

Blue House Farm

This combination of nature reserve and farm covers 240 hectares between the river Crouch and the railway line. It is almost entirely land reclaimed by the sea and a series of old sea walls can be seen snaking around the flat marshland. It is perhaps best known for the large flock of 2,000 Brent Geese that spend the winter here, having spent the summer months high up in Siberia within the Arctic Circle. However it is also home to a host of coastal species from rare plants and insects to mammals and birds.

Heronry are a common sight at Blue House Farm as there is a Heronry at Hall Wood in North Fambridge – a short flight from the rich feeding areas of the farm.

The reserve is always open to visitors and it is free to visit. There are three bird hides on the five kilometre circular route around the farm, which is a ten minute walk from North Fambridge Station. For a longer walk of about five miles you can get off the train at North Fambridge, walk down to Blue House Farm and then head easterly along the sea wall until you reach Althorne Marina where you head inland up to Althorne station.

More information about Blue House Farm and the other nature reserves can be found on the Essex Wildlife Trust's website www.essexwt.org.uk.



Red Shank

Photo by Tom Marshall

Grey Heron

Photo by Amy Lewis

The Crouch Valley Line

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The Wildlife of the Crouch Valley Line

The Crouch Valley Line runs from built-up Wickford, along the north bank of the River Crouch Estuary and out into the very rural Dengie Peninsula.

Wildlife can be seen even in the residential areas of Wickford. In addition to the familiar garden birds, urban foxes are common here and will often be seen in daylight hours. As you leave Wickford the countryside opens up into fields and hedgerows - look out for rabbits and flocks of rooks feeding on the farmland. Kestrels are also plentiful and can be easily recognised by their habit of hovering in mid-air whilst scanning the ground below for food.

The railway line crosses the River Crouch twice: the first time just outside Wickford, and then a mile and a half down the line, beside an Essex Wildlife Trust Nature reserve here called Shotgate Thickets.

As you approach the new town of South Woodham Ferrers you will cross an Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserve called South Woodham Fen.

On the other side of South Woodham Ferrers there is a fantastic stretch of track where the estuary comes right up to the railway embankment giving wide open views of the saltmarshes and mud. Thousands of ducks can be seen here in the winter, predominately Wigeon and Teal.

A kilometre to the north of the railway is another Essex Wildlife Trust reserve, Stow Maries Halt, which is famous for glow worms. Buzzards, which were eradicated from the South East of England, have returned to the area in recent years. They can often be seen circling high overhead along this section of the railway line.

Much of the land to the south of the railway line and even some to the north has been reclaimed from the sea. The low lying land is used for a mixture of arable farmland and grassland for sheep and cattle.



Kestrel

Photo by Bob Coyle

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Tickets and Travel Information

Latest information on train times and fares for any rail operator in the UK can be obtained from National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950 or via the website www.nationalrail.co.uk

Tickets & Fares

Tickets can be purchased from ticket offices, or ticket machines (where available) or from the conductor on the Crouch Valley Line. If travelling from a station with ticket selling facilities you must purchase your ticket before you board. For certain tickets types it is cheaper to book in advance online.

Off Peak Tickets

Travel after 8.45 on weekdays. Off-Peak Day tickets do not have evening peak restrictions so the return journey can be made at any time, including from London. There are also special tickets available off peak.

Super Off-Peak Day Tickets

When travelling to London or Stratford these tickets are valid on the first train that arrives in London after 12.00 on Mondays to Fridays. The return journey from London may not be made between 16.00 and 19.00 inclusive. On local journeys, Super Off-Peak tickets may be used at any time after 12.00. No return restrictions apply from stations outside London.

At weekends Super off-peak tickets may be used at any time of day so are the best value option.

Group Save Tickets

Groups of three or four travelling together can travel for the price of two to any station in the local area (including London Liverpool Street).

Child Tickets

Children aged 5-15 travel for half price and children under 5 travel free.

Railcards

Various railcards are available where you can get up to a third off the price of off-peak tickets.

16 – 25 Railcard – for anyone aged 16 – 25

Senior Railcard – for anyone aged 60 and over.

Friends and Family Railcard – for family groups.

Network Card – Anyone aged 16+ travelling in the South East (minimum fare applies weekdays).

2FOR1 offers at London attractions, theatre, restaurants, galleries, museums, tours and events.

Visit www.greateranglia.co.uk/2for1

Full details of Greater Anglia services, train times and ticket bookings can be found at www.greateranglia.co.uk

Facts about the Crouch Valley Line

1. Opened to goods trains 1st June/passengers 1st July 1889 by Great Eastern Railway.
2. The line runs for 16½ miles.
3. It was required to open before the Southend Line by act of parliament, because people felt it would not be completed had the main line been opened first.
4. The entire line was built with 2 tracks.
5. The first time a railway to Southminster was proposed was in 1865 from Billericay.
6. There were two private sidings opened in 1889, at Hogwell (between Woodham and Fambridge) and at Creeksea (between Althorne and Burnham). Both had closed by 1954.
7. A light railway to Bradwell on Sea was proposed in 1914, as Southminster was designed as through route.
8. Became part of by LNER in 1923
9. Maldon West branch line closed on 10th September 1939 closing as through route in 1941 and dismantled in 1953
10. Steam finished on passenger service's in 1956 replaced by diesel multiple units.
11. 1962 saw last steam trains on goods.
12. In 1962 the nuclear flask traffic began using the line, finishing in 2006
13. In 1968 the passing loops closed at all stations except Fambridge. Some of the station buildings were demolished in the 1980's.
14. The line was electrified in 1986



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The Crouch Valley Line

Your guide for the Wickford to Southminster branch line and surrounding area, for a great day out by train



GreaterAnglia

Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership

Established in 1998, the Partnership brings together 8 partners with the aim of promoting train travel and securing the future of our 5 branch lines. The Crouch Valley Line from Wickford to Southminster, has 7 stations along the line. Each station has dedicated station adopters who work with the train operator and the CRP under the **Greater Anglia Station Adoption Scheme**.

A really popular event provided by the Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership is our annual Santa Train, which is great fun for the local children in the communities along the line.



For more information on the ESSCRP work Please look at our website www.esscrp.org.uk



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Wickford

The Crouch Valley Line starts at Wickford, which is the link to the main line. Through services to and from London are available in the peak time, Monday to Friday.

Wickford town has a busy high street, with a market on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday - well worth a visit.

Battlesbridge

Battlesbridge Antique Centre is the largest centre of its type in Essex. Established in 1967, 80 dealers are housed in old buildings and court yards, one of which is a former mill. The Old Granary, which is just visible from the train, houses five floors of antiques, collectables and reproductions.

A coffee shop on the top floor commands spectacular views of the surrounding area and the weir that marks the start of the estuary and the tidal seawater that is part of the River Crouch. There is also a Motorcycle Museum which is open on Sundays. A visit could perhaps include a meal at one of the two public houses, The Barge Inn and The Hawk.



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Why not visit the **Hub café at Burnham Station** open Monday to Friday 6am to 12.30pm providing hot and cold snacks, papers, hot drinks and confectionary. Dry cleaning service available.



Burnham-on-Crouch is a small historic town situated on the banks of the River Crouch well known for its sailing connections. It is home to 5 sailing clubs. The annual Burnham Week at the end of August includes yacht and dingy racing on the River Crouch. Along the Burnham quayside are many interesting features including moored houseboats, The Burnham & District Museum and The War Memorial. There is a wealth of unusual shops together with hotels, pubs, cafés and restaurants. A visit to the High Street and its unique Clock Tower is a must.

The last Saturday in September is Burnham Carnival this event has been held annually for over a hundred years. Shop windows are decorated and roads are closed for stalls, entertainments and the illuminated carnival procession.

The Town's Art Festival is held in the last week of June annually, many local artists and craftsmen display their work in the shop windows in the Town. The Burnham Museum that week have an exhibition where many of these works of art are for sale.

Burnham to Wallasea Island Ferry. Why not take a trip on this delightful ferry ride to the RSPB Wild Coast Project? The Ferry operates on a 6 day a week dial a ferry service which starts from the 29th March 2013 for details phone 07704 06 04 82 or email burnhamferry@hotmail.co.uk

The RSPB at Wallasea Island is working hard to attract visitors to this beautiful coastal area. There is lots going on: you can view the marshes in bloom (sea lavender, sea aster and sea purslane create a carpet of colour); see the rusty seals basking on the mudflats, gleaming red-golden in the sunshine; or soak up the sun on the sea wall and hope to see a migrant butterfly - it could be a Clouded Yellow or Painted Lady.



South Woodham Ferrers

As the railways spread out across Victorian Britain, it became possible to bring perishable products into London overnight from previously inaccessible places. The scale and quality of such produce led to a collapse in agricultural land values in the Home Counties, creating an opening for speculators to turn marginal farmland into plots for housing. The early settlers were mostly Londoners looking for a new lifestyle, happy to live as pioneers in a wild and windswept setting.

As well as a major store, a choice of smaller shops, and a wide variety of eating places, South Woodham Ferrers is also home to the award-winning Crouch Vale Brewery and other leading edge local industries.

Latest addition to the town's amenities is the centrally situated Leisure Centre, with 25m swimming pool, climbing wall, fitness classes, all-seasons outdoor facilities and many more attractions for children and adults of all ages. Marsh Farm Country Park is a working farm where children can get close to farm animals and play safely in adventure play areas. The farm includes a visitors centre, gift shop and indoor lunch area. The country park also boasts some excellent riverside walks. www.marshfarmcountypark.co.uk

Tropical Wings Zoo has butterfly, animal and bird collections. There is also a gift shop and cafe. Within easy reach by taxi from the station (or by bus link from Battlesbridge) are the gardens of Hyde Hall, where the Royal Horticultural Society has invested hugely in a challenging setting populated with an extraordinary diversity of plants.

North Fambridge

North Fambridge is a small village on the north bank of the River Crouch. The station was originally called Fambridge and was renamed North Fambridge in 2007 to avoid confusion with South Fambridge on the other side of the river, which is fifteen miles away by road. The pretty station garden includes an anchor and is sponsored by Fambridge Yacht Haven.

At the end of the village is the quaint 500 year old Ferry Boat Inn which you can visit for a quiet drink or meal. Accommodation is also available.

Althorne is a small village on the ridge overlooking the River Crouch. The land sloping down to the river is designated as a Special Landscape Area and there are four conservation areas close to the waterside - two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (one a site of geological special scientific interest), a Special Protection Area (a Ramsar wild bird site), and a Special Area of Conservation (for plants). From the top of the ridge it is also possible to see the River Blackwater.

The village is accessed by a steep track from the station ¾ mile long. There are 2 pubs in Althorne both of which serve food. The third pub, The Black Lion built in 1770 is grade 2 listed (as are the weather boarded cottages nearby) but no longer trades as a pub. A circular pub walk of just over 5 miles takes you along the seawall and by footpath through the village to both pubs and back to the station via the churchyard of the 14th century St Andrew's Church. There is a shorter self guided nature walk through the comparatively newly planted Bass Wood and along the seawall past the old oyster pits; during this walk you can spot birds and salt marsh flowers. Full details of walks can be downloaded from our website www.esscrp.org.uk

At Althorne Station there is a small community garden supported by the Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership which was constructed when the old station-master's garden was incorporated into the car park.



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Althorne

Southminster has good local services including a selection of pubs where local ales can be enjoyed. The Southminster Flower Show is held every year in July. St Leonards Church was enlarged in the sixteen century, it is an imposing heavily built church in cruciform structure, with a small tower housing the only peal of 8 bells in the Dengie Peninsula. The Revd Dr Alexander Scott (Rector 1803 - 1840) was Chaplain and Private Secretary to Lord Nelson and cradled the dying Admiral at the Battle of Trafalgar.

Things to do around Southminster

Bradwell on Sea, a twenty minute bus ride from Southminster Railway Station, is a picturesque village with mounting steps outside the church and 19th century village lock-up. A two mile walk takes you to a dramatic landscape of open sky and sea. Beside the Bradwell Cockle Spit, a beach of shells and shingle is the mystical chapel of St Peter's built on the site (and with stones) of the Roman fort at Othona. The Othona community nearby offers a warm welcome to all comers:- founded just after World War 2, it continues to provide space to explore social and spiritual challenges in an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation.

Cycling from Southminster

Southminster to Bradwell via Tillingham, explore the picturesque countryside on your bike, cycle via very quiet lanes, stop at Tillingham for a fine real ale pub, on a Saturday or Sunday when the trains can accommodate plenty of bikes it makes for a smashing day out. For more details please look on our website www.esscrp.org.uk



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