

## WALKS OFF THE STOUR VALLEY PATH

# EXPLORE THE BRETT VALLEY

Walk Length: 12 miles (19 km); Higham walk 4 miles (6.5 km)  
Please use OS Explorer Map number 196



DEDHAM VALE

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY  
& STOUR VALLEY PROJECT

## An Introduction to the Brett Valley Walk

This circular walk around the lovely Brett valley is best begun at Stratford St Mary. It takes you to Withermarsh Green, Shelley, Lower Raydon and Holton St Mary, while the short route takes you to Higham. Some of the route is along the Stour Valley Path and also the St Edmund Way, a long distance footpath of 79 miles (127km) running from Manningtree in Essex to Brandon in the Brecks in north-west Suffolk, via Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds.

Look out for signs of otters, which have returned to the Stour and its tributaries after an absence of forty years.

### Points of interest

The **River Stour** is about 47 miles (76 km) long and the name derives from the Celtic sturr meaning "strong". The earliest known settlement on the river in Suffolk was at Great Bradley (near the source), where man has had a recorded presence for over 5,000 years. The River Stour was one of the first improved rivers or canals in England. Parliament passed 'An Act for making the River Stower navigable from the town of Manningtree, in the county of Essex, to the town of Sudbury, in the county of Suffolk' in 1705. It was a working river until after WWI.

**Stratford St Mary** is at the heart of 'Constable Country' and John Constable (1776 – 1837) painted several pictures here. Evidence of Stratford's antiquity includes traces of a henge from c. 4,000BC, and Roman remains on Gun Hill. The original Saxon settlement comprising 30 tenants and a mill mentioned in Domesday Book was abandoned as settlement grew along the river Stour and the road to Bergholt.

The main street would once have seen flocks of thousands of geese and turkeys from Norwich and Ipswich on their way to London markets in an early 1800s autumn. To protect their feet for the long walk they were walked through hot pitch and sand to make durable 'slippers'!



Cottage at Withermarsh Green

**Withermarsh Green** has a 'classic' green, bordered by thatched cottages. At Gifford's Hall, the historic home of the Mannock family, a Roman Catholic Mass has been celebrated continuously (despite the Reformation) since 1216. The present chapel dates from 1827 the year of the Catholic Relief Act.

**Shelley** is well-known for its well clipped holly hedges. There are several superstitions linked to holly: it was bad luck to cut down a holly bush as they were markers for ploughmen and their horses; and a stick cut

from a holly bush was thought to bring home runaway cattle. The pretty All Saint's Church has an off-set tower and is the resting place of Elizabeth Gosnold Tilney, the sister of one of the founding fathers of America, the Jamestown colonist Bartholomew Gosnold.



Shelley

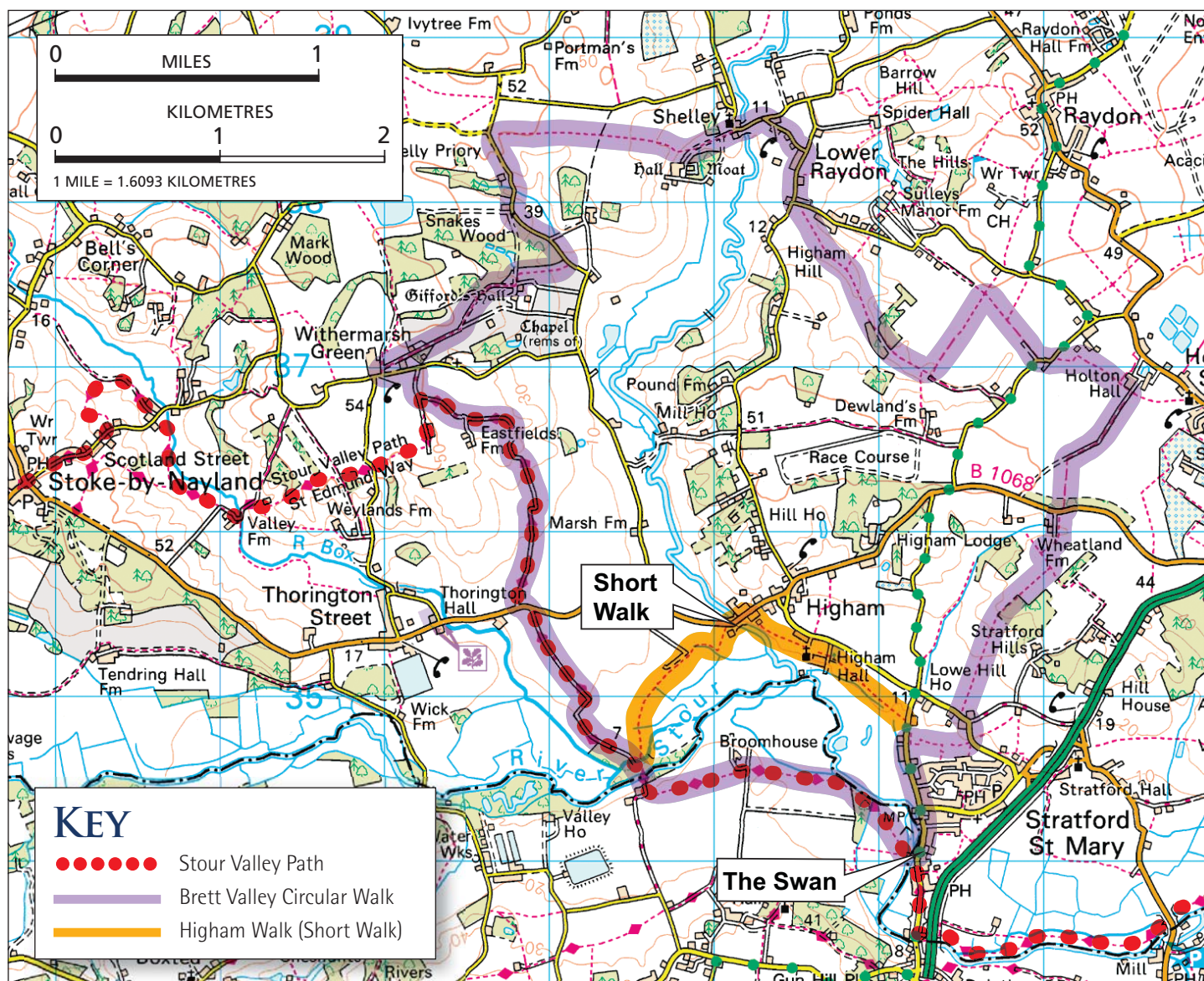


The Brett Valley

As you look over the **Brett Valley** you can see an area of meres or fleets. These are low lying pieces of inland water near rivers that may have been formed

from meanders. When these become silted up they can be invaded by wet woodland species such as alder and ash, then becoming known as "carrs".





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Terrain: Easy walking on good paths and tracks, with some gentle climbs. Some sections are on minor roads – care required. Parts of the walks may be muddy and wet after rain, or overgrown at some times of the year.



Please follow the  
Countryside Code

### Refreshments

A range of refreshments are only available in Stratford St Mary including village store, farm shop and pubs. Please take water and a snack with you.



Web: [www.stratfordswan.com](http://www.stratfordswan.com)  
Tel: 01206 321244  
Email: [info@stratfordswan.com](mailto:info@stratfordswan.com)  
Twitter: @stratfordswan  
The Swan, Lower Street, Stratford St Mary, Suffolk, CO7 6JR

### Car Parking

Parking is available in Stratford St Mary, please park considerately.

### Transport

[www.travelineeastanglia.org.uk](http://www.travelineeastanglia.org.uk)

**Train:** The nearest stations are Colchester, Manningtree and Ipswich on the London Liverpool Street-Norwich main line.

**Bus:** The Colchester-Hadleigh and the Ipswich-Colchester buses stop at Stratford.

An on-demand bus service from Hadleigh operates in the area and links several villages. Advance booking must be made  
[www.suffolkonboard.com/suffolk\\_links\\_demand\\_responsive\\_transport](http://www.suffolkonboard.com/suffolk_links_demand_responsive_transport)



This leaflet was produced  
November 2012

