*ph12.2*), a brother-in-law of J.S. Henslow, had first refusal in 1831 to travel with the Beagle, but instead suggested his friend **Darwin**, who was a fellow student of Jenyns, the two sharing trips into the fens together with Darwin often collecting beetles.



12.2 Rev Leonard Jenyns

Rev Jenyns was a notable naturalist of the area and some of his work can be seen in the **University of Cambridge Museum of Zoology** (www.museum.zoo.cam.ac.uk). Amongst many other papers, he wrote an important account on local natural history 'Contributions towards a Fauna Cantabrigiensis' in 1869.

The church nave originated in around 1100, but the tower and some other enhancements date from the 13th century. Many of the pews date from the 15th C and are adorned with various exotic birds and beasts. The outside stone is mostly **clunch** with some **Barnack Stone** (limestone) forming quoins and windows. There has been much restoration, some of it not that sympathetic. An unusual



12.1 St Mary's church, Swaffham Bulbeck

feature in the **clunch ashlars** are markings indicating where a render had been put over the stone (*ph12.3*), presumably in an attempt to prevent further decay. The render has mostly gone leaving the mortar infill. Other decorative **carved figures** are being gradually renovated.



12.3 Church Clunch wall - signs of render?

13 Another area of interest is the site of the quarry behind the village (*ph13.1*). The **Chalk escarpment** becomes more prominent here as the harder **Totternhoe Stone** outcrops (appears at the surface). This horizon is the source rock for the bulk of the quarrying, although no doubt some of the overlying, **softer Zig Zag Chalk** was also taken.



13.1 View north west across old quarry workings

From the hill along **Quarry Lane**, there is a significant view (*ph13.2*) of the landscape over which this south eastern part of the Trail winds its way. You can look out from the Chalk upland across the flat fenland and River Cam terraces, with Ely Cathedral in the distance. **The walk ends at the junction with Swaffham Heath Road.**

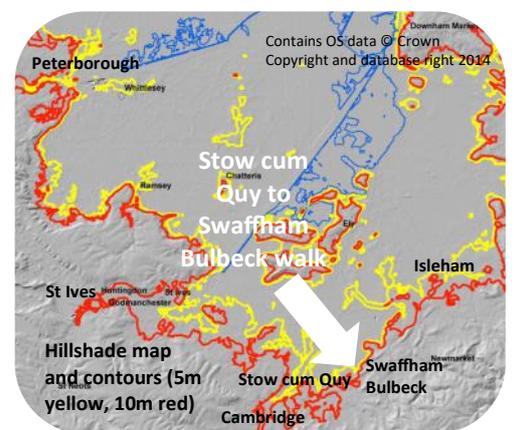


13.2 View across fenland from Chalk escarpment

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, via **St Ives** and **Cambridge**, to the Suffolk border at **Isleham** in the south east, it will also extend to include the 'fen islands' including **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 helping to develop the Trail. Our main partner is **The Fenland Trust**. Information on the Trail, and points of interest along the walks, are gradually being added to the website together with the walk guides.



Cambridgeshire
Geological Society

www.cambsgeology.org

www.fenedgetrail.org



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www.fen.land

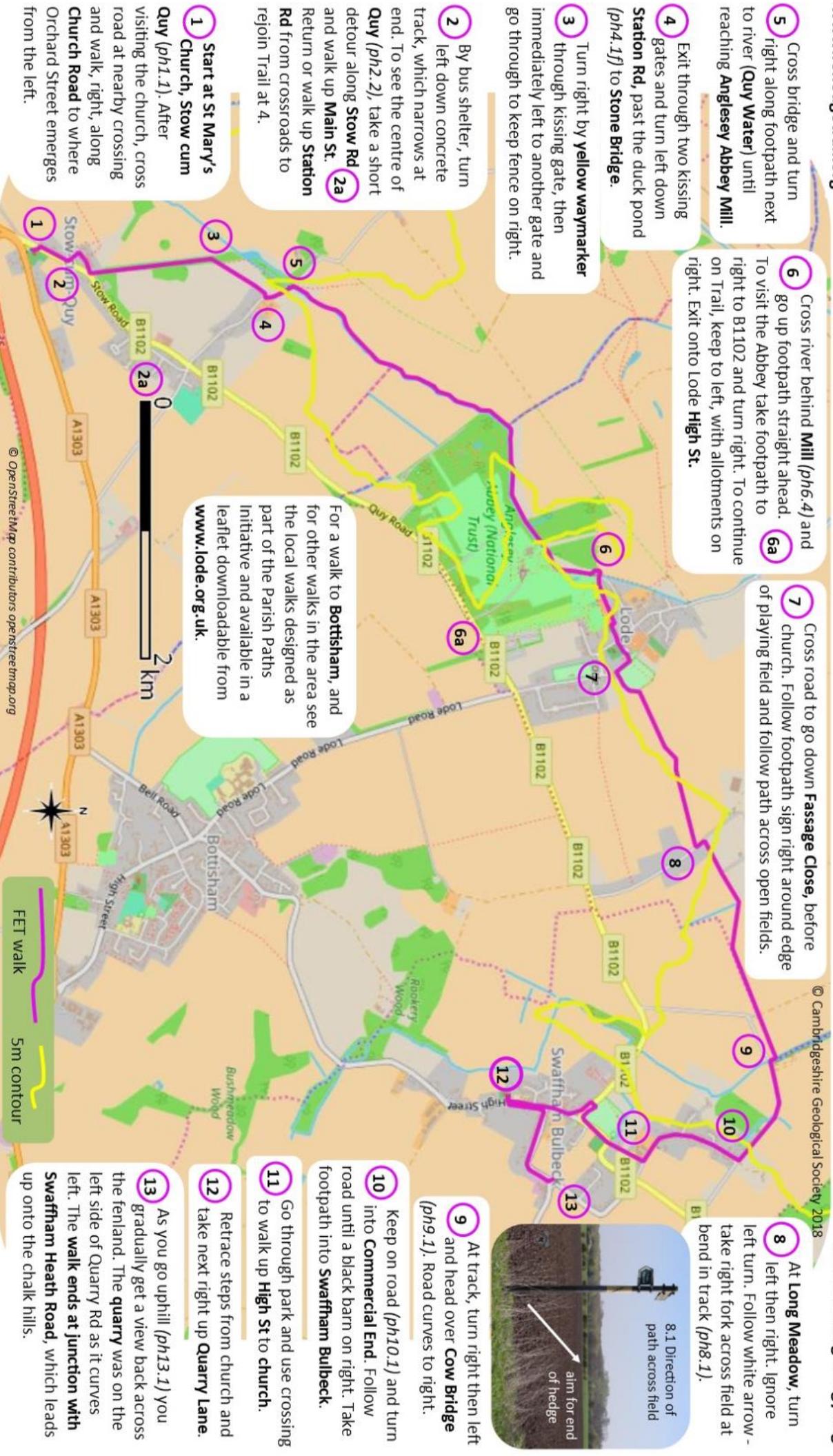
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The Fen Edge Trail Walk: Stow cum Quy to Swaffham Bulbeck

Directions map (5.5 miles / 8.8 km)

www.fenedge trail.org

www.cambsgeology.org



5 Cross bridge and turn right along footpath next to river (Quy Water) until reaching **Anglesey Abbey Mill**.

4 Exit through two kissing gates and turn left down **Station Rd**, past the duck pond (ph4.1f) to **Stone Bridge**.

3 Turn right by **yellow waymarker** through kissing gate, then immediately left to another gate and go through to keep fence on right.

2 By bus shelter, turn left down concrete track, which narrows at end. To see the centre of **Quy** (ph2.2), take a short detour along **Stow Rd** and walk up **Main St**. Return or walk up **Station Rd** from crossroads to rejoin Trail at 4.

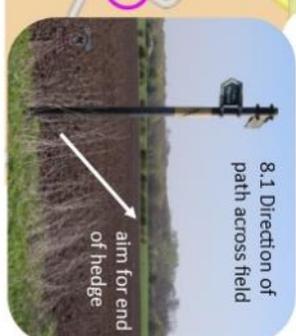
1 Start at **St Mary's Church, Stow cum Quy** (ph1.1). After visiting the church, cross road at nearby crossing and walk, right, along **Church Road** to where Orchard Street emerges from the left.

6 Cross river behind **Mill** (ph6.4) and go up footpath straight ahead. To visit the **Abbey** take footpath to right to B1102 and turn right: To continue on Trail, keep to left, with allotments on right. Exit onto **Lode High St**.

7 Cross road to go down **Fassage Close**, before church. Follow footpath sign around edge of playing field and follow path across open fields.

For a walk to **Bottisham**, and for other walks in the area see the local walks designed as part of the Parish Paths Initiative and available in a leaflet downloadable from www.lode.org.uk.

8 At **Long Meadow**, turn left then right. Ignore left turn. Follow white arrow - take right fork across field at bend in track (ph8.1).



9 At track, turn right then left and head over **Cow Bridge** (ph9.1). Road curves to right.

10 Keep on road (ph10.1) and turn into **Commercial End**. Follow road until a black barn on right. Take footpath into **Swaffham Bulbeck**.

11 Go through park and use crossing to walk up **High St** to church.

12 Retrace steps from church and take next right up **Quarry Lane**.

13 As you go uphill (ph13.1) you gradually get a view back across the fenland. The **quarry** was on the left side of Quarry Rd as it curves left. The walk ends at junction with **Swaffham Heath Road**, which leads up onto the chalk hills.

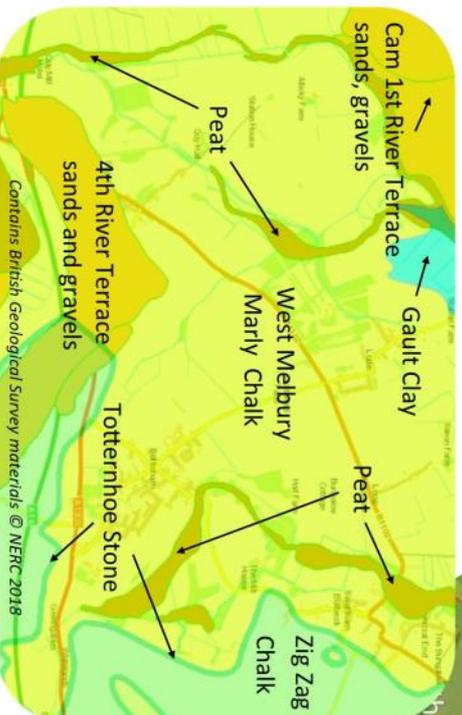
Walk: Stow cum Quy to Swaffham Bulbeck - geology and contours map

Landscape and Geology (see website for more details)

The bedrock in this area is of Lower Cretaceous age, the **Gault Clay** being the oldest and the **Zig Zag Chalk** the youngest. The **strata** (layers) dip shallowly to the south east with the Chalk forming the low scarp (steep) face to the east of the Trail. The strike (direction) of the rocks is shown by the orientation of the scarp edge (south west to north east). The lowest Chalk layer is the **West Melbury Marly Chalk** (soft, impure chalk), above which is a band of **Totterhoe Stone** - hard chalk used as building stone (e.g. from quarries behind Swaffham Bulbeck *phg.3*). The Zig Zag Chalk overlies this and forms most of the top of the scarp.

The thin bed of **Cambridge Greensand** lying at the base of the Chalk and the Gault Clay below it were the source of the phosphatic nodules (coprolites) which were extensively mined along this part of the fen edge.

The covering of **Peat** in the fenland here is much reduced and in places the underlying clay, Greensand and Chalk can be ploughed up to the surface. Small flint pebbles are ubiquitous in the soils - they are very resilient to wear and were probably dropped by glaciers.



The start of the walk is on one of the old **River Terraces** of the Cam (the 4th), consisting of poorly bedded (jumbled up) chalky sands and gravels. This may account for the rich brown soils seen in the fields across the road from the church, where the view north east looks down from the terrace at over 10m above sea level to the 5m contour where a small river valley leads north to the Cam.

As you walk past ploughed fields, notice how the soil colour changes: whitish when on the West Melbury Marly Chalk, greyish brown on areas small pockets where the Cambridge Greensand is exposed, almost black on the small areas of residual Peat and light orange-brown on the fine **Alluvium** deposited along water channels.

