

# Useful contacts

## Kent County Council

Responsible for the maintenance of the Great Stour Way.  
☎ 08458 247800  
www.kent.gov.uk/roads\_and\_transport.aspx

## Canterbury City Council

Own and maintain the riverside land from Westgate Gardens to Whitehall Meadows.  
☎ 01227 862000  
customer.services@canterbury.gov.uk  
www.canterbury.gov.uk

## Explore Kent

For more information on walking and cycling in Kent.  
www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent

## Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

Responsible for ongoing projects on and adjacent to the Great Stour Way.  
☎ 01233 813307  
kentishstour@kent.gov.uk  
www.kentishstour.org.uk

## Kent Enterprise Trust

Own and manage Hambrook Marshes.  
☎ 01227 844500  
getinvolved@enterprisetrust.org  
www.sekgroup.org.uk/ket/hambrook-marshes

## Spokes East Kent Cycle Campaign

Campaign for better cycling facilities in East Kent.  
spokes@spokeseastkent.org.uk  
www.spokeseastkent.org.uk

## Mid Kent Fisheries

Manage the Thanington Lakes fishery.  
☎ 01227 730668  
info@midkentfisheries.co.uk  
www.midkentfisheries.co.uk

## Sustrans

The UK's leading sustainable transport charity.  
☎ 0845 1130065  
www.sustrans.org.uk

# Visitor information

## Canterbury Visitor Information Centre

☎ 01227 378100  
www.canterbury.co.uk

## Buses and Trains

### Traveline

☎ 0871 2002233  
www.traveline.org.uk

### National Rail enquiries

☎ 08457 484950  
www.nationalrail.co.uk

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*The Great Stour Way has been made possible by a number of individuals and organisations, some of which are:*



SPOKES



*Produced by the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership.  
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Designed by Clarity Interpretation 01303 249501  
www.clarity-consultancy.co.uk

# The Great Stour Way

An attractive, three mile, traffic free route, following the course of the River Great Stour.



The Great Stour Way was opened on May 21st 2011. It is a three mile surfaced shared use path between Canterbury and Chartham running alongside the river. The path is part of the National Cycle Network, route 18, and for people from Canterbury it's a gateway to the Stour Valley and to the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

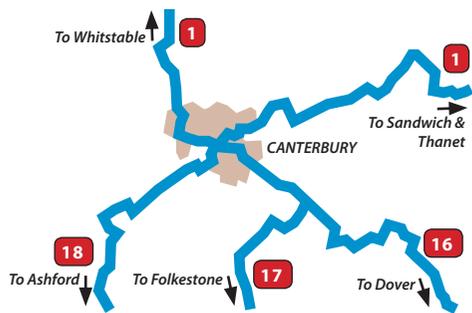


**Opening of the Great Stour Way.**

Planning and management of the project was carried out by a working group of organisations – Canterbury City Council, Kent County Council, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership and Sustrans. The path was also made possible with the co-operation of local landowners including the Brett Group and Kent Enterprise Trust, and support from Spokes East Kent Cycle Campaign, and the Parish Councils of Chartham and Thanington Without.

The construction of the path included a new bridge over the River Great Stour, linking it to the Wincheap Retail Park, and three new smaller bridges.

The main funders of the scheme were Kent County Council, Sustrans through the Links to Schools Programme, and Brett Environment Trust.



**Canterbury is the cycling hub of Kent with fantastic routes going to Whitstable - the Crab and Winkle Way, Sandwich, Dover and Folkestone.**

Construction of part of the path started in 1993, so landowner negotiations, planning, fundraising and construction took 18 years! Over this time volunteers from the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership have planted shrubs and climbers; installed bird boxes; built an otter holt; sowed wildflower seed along the edge of the path; and built a sustainable erosion barrier to stop the path disappearing into the river at Chartham.



**Construction of the new bridge.**  
(Keith Hanna, Spokes.)

Seats have been installed along the path and an impressive picnic table with carved river wildlife by the old Elham Valley Railway embankment.

Because livestock is present along the path there are a number of cattle grids and wooden kissing gates. The cattle grids allow cyclists to pass over whilst the kissing gates have been designed for large mobility vehicles.



### **Keep dogs under control**

The river and grasslands have important wildlife which can be disturbed by dogs. Birds nest alongside the river and in the grassland. In winter wading birds such as lapwing and snipe require the wet grassland to feed. Many of these species are declining and need our help to survive.

Your dog could be put down if found to be worrying livestock.

Please clear up after your dog.

### **Keep to the surfaced paths**

Brett gave permission in 2010 for new public access between Tonford Lane and Milton, however, there is no permission for the public to move off the path, other than public footpaths, between Tonford Lane and Chartham.

### **Take your litter home**

### **Be courteous to all users of the shared path**

Cyclists please slow down when approaching walkers. Walkers please be aware that cyclists may sound their bell or call out in order to warn you that they are approaching.

### **RADAR gates**

The metal gates on the Great Stour Way at Tonford and Chartham are RADAR gates. They were installed combined with motorcycle inhibitors, at the insistence of the landowner, to prevent motorbikes from using the path. They can be opened fully with a RADAR key available to registered disabled people from Canterbury Mobility Shop, 6 Iron Bar Lane CT1 2HN ☎ 01227 450743 or from RADAR: ☎ 020 7250 3222 or [www.radar.org.uk](http://www.radar.org.uk)

### **Be aware of the possibility of flooding**

The Great Stour Way is built in a floodplain. There will be times when part of the path will be covered in floodwater.

**To report criminal activity or misuse contact Kent Police**  
☎ 01622 690690.

**Follow the Countryside Code - Respect, Protect, Enjoy.**

# The Story of the Stour

## *The river - always there, yet ever changing.*

The Great Stour was flowing long before early humans set foot here. Its deposits of gravel and sand have preserved evidence of these Palaeolithic peoples, and the long extinct animals they hunted. Since then it has undergone great change - swollen by the melt water of passing ice ages, its estuary shifting with the rise and fall of sea levels, and increasingly altered by man.

A river is a dynamic, living entity. It does not sit still in the landscape. It slowly but constantly erodes and deposits material, meanders forming, banks shifting. Change also occurs more rapidly, with the cycle of the seasons. Climate, geology and soils all play their part.

But there is another factor shaping the river, its



*Joe Munds and Stephen Brett holding a mammoth tusk discovered at Hambrook Marshes when it was quarried (1979-85). (Kentish Gazette.)*

effects ever increasing...it's us. It's water abstracting, gravel quarrying, sewage treating, agricultural run-off producing, flood managing, river channel straightening, alien plant introducing humans. Yet somehow the Great Stour has dealt with everything we have thrown at it, and we have learnt to look after it better.

## *No longer a wild river but still a home for wildlife.*

This diverse, dynamic river offers many opportunities for nature to exploit. The main channel is home to plants, such as water crowfoot, that have leaves adapted to absorbing carbon-dioxide from flowing water.

The gravelly bottom and clear water are ideal for a once plentiful crustacean, the white-clawed crayfish; our only native crayfish is now uncommon, protected and restricted to just one stretch of the Great Stour. Fish species present include bream, barbell, three-spined stickleback and brown trout. You are likely to see families of mute swans or mallards on the open water in spring.

In the still river margins, things are quite different. Emergent plants like yellow flag iris and reedmace can take root in the shallows. Dragonflies and damselflies use their stems to emerge from their larval stage in the water; watch out particularly for the banded demoiselle. You should see other invertebrates moving on the water's surface such as

water measurers and water boatmen.

Living in the riverbank is a special resident of the Great Stour – the water vole. Sadly only present in small numbers, this once common aquatic mammal has declined due not least to the presence of American mink – an introduced predator that can wipe out whole populations of voles. The river banks are also home to a community of plants that like damp conditions such as purple loosestrife and fleabane.

The river ecosystem doesn't stop at its banks, because it regularly floods out of them. Wet riverside grasslands are home to wading birds such as lapwing in winter. Ponds, backwaters and ditches are habitats for aquatic plants, birds, invertebrates and amphibians. Floodplain trees, particularly mature willow and alder, are roosting sites for birds and bats. Flooding is inevitable, and as natural a part of a river as the fish that swim in it. Happily, in the most recent chapter of this story, we are learning that the more natural a river is, the better for wildlife and for us.



### ***Alien plants***

*Himalayan balsam is an attractive plant introduced to Britain in 1839. Over time it has established itself in the wild and become an invasive species. It is being actively controlled on the Great Stour. Unfortunately it's not the only problem alien species affecting our rivers.*

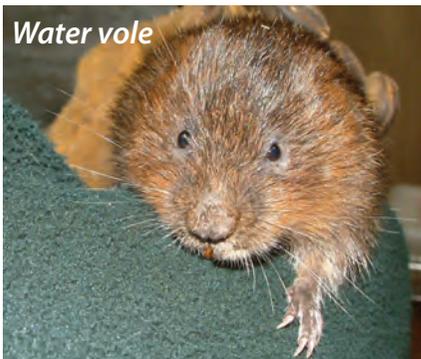


### ***Grass snake***

*This is the only British reptile that likes a swim, in fact it specialises in aquatic prey such as amphibians. It is often seen slithering from the riverbank into the safety of the shallows, crossing the river or swimming in a lake.*



*Lapwing*



*Water vole*



*Banded demoiselle*

### ***Chalk rivers***

This part of the Great Stour is very special in that it is a chalk river. Most of Europe's chalk rivers are found in south and east England, famous for their crystal clear waters and fly fishing. Their gravelly bottoms, lack of silt, stable temperature and stable flows combine to provide conditions for very specialised wildlife communities, including water crowfoot, white-clawed crayfish, water shrew, brown trout, mayfly, brook lamprey and pea mussel.

## 1 Chartham Paper Mill

Chartham Paper Mill is, in common with many mills, the last in a very long line of buildings. A good place for a mill in the time of the Domesday book is usually a good place for a mill hundreds of years later. What changes is what is being made there. The mill recorded here in 1086 would probably have been grinding corn. By 1438 it was a fulling mill. The conversion to a paper mill took place in 1730. In the 1850s the mill entered the modern age - the most up to date machinery was installed, including the first air drier ever used in paper making, and the artificial channel you see today was created.

## 2 Tumbling Bay

Tumbling Bay is an old local name for this point where the artificial mill channel joins the Great Stour. Older Chartham residents relate a story of a local boy called Faulkner who rescued a friend from drowning here. He was given a bravery award by the Scouts. You may have noticed a barrier structure along the bank. It was constructed by volunteers from the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership to prevent erosion.



## 3 Horton/Chartham Lakes

At Horton, across the river, six Anglo-Saxon graves and traces of a building were discovered in 2001. The people who lived (and died) here knew this place as *Horatun* – the muddy farmstead. Their dwelling stood just 200m from the present manor house, which is late 15th century. To the rear and left of the house you might be able to glimpse the bellcot of the 13th century chapel – it is one of the few twin arch bellcots in Britain. The lakes close to this section of the river are an industrial legacy. They date from the earliest phase of gravel quarrying here after WWII (see The Importance of Gravel).



Horton Chapel when used as a barn (early 1900s).

## 4 Milton Church

Take a short diversion along the footpath here to see the earliest and latest chapters in the story of this tiny settlement. The story starts with St John's Church. It dates from the 13th century, when the manor was held by Sir Robert de Septvans. To get to it you walk through the most recent chapter - an aggregate processing site. Milton never really grew beyond its origins as a farm with a mill (Old English – *myln ton*). In 1588 12 people were taking communion at the church, in 1640 it was 10. By the 1980s, when the church became disused, there were just 6.

## 5 Milton - riverside

Those who regularly pass this way say this is the best place to see kingfishers along this part of the Great Stour. If any bird has earned its name, it's this one. They hunt by diving into the water from riverside perches. No easy feat as the fish are small and constantly moving, and the bird has to assess their depth and account for the refraction of the water. On top of that, its eyes are closed as it hits the surface! The presence of kingfishers is a sign of a healthy river – polluted waters do not support enough small fish to feed them.

## The Importance of gravel

You probably don't spend much time thinking about concrete and tarmac, but they are of course the foundations of our modern world. Rivers like the Great Stour have played a vital role in supplying them. Gravel and sand, laid down by rivers hundreds of thousands of years ago, have helped to build our towns and roads. This part of the Stour Valley has been profoundly shaped by efforts to extract those materials. In the post-war building boom, quarrying companies bought up land along the river. Processing works sprung up to turn the gravel into construction materials. At A.H. Hooker's Chartham Works they washed it, sorted it with perforated cylinders, and crushed it using magnesium-steel hammers; some was baked to produce different colours for pebble dash and road chippings. The Brett Group's Milton Manor Quarry was set up in 1978 and is still going today. Many disused quarries were carefully landscaped and flooded to create the beautiful lakes you will see along the Great Stour Way.



Brass of Sir Robert de Septvans in St Mary's Church, Chartham.



Great crested grebe.

## 6 *Thanington Lakes*

Thanington Lakes is home to an array of fauna and flora, tranquil, restful, visually appealing...and completely man-made. Yes, these watery wildlife hotspots are about as natural as the A28 that rumbles past them. And the same goes for all the other lakes you will see along the Great Stour Way. They are the product of industry – disused gravel pits (see The Importance of Gravel below).

But just look what nature has done with these man-made foundations! Gaze across the tranquil waters and you might see tufted duck and great-crested grebe. The lake margins are a profusion of wild flowering plants including purple loosestrife and fleabane. Reed warblers nest in the reed fringes. Whirlygig beetles dance on the water, while dragonflies hawk overhead. There are many lakeside willows, and look out for some dead trees which are just as important for wildlife as living ones.

## 7 *Tonford*

In the 15th century, property development wasn't about location, location, location, it was about crenelation, crenelation, crenelation! This was when wealthy landowners put battlements on their manor houses to make them look like castles. That's exactly what Sir Thomas Browne of nearby Tonford Manor did in 1449. To be fair, his extravagance did pay off, because Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon stayed there in 1512. Traces of these fortifications can still be seen today.



### **In the footsteps of invaders**

In 54BC, Julius Caesar led a Roman legion across the English Channel. He described their first encounter with Britons, at a river 12 miles from their landfall, which must have been the Great Stour. They were confronted by the Cantiaci, a Celtic tribe, but the Romans pushed them back into the woods where Caesar described man-made defences – probably nearby Bigbury Hillfort. So it seems the point where the Romans crossed was somewhere along this stretch of the Great Stour. Some say it was at Tonford as it is so close to Bigbury. This episode was not an invasion but an expedition, and the Romans went on to trade with the British Celts. But less than a century later they would be back, and this time to stay.

## 8 *Thanington*

By anyone's standards, Thanington has been around for a while – an Anglo-Saxon reference to *Thenningden* dates from AD791! Across the Great Stour you can see the Medieval heart of the Parish – the Court Lodge Farm and the Church. There's a theory that this was the country churchyard about which Thomas Gray's famous *Elegy* was written...but it is just a theory.

The Manor of Thanington has been owned by many wealthy families, who can be traced right back to Domesday. In the 16th century tragedy struck one of these families – the Hales. Eldest son James was imprisoned and tortured on the orders of Mary Tudor. On his release he returned to Thanington, but drowned himself in the Great Stour soon after.



*Milton Manor Works.*

## 9 *Elham Valley Line/Wincheap Meadows*

Common lizards love to bask on this bank of earth that crosses the marshes, but it wasn't put here for them. It is the embankment of a long lost railway, the Elham Valley Line. It branched off the mainline here, curving across Hambrook, the Great Stour, and then Wincheap Meadows, before heading on its way to Folkestone. Read the information panel to find out more. Looking across the river to Wincheap Meadows, you can see the land is much less open than Hambrook Marshes. Trees and scrub have crept in over the years because, unlike Hambrook, these fields are not grazed and the meadow plants have slowly disappeared.

## 10 *Hambrook Marshes*

Hambrook Marshes are named after the last farmer to own them, in the 1930s. He grazed his cattle here and every day walked them across a ford in the Great Stour, and up Cow Lane (where else?) to his dairy in nearby Wincheap.

In 1950 the marshes were sold to the Brett Group, a local quarrying company. But it wasn't until 1979 that the quarry machines moved in. Quarrying lasted just six years, then the pits were filled in and the land restored to grassland.

In 2004 the marshes were sold again, this time to a charity called the Kent Enterprise Trust. They engage a diverse range of groups and individuals in improving the land, through conservation work and other practical projects. They have done much to protect and enhance habitats on the marshes. The wet grassland is maintained by low intensity grazing. It floods in winter, providing habitats for migratory birds, and shallow 'scrapes' have been created to hold water for them.

*As you walk through Hambrook, you will see a number of information panels that will tell you more about its history, and wildlife.*



*This bridge carried the Elham Valley Line across the River Stour, very close to where you are standing. (Arthur Wells.)*

## 11 Bingley's Island

Look across the Great Stour from Whitehall Meadow and you will see the tall vegetation and willow scrub of Bingley's Island. So who was Mr. Bingley and why did he have an island named after him? In fact there never was a Mr. Bingley. The name comes from an Old English name recorded in 814 - *binnan ea*, which means 'within a river'. The island is now a Local Nature Reserve.



## 12 Whitehall Meadows

If the Victorian artist Sydney Cooper could see Canterbury today he would surely be astounded at how much it had changed since he created his paintings of the Great Stour. But here at Whitehall Meadow he would perhaps feel that something of that pastoral idyll still remained.

In Cooper's time there were numerous wet meadows like Whitehall in the Stour Valley. The 20th century wasn't kind to them and many were lost to agricultural drainage and gravel extraction. Whitehall escaped these changes and is today a Local Nature Reserve, managed in the traditional way by annual mowing and grazing. A range of plants that like damp conditions do well here, including the locally

scarce brown sedge. In winter, visitors can enjoy flocks of teal, snipe and lapwing, that flock here because the meadow is allowed to flood – another bit of traditional management that we think Mr. Cooper would approve of.

### PARKING FOR THE GREAT STOUR WAY (numbers on main map)

1. Staples, Wincheap Retail Park, CT1 3TQ (off A28), free in the overflow car park, by the side of the store (by kind permission of Staples). Please access the Great Stour Way via the front of the store.
2. Wincheap Park and Ride CT1 3TY (off A28), £2.50 all day.

Access the path between Staples and the Park and Ride, at the opposite end of the retail park from the entrance. Cross over the River Great Stour and turn right to go towards Toddler's Cove, Canterbury (0.6 miles) or go left to Chartham (2.4 miles).

3. Toddler's Cove Car Park, Whitehall Road, CT2 8NL 10p for up to 2 hrs. Over 2 hrs, 90p hour ie. 3 hrs £2.70, 4hrs £3.60. Directions to Toddler's Cove Car Park: In St Dunstons St. (near to Westgate Towers) turn into Linden Grove, right into Whitehall Bridge Road, left into Whitehall Close leading to Whitehall Road.

4. Chartham Village, CT4 7HX  
Parking is available in the village, please consider local residents. The path starts by the river opposite the Paper Mill and next to the Village Hall, Station Road.

**Prices correct as of December 2011.**  
**For up to date details on parking and charges contact Canterbury City Council on 01227 862000 or visit [www.canterbury.gov.uk](http://www.canterbury.gov.uk)**



*Yellow rattle - found in meadows at Hambrook Marshes.*

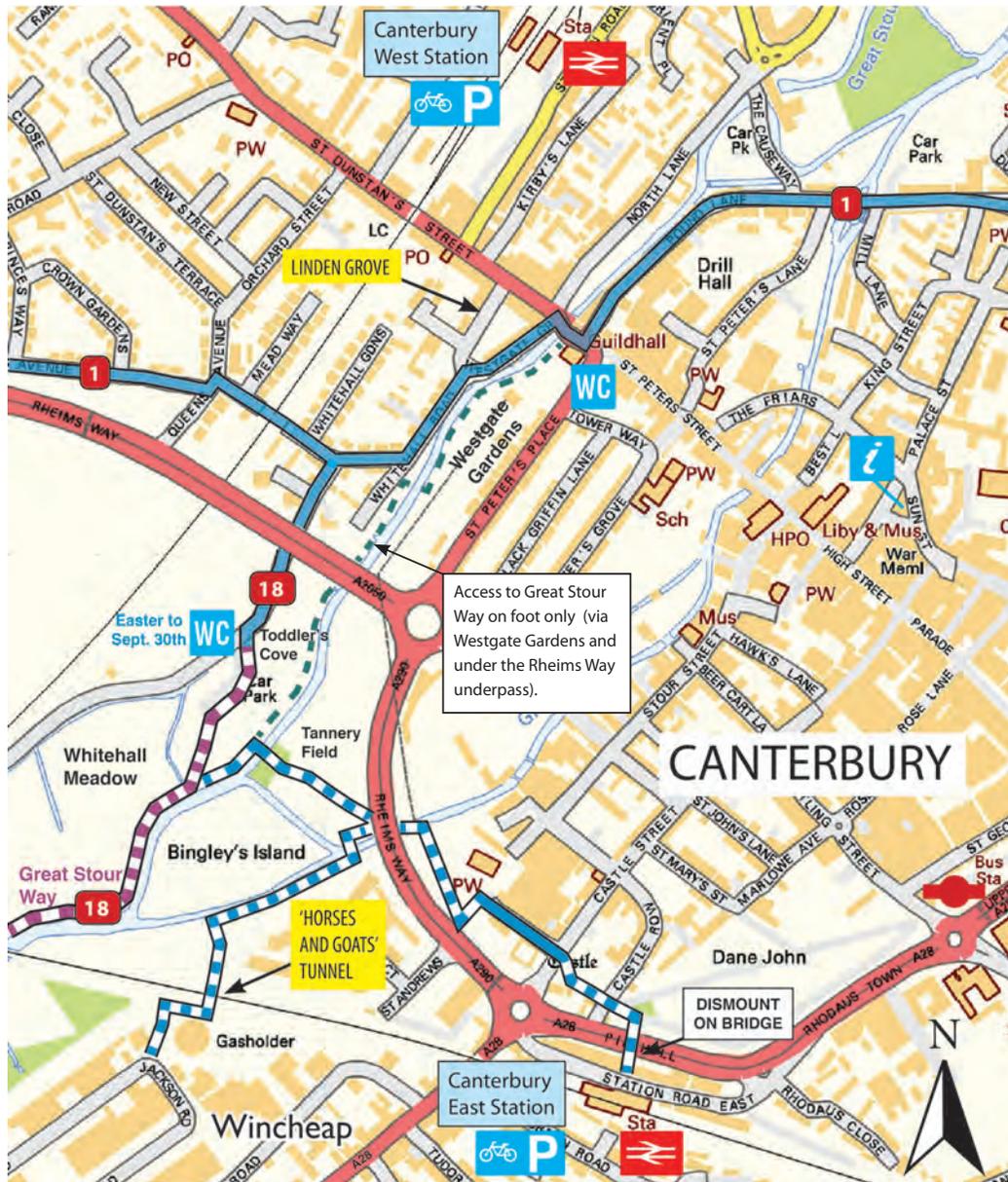
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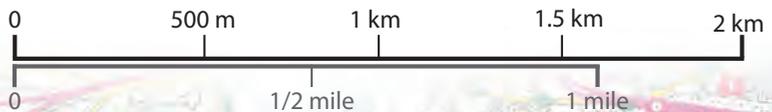
*Canterbury Meadows by T.S. Cooper, 1875.  
(© Canterbury City Council Museums.)*



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### KEY

-  Great Stour Way  
Part of Route 18 Canterbury-Ashford-Tunbridge Wells
-  Other cycle routes - on road
-  Other cycle routes - off road
-  National Cycle Routes
-  Public Footpath
-  Public Bridleway
-  Byway Open to All Traffic
-  Promoted/long distance routes
-  Permissive footpath
-  Points of interest
-  Seat
-  Log seat
-  Picnic bench
-  RADAR gate
-  Dog waste bin
-  Selected toilets
-  Parking
-  Railway station
-  Bus station
-  Selected cycle parking
-  Visitor information centre
-  Public house  
The Artichoke Inn, Rattington Street, Chartham, CT4 7JQ ☎ 01227 738316



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