The River Alde is little more than a stream until it nears Snape Maltings. Here the river becomes tidal and it broadens into a wide estuary. It’s a place of glistening wildlife spectacle that changes with the passing seasons.

The River flows through a wide, barely discernible valley. The countryside here is highly characteristic of the AONB, an intimate mosaic of wetland, woodland, farmland and heath that makes the area so special and deservedly recognised as one of Britain’s finest landscapes. Signs of habitation around the River Alde date back to at least Roman times. Today, Snape village remains a thriving rural community whilst Snape Maltings is an excellent example of an enterprising business flourishing within a protected area.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of Britain’s finest landscapes. It extends from the Stour estuary in the south to the eastern fringe of Ipswich and north to Kessingland. The AONB covers 403 square kilometres, including wildlife rich wetlands, ancient heaths, windswept shingle beaches and historic towns and villages.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB

The Higher Ground on either side of the river is part of the Sandlings plateau, a narrow band of light, sandy soil that runs roughly north-south from Southwold to the eastern fringe of Ipswich. Originally the land around the river would have been woodland, but its use by people over thousands of years has led to the more varied landscape we see today. The sandy soils were unsuitable for intensive agriculture, so sheep grazing dominated for many centuries. This led to the development of large expanses of heathland, a landscape of grassland, scattered trees and heather through which huge flocks of sheep roamed. Over the last century, modern farming methods, forestry and the growth of towns and villages have brought change and much of the area’s heath has been lost. Fortunately, fragments survive in the Alde valley and elsewhere in the AONB.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB is a partner of the Balance project, part-financed by the European Union through the Interreg IV A Cross-Border Programme.

Suffolk, Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB

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Visiting Snape Maltings

The Alde Estuary is vitaly important for wildlife, in particular, migratory wading birds and wildfowl. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and, because of its international significance, a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar wetland site. Many of the species for which it is important can be seen from the Snape Explorer trails. By visiting at different times of the year, you can enjoy a wonderful wildlife spectacle that changes with the passing seasons.
Walk to the Warren

Distance: 2 miles (3.2 km)

Time: 1 hour 30 mins
Terrain: Easy – Ground under foot fairly flat, part of route on minor public road, one stile. Please be aware of traffic.

From the Plough and Sail pub in front of Snape Maltings, cross Snape Bridge and turn right onto the grassy embankment with the river Alde on your right.

This lovely circular walk follows the bank of the river, winding through grazing marsh, reed beds and marshy scrub until it reaches Snape Warren. Here, the trail turns left, following a path through the wood for about 250m, before turning left once more.

Continue through marshland to Snape village. At the crossroads in the centre of Snape, turn left and follow the road back to Snape Maltings.

The walk can easily be extended by adding a loop around Snape Warren, following the footpaths through the woods, foreshore and heathland.

River’s Edge Ramble

Distance: 2 miles (3.2 km)

Time: 1 hour 30 mins
Terrain: Easy – Ground under foot fairly flat, part of route on minor public road. Please be aware of traffic. We recommend that some type of high visibility clothing is worn.

This walk begins from the car park in the south eastern corner of the Maltings complex, beyond the music school building.

Follow the footpath across open farmland and then over a short, wooden boardwalk. Continue past a small area of scrub before crossing a longer boardwalk through a reedbed.

After the boardwalk, the path continues through a small area of saltmarsh (please be aware that this section can flood during very high tides). Cross farmland once more to reach the end of the trail at Iken picnic site.

This walk can be extended by continuing along the riverside footpath beyond the picnic site. This provides excellent views of the river, its birdlife and Iken Church in the distance. The footpath can be very muddy in places particularly in the winter. You can walk all the way to the church by following the footpath when it turns away from the river to the public road. Turn left along the road and first left along Church Lane. Do not try to walk all the way to the Church along the river.

Images: A. Dandelion – wildflower seeds are an important food for farmland birds – Dave Pressland/FLPA. B. Bearded Tits – ‘ping’ in the reedbeds along the river - Paul Sawer/FLPA. C. Gatekeeper – one butterfly to look out for on a summer walk - Malcolm Schuyl/FLPA. D. Marsh Harriers – can be seen in the area - Robert Carol/FLPA. E. Redshank – visit in important numbers in winter and breed on the saltmarsh during summer.

Find out more about the Countryside Code:
www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk