

BECCLES MARSHES WALKS

Starts: Beccles Marshes car-park

Parking: Beccles Marshes car-park

Moorings: The Quay, Fen Lane, Beccles

Distance & time required: Trail 1, 1 mile (1.5 km), 1 hour

Trail 2, 3 miles (5 km), 2 hours

Trail 3, 5 miles (8 km), 3 hours

This popular series of walks explores an area of grazing marsh on the outskirts of Beccles. There are three walks of differing lengths you can choose from, marked clearly on the map and by waymarking arrows.

The marsh is owned by Beccles Town Council and was given to the people of Beccles by Queen Elizabeth 1 in 1584, in recognition of the town's importance as a trading centre for the woollen industry. At that time, Beccles was on the edge of a huge estuary and it was one of the most important ports in eastern England. The marsh is managed by Beccles Town Council with help from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Until about 1965, most of Beccles Marshes was grazed by cattle. Since then, however, large areas have been drained so that arable crops like cereals, vegetables, sugar beet and horseradish can be grown. The grazing marshes that remain are a typical feature of the traditional Broads landscape.

Notice the network of drainage ditches or 'dykes' which bisect the grazing marshes. These dykes, which would have been dug by hand, are miniature nature reserves. They contain a wonderful variety of water plants and insects once found throughout the Broads. Spring and summer are lovely times to visit the marshes here when the dykes will be teeming with life.

All kinds of colourful wild flowers fringe the dykes, from the flamboyant reddish-purple displays of purple loosestrife to the tiny blue flowers of branched bur-reed. The sparkling waters of the dykes also contain nationally rare plants like water soldier.

You'll also see the jewel-bright flashes of insects like dragonflies and damselflies. To tell them apart, dragonflies are usually larger than damselflies and rest with their wings spread out. This is one of the few places where you might catch a glimpse of the Norfolk hawk, a large brown dragonfly which only occurs in the Broads.

Dykes like these, which are rich in wildlife, are very important because they contain water plants which have sadly disappeared from many of the rivers and broads. Over the years, two chemicals, phosphates and nitrates, have built up in the water, creating conditions in which many plants can no longer flourish.

The Broads Authority, along with the Environment Agency and Anglian Water, is working on a number of schemes to improve water quality and restore wildlife to the rivers and broads. Sometimes plants are taken from the grazing marsh dykes and transplanted into restored broads, like Cockshoot Broad. The dykes are in fact mini wildlife reservoirs for the rest of the Broads, so it's easy to see why they are so important.

To return to Beccles Marshes car-park from the Quay, continue to the end of the dyke, then turn left along a path bordering the far side of another car-park. At the end of the path, take great care crossing the main road. The car-park is down the steps, on your right.

MAP KEY

--- Waveney Valley Walks
★ Starting point

i Broads Information Centre
☎ Telephone

■ Dyke, River, Broad
☼ Fen, Marsh
🌳 Woodland

PO Post office
✙ Church
+ Chapel

P Parking
M Moorings

PH Public house
+++++ Railway
FB Footbridge

