

Go out on a limb!

It may not be as easily accessed as some parts of the UK but East Anglia boasts the best of coast and culture as well as some cracking Club sites, says Don Jolly



East Anglia is sometimes unfairly ignored – and this may be in part due to our road system. You only have to look at the motorways radiating out of London – they seem to head in every direction except north-eastwards, leaving Suffolk and Norfolk out on a limb. A good thing, you might say. Let the crowds rush on and leave those who understand and appreciate their qualities to enjoy it all – the big skies, the open countryside and pretty villages – in peace.

While the Club has an impressive seven sites in Norfolk, further south is less well represented. One location worth considering, however, is Round Plantation at Mildenhall. Amid woodland mirroring the nearby Thetford Forest, it is laid out in small parcels, so wherever you are on site, you feel you could be miles from anywhere. There are 80 pitches, a handful of them hardstandings. There's no toilet block nor play area so there are usually fewer children here than on other sites – this may please those seeking tranquillity. Unfortunately, aircraft

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A calm day at Blakeney Point

FAMILY FUN



Wildlife

If you like nature you'll love Pensthorpe near Fakenham. It is home to a variety of water and land birds plus animals such as otters, longhorn cattle and red squirrels.

T 01328 851465
W pensthorpe.com



Railway

North Norfolk Railway's Poppy Line between Holt and Sheringham is a nostalgic treat. Special events are held throughout the year.

T 01263 820800
W nnrailway.co.uk

BEACH BONUS



Amusements

Great Yarmouth has fabulous sands, donkey rides and the famous Pleasure Beach, which comprises nine acres of seafront amusement park.

T 01493 844585
W pleasure-beach.co.uk



DON'T FORGET
You can book your pitch online at caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook or by calling our Advance Booking Service on 01342 327490. AS sites should be called directly.

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED SITES

- ROUND PLANTATION**
See p196 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2011/12*
- THE COVERT**
See p168 of the *Directory*
- FAKENHAM RACECOURSE AS**
See p165 of the *Directory*
- GREAT YARMOUTH**
See p166 of the *Directory*



Driving

Anglia Karting Centre near Swaffham is great fun for aspiring racing drivers. Pit yourself against others or the clock. Prices start at £14 for 15 laps.

T 01760 441777
W anglia-karting.co.uk



FOOD + DRINK



Great spot

The Cutter Inn surely has the best location in Ely – right beside the River Great Ouse. Enjoy traditional pub grub or something from the more extensive main menu.

T 01353 662713
W thecutterinn.co.uk

Seafood

Look out for terrific local seafood including delicious Cromer crabs, sold from kiosks such as Morston Crab Stall at Morston Quay.



TOP CAFÉ



Café treat

The Market Cross Café Bar in Swaffham is open for light lunches seven days a week and for evening meals Thursday to Saturday. Booking is advised.

T 01760 336671

Varied menus

The Oak Inn in Fakenham has a cellar restaurant and offers interesting and extensive lunch and evening menus along with a range of cocktails.

T 01328 855077
W theoakinnfakenham.co.uk



Gooderstone Water Gardens



The Covert



Fakenham Racecourse

“At The Covert you’ll share the site with squirrels and roe or muntjac deer”

DID YOU KNOW?
On 19 January 1915, Great Yarmouth was bombarded by the Zeppelin L3.

operations at nearby RAF Mildenhall do disturb the silence, though when I was there movements were infrequent. Anyway, the trees go some way to reducing noise, and no one voiced any complaints. One moan used to relate to poor television

reception, but since the site went digital things have improved. If there is a gripe now, it’s that people don’t wander round for an evening chat any more – they’re inside watching TV!

Must-visit places nearby include charming Bury St Edmunds, Thetford

(birthplace of the revolutionary, Thomas Paine, and where *Dad’s Army* was filmed), Newmarket (the home of horse racing and boasting an interesting museum on the subject) and Ely, with its stately cathedral and Oliver Cromwell’s house.

Across Thetford Forest, near Swaffham, The Covert, too, has military connections. In 1944, the ground shuddered beneath the Desert Rats’ tanks as they prepared for D-Day at their massive camp.

Until recently, the concrete areas they stood upon served as hardstandings, although pitching awnings was impossible. Last year, gravelled areas and tarmac access roads were installed but the site’s history is still very much in evidence. A Cromwell tank marks the approach, for example, and you can follow a Desert Rat trail which passes the camp’s remaining buildings. Every summer, a commemoration day (24 June this year) features vintage vehicles, a flypast, characters in period uniforms and 1940s music.

As at Round Plantation, there is no toilet block at The Covert. It may discourage

families, but most visitors see the site as a hidden gem, a place for peaceful relaxation, handy for cycling or walking quiet lanes and trails, possibly without seeing another soul.

You’ll share the site with a multitude of wildlife. Squirrels are well represented and you may see the occasional roe or muntjac deer. Bird species include nuthatch, treecreeper, tit, woodpecker, owl, goshawk and buzzard. There is also a nightjar nesting area with accessible viewing next to the site.

Eight miles away, Georgian Swaffham is delightful, its square abuzz with market shoppers every Saturday. Other nearby attractions include the Ecotech Centre and its wind turbine, pretty Castle Acre where you can see 12th-century ruins, moated Oxburgh Hall, Gooderstone Water Gardens and Cockley Cley’s Icen Village.

Continuing northwards, the Affiliated Site at Fakenham Racecourse is very different. Firstly, there’s scarcely a tree in sight (apart from conifers providing perimeter shelter); secondly, there are loos. What’s more, one block and a separate disabled toilet and shower unit were refurbished last year – by the time you read this, two other blocks should have undergone improvement.

While there are some hardstandings, most pitches are grassy. Some are sited beside the racecourse, though on race days (generally once a month) all caravans must be moved to the infield. In exchange, two free race tickets are available for each caravan staying more than two nights (there are no fixtures from mid June to late October). >>



The Desert Rats were based at The Covert

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

KEEP ACTIVE

Cycling

From Fakenham Racecourse: National Cycle Network route number 1 runs close to the Fakenham Racecourse site. Head north for a ride to Wells-next-the-Sea. From Great Yarmouth: pick up Regional Cycle Route 30 from Caister and head north for a pleasant ride to Waxham.

W sustrans.org.uk



Forest fun

Between Mildenhall and Swaffham, Thetford Forest is a delight. Enjoy the way the light catches its various moods – woodland sliced through by sunbeams, or heath lightly veiled in diaphanous mists.

T 01842 816010
W forestry.gov.uk/thetfordforestpark



Bird paradise

Lakenheath Fen, a large RSPB reserve by the River Little Ouse, is home to a number of star species, including reed and sedge warbler, bearded tit, marsh harrier, hobby, golden oriole, kingfisher and bittern.

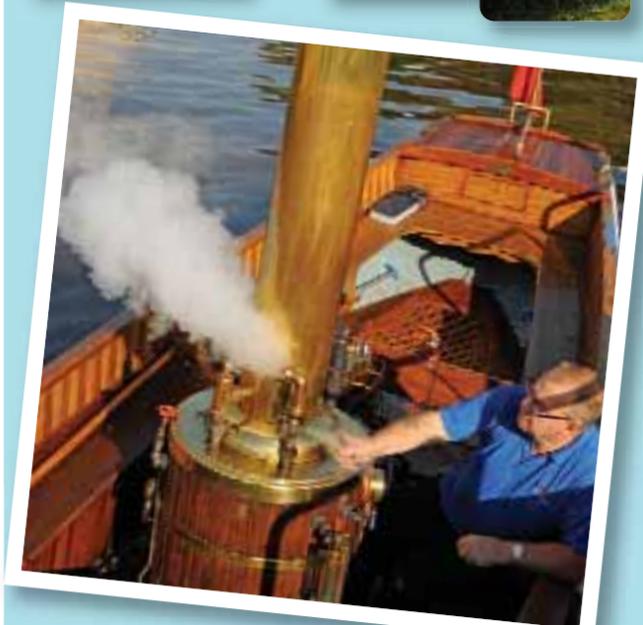
T 01842 863400
W rspb.org.uk/lakenheathfen



Broads appeal

The Norfolk Broads – an area of linked rivers and lakes – has national park status. You can hire boats and canoes or take a trip on the 1895 steam launch, *Falcon*. Also great for birdwatching and angling.

W enjoythebroads.com



CULTURE

Cathedral

Ely Cathedral is famous for its towers, particularly the unusual Octagon, considered a wonder of medieval engineering. Check out, too, the cathedral's stained glass museum, containing works covering over eight centuries.

T 01353 667735
W elycathedral.org



Ancient mines

In Thetford Forest, Grime's Graves form a pock-marked, grassy lunar landscape. The 'graves' are the remains of flint mines dating back more than 5,000 years. Visitors can descend a 30ft shaft to view galleries dug out by workers using antler picks.

T 01842 810656
W english-heritage.org.uk



Mansion

Eighteenth-century **Holkham Hall**, a grand Palladian mansion north of Fakenham, is set amid magnificent parkland. Look out for the Bygones Museum which has 4,000 exhibits ranging from mechanical toys to vintage vehicles.



T 01328 710227
W holkham.co.uk

Historic Yarmouth

Great Yarmouth displays its brasher face on the seafront, but there is another side – the old town along the River Yare's South Quay. Numerous historic properties and museums tell of the town's rich heritage, while early every September the Maritime Festival is held here.

W museums.norfolk.gov.uk



Some course facilities open daily, notably Fakenham Sports Centre, where caravanners from the Club site enjoy automatic temporary membership and can take advantage of golf, indoor bowls and racket sports. A bar serves lunchtime and evening meals.

Off-site, among north Norfolk charms within easy reach are Burnham Market, Wells-next-the-Sea, Blakeney and its Point, Cley next the Sea and Walsingham, with its abbey ruins and light railway.

Our fourth site, away on Norfolk's east coast, is another racecourse location, this time at Great Yarmouth. While the resort's razzmatazz is not far away, thus making the site ideal for family holidays, it's surprising how peaceful the Club site is. I can't vouch for race events,

though, which sometimes run to two or three days and which all fall within the site's opening dates. One good aspect is you don't need to move your caravan for racing; on the other hand, arrivals are not permitted on race days.

The site lies a little north of the resort's centre, just 30 minutes' walk away for those who like the exercise, although a bus and tourist land-train are available to those who don't. The Pleasure Beach, on the seafront overlooking extensive sands, awaits those seeking the fun of the fair. Alternatively, there are museums aplenty for those who prefer something more cerebral, while for those whose senses are tuned to more scenic wonders, the Broads start at Breydon Water, just behind the town. ■



Nigel Bishop and Diane Blackmore (above), from Wimblington in Cambridgeshire, think Fakenham Racecourse is a lovely, high-standard site. They reckon the market in Fakenham is excellent, and say Cromer, Sheringham and Holt are all lovely places to visit.

MEMBERS'VIEW

Graham and Winifred Wright (below) head for The Covert whenever they want to escape the hustle and bustle of Great Yarmouth, where they live. "We like the tranquillity here, it's a little retreat for us," they said. They find the site's wartime history interesting and have spent time wandering the woodland trails finding out more.

To read even more member views, see our new online forum at caravanclub.co.uk/together



Joe and Linda Devoti (below), from Huntingdon, were on their second visit to Round Plantation, and loved it, especially in September when there was plenty of room. They scarcely noticed the heavy transport planes flying into the airbase nearby. "Our main concern," they told me, "is the acorns falling on the caravan!"

