

THE CROUCH VALLEY TRAIL

Introduction

Welcome to the Crouch Valley Trail! This walk of nearly 30 miles highlights some of the most pleasant scenery in the County of Essex, providing the opportunity of experiencing rural life alongside the region's history.

The trail commences at the old market town of Rayleigh and passes through the many distinctive towns and villages of both north and south of the River Crouch, before ending at the fine sailing town of Burnham-on-Crouch. Both the start and finish points: The Windmill, Rayleigh and the Clock Tower, Burnham have been selected as they encompass heritage points of interest.

The route of the trail has been composed to provide regular opportunities for refreshment stops and thought has been given to facilitate public transport links as best as possible.

The trail has been broken down into 4 stages in order to provide flexibility and options, and combinations or parts of the stages can be undertaken to suit whichever route you wish to take. The 4 stages in themselves can be considered a complete walk; each vary and are individual in terrain and length.

Please enjoy the charming countryside of rolling hills, farmland, woodland and riverside as you journey through the Crouch Valley Trail.

Public Transport Links

Due to the linear nature of this walk, there is obviously a need for public transport to get you back to your starting point or to join the trail at any link. If you are driving to any part of the trail, it is recommended that you park at a rail station as mentioned within the Trail Directions. Stages 2, 3 & 4 run very much in relation to the Wickford and Southminster lines and it is also recommended to use the railway as necessary. At the time of writing, the quoted bus links are practical and provide regular services but operators are prone to withdraw or revise services. Always check timetables when planning and visit the website:

www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk to assist you. All links are embedded within the trail directions at the relevant point for your convenience.

Trail Notes

- *All distances quoted in the directions are approximated.*
- *The Explorer Ordnance Survey Maps relevant to the trail are Explorer 175 & Explorer 176.*
- *Essex is regarded as having moderate walking conditions compared with other parts of the UK. However, please respect the terrain and elements. Dress appropriately and remember your waterproofs and drinking fluids. Wear proper walking boots that will cope with uneven ground, stones and tree roots etc.*
- *Always exercise extreme care at road crossings and sections which include road walking.*
- *Always comply with 'The Countryside Code'.
Website: www.naturalengland.org.uk*
- *Remember to plan your public transport links!*

About Rayleigh

The name 'Rayleigh' is Saxon in origin and is cognate to the German place name 'Rehlach' of the same meaning. According to the English Place Names Society, 'Rayleigh' derives from 'raege', and 'leah', meaning "Female roe-deer stream" or "she-goat stream". There are lands around Rayleigh that were used as royal hunting forests for many hundreds of years and during Henry VIII's reign, deer were constantly taken from the town to replenish the herds in Greenwich Park.

It is apparent that there were both Roman and Saxon settlements but it wasn't until later that Rayleigh became established as a market town. It is thought that the market may have originated at the time of the Domesday survey, but the earliest date recorded for the market is 1181 in the reign of King Henry II. It was originally held in Rayleigh's wide 'High Street' which may date back to Saxon times.

Today the busy modern Rayleigh has a population of approx. 31,000 people as a result of rapid expansion since the 1960's. It forms part of the District of Rochford and has its own Town Council.

A prominent feature of the town is its windmill which dates back to 1809 and is a Grade II listed building. The first floor of the windmill houses an accredited museum and particular emphasis is placed on the collection of photos, archives, wartime, domestic, farming and business items that have direct links to Rayleigh.

It is here that the Crouch Valley Trail begins!

THE TRAIL DIRECTIONS

Public Transport Link

Links to and from Rayleigh are possible by bus and rail.

By bus: For all bus services that serve Rayleigh, please visit the website: www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk select the 'find a timetable' tab and enter 'Rayleigh High Street SS6 7QA' in the location field.

By rail: Rayleigh is served by services between London Liverpool Street and Southend Victoria.

To get to the starting point of the trail from Rayleigh Station, exit the station forecourt and walk up Crown Hill. At the top, cross the road at the crossing and walk past the 'Ye Olde Crown' public house and shops. Take the left fork, 'Bellingham Lane', and make for the Mill Hall Car Park where you will see the towering windmill.

Car parking is available at Mill Hall Car Park, SS6 7ED

STAGE 1: RAYLEIGH TO BATTLESBRIDGE (8 miles/13 km)

From the windmill, exit the car park via the paved path heading towards the 'one way' sign with Mill Hall on your right. At the roundabout, cross the road to

the car park's 'pay here' sign and continue 30 yards to the road junction. Turn left, passing the Women Institute Hall and cottages on your left, and continue to the next road junction.

Turn right into 'London Hill,' passing the Royal British Legion Hall and enter the churchyard of the Holy Trinity Church.

Note of interest: Holy Trinity Church, Rayleigh

The focal point of the 'High Street' is the Holy Trinity Church which - architecturally speaking - is of the Perpendicular period (1401-1500) with traces of Roman and Norman work. The tower houses an eight peal of bells which were cast in 1657 and 1746. Two further bells were cast in 1790 and two more in 1897.

A large building known as Wysteria House originally stood to the south of the church and in front of the existing properties in 'Church Street'. The building housed a bakery and corn chandlers together with a manually operated telephone exchange. The demolition of this building opened up the present view of the Church from the lower point of the 'High Street'.

Pass the church to your left. After exiting the churchyard turn left into 'Hockley Road' and cross 'Rectory Garth'. Cross the main road with care and turn left along the pavement until you arrive at 'Public Footpath 46'. Turn right into the straight footpath and head on; soon FitzWimarc School will appear on your left.

Turn right when you reach 'Helena Road.' Cross the road at the beacon crossing, turn left and right again into 'Louise Road'. At the end of 'Louise Road', turn left into 'Bull Lane' and continue for approx. ½ mile which includes the road ascending into a narrower lane. At a fingerpost on the left side of the lane, turn left into the ascending farmland.

Follow the perimeter of the field to the right and head on towards a radio mast. After passing the mast, continue eastwards for a little over ½ mile with Southend-on-Sea visible to the south-east (ignore all turnings to the left into

the woods). Where a footpath heading south is met at a hedge crossing, turn left into Hockley Woods.

Cross over a log gate, ignore the east and west paths and head on to the path going north through magnificent woodland.

Note of interest: Hockley Woods

Hockley Woods is the largest continuous native woodland in Eastern England and covers 130 hectares. This area is a survivor of wild wood that covered the region after the Ice Age 10,000 years ago.

The upper slopes of the woods include a variety of tree types including Oak, West Chestnut and Rowan, with the wetter lower soils having such types as Hornbeam, and the streams containing Willow, Hazel and Ash. Many ancient woodland plants can be seen such as the Wild Service tree, Wood Anemone and Common Cow-Wheat. These examples will only grow on undisturbed soils of ancient woodland such as in Hockley Woods.

When the path meets the cross paths turn left for 20 yards, then right and then head on northwards again, ignoring any turnings until you reach 'Hockley Woods Car Park'. There are public toilets here. Exit the car park to the road.

Watering Hole: If you wish to have a break, why not pop in to 'The Bull' which lies just to the left of the car park. 'The Bull' has a traditional pub atmosphere and the garden has a large seating area.

Public Transport Link

For all bus services that serve this location, please visit the website: www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk select the 'find a timetable' tab and enter 'Hockley (Essex) Bull Inn' in the location field.

Carefully cross the road into 'Bull Lane' and head down the gravel lane marked 'No Through Road'. The lane turns into a footpath and shortly after you will cross another road. Proceed through a tree-lined path and after passing a playing field on the right, the path breaks into farmland with a railway line ahead. Keep following the perimeter of the field and enter woodland with the railway running parallel to your right.

At a path junction turn right and cross a footbridge over the railway. Follow the path round and go through a kissing gate. Pass a bungalow on the right and then walk into 'St Peter's Road' with houses on the right. At a bungalow named 'Hornbeams', continue on the footpath for a short distance before turning left at a fingerpost. Ignore the immediate turning right and head west. Views of the River Crouch and the valley are now on your right.

At the next path junction (at the large oak tree), turn right, then diagonally left by a seat, and stroll through the churchyard of St Peter and St Paul's Church, Hockley.

Note of Interest: St Peter and St Paul's Church, Hockley

The present building dates back to 1220 – during the reign of Henry III – but it is known that a church was on this site prior to that date as earlier foundations were discovered during renovation in the rood loft area.

Outside the Tudor brick porch and set into the path is the tombstone of William Waight (1790), who gave instruction that as he had always been trampled on in life, he saw no reason why things should not change after death!

The tower was built in 1350 at the time of the Black Death. The 3 bells are dated 1626, 1684 and 1657 and hang from a 14th century bell frame. The two windows are 14th century.

Exit the churchyard and turn right down to the road. Staying on the verge turn right and descend down the hill. Walk carefully, as you will need to go on the road for a short time.

When you reach the 'Wadham Park Farm' sign, cross the road, go through a kissing gate and descend diagonally left through a series of kissing gates as you

pass through a paddock. Then pass over a footbridge, a wooden gate, a steel barred gate and then turn diagonally right towards a large tree with a white mark on it. Now head for a waymarker post and shortly after turn left and enter through a metal kissing gate. Proceed with a wooden barred fence on the left which is narrow at times.

Exit the path through a metal kissing gate and after going over a footbridge turn right onto a track. Continue on the track for about 1/3 of a mile and exit onto a road. Turn left and continue on an unmade pavement and head for a telephone box. Just past the box look for a fingerpost on the other side of the road. Cross over and pass over the footbridge and continue on the path as it winds through grass and shrubs and then breaks into open farmland.

Cross the field diagonally and then turn right into the road. At Cracknell's Farm the road narrows into a track. Continue on the straight track for approx. ½ mile. The track then joins another road. Head straight on and follow the bend left into Hullbridge.

After you have passed some houses, enter a recreational ground through a kissing gate and make for the River Crouch. At the riverside, turn left and stroll along a gravel path until you reach the Anchor Riverside Bar and Restaurant.

Watering Hole: Why not enjoy some riverside refreshment and a lively atmosphere at the 'Anchor Riverside Bar and Restaurant'.

Public Transport Link

For all bus services that serve this location, please visit the website: www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk select the 'find a timetable' tab and enter 'Hullbridge, The Anchor' in the location field.

Note of Interest: The Hullbridge Ferry

It was here that pilgrims crossed the river from the North bank on their way to Canterbury. Signs of the causeway can still be seen at low tide but there are no signs of the bridge that is said to have spanned the river from the 13th century to Cromwell's time.

In later years, a ferryman would row children across the river from Woodham Ferrers to the Old School House in Ferry Road.

At the old ferry crossing, turn left and at the footpath turn right and pass 'The Smugglers Den Club'. Join the gravel path that enters 'Kendall Park Hullbridge Local Nature Reserve'. Keep to the path closest to the river which goes through a delightful wooded section set at the river edge.

The Path exits onto a concrete road. Proceed on this, then peel right at the fingerpost along a narrow path which takes you out of Hullbridge and on to the seawall. Continue on the seawall for approx. ½ mile.

When the river veers to the right, look for a path to the left of a metal gate (this is not on the seawall and you will need to come off the seawall via a slope.) Follow this path, continuing with a wire fence on your right. A section with trees and shrubs on your left then follows as the 'Old Granary' in Battlesbridge looms in the distance. Follow the footpath to the waymarker on the seawall, take the left fork through a hedge and then turn right along a field edge. After going through a narrow section between hedges, the path exits into a road. Turn right at this point.

THERE NOW FOLLOWS AN UNAVOIDABLE SECTION ON THE ROAD WITHOUT PAVEMENTS WHICH CAN BE BUSY. PLEASE BE VIGILANT AND RESPECT THE TRAFFIC ESPECIALLY WHERE THE ROAD BENDS. IF THE TRAIL IS BEING UNDERTAKEN BY A LARGE WALKING PARTY THEN DIVIDE INTO SECTIONS, WALKING AT INTERVALS WITH THE LEADERS INDICATING TO VEHICLES THAT WALKERS ARE FOLLOWING.

Walk along this road for approx. ¾ mile into Battlesbridge. Where the road meets a junction, turn right and proceed on the pavement. Cross over the bridge to the north bank of the Crouch and make your way to the entrance of the 'Old Granary/Barge Inn car park'. Public toilets are housed to the rear of the Old Granary.

Watering Hole: Time for a break? Then take advantage of refreshment provided at the 'Barge Inn' with its typical Essex historical Weatherboarding features.

There is numerous tea rooms dotted around Battlesbridge within the Antique Centre.

Public Transport Link

Links to and from Battlesbridge are possible by bus and rail

By bus: For all bus services that serve Battlesbridge, please visit the website: www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk select the 'find a timetable' tab and enter 'Battlesbridge Riverside' in the location field.

By rail: Battlesbridge is served by services that run to Southminster on a single line that branches from the London Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria route at Wickford.

Car parking is available at Battlesbridge Rail Station.

If you wish to leave the trail at this point and head for Battlesbridge Rail station, from the car park entrance of the Old Granary, marked 'Antique & Craft Centre' opposite 'The Barge Inn', turn right along the pavement passing the Free Church and crossing 'Maltings Road'. Keep on the pavement and follow the bend to the right passing 'The Hawk' public house and then turn right into the path that ascends to the station.

To get to the trail from Battlesbridge Station, proceed from the car park going down the track that leads to the road and turn left. Continue by walking along the pavement passing 'The Hawk' public house and the 'Bones Lane' turning, and head to the entrance of the car park of the Old Granary building marked 'Antique and Craft Centre' and the Barge Inn.

Note of Interest: The Battlesbridge Antique Centre

A major feature of Battlesbridge is the Antique centre - which has over 80 dealers housed in a variety of old buildings and courtyards. Dealers trade in a wide range of antiques, collectables, crafts, architectural items, garden ornaments, fireplaces and reproductions and they also offer valuation, restoration and interior design services. The centre was established in 1967

and also has a Motorcycle Museum which is open on Sundays. There is also a showground hosting various events throughout the year.

STAGE 2: BATTLESBRIDGE TO WOODHAM FERRERS (6 miles/10 km)

The starting point of this stage of the trail is the car park entrance of the Old Granary, marked 'Antique & Craft Centre' opposite 'The Barge Inn'. Continue on the pavement on the right hand side of the road passing 'The Harbour Club' and 'Battlesbridge Free Church', and then turn right into 'Maltings Road'. As the road bends to the right, you will pass through various antique outlets.

Continue along 'Maltings Road' until the road splits into a track to a house and an entrance to industrial units. Do not enter either; take a sharp right here, and climb a few steps onto an embankment which leads to the River Crouch then bends left and proceeds beside the river for about a ¼ mile. It then rises onto a slightly higher bank and starts to wind north-east away from the river. Shortly after, turn left onto a gravel track and continue up the straight track towards a railway crossing. Pass through a metal 5-bar gate, go over the railway bridge and advance to the road, going around a yellow barrier.

Cross the A132 WITH GREAT CARE; IT IS VERY BUSY!!

Immediately opposite is a footpath heading north-west. Proceed along this (it may be muddy at times). Ignore a path that leads right and head straight on. Cross a barred fence and as you continue the path turns into a tranquil green lane. Keep going and this leads to another road. (Thankfully, this should be quieter than the previous crossing!)

Proceed into 'Farm Crescent' opposite; the road bends to the left, but continue on the footpath at this point. The path now passes through woodland and starts to ascend until it breaks into farmland. Continue on ascending, occasionally passing lone standing trees. Where the path crosses an east-west path at a way marker post, carry straight on as the path descends. At the bottom, by an oak tree at a stream, cross a footbridge to your right and proceed along the footpath to cross a stile. The path may be overgrown at this point, but you will pass through a lovely section full of wild flowers at certain times of the year.

Continue on at the next stile; cross another stile which leads into an edge of a field and turn right, then left skirting the field with a hedge on your right. The hedge ends at 'Mark's Farm' where there is a kissing gate and a way marker. Turn left here and descend across the field. At the bottom, cross a stile and footbridge and then go diagonally right and aim for a gap between two trees – there should be an electricity pylon on top of a hill in the distance.

When the gap is reached, cross the next field aiming to the right of a clump of trees. At the clump of trees, go straight ahead across the next field with rolling hills in the distance. As you go over the brow of the hill a white tipped marker post comes into view.

Turn left at the marker post and proceed onwards alongside a stream to your right. Just before you reach an electricity pylon, turn right to cross a concrete bridge and go up a green lane. When the green lane ends, continue up to the houses. You are now entering Rettendon. Leave the footpath by turning left into 'Salforal Close' and head to the main road (East Hanningfield Road).

Watering Hole: If you are in need of refreshment, then head to the traditional 'Bell and Chimes Restaurant' by turning left down East Hanningfield Road. The pub is approximately 400 yards on the junction with 'Main Road'. After your stop, retrace your steps to the entrance of 'Salforal Close'.

Public Transport Link

For all bus services that serve this location, please visit the website: www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk select the 'find a timetable' tab and enter 'Rettendon Old Bell Lane' in the location field.

Cross the 'East Hanningfield Road', turn right and walk for 30 yards. Just to the right of 'Sketts Cottage' is an ascending footpath. Turn left onto this and proceed upwards. Keep going as the path emerges into charming rolling hills for about ¼ mile. Then cross a stile and footbridge and continue to climb on a green path with trees on your left.

Cross a track by a green 5-bar gate and continue ascending. When you get to the top, go between two posts and a way marker and skirt a farm field by

turning right. At this stage, you will see trees to your right but you will be heading towards the trees to your left. This side should include a shed. About 20 feet before the trees, there is an opening in the trees to the right with a stile. Cross this and turn left. Keep to the left and proceed to the road. Go over the stile and cross the road.

Turn right on the other side of the road. Pass a house and turn left down a bridleway heading east. After a short woodland section, you will see an open section with views to the south. When the field ends, keep going with trees on your right. The path then descends into a green tree lined-track. Proceed along this and the bridleway leads to a road. Turn left into 'Buckhatch Lane' and walk along the road passing farm buildings on your right. Continue on until you reach a bridleway on the right. You are now near to the RHS Garden Hyde Hall.

Note of Interest: RHS Garden Hyde Hall

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Garden at Hyde Hall is one of four public gardens run by the Society. The garden at Hyde Hall was created by Dr and Mrs Robinson in 1955 and then in 1976, Helen and Dick Robinson formed the Hyde Hall Garden Trust which would manage the garden on a long-term basis. The trust donated Hyde Hall to the RHS in 1993. The house, which dates back to the 18th century, is a typical Essex farmhouse of timber frame, lath and plaster. Records show the existence of a dwelling on this site as far back as the Tudor times, at least. The Hyde Hall Estate now measures 360 acres and it is stated that in the year ended 31st January 2010, Hyde Hall received 130,000 visitors. The RHS is the UK's leading gardening charity dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting good gardening and surely Hyde Hall is a demonstration of this.

Entry to RHS Hyde Hall: If you wish to visit RHS Hyde Hall continue along the lane until you reach a bus stop and then turn right down a walkway to the main entrance, cafeteria and shop.

Public Transport Link

After your visit to the gardens or if you wish to leave the trail at this point, you can check for all bus services that serve this location by visiting the website:

www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk selecting the 'find a timetable' tab and entering 'Rettendon Hyde Hall' in the location field.

To continue on the trail, proceed along the bridleway which will bend to the right where you will have good views of the Hyde Hall grounds. Continue on until you reach a fingerpost to the left

Turn left at the fingerpost and proceed up a hill towards a red and white marker to continue passing the gardens. Please note: It is not possible to enter RHS Hyde Hall at this point. If you wish to visit the gardens, please follow the instructions previously given under the section 'Entry to RHS Hyde Hall'.

Keep heading east at this point towards a way marker post and head straight on past the Hyde Hall weather station, passing a lone oak tree until you reach a road. Cross the road and proceed down the track towards a line of trees then ascend a path that leads to two trees on top of a hill. At the two trees, turn right and follow the path to the right of the first oak, towards the way marker post on the second.

Turn left and head for the church. At the field edge, keep straight on and cross a footbridge and stile. Turn left and then right and head upwards towards a cemetery. Cross a stile into the cemetery and head up the concrete slope and steps. Then pass to the right of the delightful St Mary's Church, Woodham Ferrers.

Note of Interest: St. Mary's Church, Woodham Ferrers

Although originally built by Robert de Ferrers (the Earl of Derby) in the 12th century, this surviving church building dates to various phases between c.1250 and c. 1330 and was then "restored" in 1884. The north and south arcades are early survivals and are of three bays with alternating circular and octagonal piers. Some of the window tracery (bar tracery with quatrefoils in circles) is just post c. 1275. At one time there was an early 16th century tower of flint and stone flushwork, but this has been demolished and the tower arch bricked up. The belfry now rests on a big tie beam. The south porch is of timber. The clerestory (upper story of the nave walls) is late 19th century but has 13th century splays.

Cross the road into 'The Bell Free House' car park.

Watering Hole: Time for a well earned break? Welcome food and drink awaits you in 'The Bell Free House'

Public Transport Link

There is a bus stopping point at 'The Bell Free House', where you can board services for the South Woodham Ferrers Rail Station; situated on the Wickford to Southminster line. A link to Battlesbridge Station is available here and this is a good option if your vehicle is parked there.

Car parking is available at South Woodham Ferrers Station in order to connect with bus services if you wish to join the Trail at Woodham Ferrers.

For all bus services that serve these locations, please visit the website: www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk select the 'find a timetable' tab and enter 'Woodham Ferrers The Bell' or 'South Woodham Ferrers Railway Station' (as applicable) in the location field.

STAGE 3: WOODHAM FERRERS TO NORTH FAMBRIDGE (6 miles/9.5 km)

From the pub car park proceed to the rear of the garden and go through the opening in the trees. Take the footpath to the right and descend through a field. At the bottom, cross a section of gravel and ascend across the next field. At the top, a white tipped marker will come into view - head towards this. Pass through a kissing gate at the marker and head on beside a farm. When you reach the perimeter of the farm buildings, follow the way marker's yellow arrows and climb a stile that leads you onto a road.

Turn left into the road and walk along it, passing Edwin's Hall on the left for about ½ mile. Shortly after the road turns a sharp right, turn left onto a path between two concrete blocks and proceed eastwards with trees on your left. Good views of the River Crouch can be seen to the south. At the end of the field, cross the next field and descend towards a kissing gate with a way

marker. Go through the gate and ascend the next field by going just to the left of a tree in front of you. At the top is a stile which you can cross.

Cross the next field by going diagonally right to the field edge and turn left to continue until you reach a way marker. Turn right, immediately left and advance down quite a narrow, sometimes overgrown path. Ignore a gate to your right and continue until you see a stile on your right with a yellow way marker on it. Go over the stile and proceed down the tight footpath, which takes you through a lovely young tree plantation. Exit the path through a wire mesh gate, then go left and head towards floodlights, then right on a track between terracotta tubes and exit onto 'Woodham Road'. You are now in Stow Maries.

Watering Hole: Turn right on the pavement to get to the 'Prince of Wales' for a rest, replenishment and cosy atmosphere!

Once on the road, turn left and proceed on the pavement that takes you up the hill. At about 400 yards, turn right into 'Church Lane' and walk to the Church on the right side of the Lane.

Note of Interest: SS Mary and Margaret Church, Stow Maries

Stow Maries parish derives its name, as did its feudal lords (de Marisco, de Mareys), from the marsh. The name Morris Farm is derived from the former manor of Mareys. The form Stow St. Mary was erroneously adopted in the late 19th century. The church, dedicated to St. Margaret, was established in the 13th century, apparently to replace an earlier manorial chapel near the present Morris Farm. The oldest part of the building is the 14th-century chancel. The nave was built in the 15th century and heightened in brick early in the 16th century. The medieval rood loft stair survives. A wooden steeple, replacing a bell-cote in the churchyard, was added in 1686 to house a new bell.

Turn right into the churchyard, head west to the rear and exit the churchyard via a gate. Go down the hill through paddocks and cross a stile. Head to a stile across the next field, cross this and head to the corner of the next field and cross the stile. Continue on the footpath heading to the trees and follow the path to a bridleway which was formally a railway line.

Note of interest: The Maldon to South Woodham Branch line

Once Great Eastern Railways opened the Crouch Valley Line, from Wickford to Southminster, a plan was approved to extend the line which ran from Witham to Maldon. This ran as far as Woodham Ferrers to join up with the Crouch Valley Line. The line was rapidly completed and opened in October 1889 just four months after the Crouch Valley Line. Small stations were completed at Stow Maries, Barons Lane (Purleigh) and Maldon West before the trains reached the main Maldon Station. Cold Norton had a comparatively large railway station similar in style to the railway stations at Southminster and Burnham-on-Crouch. Passenger traffic ceased shortly before World War 2 but the line continued to carry munitions during the war. At the end of the war, the line was in poor condition following heavy use and little or no maintenance, and it was decided not to resume passenger traffic as bus services were considered adequate. In 1953 goods traffic was stopped on the line; the track was taken up and most of the buildings demolished.

Turn left at the 'Stow Maries Halt Nature Reserve' sign and proceed along the path for approx. 1 ¼ miles, observing some obvious remnants of the railway. You may hear the occasional 'thwack' of a ball or voices. This is because you are passing through 'Three Rivers Golf & Country Club'. You will remain on the bridleway, only once having to by-pass a dismantled bridge. The bridleway exits on to a road. Turn right and walk along the road which ascends to the Cold Norton Church.

Note of interest: St. Stephen's Church, Cold Norton

St. Stephens is a small church situated on the edge of the village of Cold Norton and hosts one of the highest points of the Crouch Valley Trail. The Original St Stephens was demolished in 1835 to make way for the current church. The original church was built in the 12th century in weatherboard with a small spire. The current building was built by Mr G E Pritchett in a non traditional style in 1855. In about 1950, the bell tower was unstable and so was demolished. The bells were put into storage but have since been stolen. The only items left from the original church are a brass dated 1520 - dedicated to

an unknown lady and the pulpit and reading desk, which are believed to have been made from oak beams taken from the demolished original church.

At the church there is a footpath on the opposite side of the road. Cross the footbridge and go diagonally right across a field until you reach a hedge to the left of a tree. Go through the hedge, turn left and descend south with the hedge on your left. At the bottom of the field, enter another field and go diagonally right heading for a gap in the hedge. At the gap by a way marker, head straight on the right side of the hedge and proceed to a metal gate leading to the 'Lower Burnham Road'.

Turn right at the road and after 30 yards CROSS WITH CARE! Proceed on the footpath towards trees at the end of the field. Follow the footpath through the trees and go over the footbridge into the next field and head south again, passing a lone house, almost to the railway line.

Turn left at a way marker post and head for houses. Keep going past the houses and continue on the track which becomes a road. Head towards a 15 mile an hour limit sign to 'Fambridge Road'. Turn right at the road, cross the railway bridge and you will soon arrive at the approach to North Fambridge Rail Station.

Public Transport Link

North Fambridge Rail Station is situated on the Wickford to Southminster line and a link to Battlesbridge and South Woodham Ferrers stations is available here if your vehicle is parked at any of these locations.

Car parking is available at North Fambridge Rail Station.

STAGE 4: NORTH FAMBRIDGE TO BURNHAM-ON-CROUCH (9 miles/15 km)

To join the trail from North Fambridge Station, follow the exit road and cross the road onto the pavement side of 'Fambridge Road' and turn left.

Continue along the straight road heading south. When the pavement ends at the 'North Fambridge' sign, cross the road to another pavement. Where the

road bends right veer left onto the gravel track (Blue House Farm Chase). You will now pass by a nature reserve.

Note of interest: Blue House Farm Nature Reserve

This 600 acre farm has been managed by Essex Wildlife Trust since 1998. The majority of the farmland comprises of coastal grazing marsh with ancient creeks and hollows contributing to its salt marsh origins.

The flat fields have been grassland for the last 100 years and are used as a feeding ground for Brent Geese. Around 2,000 geese come to the area during the winter. Other winter wildfowl and wading birds include Lapwing, Golden Plover, Dunlin, Widgeon and Teal.

Springtime will bring passage migrants such as Green Sandpiper, Ruff and Spotted Redshank. There are a wide variety of breeding birds including Skylarks, Meadow Pipit, Reed Buntings, Yellow Wagtails and Barn Owls.

Ignore all turnings into the reserve and continue to the shed with 'Heritage Lottery Fund' displayed. Go through the wooden gate to its right. Continue on the path towards the seawall. Then cross the stile on the right at the waymarker sign, cross the footbridge and then head west on marshy footpath. Head for the post with a waymarker, rise to the bank, turn left heading just to the right of an outbuilding and then join the stone track. Where the track bends right, join the permissive path to the left and exit into the car park of the Ferryboat Inn.

Watering Hole: If you have been walking for some time then take a break at the idyllic 'Ferryboat Inn'. This will be your last opportunity for a stop before Burnham-on-Crouch.

Rise up the steps on the other side of the car park and turn left onto the seawall, passing the yacht station entrance. Then, head to the river. When you reach the quay and slipway, turn left and pass through 'Fambridge Yacht Haven'.

Now commences the approx. 8 miles to Burnham-on-Crouch along the seawall. After a while the imposing steeple of St Nicholas Church of Canewdon looms on the south side of the river. When the river veers left, Althorne will come into view and you will pass Bridgemarsh Island. To the left are the hills of the trail section between Woodham Ferrers and Cold Norton.

As you approach Althorne, notice how the terrain has changed from flat marshland to rolling farmland looking northwards. Keep on the seawall when you reach the chalets at Althorne and on to Bridgemarsh Marine.

You can leave the trail here if you wish and make your way to Althorne Rail Station.

To leave the trail for Althorne Station turn left on to the stony track at Bridgemarsh Marine and head along between houses. Continue on the stony track for about ¼ mile, pass over the level crossing and turn left into the station car park.

Public transport link

Althorne Station is situated on the Wickford to Southminster line and a link to Battlesbridge, South Woodham Ferrers, North Fambridge or Burnham-on-Crouch Stations is available here if your vehicle is parked at any of these locations.

Car parking is available at Althorne Rail Station.

Note: Joining at this point provides a shorter and easier going section of the trail. This will appeal to those who prefer a more leisurely walk with limited obstacles such as stiles.

To join the trail at Althorne Station, turn right out of the station car park, pass over the level crossing and continue down the stony track for about ¼ mile. Turn left onto the seawall just before the sign for 'Bridgemarsh Marine'.

Now proceed along the seawall and you will soon head in with a creek inlet on your right. Where the inlet stops, turn right and pass through a metal kissing gate and then head out to the river.

Note of interest: The River Crouch

Although the interest of this trail is the Crouch Valley, a little attention in connection to the river itself is relevant. The Crouch rises through a series of springs into ponds situated on Burstead Golf Club, just south of Billericay. It briefly travels south, before heading east towards Wickford and generally follows the easterly course until it flows into the North Sea between Holliwell Point and Foulness Point. A major tributary to the river is the River Roach, which flows into the Crouch south-east of Burnham-on-Crouch and the 'Crouch Harbour Authority,' which is the statutory harbour and navigation authority for both rivers. The 'River Crouch Navigation' lies between the section from Battlesbridge to Holliwell and Foulness Points (17.5 miles). Abundant wildlife and boating activities are major features of the river.

There is nothing more to do now than to enjoy walking alongside the river for the next 1 ½ miles. During this section, you will pass over 'Cliff Reach' and as you descend keep to the trees just on your right. At the bottom there is a sign 'No litter-No fires-No overnight Damage', and just to the left proceed on to a path that leads to the river edge and then to the seawall proper.

When the seawall ends at a garden gate, turn left down some steps, go through a 5-bar gate and turn right. Proceed with trees on your right to the end of the field. Go through a kissing gate and walk straight ahead along a road. Follow the road as it bends right passing 'Creeksea Sailing Club' to rejoin the riverside.

Continue on the seawall and soon Burnham-on-Crouch will come into view. Head towards the yacht harbour until you reach the RNLI lifeboat station. Pass to the left of the lifeboat station and head to the right of the large light blue workshop, harbour office and the bar and restaurant. Then make for the left of the marina by going diagonally right and joining a stone path heading towards the river.

When you reach the river, follow the path round to the left and head for Burnham Town. Notice the innovative house boats that you pass, including a concrete hull example with the name 'Mulberry' designed during World War 2.

Continue on the path which takes you to the town - passing yacht and sailing clubs, tea shops and winds between architecture that is typical of a small Essex coastal town. When you reach the Anchor Hotel, turn left into 'Shore Road' (unmarked), then right into the 'High Street'. Walk approx. 30 yards to arrive at Burnham's cherished Clock Tower. The Clock Tower marks the end of The Crouch Valley Trail.

About Burnham on Crouch

Burnham-on-Crouch is part of the Maldon District of Essex and in addition to being a principle settlement on the River Crouch; it is one of Britain's leading places to practice yachting. The town hosts a sailing event known as 'Burnham Week' which takes place annually in August, and includes competitive yacht and dinghy racing on the river. The event is shared among the four established sailing clubs in Burnham: the Royal Corinthian Yacht Club (linked to the sailing club with the same name in Cowes, Isle of Wight), the Royal Burnham Yacht Club, the Crouch Yacht Club and the Burnham Sailing Club.

The yacht harbour has been a major feature of this well-known sailing town since its construction in 1989. With all the facilities you would expect at a premier marina, it offers antifouling, outfitting, rigging, gel repairs and painting services.

The Clock Tower is Burnham's best known landmark. It is a red brick octagonal clock tower with black brick quoins and diapering which was built in 1877. The tower is in four stages with a fish scale tiled ogee roof. The Tower was dedicated to the memory of Laban Sweeting, a well known local oyster merchant who was renowned for his philanthropy amongst local residents. Attached to the clock tower is St Mary's House, a building now used as flats, although its former use was as Burnham Endowed School.

Burnham is a town with attractive architecture and many public houses, restaurants and tea rooms to be enjoyed. Its attractions include a working

steam railway museum, which can be found on the Southminster Road, just north of the town.

Public Transport Link

Links to Burnham-on-Crouch are possible by rail and bus.

By bus: For all bus services that serve this location, please visit the website: www.travelinesoutheast.gov.uk select the 'find a timetable' tab and enter 'Burnham-on-Crouch Clock Tower' in the location field. Services are available to Burnham-on-Crouch Rail Station.

By rail: Burnham-on-Crouch Rail Station is situated on the Wickford to Southminster line - this is a good option if your vehicle is parked at any of the other stations on the line noted in these trail directions.

Car parking is available at Burnham-on-Crouch Rail Station.

To walk to the station from the Clock Tower; turn left down the High Street heading west, passing the Constitutional Club on your right. When the road bends to the right it becomes 'Station Road'. Simply continue along this, passing the police station on the left. You will eventually reach the station. (Total distance approx. ¾ mile).