**Lora Aziz**

Andrew Stuck is being led by **Lora Aziz** on a not particularly well-marked trail through the floodplain of the river Chelmer in Essex.

It is a windy Spring day and they have to contend with the noise of the A12 which runs on a series of bridges crossing the floodplain, so there is quite a lot of background noise. This doesn't dampen Lora's enthusiasm to tell him about the scoping project she has just completed which will bring cultural elements and water infrastructure to the forefront along this little known route that runs from Saffron Walden to Southend on Sea, and is called The Saffron Trail.

The wind drops but they are also caught in a shower of rain during the interview. We learn a lot about how Lora's mixed race heritage and passion for the natural environment in which she lives, has driven her to share her knowledge to Essex residents and visitors alike.

43'32" 20.4MB

Notes from the podcast interview by **Andrew Stuck**: Recorded on a walk recorded on The Saffron Trail, in the flood plain of the River Chelmer, in Essex, UK in June 2026 and published in October 2026. http://www.talkingwalking.net

The 71 mile Saffron Trail https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saffron_Trail was first devised by the Redbridge Ramblers https://redbridgeramblers.org.uk/ at the turn of the millennium. It runs from the north west of Essex via Saffron Walden to the Southend on Sea in the south east.

The interview takes place beside the River Chelmer https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Chelmer

Lora is the founder of The Saffron Cultural Trail and has recently completed a scoping study called Blue Steps: https://www.saffrontrail.co.uk/ - find out more about her practice: https://www.lora-aziz.com/

Saffron is a crocus - *Crocus sativus* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saffron - how it got to be grown in Britain is disputed, it may have come carried by monks and pilgrims returning from Palestine in the 1400 or 1500s, or with Crusaders travelling form the Holy Land. Its origins could be from Iran, Crete, Mesopotamia, as it features in many historical artworks and burial sites in many countries, it is hard to pin down.

Blue Steps and the Cultural trail started as a 'get back to the city centre' initiative after the COVID pandemic funded from the EU and distributed through an Ideas Lab run by Ignite Partnership supported by https://www.ignitechelmsford.org.uk/ Chelmsford City Council https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/ .

Lora describes herself as a cultural ecologist, environmental artist and a visual ethnobotanist - she helpfully explains more of what she does during our walk.

Lora started her recce from Sandford Mill https://www.museumofchelmsford.co.uk/news/sandford-mill-the-history/ and stumbled on a waymarker for the Saffron Trail that had a crocus depicted on it.

2020/1 Lora self-published Homeland is Presence Presents, Snapping the Stiletto, funded by the National Lottery heritage Fund, in which she interviewed 70 women from different diaspora across Essex to discover the ingredients they used in their cooking, this is part inspired her to develop a cultural trail along the Saffron Trail.

Ethnobotany: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnobotany

Essex & Suffolk Water https://www.eswater.co.uk/ has provided grant funding for Lora's Blue Steps initiative. https://www.nwg.co.uk/responsibility/environment/bluespaces/our-scheme/ Lora made an application to Blue Spaces - part funded by Essex & Suffolk Water and the Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust https://www.essexsuffolkriverstrust.org/ .

Lora runs "Wyrd Flora"workshops https://wyrdflora.com/ sharing her knowledge of foraging for common plants and how they can be used in healing, diet, herbalism and health.

Lora was commissioned by Estuary Festival in 2021 https://www.estuaryfestival.com/event/detail/the-commons-way.html in which she devised a trail called The Commons Way from Bobbin to Lesnes Abbey, working alongside academics from the University of Essex who were researching The Peasant's Revolt of 1381 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peasants'_Revolt .

Lora recruited Saira Niazi as a Blue Steps Project assistant - you can listen to Saira in a Talking Walking interview recorded before she worked with Lora https://www.talkingwalking.net/saira-niazi-talking-walking/ .

Other team members in the scoping study were: Leela Keshav - spatial mapper; Jess Twynman, former curator at Art Exchange at the University of Essex; Anisha Thampy - branding illustrator; Ali Pretty of Kinetika; Nikki Wilson - theory of change; Marley Karazimba, film maker, Gabriela Margarita- harpist and sound artist.

Lora has approached the Local Nature Recovery Partnership https://essexnaturepartnership.com/ to link the trail in with three farming clusters: NW Essex 1; Mid-Essex cluster; Newport Rivers Group. They considered a Spring in the Audley Estate, the common in Danbury (owned by the National Trust), the Prittle Brook, the Marconi ponds and Admirals Park which is where is the confluence of two Chelmsford rivers, the Can and the Chelmer.

Lora worked with Essex Ecology https://www.essexwt.org.uk/essex-ecology who carried out morphology surveys, and carried out desk research at the Essex Records Office https://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/ .

**Chancery calligraphy** script uses walnut ink: https://www.cornelissen.com/drawing-and-calligraphy/cornelissen-historical-ink-range/cornelissen-historical-inks-walnut.html .

Suggested walks

1. Walk anywhere and look for the plants that are growing underfoot.
2. North Norfolk coast path: https://www.visitnorthnorfolk.com/see-and-do/norfolk-coast-path-national-trail-p1526651