

## OUR WONDERFUL LONG DISTANCE FOOTPATH - THE OUSE VALLEY WAY

**Graham Campbell**, Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, describes how the Trustees are working with local authorities to improve this valuable local asset.

If you've walked even a short section of the Ouse Valley Way recently you will have noticed it is in desperate need of some TLC. Obscured signage, dated information panels, occasional obstructions and fly-tipping all spoil the experience. But the scenery is stunning and we are lucky to live in an area with so much wonderful countryside on our doorstep, especially along our river valley through Cambridgeshire. And this has been even more important for our physical and mental health during this difficult year. So the Trust has decided to make improving the path its number one project over the next few months.



Area covered by the Great Ouse Valley Trust



The path hugs the river along many beautiful stretches  
Photograph by GOVT

### First some background

Our 26-mile section is just part of the whole route that starts at the Kings Head pub in Syresham in Northamptonshire and finishes on the Green Quay in Kings Lynn, Norfolk. Many believe that the finest landscapes of the entire route are within Cambridgeshire. This was certainly the view of Councillor Stephen Ferguson, the Mayor of St Neots, who heroically walked the entire 151 miles during the wettest time of the year this November, raising large sums for local charities.

Of course not everyone has the energy or commitment for such extreme effort. But luckily the path can be rewardingly tackled in sections. For example, you can walk along the river from St Neots to Huntingdon, picnic on the way and then get the train back again making a great day out for an active family. The route was originally set out by local ramblers' groups in the 1990s, officially opened in 2004, and quickly became established as a go-to destination for keen walkers. The District Council produced excellent maps and also set up interpretation boards at key locations on the route. These boards also cleverly suggest circular walks that link back to the main route.

Whichever section of the walk you try the experience will take you away from your hectic lifestyle and ever busier roads into a completely different environment of peace and natural beauty. And this can be appreciated at any time of the year. What makes the walk particularly interesting through our section is the progression from the historic town of St Neots into the wide open meadows around Huntingdon and St Ives, and then to the mystical fenland at Earith.

The path passes through the parishes of St Neots, Southoe, Little Paxton, Buckden, Brampton, Godmanchester, Houghton and Wyton, St Ives, Holywell and Needingworth, Bluntisham and

Earith. But it allows simple diversions, into Huntingdon and the Hemingfords, for example. There is even a proposal for a ferry link from Little Paxton to Great Paxton.



### **OUSE VALLEY WAY MARATHON**

Did you know that the Ouse Valley Way is also famous as the setting for one of the best rural marathons in the country? The 26.2-mile distance is exactly the length of the path through the old county of Huntingdonshire from Earith to Eynesbury (making it an ideal venue). The race attracts runners from all over the country and is organised by the BRJ Run and Tri Club. These runners are at Godmanchester near the Chinese Bridge.

Photograph by Paul Homewood

### **So what's to be done about the state of the path?**

Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) partner members have now joined forces with the County Council on the project to both promote and enhance the Ouse Valley Way, one of the country's best-loved long-distance footpaths. Our partner members include most of the relevant Town and Parish Councils, as well as national bodies like the National Trust, RSPB, the Countryside Charity (CPRE) and the British Horse Society (BHS). Volunteers are currently surveying the whole route through our county. They will be identifying potential improvements and locating positions for new way-marking posts, finger post signs and information panels.



Renewing the waymarkers: from l-r Cambridgeshire County Councillor and GOVT Trustee Peter Downes, GOVT Chairman Graham Campbell, and (kneeling) Trustee Ian Jackson  
Photograph by Carlie Campbell

There are some sections of the path that need improving. Currently the route goes through the heavy industrial area of Meadow Lane in St Ives. The Trust is now engaged with landowners to have the path relocated along the river bank instead, providing a more attractive entry into the historic centre of St Ives.



Fallen trees are a constant hazard  
Photograph by Richard Storey

The path remains one of Cambridgeshire's greatest assets but cutbacks in public spending over the last decade have meant that the path is now desperately in need of some maintenance. The Great Ouse Valley Trust wants to improve the route but to also give it the publicity it deserves. The County Council has obtained a substantial grant from the A14 Legacy Fund and is now working with the Trust on a programme of repairs to banks and bridges. In addition, the Trust is liaising with the original graphic designer, Coral Walton, to upgrade the original 20-year-old information panels, and to add some more. We are keen to provide a new board in Brampton, for example, to show a diversion to take in Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and the historic centre of Huntingdon. We have a lot of work to do ...!

*The Great Ouse Valley Trust is committed to the promotion, protection and enhancement of the landscape of the Great Ouse Valley, and to see it designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. If you want to learn more about us and our work and how to become a Supporter please visit [www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk](http://www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk)*

