



Circular Walks

# The Nine Stiles Walk

A walk in the heart of the Brecks with no stiles!



# Welcome



Brandon lies in The Brecks, one of the driest areas in England and a landscape of gorse-covered sandy and chalky soils characterised by purple heathland, tall pines and rare wildlife.

In the 11th century, Brandon was known as Bromdun meaning a 'hill where broom grows'. The Domesday Book of 1086 records it as having just 25 households and over the centuries the town expanded on the higher land of the Little Ouse valley.

From medieval times Brandon was renowned for 'warrens'; the farming of rabbits for their pelts sold to London merchants. Warrens were still worked here into the early 1900s.

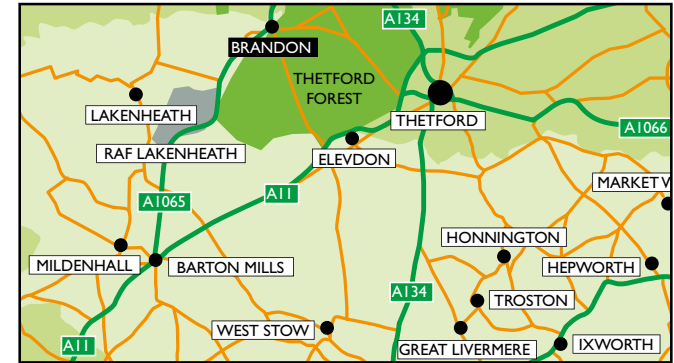
The main industry over time has been flint mining. From prehistoric times flint was mined across the Brecks with Brandon becoming a major centre for mining and knapping, the process whereby flint nodules are cut for gunflint. The quality of Brandon gunflint was so renowned that the town supplied the British Army for the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Today Brandon is a small market town. It sits on the very edge of Thetford Forest, home to Brandon Country Park, with the Little Ouse River flowing through town and RAF Lakenheath airbase close by – you may hear jets flying low overhead.

This walk follows sections of the 'Beating the Bounds' route, a traditional walk marking the parish boundary. This walk was more recently called 'The Nine Stiles Walk' but the stiles have long since been removed leaving a very pleasant and easy to follow trail through the countryside.

The walk starts at Brandon Leisure Centre Car Park, Church Road, Brandon IP27 0JB

## Location



## Directions

Brandon is located in the northwest of Suffolk on the border with Norfolk where the A1065 meets the B1106. It lies 7 miles west of Thetford and 18 miles north of Bury St Edmunds.

## Public Transport

Brandon has a train station with an hourly service from Cambridge and Ely, Thetford and Norwich. It is also served by bus. Visit [www.suffolkonboard.com](http://www.suffolkonboard.com) for timetables and to plan your journey.

## Discover Suffolk

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# The Nine Stiles Walk

**DISTANCE:** 3.5 miles (6km)

**DURATION:** 2 hours

**TERRAIN:** Sandy paths, uneven in places, country lanes, and pavements



From **A** turn left to join the tree lined path, Victoria Avenue. Continue along the path to reach a staggered junction of paths. **1**

Bear left on to a cycle path and continue ahead to The Orchard on your left. You can wander through the orchard which is full of plum and apple trees and then re-join the cycle path further along. Immediately after the orchard turn left through a metal kissing gate onto a footpath. **2** You now follow a section of the 'Via Beata' and Hereward Way.



David's Head in Pembrokeshire. The Hereward Way is a 110-mile path that stretches from Oakham in the East Midlands to Knettishall Heath in Suffolk, linking the Viking Way with the Peddars Way. It is named after Hereward the Wake, who in 1071 made one of the final stands against William the Conqueror on the Isle of Ely.

Follow the footpath passing through a second metal kissing gate into an open field with a paddock on your right. Continue over the field and pass through a third metal kissing gate and continue straight ahead past a beacon to reach an access road. You can see St Peter's Church in the near distance on your left.

You are now at the parish boundary. The Little Ouse River is a short distance to your right.

**'Beating the bounds' is a centuries old tradition of beating local landmarks with branches to remind everyone of parish boundaries.**

People would carry slender willow branches and swat landmarks that separated the parishes. As they walked they sang songs, carried flags, told stories, and created memories, gathering on the village green at the end of the walk for a celebration.

The custom was practised in England, Wales and New England USA. Led by older people in the community it created a shared mental map

The 'Via Beata', which means 'the way of blessing', is a 400-mile pilgrimage route across the widest point in Britain from Lowestoft in Suffolk to St



and living record of the parish boundary that was passed down through the generations. It could also be a time for reconciling differences between parishes, with those who did not take part being viewed as uncharitable or unneighbourly.

By the 16th century the enclosure act arrived and the tradition of 'beating the bounds' began to disappear although it is still maintained in some parishes as a ceremonial walk.

In Brandon 'Beating the Bounds' continues as an annual celebratory walk held every August.

This area is on the south bank of the Little Ouse River and was used by Anglo-Saxons as the river provided food, water and transport. Buried under this field are the remains of one of the most important Anglo-Saxon settlements to be discovered, described by archaeologists as a 'wealthy, literate, Middle Saxon settlement of either royal or monastic status'. Excavated in 1980-1988, the settlement dated from the mid-7th to late 9th centuries and was a centre of textile production and contained a smithy and a bakery.

Cross the access road and follow the footpath ahead past allotments on the right bearing left onto a grassy path to cross a small wooden footbridge.

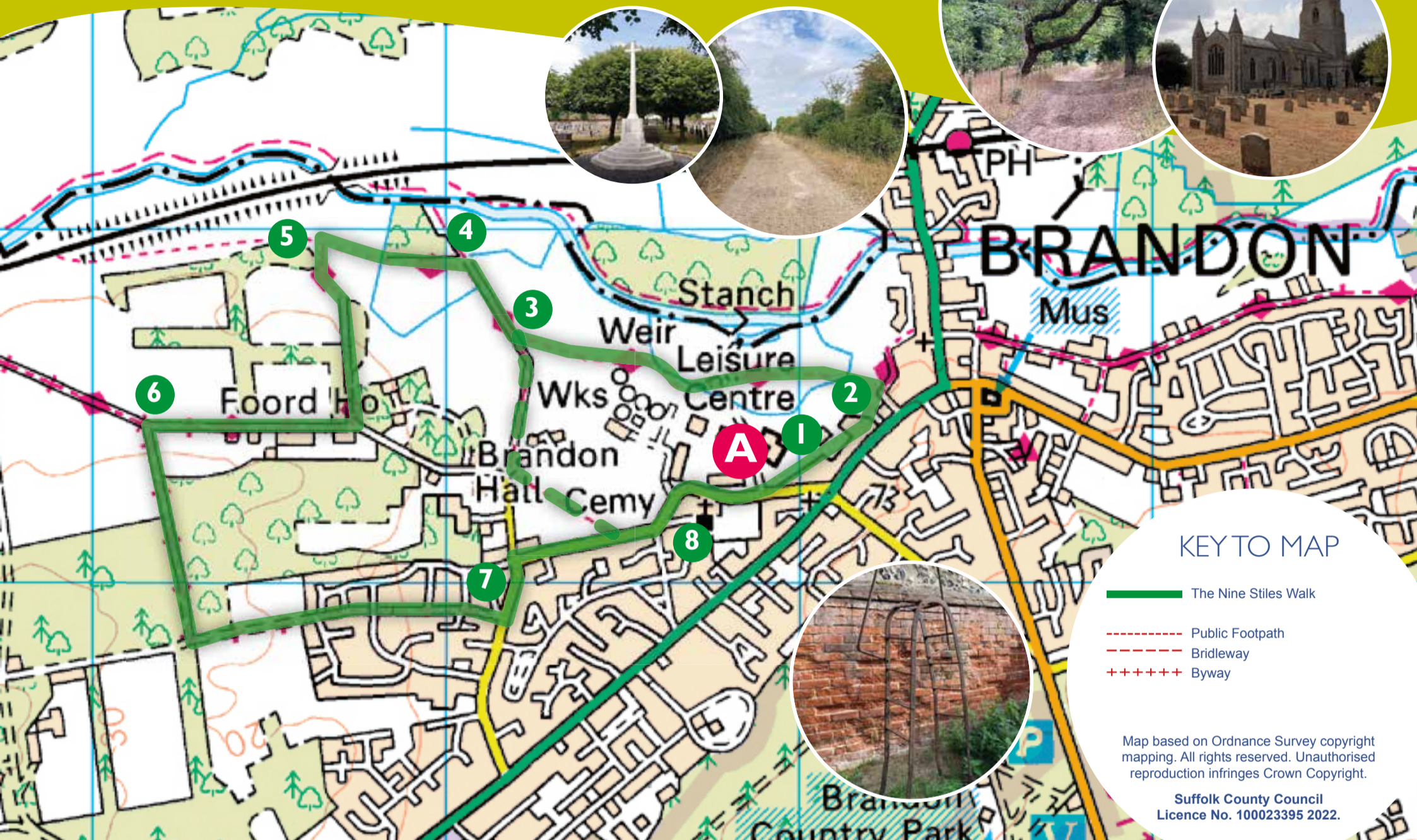
Follow the enclosed footpath to emerge onto open grassland and continue between paddock fencing to reach an access track. The track is called Smallfen Lane. **3**

Shortcut: (reduces the walk to 2 miles) Turn left and follow Smallfen Lane to reach Chalk Road. Turn left onto a footpath and continue to reach a fork. Bear right to reach Church Road. Turn left and continue to return to **A**.



# The Nine Stiles Walk

A walk in the heart of the Brecks with no stiles!



## KEY TO MAP

-  The Nine Stiles Walk
-  Public Footpath
-  Bridleway
-  Byway

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Turn right and follow Smallfen Lane to where it bends left to end at a wide metal gate. Keep right and follow the wide grassy, sandy path amongst pine trees. This is typical Breckland landscape. **4**



The word 'breck' is medieval in origin and means 'the brakes', referring to how the land was broken up for farmland and then allowed to revert back to wilderness once the soil was exhausted. The loose soils gave rise to sandstorms, a regular occurrence in previous centuries, and belts of twisted Scots Pine were planted as windbreaks to stop the precious topsoil eroding away.

The Brecks is steeped in human history stretching back to the Stone Age. Two thousand years ago the Iceni tribe had their homeland here and it was from here that Boudica led an uprising against the Romans.

The geology of the landscape gave rise to flint deposits: the Brecks was the flint capital of Britain. Flint has been mined here since the Neolithic Period and played a major part in the history of the area. Brandon's flint knappers were renowned as the best and Brandon became the first choice of the British Army to supply its gunflints, supplying over a million flints a month.

The Brecks once had the largest concentration of rabbits in the country; the dry sandy soil being ideal for burrowing. Introduced by the Normans in the 12th century, rabbits were farmed in 'warrens' for their meat and fur. This created vast open heathlands with few or no trees or shrubs.

Today, the Brecks contains the largest lowland forest in the UK and is one of the most important wildlife areas in Britain being home to endangered wildlife such as woodlark and nightjar, 25 species of invertebrates listed as in danger of extinction in Britain, and 10 species of bat who use of the river valley habitats as feeding grounds.

For more information about The Brecks visit <https://breck.org>



Continue along the wide grassy, sandy path and a metal kissing gate and continue to reach a path junction. **5**

Keeping the fence on your left, turn left on to the track. This is called Sandy Drove. Follow Sandy Drove to reach a large metal gate. Pass through the small gate on the right on to a Byway. This is Chalk Road.

Turn right. Follow the Byway for approximately 1/2 mile past houses, a farm and Brandon Primary Substation on your left. Chalk Road is lined with ancient hedgerows of crab apples, hops, hawthorn, brambles, spindle and wild rose. Continue under two electricity pylons to reach a sandy track on your left.

Turn left onto the track **6** You are now leaving the 'Via Beata' and Hereward Way.

Continue along the undulating track to reach a wooded area.

At gaps in the trees on your right, look out over fields to glimpse the tip of the church spire in Hockwold and the satellite tracking station of three giant white 'golf balls' at Feltwell.

Continue ahead along the track to a metal gate. This is another parish boundary. Turn left and continue along the path with paddocks on your right. You can see St Peter's Church ahead in the distance.

Continue past the houses and keep on the track passing a children's play area on the right to a road. Cross to The Drove and follow the pavement over a staggered junction past Pond Lane to a T-junction. There is a red letter box and bus shelter opposite. **7**

Turn left and follow the pavement past the Post Office keeping right at the crossroads with The Street on to Manor Road. You soon pass a pond and a bench on your left.

Continue ahead and at the left bend go straight ahead to the church. The former Workhouse is on your left. **8**

The workhouse dates from 1778 and accommodated up to 22 inmates. It was later converted to a Victorian National School in 1843. You can see an inscription on a limestone plaque above the entrance.

Enter the churchyard.

St Peter's Church dates from late 13th century with renovations in the 19th century. It has an impressive squat tower with six bells, two magnificent, spired turrets, and gargoyles including a Cheshire cat!

Inside, the church contains late 19th and early 20th century glass, especially on the two north windows in the chancel, signed by Leonard Walker, an artist who was only 19 years old.

St Peter's Church is locked but has a regular Sunday service.

The churchyard connects with the adjoining cemetery and contains some plague graves, many limestone graves dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, Commonwealth War Graves, a War Memorial and a Polish War Memorial in memory of Polish Officers.

Polish families arrived in Suffolk and Norfolk in 1947 when the British Government took in families and soldiers displaced by the war or deported to Siberian Gulags. They lived in 'displacement camps', the nearest one being the Brandon London Road Camp.

Continue through the cemetery to rejoin pavement to return to **A**.



## Please follow the Countryside Code:

- ✓ Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors.
- ✓ Leave gates and property as you would find them and follow paths.
- ✓ Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home.

- ✓ Keep dogs under effective control.
- ✓ Plan ahead and be prepared.
- ✓ Follow advice and local signs.

