Walberswick

Long walk – 3.75 miles/6km

Short walk – 2.5 miles/4km

**From the Bell Inn, take the track opposite, between some rows of terraced cottages, and follow round to right to steps over sea wall that protects this low-lying part of Walberswick from flooding. Cross footbridges to your right, and follow path over shingle area to sand dunes.**

**Walberswick and its surrounding landscape have been a favourite venue and inspiration for artists since the beginning of the 19th century to the present day. Philip Wilson Steer, who spent several summers here perfecting his own impressionist style, is known for his beach scenes between some rows of terraced cottages, and was part of a ’Utopian artists’ colony’ that congregated in Walberswick in about 1880, as was his own impressionist style, is known for his beach scenes**

**That’s part of the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh.**

**Turn right on the beach and head south. You may see areas fenced off to nurture the vegetation that helps hold the sand in place, so it can play its part in protection of the coast.**

**About 500m beyond the black beach hut, turn right, dropping down from the shingle bank, to a path waymarked Suffolk Coast Path, this is the path into Walberswick Nature Reserve, marked with an interpretation board.**

**A footbridge, over the Dunwich River. This used to meet the sea at Dunwich from the west. Now it turns northwards to flow parallel to the beach, behind the shingle bank, to meet the Blyth at Walberswick. In the late 19th century, when the country was considerably further out to sea, the Blyth flowed along this route in the opposite direction, its mouth being just to the north of the site of the present Dunwich River. Dunwich was an important port then, with a good natural harbour, but eroded, and build-up of shingle at both river mouths forced changes. Dunwich declined from 1328, despite efforts to dig the shingle away, and the Dunwich river was diverted northwards. By 1587, the Dunwich river was flowing into the Blyth, and the Blyth reached the sea via a man-made channel direct from the west.**

**That’s part of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of Britain’s finest landscapes. Located on the coast of East Anglia and covering 403 square kilometres, the AONB extends from the Stour estuary in the south to the eastern fringe of Ipswich and Lowestoft in the north. For more information about the area, please visit the Suffolk Coast and Heaths website or contact the AONB team.**

**In partnership with the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh.**

**Walberswick’s original parish church was allegedly sited hereabouts, but moved inland as the port shifted its emphasis. These marshes are unique in the area – they are open coastal flats, covered in a deep peat deposit. Oldtown Marshes were associated with the old port before the river course altered, and Corporation Marshes were drained and used as a meadow by 1587. Westhorpe and Dunwich Marshes were also reclaimed. Coastal flooding in the 20th century damaged some of the drainage, and the area now is the Walberswick Nature Reserve, with some elegant grazing on the higher areas, and extensive wetlands.**

**Short walk continued**

**After bridge, turn left following the Suffolk Coast Path signs and then fork left at a junction, then following the Suffolk Coast Path sign down to a boardwalk along the river. Shortly after crossing a small wooden bridge turn right onto a footpath through the reeds heading toward a seat on a low hill.**

**Behind the seat turn right, and follow the path, which bends left and out of the Reserve, heading towards Walberswick Church.**

**Turn left on unsurfaced road between houses, then cross a farm track into a byway towards the church and churchyard.**

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**www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org**

**The size of the ruins of St Andrew’s Church, dating from late 15th century, demonstrates the wealth and status of this maritime community. This was the village’s third church, built at the end of the 15th Century, to save the burden of its upkeep, and the new church built on site. It contains a number of features that date from the medieval period, including floor slabs with merchants’ marks. The tower was preserved at this time thanks to its importance as a prominent mark for mariners.**

**Decision time now – to carry on a further 2.5km or so on the Ferry Car Park, passing the Bell Inn on your right.**

**Short walk continued**

**Turn right and follow this road – with care, narrow pavements – back into Walberswick, passing the Anchor Inn on the right. The road bends left, past the village green and eventually to the Ferry Car Park, passing the Bell Inn on your right.**
Walberswick National Nature Reserve

Walberswick is narrow, with small pavements. There can be muddy paths in winter, especially out on the marshes. The Common, and the river Blyth, whilst the short walk returns past a further loop to the north of the town, to Walberswick Bridge.

The longer walk is an extension of the shorter – they start out together, but part company when they reach the river Blyth, whilst the short walk rejoins past the Anchor Inn and through the village. Be prepared for some muddy parts in winter, especially if still the November mist is still great – apart from a few minor humps in the heart of the town.

Most of the walk is soft, but the road leading back into Walberswick, with some small pavements. There can be heavy tourist traffic, so be cautious, as they may be trapped on the move too.

The walks are suitable for walking dogs, but they should not be allowed to run on the main street, where the traffic or hounds may disturb the bird life. Take note of Open Access signs at the Reserve.

Cross over, visit church, or carry straight on into Church Lane. It becomes a bridleway, and enters Open Access land. Soon after this, take the second available bridleway turning off to the right, crossing Walberswick Common.

Walberswick Common is the largest of several tracts of land around the village held by the Walberswick Commons Trust. This charitable organization, originally set up in the 19th century to manage grazing land for cattle, uses income from the lands, which include the car parks, to fund scholarships and to protect the environment, with the help of contributions from Defra under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme. One of its principles is to maintain unimproved access for Walberswick residents.

The Common is characteristically clothed in gorse and heather. This is the ideal home for the rare Dartford warbler, particularly vulnerable to cold winters, but the gorse offers some protection, as well as a perch from which to sing.

The Dartford warbler is a small brownish-orange songbird with a white breast. It is found in southern England, primarily in the counties of Suffolk and Essex, and in the Isle of Wight. The species’ population is estimated at around 2,000 pairs, with the majority breeding on the heathland of the Walberswick Common.

The Common is also home to a number of other rare and endangered species, including the Adder, the Natterjack Toad, and the Blyth’s Pipistrelle Bat. The area is managed by the Commons Trust to maintain its natural habitat for these species.

The Common is also of significant archaeological interest, with a number of prehistoric and medieval sites, including a Bronze Age barrow and a Norman motte and bailey castle.

The Common is open to the public for walking, cycling, and other non-motorized activities, but is managed by the Commons Trust to maintain its natural habitat for the Dartford warbler and other species.

Further information

Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Tel: 01502 350 045 www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org

Pub Walks

Trains Whistle stops in Walberswick

Bus East Anglia Bus Services to Felixstowe www.eastanglia.co.uk Tel: 01206 771 199

Coach – see demand bus service Tel: 07725 828 512

Ferry Cross Channel Ferries Tel: 01502 402 000

10am - 5pm. Runs each day through the Summer

Footpath/other road

Country Park

Worship Place of interest

Car Park/Layby

Long Walk – continued

Cross over, visit church, or carry straight on into Church Lane. It becomes a bridleway, and enters Open Access land. Soon after this, take the second available bridleway turning off to the right, crossing Walberswick Common.

The Southwold Railway opened in 1879, with a 3 foot gauge track running 8.75 miles from Southwold to Halesworth, crossing the river Blyth via a swing bridge. Southwold was by then in decline as a port, unable to compete with Lowestoft, but needed to serve its ongoing fishing industry, to trade, and to draw in ‘tourists’. Plans were put forward to extend and improve the line, but none came to pass. World War One damaged the fishing industry, motor bus services were introduced in 1925, and the line was closed in 1929.

The Southwold Railway was a small, narrow gauge line that operated in Southwold, a town on the Suffolk coast in England. The railway opened on 1879 and operated until 1929, when it was closed due to competition from motor bus services. The line was unusual in that it had a 3-foot gauge track, which was wider than the standard 4-foot 8.5-inch gauge used on most other railways.

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