



## SUFFOLK DOG WALKS

**Mike Trippitt** is a journalist who enjoys exploring the county, especially with his clumber spaniel, Farley

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# Along the riverbank

A circular walk tracing the historic navigation route of the Gipping Valley



## HOW FAR?

### Distances

- Bramford Meadows Picnic Site Car Park to Bushman's Bridge 0.5 miles
- .....
- Bushman's Bridge to B1113 0.6 miles
- .....
- B1113 to Thornbush Hall 0.9 miles
- .....
- Thornbush Hall to The Wild Man pub 0.9 miles
- .....
- The Wild Man pub to Hazel Wood 0.8 miles
- .....
- Hazel Wood to Bramford Meadows picnic site car park 0.6 miles
- .....
- TOTAL 4.3 miles**
- .....
- Total time, including lunch stop, 3 hours 55 minutes

### Local vets

- Barn Veterinary Practice  
The Barns, Wenham Road,  
Copdock  
IP8 3EY  
Tel: 01473 730213
- .....
- Ipswich Veterinary Centre  
1 Donald Mackintosh Way,  
Scrivener Drive,  
Ipswich  
IP8 3LQ  
Tel: 01473 555 000
- .....
- Orwell Veterinary  
Berners House,  
56 Berners Street,  
Ipswich  
IP1 3LU  
Tel: 01473 257557

It is the privilege of all the free men of Ipswich to drag the River Gipping. They have few privileges enough, but they have that.”

Whether the statement was true when it was uttered to Charles Dickens in 1859, as he fished the river with a rod and line, I cannot say, but the author watched as five men – “legalised marauders”, as he called them – began “the disgusting process of dragging the river with a huge net.”

We have come with Farley to the River Gipping at Bramford, not to fish but to walk a circular route along the riverbanks and across the meadows, pastures and fields of rural Suffolk to SproUGHTon. Bathed in

**LEFT:** Bushman's Bridge at Bramford  
**BELOW:** Farley on a mission



warm sunshine, the river is very different to that which Dickens experienced 160 years ago. Happily there's no trawl fishing.

“Fishing is much more regulated than it was in Charles Dickens' day,” says Roly Pipe, treasurer of Gipping Angling Preservation Society. “It is illegal to fish inland waters in the UK, unless you have, or are exempt from having, a valid rod licence.” The licence and byelaws, he tells us, specify the kind of fishing equipment that can be used. Among these are one or two rods and lines, a landing net and a keep net.

“Trawl nets,” Roly says, “are not listed as items of tackle that are legal to use.”

We are following Suffolk County Council's Mills and Meadows trail, and have brought along a handy guide downloaded from the Discover Suffolk website ([discoversuffolk.org.uk](http://discoversuffolk.org.uk)). We start the 4.3 miles from the county council owned car park at the Bramford Meadows picnic site, cross the B1067 and head north up the east bank of the river.

Bramford Meadows are managed as a traditional meadow on behalf of Bramford Parish Council. Hay is cut regularly, but other areas are left to long grass. Insects, wild flowers and plants flourish. It is a great place for a dog to roam.

Farley has just turned four and during our time walking with him, especially in the last year, we've noticed how he has





Heading towards The Grindle

matured. Like most Clumber spaniels, he has a stubborn streak but he's developed into just what The Clumber Spaniel Club predicts. "He will take about two to three years as a wild and loving youth before settling down into a truly aristocratic, good natured, dignified companion who, when he senses the time is right, will play the clown."

There's nothing better than meadows, hedgerows and riverbanks to produce an amalgam of scents driving Farley's nose down and tail up. We've certainly started our walk from a good spot.

The River Gipping rises at Mendlesham and becomes the tidal River Orwell at Ipswich. Though there is evidence of river traffic and trade from before medieval times, it opened as a navigation between Ipswich and Stowmarket in 1793.

Later on we will see Sroughton Lock, but first we find Bramford Lock lurking among trees and bushes at the water's edge. There are no lock gates now and passage through is not possible, but it's a reminder of this historic waterway's commercial past.

The Stowmarket Navigation had 15 locks raising barges 90 feet from the tideway to Stowmarket. Corn, slate and fertiliser were transported between the two, and goods were loaded at several water mills along the river. It closed to navigation in 1934.

Bushman's Bridge leads us over the river after half a mile. Along the path

*'Our walk is very different now. Away from the villages and water meadows of the Gipping Valley Path we have moved into agricultural rural Suffolk'*



westwards, the green canopy of summer shows the first signs of revealing autumn's golden gown. A rhus tree stands out in the sunlight, its leaves deep green and blood red. Further on, a distinct fragrance lingers on the morning air. It's not something we can place at first, but on passing an estate, where attractive new homes stand under construction, the penny drops.

A stock of yet to be used roof trusses stands adjacent to our path, and the aroma of freshly cut timber is all around. It's the evocative smell of a building site. Wonderful.

Once we emerge from the path, our route crosses both the B1067 and the B1113, and follows Bullen Lane for just under half a mile.

Our walk is very different now. Away from the villages and water meadows of the Gipping Valley Path we have moved into agricultural rural Suffolk. A public right of way with a sign imploring 'Please keep your dogs on the lead' leads us through fields adjacent to Fidgeons Farm and on to Thornbush Hall, a grade II listed building, parts of which date back to the 17th century.

Farley remains on his extender lead, though we can see other dog owners walking with their animals off lead. One tells us that most owners let their dogs off, so long as they remain on the tracks, and do not bother livestock. I'm always uncomfortable when people disobey such signs. No dog owner was ever prosecuted because his or her dog was under control and on a lead.

"Why take the risk?" I say to my wife, Clare, as we follow a lane, delightfully named The Grindle, back to the village. She's used to my rants.

Inevitably, during our walk Farley has spent time off his lead, and on his lead when rules require. But he's also on his lead when he can't be trusted to stay with us – if he gets the scent of a rabbit, sees a sheep, hears a cow. Perhaps it's just a case of horses for courses. Spaniels love the outdoors and love to run. Other breeds will walk to heel, even in the face of extreme





Grade II listed Thornbush Hall

rural temptation.

“The fact that Farley has to be on his lead when others don’t, doesn’t make it a bad walk,” I say. “It just makes him a bad boy.” Clare agrees with me, though Farley expresses no opinion.

There is no doubt of his opinion, however, as he guzzles a bowl of water and settles down on the cool floor in The Wild Man pub at Sproughton. He chews slowly through a treat while we enjoy lunch and offers his complete approbation.

All good dog walks need a pub along the way and although we chose The Wild Man – named after a fellow who lived in nearby woods 400 years ago – we could equally have chosen the Bramford Cock, also dog-friendly.

The great thing about this circular walk is that there are several places from which to start. But we’re pleased we started from where we did, as the last leg to the car is once again along the riverbank.

As well as horse paddocks, Bramford Meadows picnic site and Sproughton old lock, there’s the added pleasure of Hazel Wood that rises from the river to the south. In the autumn sunshine and the peace of the Gipping Valley, we really have saved the best ‘til last. ♦

## SUFFOLK DOG WALK IN ASSOCIATION WITH LETHERINGHAM MILL COTTAGES

Christmas is one of our favourite times of the year, here at Letheringham Water Mill. It’s so exciting decorating the cottages and seeing our beautiful grounds and gardens transformed into a winter wonderland of fairy lights.

Christmas morning is such a special occasion, whether the cottages are filled with different families or one big gathering of

family and friends. Several of our cottages are connected which makes large gatherings even easier. Our guests have celebrated some wonderful occasions with us this year from 60th birthdays to wedding anniversaries. We can cater for each celebration, ensuring that on arrival everything is set up and guests can begin enjoying their time away as soon as they arrive.

Christmas with a house full of people can be daunting at the best of times, but throw a few more dogs than usual into the mix and you’ve got even

**BELOW:**  
Christmas at Letheringham Mill Cottages. See our review on page XXX



more to worry about. Well not at Letheringham Mill Cottages. The cottages are all extremely dog friendly and, with a little planning, a stay here with dogs can be easier than being at home.

The whole site is dog secure, so you can happily sip on a glass, of something sparkling, and open your gifts, safe in the knowledge that your four-legged house guests are enjoying themselves too.

And then you can take a wander down to our wonderful local, The Easton White Horse, open this year from 12pm to 3pm, for pre-lunch drinks.

Wherever you are this year – on holiday or at home – have a wonderful Christmas.

Jacqui Fairey & Richard Gooding

*Letheringham Water Mill, Hall Road, Letheringham, Woodbridge IP13 7RE*

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