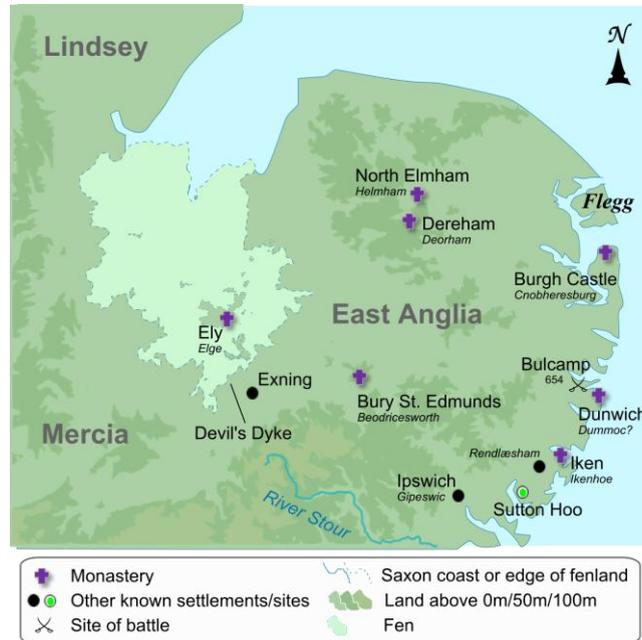


THE ISLE OF FLEGG EXPEDITION 2026

“Fleggspeidition” by Hugh Turner.

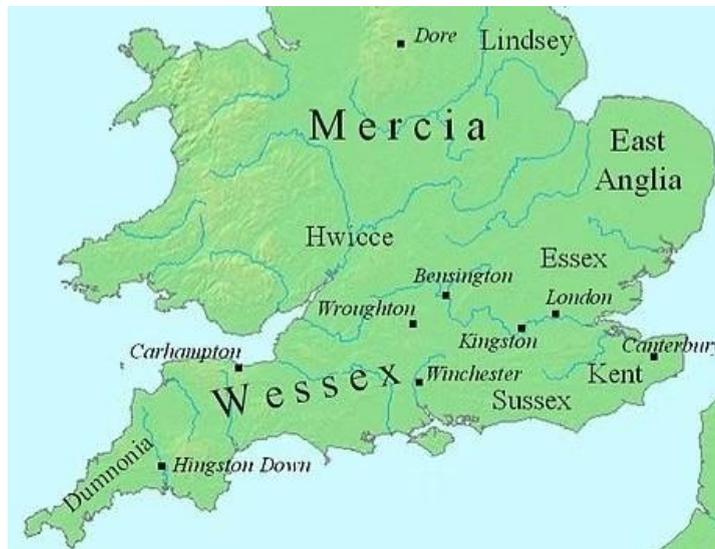


Set into a vast bay on the north-east coast of East Anglia there lies an island, the Isle of Flegg. Once the tides surged around the isle, and through the fjord which almost bisected it. Silting and the hand of man, has tamed those once-broad channels, but the island still lies between their narrowed courses and remains a place apart.



East Anglia was a land inhabited by the Angles, a people who set out from Angeln, in what is now known as Schleswig-Holstein in the German / Danish borderlands, to brave the North Sea in small, open boats, hoping to find new and richer lands on which to settle, farm, and raise their families. They divided their new home between their South Folk (Suffolk) and the North Folk (Norfolk). These days the term “East Anglia” allows itself more border flexibility, but when the Angles arrived the divisions were clear - the

Saxons to the south in their Eastern realm of Essex, and those who had fled west after the Angles' arrival, though often intermarrying with them thus carrying the Angle genes, migrating into Mercia, pushing the Celts west before them.



The marshy coast of Essex claims a larger collection of islands than any other English county, a few populated, others no more than hummocks in the tideway, some even covered by high spring tides. There are thirty five islands off the coast of Essex, and I paddled to every one of them during my Essex Islands Challenge in 2011, raising funds for the new floating lifeboat station at Burnham-on-Crouch.

However, according to “The Shell Book of the Islands of Britain” (Booth & Perrot, 1981) East Anglia, only boasts two islands, Scolt Head (Norfolk) and Halvergate (Suffolk), both uninhabited nature reserves; although concession is made to the existence of “...many other marsh islands along this coast, but most are small and liable to change from being an island to becoming part of the mainland and back to being an island again.”

What this otherwise commendable island guide ignores entirely is the Isle of Flegg, which lies almost equidistant between Scolt Head and Halvergate islands.

Even though the once fiercely tidal channels are now narrowed and tamed, the rise and fall of the tide is still to be witnessed in the rivers which now surround the isle, and Flegg remains a very different place from its surrounding Anglian mainland, for this was an island of Vikings! Its name is derived from the Danish word for the reeds and marsh plants which surround it, *flæg*.

The Isle of Flegg lies just to the north-west of Great Yarmouth, but now technically includes that seaside town due to the current course of the river Bure. It measures roughly eight and a half miles between its most southerly and northerly extremities, and around eight miles east to west, and is cut almost in half by the jagged arms of Filby, Ormesby and Rollesby broads, known as the Trinity Broad, which are linked to the tideway by the once broader Muck Fleet.

The names of those broads give a clue to the difference of Flegg. Each ends in “by”, as do most of the villages and hamlets throughout the island. Once beyond the island’s watery bounds the mainland village names hint of derivation from Anglo-Saxon and Roman terminology, but all these island “by”s endorse a Scandinavian influence.

The waters which surround all but a mile or so of the island's shores are today known as the tidal rivers Bure and Thurne. Where silting has severed the Thurne from its old estuary near Winterton, the Hundred Stream still carries a tidal boundary to within a couple of hundred yards of the sea, so water continues to surround all but a tiny fraction of the coastline of the Isle of Flegg, and the fjord-like waterway which cuts in from the south-west corner still divides the island into East Flegg and West Flegg, two of the smallest "hundreds" in England, suggesting that during the so called "dark ages", on which much light has been cast in recent years, the whole island supported around two hundred families.



December 2025 - Making Plans:

My own DNA suggests that well over 70% of my family background is East Anglian, while a bit over 20% derives from Scotland and Scandinavia, so a Viking island set into the land of the Eastern Angles seems to be calling me home. I am planning to answer that call, and I am developing the strategies for an Isle of Flegg Expedition (Fleggspedition?) in February 2026, when the winds blowing down from the icy wastes of Scandinavia should contribute to the genetic familiarity I hope to experience.

To that end lodgings are arranged in my old family heartland of Great Yarmouth, and I am already enjoying the warming anticipation of homemade pie and perhaps a pint or two of smoked porter in the Blackfriars Tavern in that town.

When I explore the island I intend to follow the Muck Fleet (once a wide and tidal fjord) from Stokesby to Fleggburgh, to see what I can of the Trinity Broads, and perhaps to check ancient churches for signs of Viking influence comparable to that at Staplehurst in Kent. Then, if time permits, I might walk the north shores where wide, reedy broads and channels endorse the Isle's ancient remoteness.

February 2026 - To the Isle of Flegg - Day 1

Thanks to an unexpected road closure just beyond Acle Bridge, which gives access to the Isle from the south-west and so from my home on the Essex / Suffolk border, my drive to my planned first-day base at Stokesby took nearly three hours. By the time I was appropriately windproofed and muck-booted it was nearly midday.

My route began on the river wall of the tidal Bure, heading west from the tiny waterside settlement towards a distant and disused wind pump, flanked by a little, white cottage.



Just beyond these historic buildings, the now narrowed, but once wide and tidal, Muck Fleet took me north along its banks into the island's interior. Though partially drained, the land to each side was low and marshy, and the wide, reedy view to the west showed just how remote this island once was.



As the village of Fleggburgh came into view, the wide landscape became embraced by woodlands, and soon my muddy path became a track, and then a surfaced lane which emerged by those essential village neighbours, a church and a pub.

A short road walk took me past the school and onto a lovely, old, tree-lined lane. This led to a cluster of cottages on the village edge, and wound on with open fields to the right, and rare glimpses of the elusive Filby Broad to the left. Except where two roads cross them, at Filby and Ormesby, these Trinity Broads are hidden secrets, with virtually no access, even on foot.

Soon the path closed in again, and muddy little lanes took me past the marshes of Little Broad to The Nab. I was fascinated by the arboreal colonisation of a chimney I passed!



From The Nab field-side footpaths carried me back to the track on which I had approached Fleggburgh, but instead of following the Muck Fleet I soon veered left onto a path through the marshes which eventually entered an ancient boscage, shown on

my map as an Alder Carr, a name often given to wet woodland dominated by the common Alder. From here clear paths and tracks took me back to Stokesby. The whole route, though muddy, had been easy to follow, and the distance, a little over 13 kilometres, took not much more than a couple of hours, so a late, light lunch in the waterside Ferry Inn fitted in well.

February 2026 - To the Isle of Flegg - Day 2

Having trekked from the south to the centre of the Isle and back on day one, I started my second day of exploration in Martham, a large and lovely village set on high ground (by Norfolk standards) above the tidal River Thurne. It has a magnificent cathedral-like church, and its name may be more Angle than those of its Norse neighbours with the “by” endings and means the home of the weasel-like martens.

From the church a series of ancient paths led onto a ridge with wide views south across the island, and north to the River Thurne. The ridge lane (Thunderhill) started with little more challenge than a few puddles, but ended on the muddiest farm track I have ever tackled! My fault - I had chosen a final few hundred yards through this filthy farm (Mustard Hym), when a straightforward alternative would have brought me to a metalled lane.



I reached the lane anyway, thankful for my substantial footwear, and followed it north to the river wall by a boatyard. Just across the river the Candle Dyke provides access for boats visiting Hickling Broad.

Between the path and the water, this part of the route is lined with characterful wooden buildings, most on stilts, which are used as waterside retreats. Each has its own little boat dock. Access is only on foot, along a path which has been thoughtlessly enclosed in a concrete channel which, at this time of year, is full of water! Luckily the grassy bank is walkable.



Soon, after passing another drainage windpump (Bracey's Mill), now converted to a holiday cottage, a further boatyard is reached where once a ferry crossed the Thurne. Here a dyke (Ferrygate Staithe) full of moored boats forces the waterside path inland, but after a few hundred yards the path loops back along its further bank, and once back on the Thurne, leads into a huge, wide-skied wilderness with little but reeds, stunted trees, and glimpses of the river for miles.

Eventually the path, which has been heading north-east, is forced south by the channel leading through the Martham Broads to delightful moorings at West Somerton. Soon this lovely, treelined path is skirting the western and southern shores of Martham Broad, with occasional open views across the water.



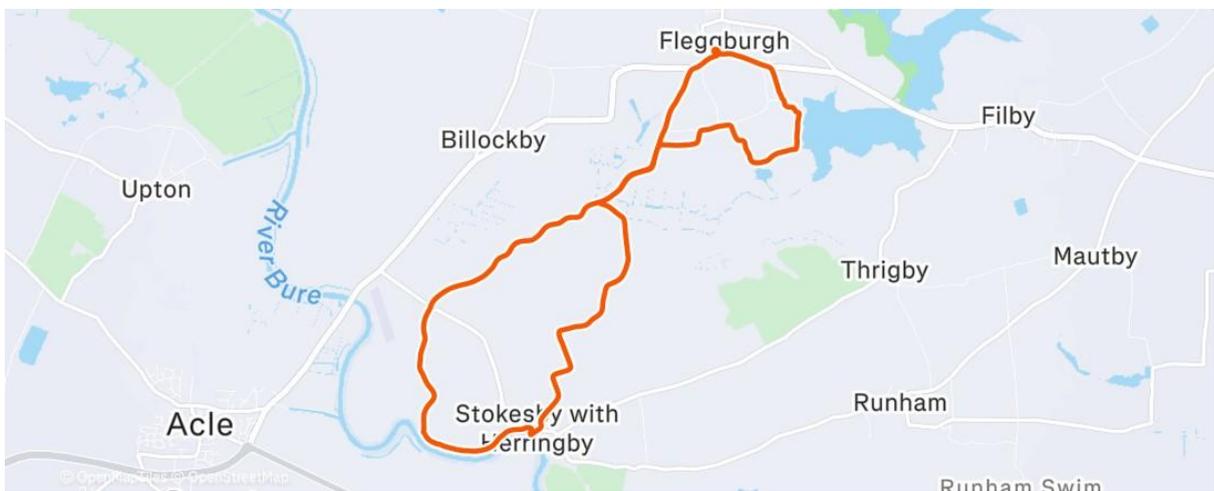
Eventually those moorings are reached. I was accompanied by a wild horse hurtling around a meadow to my right as I arrived!

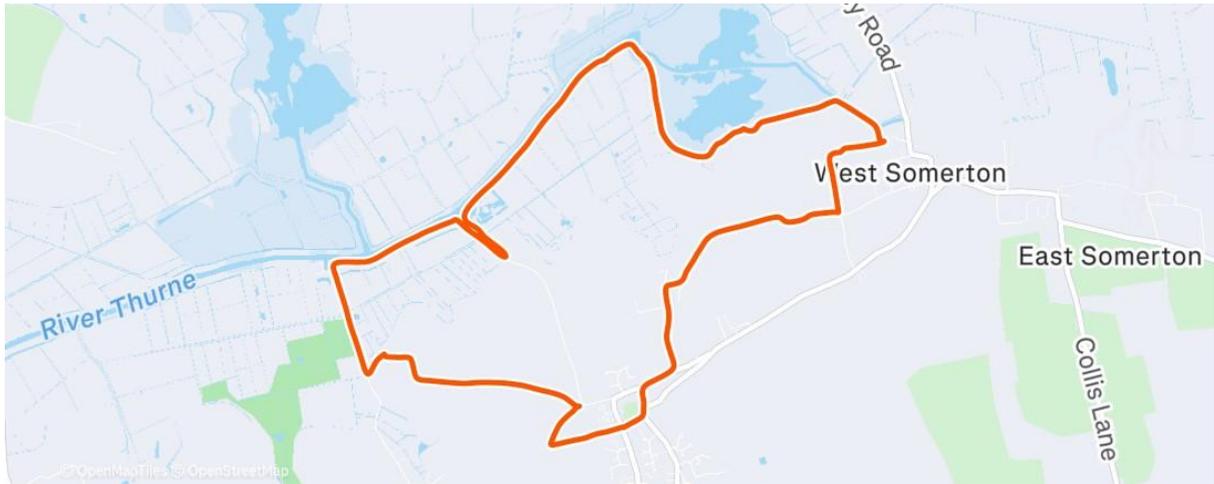
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From here a gentle, winding, easily rising series of paths and tracks carried me back to Martham after a walk of a little over 10 kilometers.

Here are the two routes I followed:





After removing my muddy boots (well, they're not called muck boots for nothing) I drove gently across the Isle of Flegg to Acle, and then tackled the busy roads home, my Fleggspedition fulfilled, although I'll be back as there is so much more to discover on this unexpected island, including, perhaps Viking clues in the churches.

February 2026