

## WALKS OFF THE STOUR VALLEY PATH

# EXPLORE 'DRAGON COUNTRY' (BURES AND WISSINGTON)

Walk length: 11.25 miles (18.1 km)  
Please use OS Explorer map 196



## An Introduction to the 'Dragon Country' Walk

Between Bures and Wissington several small, tributary streams flow into the River Stour from both Suffolk and Essex, producing a surprisingly hilly landscape that gives rewarding vistas from the higher ground across a variety of landscapes. The picturesque villages of Bures St Mary, Wissington and Wormingford are well endowed with rich artistic and historic associations, not least the legend of a fierce dragon which once dwelt in the neighbourhood...

### Points of interest

The **St Edmund Way** is a 79 mile (127 km) long distance path across Suffolk, sharing parts of the Stour Valley Path then heading north via Lavenham to Bury St Edmunds, the burial place of the martyr St Edmund slain by the Danes in 869.



Bures Mill

'Bures' comprises three settlements, Bures Hamlet and Mount Bures on the Essex side of the river, and Bures St Mary in Suffolk. Almost a mile north-east along the St Edmund Way you come to St Stephen's Chapel. This isolated, thatched chapel barn is where St Edmund was reputedly crowned king of East Anglia in AD 855. (To reach the Chapel you should divert off the Fysh House Farm to Over Hall footpath and take the short permissive path.)



**The Dragon legend** dates back to 1401: "a dragon vast in body with crested head, teeth like a saw, and tail extending to an enormous length" ('Wormingford, An English village', by Beaumont and Taylor). There are many theories about the legend, but the most credible appears to be that the 'dragon' was a crocodile, brought back from the Crusades to the Tower of London for Richard I. It escaped into the marshlands of rural Essex and made its way to the River Stour, feasting on sheep along the way.

From the south side of the chapel, looking east, you can see on the facing hillside (private land) a huge landscaped dragon... It can be seen striding along as if about to seek refuge in Wormingford Mere, which lies in the Stour Valley below, just into Essex. He looks best in the evening sun.



Dragon as seen from St Stephen's Chapel

The walk takes you along the south edge of **Arger Fen and Spouse's Vale**, both Suffolk Wildlife Trust managed woodland reserves, famous for bluebells in spring, delightful places to visit all year.

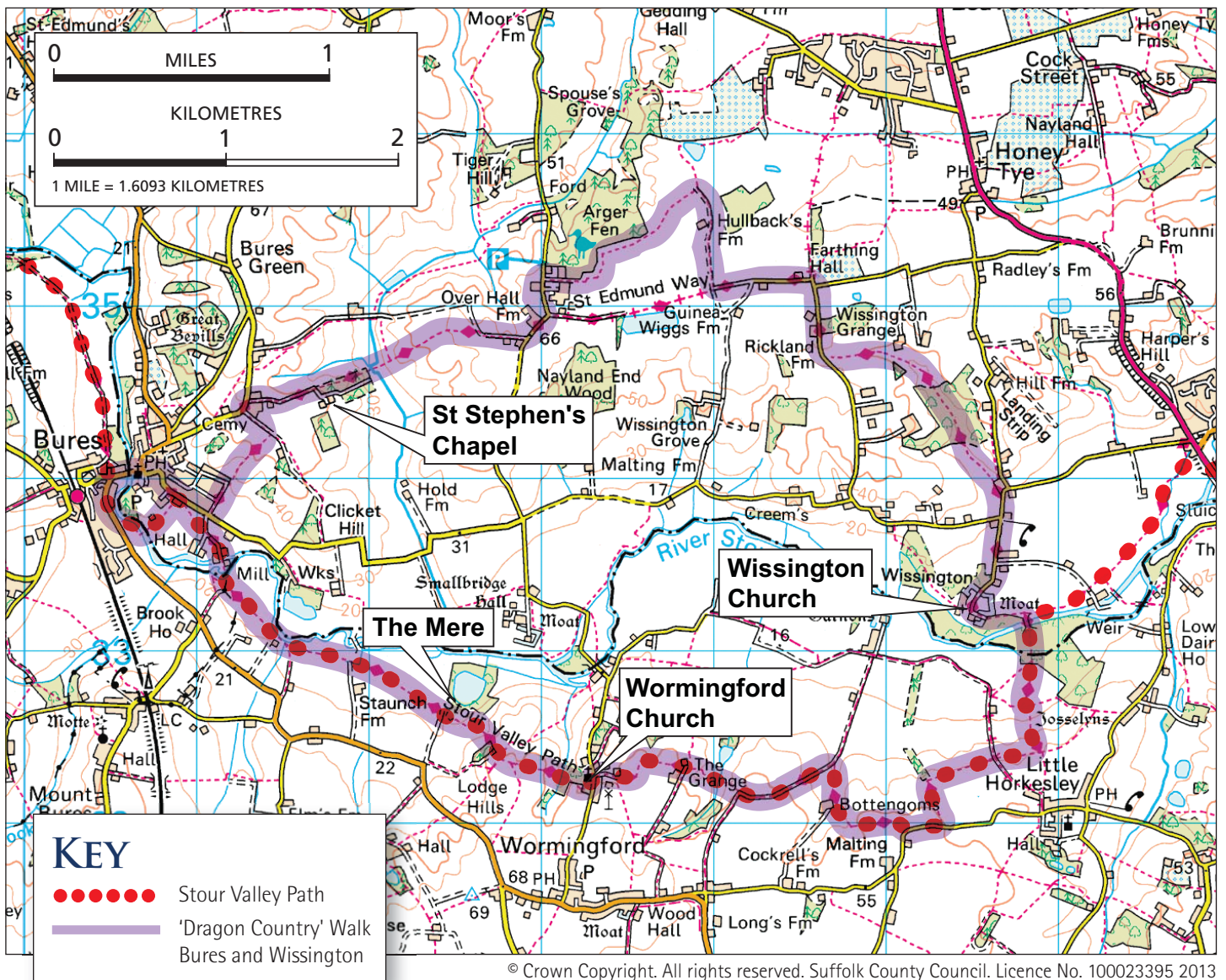
**Wissington** (or 'Wiston') is set in peaceful surroundings among tall trees and old farm buildings. Inside the church are medieval wall paintings including (on the north side of the nave) St Francis preaching to the birds (thought to be the earliest picture of him in English art!), and spanning the north doorway is a magnificent dragon...



Wissington Church  
©Mike Hunter

**Wormingford** enjoys panoramic views of the Stour Valley, and overlooks places evoked by Adrian Bell in 'Men and the Fields', an account of country life in the 1930s. A recent account of life in the area by local author Ronald Blythe is 'Word from Wormingford'. Both books are illustrated by John Nash RA, who is buried in Wormingford churchyard, where relations of John Constable are also buried. The name of the village is said to derive from the giant worm-like creature (a crocodile?) that once terrorised people in these parts, and which is depicted in the east window of the north aisle of the church.





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Terrain: Easy walking on good paths and tracks, with some gentle and some more moderate 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.



## Refreshments

A range of refreshments are available in Bures (village store and pub). There is a village store in Warmingford (off the route). Please take water and a snack with you.

## Car Parking

Parking is available in Bures, Arger Fen, Wissington and Warmingford – please park considerately.

## Transport

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

**Train:** Bures has a station on the Sudbury to Marks Tey line with connections to London, Colchester, Harwich International and Ipswich.

**Bus:** Bures has a direct bus service from Colchester and Sudbury with connections to Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich.

## Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be a responsible dog owner
- Protect plants and animals, prevent fires and take your litter home
- Leave things as you find them and follow any signs

