

## The Fen Edge

The extensive fenlands of eastern England reach far to the north into Lincolnshire, and south throughout much of Cambridgeshire. As the land rises from the low lying fens to the surrounding 'hills', the character of the buildings, land use and natural history changes. The influence of the **chalk hills** to the south east, the **claylands** to the west, the **breckland** to the east and the **limestone uplands** to the north west, have all had their effect. At various times in the last few thousand years, the fenland has been flooded and, at the Fen Edge, the land changed from extensive wetland to dryer land where settlements could be built. The surrounding higher land now provides **viewpoints that are windows into the past** - looking down into one of the last areas in England where 'wilderness' existed and people have met many challenges to survive.

The story of the formation of the original wetland, with its water channels, lakes, reedbeds and tidal marshes that resulted in the deposits of peat and marl, to the draining for use as agricultural land and the current efforts to restore some of its natural values, is one that is **unique in England**.



Ely Cathedral on a 'fen island'



**Yaxley Church** lies on higher land formed by material left by the ice during the 'Ice Age'. It stands in a commanding position overlooking the Fens on the Fen Edge. It is built of limestone, probably quarried in the limestone plateau to the north west of Peterborough.



**Waterbeach Church** made from flint from the nearby chalk hills to the south east of Cambridge



**Join this exciting project linking the landscape of the Fen Edge to the local geology, history, culture and wildlife.**

The **Fen Edge Trail** will provide a walking route around the Cambridgeshire Fens, roughly following the land that lies 5 metres above sea level (the 5 metre contour), where the low-lying fenland meets the surrounding higher land. With short detours to visit viewpoints, historical sites and areas good for wildlife, the Trail will enable you to enjoy this fascinating area that has been of strategic importance for the local inhabitants since their first arrival. As well as exploring the landscapes of the Fens, you will discover the rocks that lie underneath and those that form the surrounding 'highlands', as well as finding out about the life that existed when they were formed, and how the past and current landscapes have affected fenland life.

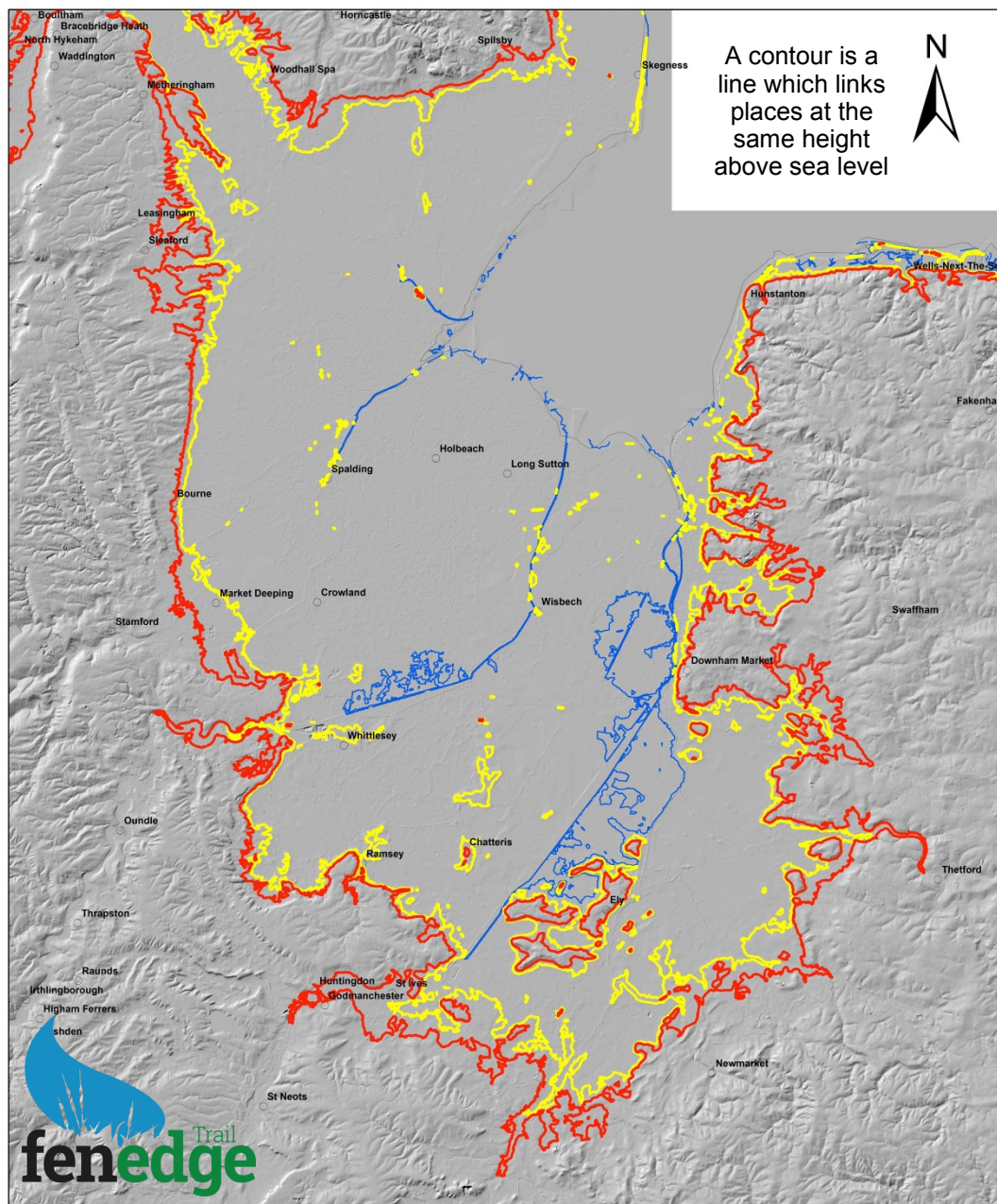
The **Cambridgeshire Geological Society** (CGS) created the Fen Edge Trail as part of its **Geosites** initiative, which aims to ensure that local sites of landscape and geological value are identified and protected, and that their importance and interest is shared with local people and visitors to the county. [www.cambsgeology.org](http://www.cambsgeology.org)

The Great Fen Trundle Mere lookout at Rymes Reedbed, on the edge of the fen basin, with Yaxley Church on the Yaxley Ridge in the background





## Map of the Fens with the hills shaded and the 5 m (yellow) and 10 m (red) contours



**Legend**

Fen\_Contour\_mod UK\_Hillshade

Contour

Value

High : 254

Low : 0

0

5

10

The blue line shows the water level that is at sea level. The land areas below sea level, of which there are still a few, are not shown. The current limit of the sea (the Wash) is shown in the north east.

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## The Fen Edge Trail route

Our Trail takes a meandering route around the edge of what we have called the Fen 'Basin' i.e. the land that lies near, and sometimes below, sea level. We are guided by the 'line' (contour) where the land reaches 5 metres above sea level, representing (very approximately) the limit of the historic wetland. The map using the 'hill shade' shows how flat the fenland area is and gives an idea of the extent of the low-lying land, a region of sometimes dramatic changes including freshwater flooding, inundation by the sea, emergence and disappearance of islands, and formation and destruction of water channels. By following the Trail you will take a journey to discover the past as well as explore the present.

Starting near **Peterborough**, where the fenland reaches the heart of the city, we travel along the western edge of the Fens through Stanground, Farcet, Yaxley, Stilton, Holme, Conington to Sawtry, and then on to Woodwalton, Ramsey Heights, **Ramsey**, Ramsey Forty Foot, Bury and Warboys. Further south the route passes through Pidley, Somersham, Earith, Bluntisham, Needingworth, **St Ives**, Fenstanton, Fen Drayton, Swavesey, Over, Willingham, Rampton, Cottenham, Landbeach, Waterbeach, Milton, and further on to **Cambridge**, another city with the fenland at its heart. The eastern route passes through or near Fen Ditton, Horningsea, Stow cum Quoy, Lode, Swaffham Bulbeck and Swaffham Prior, Reach, Burwell, Fordham, Upware, Wicken and Soham before reaching Isleham and the Suffolk border.

Within the fenland there are several 'islands' the largest of which is **Ely** (including Witchford, Sutton, Wilburton, Haddenham and Chettisham), with others being **Whittlesey**, **Chatteris** and **March** (including Doddington and Wimblington), and our Trail travels around their borders. Other islands include Manea, Stretham, Stuntney and Littleport. Each part of the Trail will have a leaflet to describe the route options and places of interest along the way, to explore the geology, wildlife, history and culture as you go. Tea shops will not be forgotten!

## Our partners

Our main partner in developing the Trail is **The Fenland Trust**, in Yaxley, and other key partners are **The Great Fen/The Wildlife Trust** (Beds, Cambs and Northants) and GeoPeterborough. Other organisations contributing to the project include Warboys History Group, Chatteris Museum, Visit Ramsey, Vivacity Peterborough and the Fen Edge Archaeology Group. If you would like to get involved in the project, please contact us.

[info@cambsgeology.org](mailto:info@cambsgeology.org)



On the 5m contour near Conington, there is a mixture of clay and peat along this road



At Duck Pit Fen, a fertile field of peat soil growing potatoes



Mare Fen, near Swavesey, where ice-age material forms part of the Fen Edge

Although the fenland is now drained, you can still see, in many places, the distinct change between the peaty soils of the fens, often used for crop growing due to their fertility, to the grasslands of the clays surrounding them.

**For information on the walks around the Trail and for places of interest along it see our website** [www.fenedgetrail.org](http://www.fenedgetrail.org)