

Start with the Diss Beacon of Hope at your back, with the Mere on your left.

Take the Park tarmac path down the hill, and **follow Madgett's Walk around the edge of the Mere.**

***Diss Mere** is thousands of years old: a natural basin, created by the collapse of the chalk bedrock at the end of the Ice Age, it is about six acres of open water, around six metres deep, with a further 23 metres of mud beneath, making our Mere one of the deepest natural inland lakes in England. Some say Diss acquired its name from the Saxon word 'Dic' or 'Disce', meaning a 'ditch of standing water'. In Victorian times, the frozen Mere hosted ice carnivals with fancy dress skaters and Chinese lanterns, as well as a cricket match! Until the 1930s, people regularly swam in the Mere. Today, the Mere is renowned among local fishermen for its stock of Crucian Carp (*Carassius carassius*), the only member of the Carp family to be considered indigenous in south east England. They are very hardy fish, able to tolerate cold conditions and resilient to pollution.*

At Diss Town Sign, turn left up (pedestrianised) Mere Street.

***Diss Town Sign** shows two scenes: **John Skelton**, Rector of Diss (1505-1529) and Poet Laureate, in his role as tutor to the young Prince Henry (later Henry VIII) and his sisters; and the noble maiden **Matilda** refusing the advances of King John, who murdered her with a poisoned egg in revenge. A legend connects the two: it is said that, to entertain his young pupil, Skelton fused several stories together, producing one in which Matilda escaped King John to join her newly married husband in a woodland: this may have been the original inspiration for the tale of **Maid Marian and Robin Hood!** Diss Town Sign was made in 1962 by Harry Carter, Norfolk's most prolific village sign maker (d.1983).*

As you walk up Mere Street, look up to see historic Diss above the modern shop fronts: elaborate timber and brickwork over Tatters and Diss Discount; faded Georgian elegance above Poundland; and a huge, ancient wooden lintel on the British Heart Foundation. The elaborate wooden carvings on Holland and Barrett including one of our two carved dragon posts, depicting an angel.

Walk straight up across the Market Place, past Diss Museum on your right.

Cross Church Street and continue straight uphill on Mount Street, past St Mary's Church on your right and with the historic Golden Triangle of Diss to your left.

Turn right into the churchyard, at the corner of the 16th century Saracen's Head Inn with its wonderful carvings. Follow the churchyard path around St Mary's.

*Dating back to 1280, **St Mary's Church** had Tudor Poet Laureate **John Skelton** as its Rector from 1504-1529, and Diss celebrated his 500th anniversary in 2004 with a year-long festival. Skelton wrote some of his best poetry here in Diss, including 'Ware the Hawk', inspired by a day he found a local curate hawking inside St Mary's! **John Wesley** preached here on 20 October 1790 (aged 88); in 1785, Wesley had described Diss as "one of the most wicked towns in the Kingdom" for gambling, gaming and cock-fighting. In the 18th century, Methodist preachers were regularly pelted and drenched in Diss.*

Come out of the churchyard and turn left onto Church Street (once known as Dirt Street!).

Continue straight on up Frenze Road, following it all the way up to the railway line.

*Pass the historic **Quaker Meeting House** on your right: this 18th century meeting house, built in 1744 with an attached burial ground closer to the town centre, reflects greater*

toleration for, and confidence of, Quakers locally and nationally at that time (it was the second Meeting House to be built in Diss). In the 1890s a schoolroom was added to the Meeting House, forming a wing to the east with the former stables.

Pass Willbye Avenue on your left: **John Willbye** (1574-1638), the son of a Diss tanner, is probably the most famous of all the English madrigalists; his pieces have long been favourites, and are often included in modern collections. When his neighbour, the daughter of Cornwallis married Sir Thomas Kitson of Hengrave Hall near Bury St Edmunds, she took Willbye and his lute with her to provide music, which he continued to do all his life. As well as working in Suffolk, Willbye would also travel with the Kitsons to London regularly, so was also active on the London musical scene. He published two sets of madrigals: the first containing 30 was published in 1598, and the second containing 34 in 1609. His madrigals include 'Weep, weep mine eyes, Weep, O mine eyes' and 'Draw on, sweet night'. Willbye also wrote the poem 'Love not me for comely grace', and proofread Dowland's songs for publication. Willbye's style is characterised by delicate writing for the voice, acute sensitivity to the text and the use of "false relations" between the major and minor modes.

Cross with care under the railway line and take the footpath on the left (also signed the Angles Way and Boudicca Way). Follow this winding country track (restricted byway) through farmland to Frenze.

The ford at Frenze is an ideal place for dogs to have a drink, but **take the higher path to the left and use the wooden bridge** if you don't want to get your feet wet! This bridge is ideal for Poohsticks.

Coming out through a tiny woodland, **head slightly right and then immediately straight on, passing Frenze Hall on your right, and church of St Andrew on your left.**

Built in the early 17th century, Frenze Hall and its estate was purchased by William Betts in the 1860s. Betts converted the 400 acres of farmland into vast market gardens supplying London with fresh vegetables. To service the estate, **Betts built his own standard gauge railway** which connected to the Great Eastern Railway mainline at Diss and ran eastwards to Scole and north above Frenze Hall, covering around 7 miles in total, with branches leading off in several directions to cover the whole estate. William Betts also owned two brick fields in the area and, in the 1880s, added the brick facade to Frenze Hall using his own wares, the present-day 'late Victorian' external appearance preserving its much older oak-framed structure inside. The railway would transport Bett's market garden produce to London daily, and to avoid empty runs back to Norfolk, the returning wagons would be filled with fresh manure from the City's streets and stables to be spread on the land, as well as coal to power his brickworks. Betts' two locomotives were sold after his death in 1885 for £20 each and were shipped out to India.

During WWII, Frenze Hall was an RAF Bomber Command Splasher Six Beacon site, transmitting to guide bomber command aircraft missions. The radio equipment was installed inside a collection of single deck buses and huts in a field near the Hall. Their transmissions frequently interfered with local reception of BBC radio, causing some complaint from the populace... During World War II, bombs fell at Frenze but The Hall and St Andrew were undamaged.

The church of St Andrew, Frenze has no less than seven figure brasses, more than just about any other church in East Anglia, as well as other memorial inscriptions. The plain altar bears a medieval mensa; surviving boards from a Stuart royal arms have been collected together and hang above the south door; and there are two piscinas set into windowsills, one each side of the nave.

Carry on all the way up the Frenze Hall drive to the road.

Do be aware of cattle in the fields on either side. Look out for spectacularly tall trees in the woods to right and left. At the end of the drive, you can see Diss Business Centre: in Betts' time, this building was known as "the Great Barn" and the railway line ran directly behind it. With its huge arched doorways, it may have been used as an engine or maintenance shed for the locomotives, while produce was sorted and packed nearby. A large water storage tank was also housed here, fed by underground pipes which led from a pumping station that Betts built near to the river.

Turn left onto the road for a short distance, and then turn right after the barns onto a Restricted Byway.

This starts as a farm track beside open fields and then becomes a pretty lane enclosed by woodland which brings you all the way up to the A140. **At the end of the lane, turn right** onto the narrow sandy track which runs along side the A140.

Follow this all the way down to the roundabout and then **turn left, crossing the roundabout**, towards Scole.

Walk up Diss Road into Scole.

At the T junction, with the historic Scole Inn on your left, **turn right** past The Crossways Inn.

*The imposing Grade I Listed **Scole Inn**, now called Diss By Verve, was built in 1655 as a coaching inn for John Peck, a Norwich wool merchant. Originally named The White Hart, this inn is said to be one of the best examples in the country of its type, and a remarkably sumptuous one for its time. The inn originally had an extravagant sign which extended right across the road (which was removed after 1795). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Scole Inn hosted as many as forty stagecoaches a day. Charles II 'broke his fast' here, and Lord Nelson slept here. **The Scole Inn is haunted** by a lady called Emma, who was murdered by her jealous husband when they were staying here in the 1750s; he wrongly accused her of having an affair with a fellow guest, a highwayman. Emma appears dressed in a grey dress and bonnet, always weeping. In the 1780s, another **highwayman, John Belcher**, had his headquarters here, and would ride his horse right up the hand-carved Jacobean oak staircase to hide in a bedroom when pursued by the law! The gate put at the top of the stairs to stop him can still be seen, and the ghostly clattering of his horse's hooves can sometimes be heard today. The impressive exterior of the historic Grade I Listed inn is a fine example of the Dutch Jacobean influence of the period, and inside the stunning original features include an original hand-painted sundial and two magnificent fireplaces in the bar, reputedly the largest in East Anglia.*

Turn right past The Crossways Inn and walk straight downhill into Scole Pocket Park.

Scole Pocket Park offers an ideal opportunity to stop and have a picnic, if you haven't already enjoyed a pub lunch at one of Scole's historic taverns!

Continue straight, crossing over the river Waveney and keep on into Suffolk, passing the Scole Dragon on your left.

***The Scole Dragon** was carved in 2002 by artists Ray Brooks and Ben Platts-Mills, working with the local community as part of the Hearts of Oak Organisations Sculpture Project. The dragon is the animal of the St Michael Alignment, the ley line which runs from St Michael's Mount (off the coast of Cornwall) through Glastonbury, Avebury, Bury St Edmunds, Thornham Magna, Eye, Scole and on to Hopton-on-Sea, near Great Yarmouth.*

*As you approach the roundabout, you are now walking on **the Roman site at Scole** which appears, from casual finds and limited excavation over the years, to have been a major roadside settlement or small town. Its position on the major road running between the Roman towns of Venta Icenorum (Caistor St Edmund) and Camulodunum (Colchester) means this could be the 'Villa Faustini' site of the Antonine Itinerary (a Roman road map), although this is not proved. Remains cover an area of some 35 acres, and indicate occupation throughout the Roman period. An excavation in advance of the A140 bypass construction in 1993 (NHER 1007) recovered a large quantity of evidence, including thousands of coins, pottery sherds and metal objects, as well as the rare recovery of several waterlogged items, thanks to the proximity of the river Waveney: fragments of a Roman writing tablet, timber-lined wells, timber framed buildings, and the remains of the first Roman roofing timbers to be recovered in Western Europe. Evidence such as two rare unfinished wooden bowls also indicates that the occupants did not rely entirely on the road for trade, but undertook industrial activity such as tanning, leather working, iron smelting and smithing themselves.*

Cross with care straight over the A143: turn right and almost immediately left onto a small footpath to the left of a cream cottage.

Keep left when the bridleway veers off to the right, and walk around the side of the field to the road, by some large feed hoppers.

A new farm shop may be coming here – subject to planning permission!

Turn right and walk up the B1118 to the T Junction with the A140, using the wide verges.

At T Junction, cross with care over the A140, and continue straight onto the (now disused) Old Bury Road. Follow Old Bury Road straight up, past farm on left, and on to B1077.

Cross B1077 and walk straight through the picturesque village of Stuston, past the Stuston phone box library on your left, and Place Farm Shop on your right.

Keep straight on past Peacock Montessori nursery and Roots Activity Centre on your right.

Carry on down the hill, and as the road rises again, **take the footpath on your right** through the woods.

Cross A143 with care: there are two kissing gates, one either side of the road.

Continue on the footpath straight over the field, down to the bridge.

Cross the road, and turn right, using the little path on the edge of the woods to walk up the hill safely immediately beside the road.

Cross the railway line with extreme care.

Follow the road up the hill into the pretty village of Palgrave.

Look out for the straw horned owl on the thatched roof of The Thatchers. Straw finials, like this, emerged from old farming traditions: hay ricks and straw stacks would be thatched and topped with an ornament intended to keep away both birds and witches. The designs were originally of a religious nature, thus intended to scare away witches, but a countryman always hedges his bets, and would say the ornaments also gave a witch something to play with, thus diverting her attention from making mischief elsewhere. Straw finials might also

signify who owned the rick, or who had done the thatching. Straw ornaments on the thatch of houses have been recorded as far back as 1689.

Also look out for ducks on the large pond on Burlington Close, and pargetting on Pear Tree Cottage.

At the T Junction, turn left.

Turn right before the church of St Peter, Palgrave, and keep right on the footpath past the cottages, passing both church and primary school on your left.

St Peter's Church, Palgrave: its stunning flintwork exterior is immediately impressive, with spandrels on the outer arch of the main door carved in relief with St Michael. The 15th century nave has a striking stencilled and painted single hammer-beam roof from the 1420s, possibly the work of Diss master carpenter John Hore. The tower is circa 1300 and contains a ring of eight bells, the oldest dating from 1737. In 1995 a stained glass window was installed, created by Suffolk artist Surinder Hayer Warboys.

As you continue down the footpath, look out for ornate oriental bird boxes on your right, and Palgrave's historic water pump on your left.

At the end of the footpath turn right, and continue straight down Lows Lane, which narrows to become a footpath, The Lows. The Lows soon opens up with farmland to the right before heading into a wood.

Look out for the beautiful fallow deer herd in the woods on the left!

Cross the bridge over the River Waveney.

[There is a lovely short riverside walk just to the left here, if you want more of a chance of seeing the fallow deer and still have the energy! Then return to The Lows.]

Follow The Lows straight up, keeping Tesco on your left.

Cross straight over Victoria Road with care, and turn left.

Go past the bus stop, and **turn right on the footpath** immediately opposite Tesco roundabout.

Walk straight up this footpath, passing the School Playing Field on your left, and the Rectory Meadow Cricket Pitch on your right.

At the end of cricket pitch, turn left onto The Entry, past Diss Church of England Junior Academy. Follow The Entry round to where it meets Frenze Road.

Look out for the cat straw finial on the thatched roof of Number 6!

At the T Junction with Frenze Road, turn left back onto Church Street.

At the Market Place, **turn left** before Diss Museum and **retrace your steps straight back down Mere Street.**

Turn right at Diss Town Sign by the Mere.

Follow Madgett's Walk to the left around the edge of the Mere back into the Park, finishing at the Diss Beacon of Hope.

THE END