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 to Kessingland in the north. www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org

From the Horse and Groom (1) turn right and walk 300 metres alongside the busy A12 to the crossroads in Wrentham. Turn right into Southwold Road and carry on until you reach a cottage on the right with a Greco/Roman façade. Cross the road to footpath opposite (turning left off road).

Alternatively, start at Five Bells, on the Southwold Road: turn left out of pub, and about 150m on you will see the cottage (as above) on your left, footpath off to the right.

Take the well-marked path straight across field, and at field edge, turn right.

In these open fields, you may see some migrating Wheatears and Wagtails in spring and autumn. They are most likely to visit our east coast during or after easterly or north-easterly winds, in periods of low pressure and rain.

After 100m turn left by a large oak. Follow this broad path, passing Field Farm on the left, to a T junction with a generous byway (Green Lane) – note, these tracks can be used by motor vehicles, and you may well meet farm traffic.

Turn right and follow the byway to a crossroads with a metalized lane, where you turn left and follow to the hamlet of Covehithe. Turn right at the junction and pass St Andrews Church.

The impressive but ruined St Andrews Church, probably dating from the 15th century, did not serve an exceptionally large congregation at any time, despite its size. Along with Blythburgh and Southwold, it was built at a time when local landowners made hefty donations to the local church, to demonstrate their status and ease their passage into the next world. A smaller church was built within the ruins of the old, after the Civil War, and it still contains the damaged but salvaged 15th century font.

Walkers can continue to the end of the road (400m), from where Southwold is visible in the distance, to the right. Please note, the beach and cliffs are not accessible from here.

The coastline suffers from severe erosion at this point. Below you, the underlying geology is soft and sandy – not ideal cliff material. The North Sea attacks the base of the cliffs, the top becomes unstable and eventually slumps, the beach receives the debris, the sea removes it – and starts all over again. The cliff line has receded about half a kilometre in the last 150 years and the church may be at risk within the next 100 years.

The cliffs have been designated as part of a larger SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), extending from Pakefield to Easton Bavents, for their geological significance. The soft cliffs are cut in the chalky sands of the Norwich Crag, tipped with the pebbles of Westleton Beds, and when the beach has been scoured by the sea, clays rich in fossils are exposed.

Retrace your steps back past the church to the road junction.

(Continued overleaf)
Wrentham Route overview
The longer version of the walk (5.5 miles/8.9km) starts at the Horse & Groom in Wrentham and also visits the Five Bells in Southwold. For a shorter walk (4.5 miles/7.2km), you could simply start from and return to the Five Bells. There is an optional extra 2km when you get to Covehithe, to visit the Broad and beach. From the junction bear right at the junction – signposted ‘Wrentham’. Follow this lane past woods on left, then – opposite a pub on right - turn left into Byway (the other end of Green Lane). After 400 metres turn right on footpath – you are now retracing your steps along the track to the large oak, turn right, turn left across field and back to the Southwold road opposite the Greco/Roman cottage. Beware of traffic when emerging on to this road. You can follow us on twitter.com/adnams or our website adnams.co.uk for more Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB pub walks and guides.

Wrentham
Optional diversion to the seaside
This adds about 3km to your walk. For a complete change of scene, take the footpath to the left just before the junction. It leads down to Covehithe Broad and a delightful secluded beach, through a fragment of heath. This is part of Rameace Reserve – dogs on leads please. To return, retrace steps to Covehithe village, and back to road junction.

Covehithe Broad is one of several ‘percolation lagoons’ on this coast, where a bay has been cut off by the shingle deposition on the beach. Fresh water drains into the lagoon from the land, and salt water percolates into it through the shingle, as well as occasionally flowing over the top. Salts, but less so than seawater, it produces yet another variety of habitat. There are extensive reedbeds and some open water – a paradise for birds. Ducks, Kittiwakes and wildfowl abound. Migrants may be seen, too, heading inland for shelter in northerly and easterly winds. Look out for swallows heading south in the autumn. Sand Martins nest in the sandy cliffs, and Sedge and Reed warblers frequent the reedbeds.

From the junction bear right at the junction – signposted ‘Wrentham’. Follow this lane past woods on left, then – opposite a pub on right - turn left into Byway (the other end of Green Lane). After 400 metres turn right on footpath – you are now retracing your steps along the track to the large oak, turn right, turn left across field and back to the Southwold road opposite the Greco/Roman cottage. Beware of traffic when emerging on to this sometimes busy road - there is no footpath this side. Go left for the Five Bells – 150m. Go right to crossroads in Wrentham then left along A12 to the Horse & Groom.