

FINDING YOUR OUSE VALLEY WAY!

Our long-distance footpath gets its 'tender loving care' with new information panels. Ian Jackson of the Great Ouse Valley Trust describes the project

Back in January Graham Campbell, our Chair, announced that the Trust had received funding from the County Council to provide the Ouse Valley Way with some 'tender loving care'. He described what had to be done and said, 'We have a lot of work to do'. He was right!

As a volunteer group passionate about the Great Ouse Valley – its beauty and all it has to offer for our pleasure and well-being - we were excited to get the go-ahead. It was a project where we could really show what we could do. We had already been surveying the state of the path and encouraging our Partner Member Parish Councils to feed back their own suggestions. The new project asked us to organise the siting of new and replacement waymarker and fingerpost signs and, most significantly, to recreate twelve highly-detailed information panels. And all to be done by the end of March.

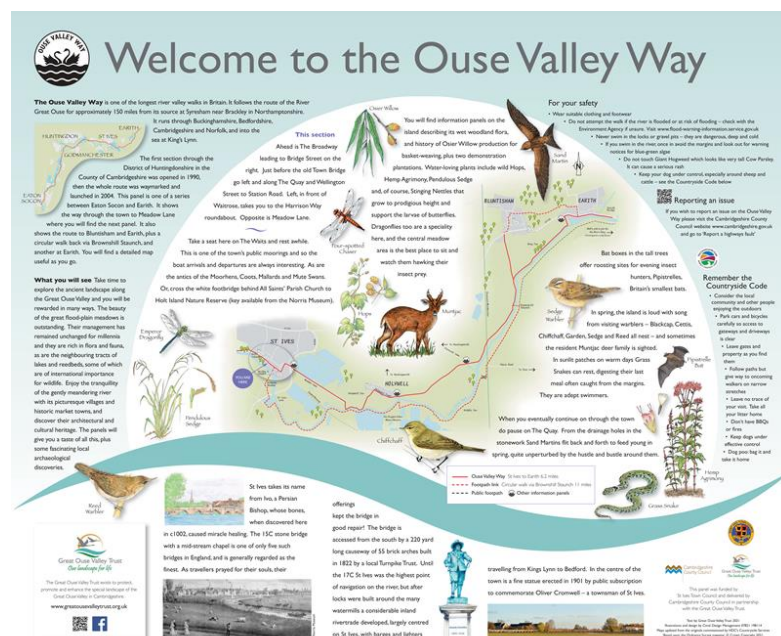
The Ouse Valley Way is one of the longest river valley walks (approximately 150 miles) in the country. It runs through Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. It last made the news here when the Mayor of St Neots, Cllr Stephen Ferguson, walked its entire length, mostly in the pouring rain, to raise funds for his charities, and his blistered feet ended up featured on Facebook. There is another complete walk being planned for August this year, this time by Celia Woolley who won't be in such a hurry as Stephen and who will make a Blog of her journey. And of course the BRJ Run and Tri Club are just itching to stage their Ouse Valley Way Marathon again this year – the section of the path through Cambridgeshire just happens to be 26.2 miles!



The original information panels were created by HDC when the path was first waymarked in 2004 and they have stood the test of time fairly well. However, the County Council made the decision that, along with better signage and improvements to the path itself, a fresh look and update for the panels would be the perfect project for funding from Highways England A14 Legacy Fund. And, that the Great Ouse Valley Trust would be the perfect local volunteer group to provide the panels. We of course readily accepted the challenge, but took a breath when we learned of the deadline.

First, contact was made with the original designer-illustrator Coral Walton, of Coral Design Management. Thankfully she agreed to come on board – after all, she held all the original artwork files! Then we analysed the previous boards. We decided to retain much of their original style and character but make some significant changes. A new template was designed to reflect the GOVT logo. To add value to the information offered we included illustrated heritage topics. These comprise notes on interesting local buildings, archaeological discoveries and historic events, and we hope these will tempt walkers to linger awhile in particular locations.

We reviewed the flora and fauna artworks, created some additions and reallocated them as evenly as possible to the sections of the path covered by each panel. A new text was written and this now includes extra guidance on following the path and the circular walks. These are clever diversions of varying length for those more casual walkers who simply want an interesting local ramble to lead them back to where they started. The safety information has been updated and a concise Countryside Code added.



A completed panel to show the new look

As work began, we received a request from Huntingdon Town Council for an additional panel to feature a new circular walk to encourage walkers to visit Hinchingsbrooke and the Country Park, and the Cromwell Museum. This has been positioned in Bromholme Lane near Brampton Mill. We also decided to offer a new panel to St Ives Town Council, to be of interest to walkers entering the town on the path from Houghton & Wyton. As it was not included in our original budget we are delighted that the Council has agreed to fund this extra panel. It will be installed soon.

It was relatively easy to replace the top panels of most of the existing boards, but the one at Earith had to be completely renewed as it had been hit by a falling tree! The new ones are concreted into the ground by the expert team from Create Signs.



The replacement sign at Earith (left), and the Create Signs team at work (right)



The replacement board at Meadow Lane, St Ives, with Ian Jackson from the Great Ouse Valley Trust

Number Crunching

26 Distance in miles covered by the panels

13 Number of panels

11 Circular walks along the way

185 Total number of illustrations

Where's my nearest Ouse Valley Way board?

Here is the sequence of locations

- Eaton Socon Lock
- St Neots Bridge
- Paxton Pits Nature Reserve
- Buckden Marina
- Bromholme Lane
- St Mary the Virgin Church, Godmanchester
- Houghton Mill
- Houghton Mill National Trust carpark
- St Ives, The Waits (still to be installed)
- St Ives, Meadow Lane
- Holywell, The Old Ferry Boat Inn
- Needingworth, The Pike & Eel Hotel
- Earith

So what next? We know the County Council is keen to get on with the badly needed physical improvements to the path, currently delayed by both the weather and Covid restrictions. And the Trust is keen to build on the new panels' project by creating new detailed map leaflets for each section of the walk to include the circular walks. These would be offered in a set of seven held in a wallet - the perfect companion for that stroll one afternoon, or for a more ambitious ramble. We are very proud of our Ouse Valley Way – we hope you too will soon be able to discover and enjoy its secrets.