

# The Fen Edge Trail

## Walk: Sutton to Haddenham

5.3 miles (8.5 km)

The route: 'along the Catchwater and over the high hills on the Isle of Ely'

*'The fabulous views from the top of North Hill are a real surprise'*

*Jeff, Cambridgeshire Geological Society Geosites team*

6.5f View to east from North Hill, with Ely Cathedral in distance



1.3f St Andrew's Church, Sutton



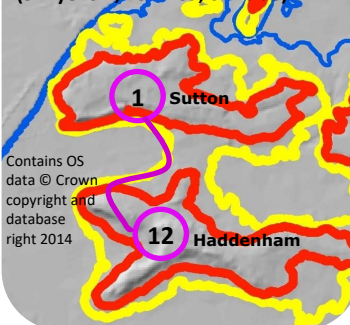
6.4f There are excellent views from North Hill: across the low fen to Sutton church, on the ridge to the north



10.5f Pink granite door columns

This part of the **Fen Edge Trail** links the two villages of **Sutton** and **Haddenham**, which lie in the south west of the **Isle of Ely**. The Isle is better thought of as an archipelago, since it includes such separate 'isles' as Littleport, Coveney and Wardy Hill. Prior to the major draining of the Fens in the 17th century, the Isle was surrounded by freshwater marshes and meres. This walk follows **ancient droves** and **ways**, alongside the **Catchwater Drain**, around the edge of the Isle linking these historic villages that sit on key promontories where, once, our ancestors sat and looked out across **marshes** or, sometimes, even **sea**. We start on the higher slopes of the **Sutton** ridge, on which the **church** stands, but drop rapidly down to the low fen, reaching just 2 metres above sea level. After skirting the drained 'bay' between **Sutton** and **Haddenham**, walking for some time **along the 5m contour** (the classic 'fen edge'), we then climb once more onto a 'headland' and pass **the highest point** on the Isle, **North Hill**, with its stunning views in all directions. Descending from the hill, we walk a section of the **ancient route** between **Earith** in the west and **Ely** in the east by following **Hill Row** as it climbs to higher ground at the centre of the village of **Haddenham**, once a major crossroads in the Fens. The high ground that creates the Isle is formed by **a series of ridges** made from **Jurassic** and **Cretaceous** bedrock, including the famous **Woburn Sands** (better known from Bedfordshire), capped in places by **glacial** material and reaching a height of some 40 metres (133 feet) above sea level.

Hillshade map and contours (5m yellow, 10m red, 0m blue)



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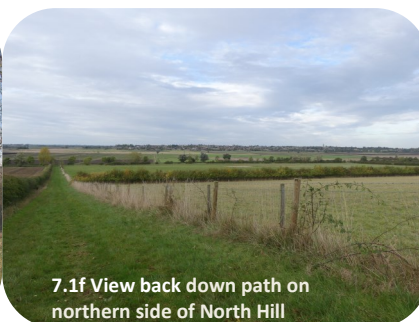
5.2f Footpath along bank of the Catchwater



7.5f Orchard on North Hill



7.1f View back down path on northern side of North Hill



10.4f Restored tower of Holy Trinity Church, Haddenham



**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 in which they are seen e.g. 7.5f is the fifth photo relating to part 7 (f = on this front page). It is difficult to divide the walk into 2 round trips due to lack of suitable paths.

**Length of walk** (one way) approx. 5.3 miles (8.5 km), guide time if not stopping 3 hours (slow walking). The GPS track is available—please email us. Grid ref for start TL448789. Maps O.S. Explorer 225 and 226. BGS Geology **Map 173 Ely & 188 Cambridge** (1:50,000 New Series). Free, easy to use online geology map viewer (and phone app **iGeology**) on [www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology).

**Transport and services** **Buses** run (not Sundays) from Ely to Sutton [www.stagecoachbus.com](http://www.stagecoachbus.com) and from Ely to Haddenham [www.dews-coaches.com](http://www.dews-coaches.com). Stagecoach also run one bus a day (eve) from Haddenham to Sutton. **Train services** go to Ely (6 miles). Street parking available in both villages. Please park only where permitted and in consideration of others. There are pubs and shops in both villages.

**Safety** Be aware of risks you may encounter and take note of warnings given by landowners or on pathways. The terrain is mostly relatively flat, but with some slopes, such as those found on the Sutton and Haddenham ridges, particularly the **climb up to North Hill**. 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 (Rights of Way or Permissive Paths).



# Places of interest along the Trail

**1** The walk starts in **Sutton-in-the-Isle** at **St Andrew's Church**, Grade 1 listed and built partly of Barnack limestone (read more about St Andrew's in the Witcham to Sutton walk). As you walk down **Station Road** it is worth noting some of its fine brick buildings, particularly **Rectory Farmhouse** which is mid-17th century in origin, as well as the attractive **Rose and Eastwood cottages** (1.1). On the bend in the road can be found **Stankers Pond** (1.2) - the nearby information board provides details. It is worth a close look to appreciate the fact that it is fed by a **stream** – a rare thing on the Isle of Ely – which originates from higher ground in the village where water seeping through the **Glacial Till** reaches the more impervious band of **Kimmeridge Clay**. This spring line is seen at several places in Cambridgeshire. At the end of **Station Road**, before you take the track leading off to the left, it is worth looking carefully at the buildings here to see if you can spot the **old station**. The railway station was opened in 1866 by **Great Eastern Railways**. In 1878, the railway line was extended round the edge of the fen to **Earith Bridge** and on to **St Ives**. The combined line then became the **Ely and St Ives Railway**. The branch to St Ives was closed in 1958, followed by the line to Ely in 1964. There are also fine views back up the slope to the church in Sutton (1.3f).

1.1 Rose and Eastwood Cottages



1.2 Stankers Pond

2.1 Kimmeridge Clay with Glacial Till higher up the slope



**2** Once clear of the village the **topography** becomes more evident; immediately to the north lies the rising ground of **Kimmeridge Clay** and **Glacial Till** up onto the **Sutton ridge** (2.1), whilst to the south, at some distance, the ground rises once again, to the high area of **North Hill** on the Haddenham ridge. In the '**bay**' between these two '**headlands**' and the land further out to the west lies a large area of 'fen farmland'. The land here

drops from **Kimmeridge Clay**, to **Amphill Clay** giving way to **Nordelph Peat** and eventually, in the west towards **Earith Bridge** and the **Ouse Washes**, to marine **Shell Marl**. This marl was deposited when sea level rose during the Early/Middle Bronze Age (c.3,600-3,200 years ago) and salt marsh replaced the freshwater marsh. Separating the two distinct areas of higher and lower ground is the **New Cut Drain**. This drain is part of a common **ancient feature** around the Isle also known as the **Catchwater**, **Grunty Fen Catchwater**, **Thetford Catchwater**, etc. It is worth noting how shallow this water course is at this point (2.3) and how it deepens and widens as it travels many miles across the fens before it can be emptied (pumped) into local rivers. The drain, and the walk here, follows the 5m contour (the classic 'fen edge') until point 6.

2.3 The shallow Catchwater Drain



3.1 Raised flood banks



**3** It is interesting to note that as we turn away from the higher ground to the north and head out around the **inner part of the 'bay'** it becomes necessary to build **raised flood banks** to separate fields, tracks and drainage ditches (3.1 & 3.2). Not long after the start of this part of the walk, we drop below the **5m contour** and reach the lowest point of the walk, at **2m above sea level**.

3.2 The Catchwater Drain



4.1 Looking out into the 'bay'



5.1 Farm track, once a railway line



**4** Out to the west, we can see the 'fen fields' drop lower and lower as we walk along (4.1).

**5** On the right the farm track (5.1) is all that is left in this area of the **railway line**, running between **St Ives** and **Ely**, which once connected many villages on the Isle. As we turn west along the northern edge of North Hill it is clear the **New Cut Drain** has increased in size and the raised banks have become significant (5.2f). There are clear views of the whole of the high Sutton 'headland'.

**6** At this point you will enter an area of land opened to the public by the landowner under the **Countryside Stewardship Scheme**. The Permissive Bridleway takes you along the Catchwater (6.1) and then winds through this area and takes you up the hill. Starting at the base of the hill you are on **Amphill Clay**. On the first section of the path look carefully to the field on your left for evidence of small scale excavation - this is the location of a small deposit of **Glacial River Sand and Gravel** (6.2), deposited by powerful rivers carrying meltwater as glaciers melted (probably at the end of the **Tottenham Glaciation**, 160,000 years ago). No doubt once covering more extensive areas, a few patches remain on the ridges providing useful local material. As you climb the hill, there are two very obvious rises in altitude - the first lift being the greater (6.3), where there is a noticeable change in incline as you cross from Amphill Clay onto **Kimmeridge Clay**. At the second rise (with a well-earned rest on the bench provided) you will be crossing onto **Glacial Till**. This deposit of mixed material left by melting glaciers has protected the underlying clays from erosion and is, therefore, often found on hill tops.

6.1 The Catchwater

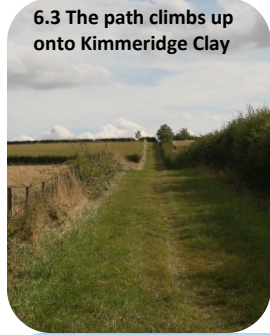


6.2 Remains of Glacial River Sand and Gravel excavations

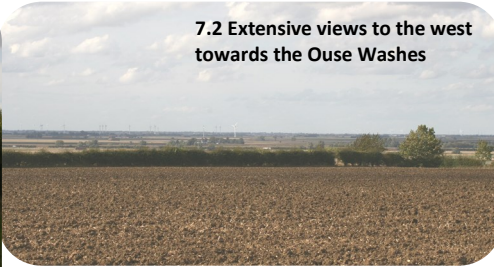




6.3 The path climbs up onto Kimmeridge Clay



7.2 Extensive views to the west towards the Ouse Washes



As you rise, the views for many miles in all directions are impressive – particularly to the north, where you can see Sutton church on the ridge (6.4f). In the east, **Ely Cathedral** is easily seen over 6.9 miles (11km) away (6.5f). The change in geology leads to an obvious change from arable farmland to pasture and to the reinstatement of old orchards.

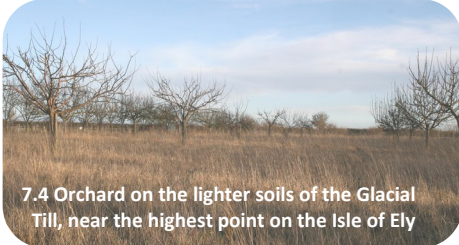
7 More outstanding views appear including those down North Hill (7.1f) and to the west towards the Ouse Washes (7.2).

After the (very welcome) bench (7.3), you pass through an orchard (7.4).

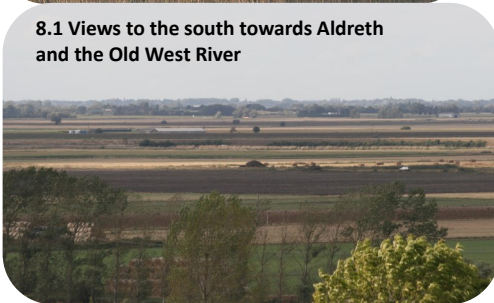
Orchards were once far more common in the area, which was known for its soft fruit growing due to the sandy, loamy soil. These orchards (7.5f) are under restoration.

7a If you walk to the fence along the field edge on the far side of the orchard (past the picnic bench) you will be close to the **top of the hill**, having walked up from 2 metres (c.6ft) above sea level by the Catchwater Drain to near the **highest point in the Isle of Ely at 40.5 metres (133ft)**.

7.4 Orchard on the lighter soils of the Glacial Till, near the highest point on the Isle of Ely



8.1 Views to the south towards Aldreth and the Old West River



8 As you exit the orchard you have excellent views including **Bluntisham**, far to the south west and, to the south, (8.1) Aldreth and over towards the **Old West River**, a stretch of the Great Ouse that lies in a wide 'valley' containing important wildlife habitats, now the focus of **Cambridgeshire Acre's New Life in the Old West project**. The drop back down to the road takes you off the Till back onto Kimmeridge Clay.

The **slope down is relatively steep (8.2)** and **should be TAKEN WITH CARE**, particularly if

the weather has been wet. Note the sign on the gate about the **Conservation area** and **orchards**.



7.3 Bench near the hill top



8.2 The walk down is relatively steep

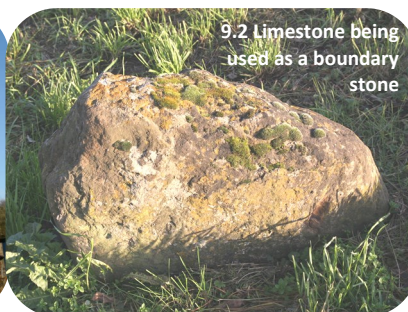
9 Just west of here, in the fenland, are patches of **Shell Marl** and **1st Terrace River Deposits** on which have been found **Neolithic burial chambers** (the oldest, at c.6,000 years, is one of the oldest in **Europe**) as well as **Roman** remains attesting to the very early occupation of this part of the Fens. Early Saxon records (from 970) refer to **Haeden Ham** or Haeda's Homestead. In the Domesday book it was **Hadreham** and by the Middle Ages it had settled as **Haddenham**. The village grew out of the earlier hamlets of **Linden** (Linden Way), **Hill Row** and **Haddenham** (at the crossroads), as well as the neighbouring hamlet of **Aldreth**, and commanded principal land entrances to the Isle of Ely, particularly via the **Aldreth Causeway**, an ancient route, once possibly used by Hereward the Wake (see walk from **Haddenham to Wilburton**). This feature helped bring prosperity to Haddenham which in 1562 was the **most populous village in the county**. The points of entry and their development eventually led to the village becoming a crossroads of some importance.

The parish of Haddenham extends in the west almost as far as the New Bedford River and Earith Bridge. It includes large tracks of land alongside **The Great Ouse** and, as a consequence, much of it (**The Delphs** and **Adventurers Fen**, some 2,000 acres in total) was inundated to the eaves of the houses in the **Great Flood of 1947**. During the **Second World War** Haddenham was a **Starfish** bombing decoy site, diverting attention from **RAF Bomber Command's** nearby airfields.

On your left, as you walk into town, you pass an excellent selection of dwellings made from different types of local bricks. **The Porch House (9.1)**, a fine brick Grade II listed **Elizabethan Long House** dating from 1657, is thought to have been built for the Fen Drainage Administrators and is considered to be one of the most interesting domestic buildings in the village with its prominent chimneys and porch. At the point where **Hill Row** becomes **West End** there is a block of **limestone** being used as a boundary stone (9.2). The nearest limestone is at Upware but this could be a discarded building stone from a more local building.



9.1 The Porch House



9.2 Limestone being used as a boundary stone

10 On the left hand side as you walk down **Church Lane** is the **Burial Ground Wildlife Garden (10.1)**, managed by **Haddenham Conservation Society**. This tranquil spot gives views over the fens as well as a good view of a **large pit (10.2)**. This pit, first shown on the 1882 OS map, was dug out to provide sand for the railway construction – the bedrock here being the (Cretaceous) **Woburn Sands**, one of the layers of the **Lower Greensand Group**. On the Isle



10.1 Burial ground wildlife garden, Haddenham

of Ely the bedrock includes the **Woburn Sands**, which lie over the older clays. It is thought that these rocks were affected by the growth and retreat of glaciers during the **Tottenham Glaciation**, 160,000 years ago, forming the ridges present today. Deposited in the sea about 120 million years ago, the Woburn Sands are now found at the surface from Gamlingay to Ely. It is a fine-to medium-grained, **ferruginous (iron-rich) sandstone** that does not contain many fossils. It has been used as **building stone** which has a very distinctive, dark purplish-brown to deep orange-brown or dark buff-ochre colour, typically becoming greenish-grey when weathered. It forms the **hill on which Ely Cathedral** stands and is used in several buildings in the city.





10.2 Sand pit where the Woburn Sands sandstone was excavated



10.4 sandstone rubble in the church walls

The Church of Holy Trinity is on the site of the original church built by **Ovin**, steward to **Queen Etheldreda**, in 673 A.D. The Church of Holy Trinity was largely built in the 13th century, refashioned in the 15th and starting in 1876 underwent a 'drastic restoration' – it was thirty years before the 15th century rood screen was restored to its rightful position! The most significant element of the restoration

was the complete rebuild of the tower using some of the original materials (10.3f). Grade I listed and built predominantly of **finely cut limestone ashlar** and local **sandstone rubble** (10.4), there was more expensive material introduced during the restoration - 'exotic' stone brought in for decoration. The west door of the tower (10.5f), the pulpit and the easternmost piers (10.6) contain elements of **pink granite**, a stone not found in this part of the UK but imported from the west or even from overseas. You can see the large individual crystals that it is made of; the pink is a mineral called feldspar. On the east side of the road opposite the church stood '**Ovin's Stone**' (10.7), the limestone base of a wayside cross, which dates back to Saxon times. It is now the most ancient monument kept at Ely Cathedral.



10.6 Pink granite piers



10.7 Ovin's Stone now in Ely Cathedral



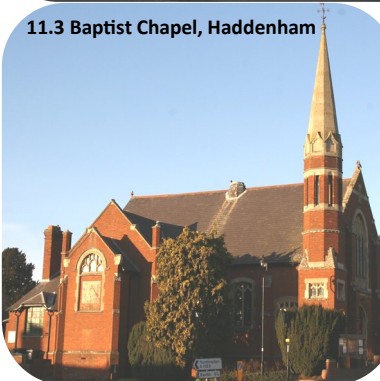
11.1 Arkenstall Village Centre

11 On your right is the **Arkenstall Village Centre** (11.1), once the local

school. The original village school, established in 1698 under a bequest by local farmer **Robert Arkenstall**, developed over time on this site. The current buildings date from 1863 and were purchased through village fund raising in the early 1970s to become the Arkenstall Village Centre. On your left is the Grade II listed **Three Kings Public House** (11.2), which encapsulates many aspects of the village in its key location. It was a typical 17th century hostelry and 'coaching inn' set on this important crossroads. Records show the inn being used as the meeting place of the **Haddenham Drainage Commissioners** since 1727, a practice that was still in place as late as 1975, and in 1990 work in the car park revealed exceptionally well preserved **Saxon graves**. The **land is high** at this point (c.40m) as it lies on the westernmost point of the **Gault Clay**, which caps the sandstone on the top of the ridge. Not far away (at an elevation of c.37m), a 1969 **borehole** showed **Woburn Sands** down to 11.5m,



11.2 The Three Kings public house



11.3 Baptist Chapel, Haddenham

**Kimmeridge Clay** to 33.4m, **Amphill Clay** to 66.2m, **Elsworth Rock Group** to 67.6m and, at the bottom of the hole, **Upper Oxford Clay** was seen at 77.1m. As a consequence, it is not surprising that village records detail several brick pits and **brickworks** in the parish as well as tile making, using local clays. **Local brickwork**, of a variety of colours, gives the village much of its character. There are also numerous pits where sand has been extracted.

Overlooking **The Green** is the **Baptist Chapel** (11.3). The current building, erected in 1905, is an excellent example of 20th century **Nonconformist architecture**.

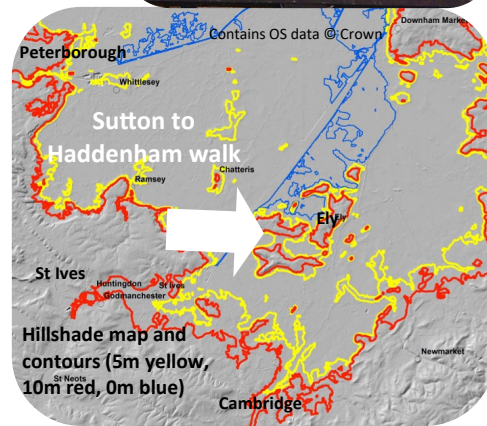
12 The Green possibly dates back to Saxon times. On it stand the village sign (12.1) and the **War Memorial** (12.2), made of Cornish **granite**, Grade II listed and dating from 1921. This is the end of the walk.



12.1 Village sign



12.2 War Memorial



Hillshade map and contours (5m yellow, 10m red, 0m blue)



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# The Fen Edge Trail

## Walk: Sutton to Haddenham Directions

map (5.3 miles / 8.5 km)

**1** Start at St Andrew's church in Sutton on **High St.** On the adjacent corner with **Church Lane**, take the turning down **Station Road**. Follow the road as it bends to the right, taking you downhill.

**2** At the end of **Station Road** turn left down the track with the **New Cut Drain** on your left. From here until you turn uphill at 6, you will be on a Public Right of Way.

**3** At inter-section of tracks bear right (south), keeping **New Cut Drain** on left.

**4** At the next inter-section of tracks, cross the farm track and continue straight (on the raised bank), keeping the **New Cut Drain** on your left.

**5** At next inter-section of tracks, cross farm track (old railway) and walk straight on (on raised bank), along **North Fen Side Track** with **New Cut Drain** on left.

**6** Having passed derelict building on right, turn left to cross the **wooden bridge** over the drain (ph6.1). Turn immediately right to walk along **Permissive Bridleway**, with drain on your right. Follow bridleway which turns left, left again and then right to top of **North Hill**.



6.1 Footbridge across drain

**7** Ignore small lane straight on that leads down to road to bear left along bridleway through **orchard**.

**7a** Take a short walk off the path into the area to the left (with picnic table) to far fence which is near to the highest point of the hill.

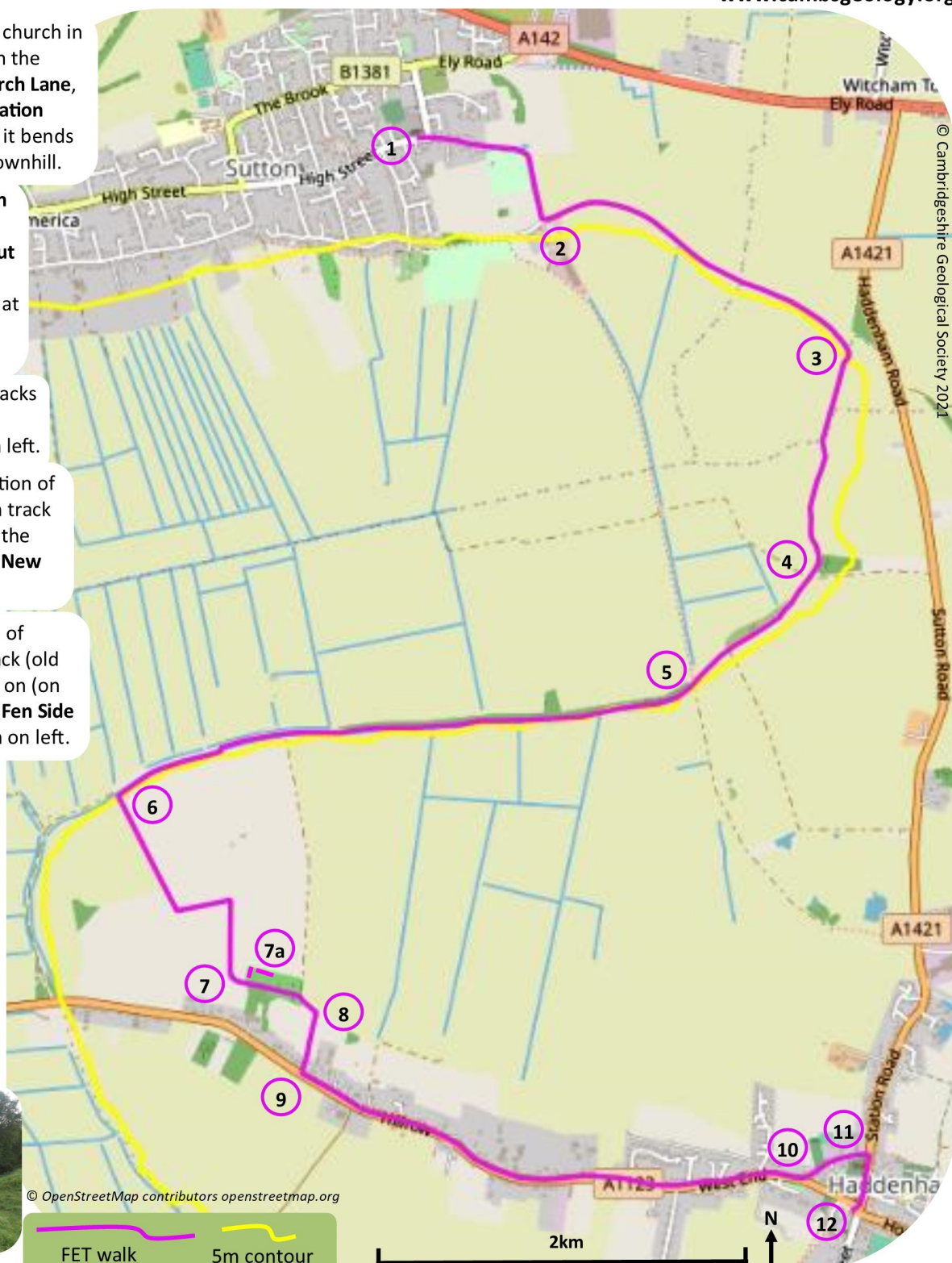
**8** At end of orchard bear right and follow footpath signs right (heeding private land notices) downhill. Follow track down to road, **Hill Row**, passing large barn. **Grassy slope can be muddy and slippery if wet.**

**9** On reaching **Hill Row** turn left and walk approximately 1.3 km along the road, up the hill, towards the centre of the village where the road becomes **West End**.

**10** Where road forks, turn left down **Church Lane** to **Holy Trinity Church**.

**11** At the end of **Church Lane** turn right up **Station Road** to arrive at **The Green** and the **War Memorial**, which is the end of the walk.

**12**





# Walk: Sutton to Haddenham - geology and contours map

## Landscape and Geology

On this walk you pass over four different types of bedrock. The oldest, underlying the lower land in this part of the fens, is **Amphill Clay**, which is c.155 million years old (**Jurassic** age). An extensive sea covered this part of Britain with the clay forming from material deposited on the sea floor. The **Kimmeridge Clay**, famous for fossils of marine reptiles such as **Plesiosaurs**, is younger (also Jurassic) and lies on top of the Amphill Clay forming a **series of roughly east-west ridges**. Younger still (Cretaceous Age) are the **Woburn Sands** (**Lower Greensand** group), a sandstone formed in shallow seas, and the youngest is the **Gault Clay**.

As you climb North Hill you walk on **Glacial Till**, a much younger deposit lying on top of the bedrock, left by retreating glaciers in the **Pleistocene** 'Ice Age' (either in the **Tottenham Glaciation**, c.160,000 years ago when a tongue of ice extended south over the Fens, or in the **Anglian Glaciation**, c.625,000 years ago). This Till (a mixture of material often brought from far away) often remains on hill tops, along with **Glacial River Sands and Gravels**. The lower land has coverings of **River Sands and Gravels in terraces**, deposited when the Ouse was a much larger river towards the end of the last (**Devensian**) glaciation, which ended c.11,700 years ago. Three other deposits cover the underlying clays: marine **Shell Marl**, showing the sea once reached here (in the **Neolithic**), **Peat** formed from decaying vegetation in freshwater 'swamps' and **Alluvium**, a fine material that is carried down the river and deposited in the channel or, during flooding, on adjacent land.

The walk starts on the ridge of **Kimmeridge Clay** and travels down onto the **Amphill Clay** before climbing up and over another ridge of Kimmeridge Clay topped by **Glacial Till**. The walk finishes by walking up onto the **Woburn Sands** and **Gault Clay**, which form the ridge top going east. The **highest point** is on the westernmost tip of the remaining Gault Clay, just before the crossroads at the finish.

### Ages of local rocks (years):

**Jurassic** (Amphill Clay, Kimmeridge Clay): c.164 to 152 million

**Cretaceous** (Woburn Sands, Gault Clay): c.126 to 101 million

**Pleistocene** (Glacial Till, Sands and Gravels, River Terrace Sands and Gravels): c.625,000 to 11,700

**Holocene** (Marine Shell Marl, Peat, Alluvium): under 11,700.

