

the Sixteen Foot Drain. For 13 km, dead straight, with the exception of an unexplained kink at 3 km, you run parallel to and above the water. This is rare in the Fens – despite the profusion of drains, you are usually crossing them, or following their earth banks.

After you have passed Christchurch to the right, you will see a sign for Nordelph and Downham Market to the right. Follow this, turning left again in about 0.5 km. At the next cross-roads (with the A1101) go straight across and enter the Silt Road. The directions continue below with **Entering Nordelph**.

### 3: The Thorney Abbey Route

*A mixture of wild Fen and pretty villages. The most attractive final approach to Nordelph.*

Pass to the north or south of Peterborough, depending on your direction of travel. If passing south, enjoy the view of the cathedral to the left. Once on the A47 (signed Wisbech and Kings Lynn) you will soon come to Thorney, a notorious bottle-neck. Be cautious! This village has no less than four speed cameras. The abbey is glimpsed to the right just before the traffic lights. Once past the lights, you may be entertained by the two adjacent classic sports car sale rooms to your right.

Beyond Thorney, you are into the Fens – straight roads, wide horizons. Pass a sign for Gedney Hill to the left, and recognise that 'hill' has a different meaning out here. At Thorney Toll, the only settlement of any size on the road, note that the (very good) Elgood's pub is the Blackhart going east, but the Black Hart going west! Wonder too, what an Oriental Noodle Bar is doing out in the wilds.

You enter the eastern hemisphere just before Guyhirn, where you cross the River Nene and immediately turn left for Wisbech. You run beside the river for some while and, about 10 km further on, come to Wisbech, 'Capital of the Fens'. Fork right on the by-pass (A47, Kings Lynn) – no responsibility is accepted for travellers who get ensnared in Wisbech! 2 km further on, you enter Norfolk and almost immediately leave the A47, turning right at a roundabout; follow the A1122 right for Downham Market.

Outwell is the only village en route, with a fine church across the river, sensitively floodlit at night. From Outwell, you will be following Well Creek, which fronts Moot Point! Halfway to Nordelph, you will pass by the only aqueduct in the Fens, where Well Creek passes over the Middle Level Main Drain. The directions continue below with **Entering Nordelph**.

## 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 Christchurch) over the hump-backed bridge. Immediately over the bridge, turn left into High Street.

### From Wisbech

After entering Nordelph, take the second bridge to the right (signed Christchurch). Immediately over the bridge, turn left into High Street.



52° 35' N  
00° 17' E



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

*Western 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 three routes from the west of the country is described here, together with notes on what we enjoy.

There is little to choose in terms of distance: each of these routes is about 50 to 60 km, and will take about an hour.

From the north of England, use the Peterborough gateway and route 3. We advise against travelling through the Lincolnshire Fens, as the route is poor and the traffic terrible.

From anywhere south or west (such as London or Milton Keynes), all three routes are viable. The A1, with motorway stretches, takes you speedily to either Peterborough or Huntingdon for routes 2 and 3, while Cambridge is accessible via the M11. A brief stretch along the A14 eastbound brings you to the start of route 1.

Travellers from Essex, Suffolk and the east of Norfolk 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 sign-posted 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 bypass, 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: The Great Fen Route

*The most open and unspoiled route, through land that it is planned to return to nature, and for miles along the Sixteen Foot Drain.*

Pass to the north of Huntingdon on the ring road, turning off on the A141 for March. Almost immediately, you become aware of the Fens, with their huge skies and wide horizons. To your left throughout the first part of the journey is the Great Fen, an area that might be allowed to return to the waterlogged reed beds that prevailed before the Dutch drained this land. Just before Chatteris, you pass from the western to the eastern hemisphere.

At the second roundabout in Chatteris, leave the A141 for the A142 signed Ely. After barely 1 km, turn left for Manea. At the next T-junction, turn left, and then shortly after crossing a river, left again.

You will find yourself very shortly running alongside