

The Dragonfly Trail takes you around an area that is being transformed from arable fields to wet pasture, rich with wildlife. It visits a wooded area, an unusual wildlife hide and the track of an old railway. Look out for information boards and way-markers along the trail.



1 Old farm area

The starting point for this walk is the Great Fen Information Point alongside the B660 (or Fen Drove). The carpark is surrounded by a display of large pieces of bog oak that were found during construction work. These are the semi-fossilised remains of trees that have been covered by peat for thousands of years. Interpretation boards describe the past landscape and the Great Fen vision for the future.



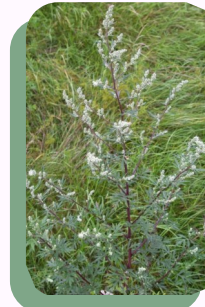
Here you are at the heart of the Great Fen—take a moment to appreciate the far horizons, the vast fen sky and the nearby fields which are experiencing fundamental changes.

Near the carpark there is a small group of trees which marks the location of Halfway Farm. Here generations of the Robinson family lived and worked the land. Their water well remains, as do the fruit trees that grew around the bungalow—apples, damsons, a vine and a splendid walnut tree. There is a picnic area here as well as newly created ponds to encourage dragonflies and other wildlife. The trail goes through the gate along a grassy ride.

2 The fields and verges

The fields beyond the drainage ditch to the left to the west are still being cultivated, but those to the right were acquired for the Great Fen and began to be restored in 2010. Initially grass was sown, sheep grazed and hay removed to reduce excess nutrients. Now cattle graze and in the future the dry meadows will become wet pastureland.

The verges are deliberately being left to grow wild and plants such as Mugwort, Hemlock, Sowthistle, Sorrel and Docks grow in profusion. Their seeds provide food for flocks of wintering finches and buntings. Corn Buntings are often seen in this area and their jangling-keys song can often be heard in spring and summer.



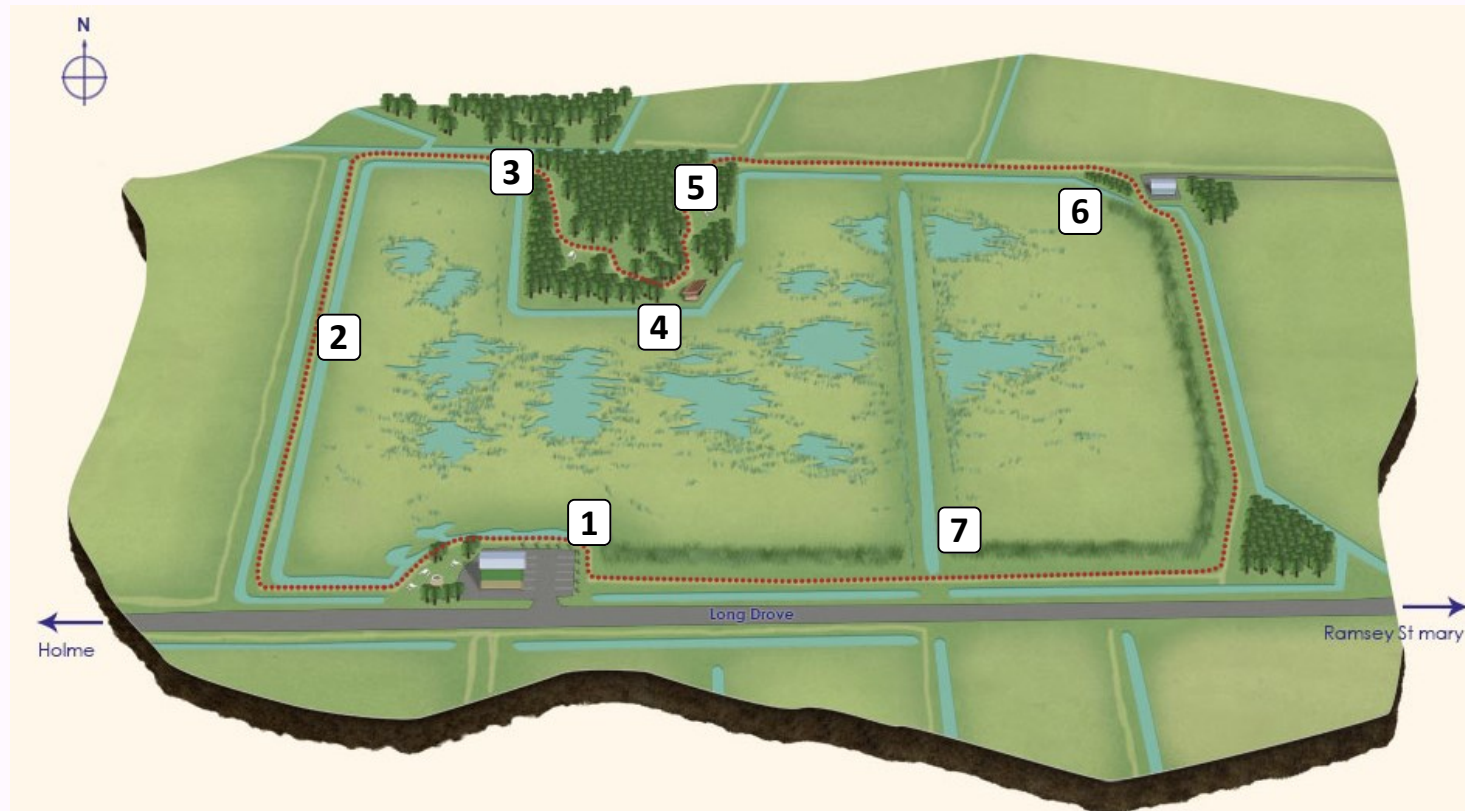
Mugwort

3 A railway crossing

As you enter the woodland you cross the track of an old railway. Just 6 miles long, the Holme to Ramsey branch line was built in 1863 and finally closed in 1973.

The path leads through a young plantation of native trees—Alder, Birch and Oak. There are also mature trees away to the left of the path and it is well worth looking for Siskins and Redpolls feeding in the tops of the trees in winter.

The path leads on to the bird hide and there are benches in the woodland. After visiting the hide you can either retrace your steps to the carpark or continue along the trail to complete the longer circuit.



4 A bird hide made of straw bales

Jon's hide was built by volunteers in 2012 using locally-produced straw bales. From here there is a view across the shallow scrapes and wet meadows that will attract wading birds as the site develops. There are also bird feeders that attract seed-eating birds from the woodland, particularly in the winter.

5 Peat shrinkage



As you walk amongst the mature Oak, Alder and Birch trees, look out for their amazing root systems—a reminder of the way in which the fenland peat soils are disappearing,

both through shrinkage and by erosion.

The trail turns right here and continues along the side of a drainage ditch.

6 The New Decoy

Ahead of you are the buildings of the former New Decoy Farm. Just to the north is the site of the 'Holme Decoy', a star-shaped pond surrounded by trees, which was used to lure and kill ducks and wildfowl. This decoy pond had probably ceased to be used by the end of the 19th century.

During the next few years the old farm buildings will be replaced by the Great Fen Visitor Centre.



Artist's impression

7 Ditches, drains and cattle

Moving ground water is crucial to the management of the fens and the ditch running across the field has a very different purpose and profile from those you passed earlier. Rather than taking water away this one helps to retain water on the wet meadows. There are often Highland cattle grazing these fields. Their hooves create puddles where insect life thrives and they graze the grass allowing other plants to flourish.



Contact the Great Fen team

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Wildlife Trust Countryside Centre, Chapel Road,
Ramsey Heights, PE26 2RS. (usually staffed
9am-4pm Mon-Fri).

This trail guide is also available on
the Great Fen website.

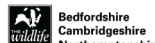
New Decoy Farm Dragonfly Trail

A guided trail around the fields that are being
transformed into a haven for wildlife.
Full circuit 1.5 miles (3 km).
About 90 minutes.



This trail is Heritage Lottery Funded

The Great Fen is delivered by:



www.greatfen.org.uk