

3: Thetford Forest

A stretch of Forestry Commission land with the chance of deer sightings.

Leave the A14 at Woolpit for the A1088 (this is *not* signed for Thetford, although this is the only major town en route). After 20 km, navigate Ixworth and continue for a further 20 km, passing Euston Hall with its elegant landscaped gardens to your right until you reach Thetford. This is your only urban blight, but press on through the outskirts of the town for the A134 to Mundford. A faster, but less attractive alternative is to continue to Bury St. Edmunds and follow signs for the A134 for Thetford. On leaving the town, take a short stretch along the A11 for Norwich before turning off to the left to Mundford.

Immediately you have left the A11, you have a delightful run of 12 km through the heart of the forest. Grimes Graves, the Neolithic flint mines lie to your left, and might be worth a detour, and there are picnic sites and nature trails to your right. On a number of occasions, deer can be sighted, standing motionless in the undergrowth.

Continue with the A134 through Mundford for 20 km to Stradsett, and turn left onto the A1122 and join **route 2**.

4: Mildenhall

An American time-warp.

Just after passing Bury St Edmunds (marked by its sugar silos), leave the A14 for the B1106. Very shortly, turn left onto the A1101.

Although pleasant enough so far, the attraction of this route only emerges after you have crossed the A11 at Barton Mills, following the A1101 through Mildenhall and on past the vast USAF base. Aside from the possibility of seeing huge military aircraft limbering up for a regime change somewhere in the world, you can marvel at the anachronisms — American diners, US car dealerships, all the trappings of being in a foreign land and taking home comforts with you!

Some 10 km further on, you reach Shippea Hill railway station. You may wish to survey the largely empty Fenland landscape, and speculate on why anyone thought it was worth building a station here!

At a roundabout with the A10 (in fact the end of the Ely by-pass), you can choose to turn right and join **route 1a**, or turn left for 2 km and then take a right turn at the next roundabout for the continuation of the A1101 and Welney Wash, described in **route 1**.

Entering Nordelph

Along Silt Road

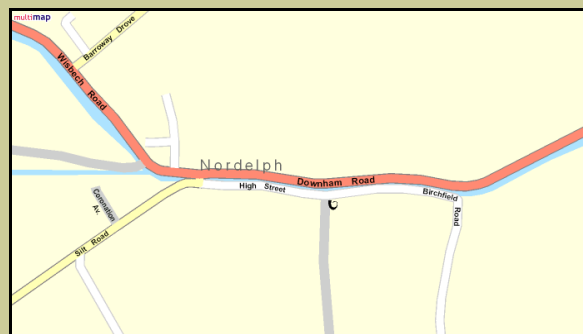
As you enter Silt Road, watch for swans. The fields hereabouts are the chosen nesting place for the 2003 birds.


After about 5 km, you enter Nordelph. High Street is the first turning right (a cul-de-sac) just before the bridge. Be careful turning right — traffic appears over the crest of the bridge, not expecting to find turning cars.

From Downham Market

You pass through Salters Lode, the only village en route. The earth bank to your left conceals Well Creek, which fronts Moot Point!, but you will not see it until you are in Nordelph.

Just after the filling station and pub (The Chequers) on the right, turn left (signed for Welney Wildfowl Trust and Christchurch) over the hump-backed bridge. Immediately over the bridge, turn left into High Street.



If you call ahead from the point marked  on your route, you will give us just enough time to have the drinks ready as you arrive!

52° 35' N
00° 17' E



*How to find us,
and enjoy the trip!*

Eastern Hemisphere Routes

Finding us in the Fens

The nature of your journey to us is largely determined by the place you choose to enter the Fens; each of four routes from the east of the country is described here, together with notes on what we enjoy.

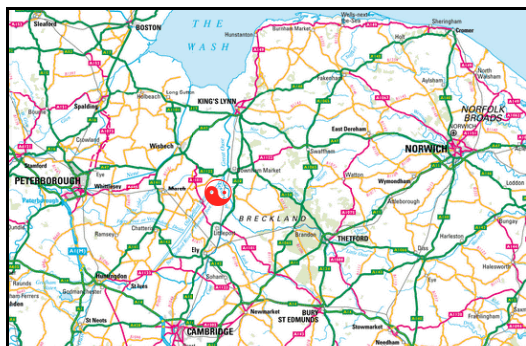
From almost anywhere in Norfolk, you should head for Downham Market (route 2).

From Suffolk and SE Essex, you should make for the A12 and A14, and choose from routes 1, 3, or 4.

From other parts of Essex, and from Hertfordshire and North London, the M11 and a brief stretch along the A14 eastbound brings you to the start of route 1.

Travellers from the west and north of the country have access to other routes not described in this leaflet.

Bon voyage!



1: The Welney Wash Route

An unusual journey through bird lands, with the additional complication that your route may be flooded!

Leave the A14 north of Cambridge on the A10 signposted for Ely. At first, you will be passing through the Cambridge dormitory villages, the science parks and the waste management depots. The soil here is red-brown, and the rivers meander — both of these deficiencies will be corrected in due course!

As you approach Stretham, the horizon begins to recede and, as you pass the windmill to your right and leave the village, you will be treated to a fine vista of Ely Cathedral, initially to your right, but coming to your left as the road twists. Floodlit at night, you can see why it is known as the 'ship of the Fens', and why this area was known as the Isle of Ely. This is Hereward the Wake country.

At the Ely ring road, turn left (still following the A10). Read the roadside signs carefully! If Welney Wash is flooded, you will be told by a succession of black-on-yellow signs. You need not follow the diversion, but you do need to know. The crunch point comes at Littleport, where you turn off left at a roundabout, onto the A1101. If the Wash is flooded, skip over the next paragraphs and continue with '**Downham Market**'.

Initially, you may wonder why we like this route, as you pass a seedy industrial estate, but very soon you are in open country. The horizons have receded, the soil is peat-black, the roads are die-straight and the land is flat. Welcome to the Fens!

It is easy to misjudge distance in such a landscape: the car coming towards you takes forever, not because it is slow, but because the road is twice as long as your eyes tell you.

As you enter Norfolk at a sharp right-hander, keep your eyes alert for birds. Three times here we have seen a Barn Owl, in daylight. Behind the high earth bank to your left is the New Bedford River or the Hundred Foot Drain (that's its depth!). A mile further on, the road turns sharply left over the drain; continuing straight on will lead you to the Welney Bird Reserve. Early each year, the fields here are covered with swans resting during their migration. You are now in Welney Wash: the road floods here often, and in winter the fields freeze over and skating is the order of the day. Here too, water birds can usually be seen at any time.

You leave the Wash as you pass over two adjacent rivers. The Fen waterways are coming together here, prior to draining into the (other) Wash. Weaving through Welney, you come into a countryside without real villages, and isolated houses. Lakes End is the last place that merits a name, but you will search in vain for a lake. A mile or so beyond, a right turn is signed 'Nordelph' and you turn into the Silt Road. The directions continue below with **Entering Nordelph**.

1a: Downham Market

If Welney Wash is flooded — or just for variety — continue with the A10, turning left just after you have crossed the River Great Ouse. You will follow this for some miles, sometimes above it, sometimes below. You enter Norfolk at Brandon Creek (Ship Inn recommended). Look out now for pumping stations and pill boxes, relics of the Fen past. You cross other rivers — the Wissey and the Cut-Off Channel. The latter is as elegantly landscaped as anything in Versailles.

Downham Market is attractive, but approached from this direction, the one-way scheme will send you through the back streets. Hence, turn off on the by-pass, signed A1122 Wisbech. You leave Downham by Heygates' flour mill, still locally known as Birds'. You cross two great rivers in quick succession — notice how their colour is usually very different. To your left, you can see the machinery at Denver Sluice, controlling the Fen waters' passage to the sea. The directions continue below with **Entering Nordelph**.

2: Breckland to the Fens

Hardly a route, but easily the most dramatic change of landscape.

From the A47 westbound, turn left after the Swaffham by-pass onto the A1122 signed 'Downham Market'. You pass RAF Marham to your right. This is perfect Breckland scenery — sandy, gently rolling landscapes, dotted with pines, often in managed plantations.

After Fincham (drive slowly — a popular speed trap) and Stradsett (ignore Kings Lynn turn and continue straight ahead), you come to Downham Market and the scenery changes from one side of the town to the other. Beyond are the flat open vistas of the Fens. With their dark peaty soil.

The route through Downham is unattractive from this approach, although proceeding straight ahead takes you through some mannered Victorian town houses, before you reach Downham's only traffic lights. Turn left here, and follow signs for A1122, Wisbech.

Alternatively, you may feel it is worth diverting 1.5 km south on the A10 to take the A1122 by-pass, signed 'Wisbech' (see end of **route 1a**). After the flour mill and crossing two Fenland rivers, the directions continue below with **Entering Nordelph**.