Blythburgh

Main walk – 2.5 miles/3.8 km

From the White Hart Inn turn right towards the bridge then right again down the lane to left of pub. At gateway to house, turn right (signed “Walberswick”) and enter the Walberswick National Nature Reserve. Alternatively, start by going to the bottom of the pub garden, through the gate onto the river wall and turn right.

Blythburgh’s location at the first practical crossing point of the River Blyth, and at the navigable head of the tidal river meant that it was once a much more important settlement than it is today. There has been a bridge here since the 12th century, and it was a significant site for the Anglo-Saxons.

The White Hart Inn was the court house for the port of Blythburgh in medieval times, while the house opposite was a customs house. Its red brick ‘Dutch’ gable end was a fashionable addition, added in the seventeenth century to a building that has been changed considerably over the years – though it would be unwise to venture along them!

In partnership with

Blythburgh was once a thriving minor port and market town, larger and more important than nearby Lowestoft, Halesworth or Southwold. Its decline began following the arrival of the Black Death in 1349, although the port continued to trade in coal, timber and stone until the beginning of the 20th century. In 1759, work began on the Blyth Navigation, a series of locks and other works built to enable boat traffic to reach as far as Halesworth, although little survives today. Later, the narrow gauge Southwold Railway (line operated between Halesworth and Southwold, via Blythburgh, from 1879 to 1929) was built. The line was badly damaged beyond economic repair, allowing the river to spread once more across the valley floor. The walls were constructed by driving wooden stakes into the river, which were then covered with clay to build up a protective bank. You can still see the remains of some of these walls today, and the Ordnance Survey still record them as Rights of Way.

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At low tide the bird life of the river can be enjoyed, and redshank, davids and lapwing are among the species likely to be seen. There has been a great increase in the number of over-wintering wading birds here since English Nature obtained most of the shooting rights in 1989. The river, coastal marshes and heathland between Blythburgh, Dunwich and Walberswick collectively form Walberswick National Nature Reserve, one of the outstanding wildlife sites for which the Suffolk coast is famous.

Compared to the rest of the Suffolk coast, land reclamation in the Blyth valley occurred comparatively late, taking place mainly during the 18th century. Many of the walls in this part of the river have since been abandoned, or damaged beyond economic repair, allowing the river to spread once more across the valley floor. The walls were constructed by driving wooden stakes into the river, which were then covered with clay to build up a protective bank. You can still see the remains of some of these walls today, and the Ordnance Survey still record them as Rights of Way – though it would be unwise to venture along them!

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At cross tracks, where a path comes in from the right (this land continues onto the old river wall), go straight across, leaving an area of fenced woodland known as Deadman’s Covert to your right. At the end of this section of the wood you will reach a sign marking an area of Open Access and continue onto a right turn, curving round the end of Deadman’s Covert, and soon at a T junction with a larger track, turn right and to return along the southern side of the Covert, and keep right through gateposts.

Stay on this unsurfaced track (Lodge Lane) until it reaches the Dunwich Road. For a quick route back to the pub from here, turn right along road.

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 covering 403 square kilometres, the AONB extends from the Stour estuary in the south to the western fringe of Ipswich and to Kesgrave in the north.

www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org
Blythburgh

**Route overview**

This 2.5-mile walk follows the River Blyth downstream towards Woodbridge, following the river walk before descending into Blythburgh village.

The A12 road is crossed twice - please be careful. There is parking at the pub, but please check with the landlord before leaving your car there, especially if you plan to walk first, and don’t forget to take money for the pub.

Blythburgh Church is one of the sites in Suffolk associated with the Black Shuck myth - it’s said that on a fateful night in 1577, what was described as a fiery dog the size of a small pony, tore through the congregation, bringing mayhem and death to two worshippers. Legend says that the evil hell hound left deep scorch marks on the door as it fled from ‘Yon Church’. Could this explain the burn marks uncovered in 1933 when the door was cleaned? A more likely, if still-extraordinary, explanation is that the church spire was struck by lightning just around the corner from the church, in the garden of a house called The Priory and not currently open to the public, are the remains of Blythburgh’s Augustinian Priory. The Priory was founded 1125 and was never very large, but continued until 1537 when King Henry VIII suppressed it. The ruins and fur from the fen were valuable produce and the priory was often granted rights to take these, from lamp rectangular pits uncovered in 1933 when the door was cleaned. A more likely, if still-extraordinary, explanation is that the church was struck by lightning.

**Optional loop – 0.75 miles/1.2 km**

For the optional loop to Blythburgh Church, you will need to continue along the A12 road, cross and continue on the footpath (slightly to right), and stay on this path as it bends right towards the church, eventually to join Church Lane, bringing you to the church.

Holy Trinity Church, is one of the most famous landmarks on the A12 and fully justifies its popular nickname ‘The Cathedral of the Marshes’. It was completed in 1450 and has a spire until 1577. Its door is reputed to be the largest medieval door in England. The church has a striking feature beautifully carved wooden angels that bear damage from lead shot fired at them during the Civil War.

The safest way back to the White Hart from the church is to turn right and follow Chapel Road opposite until the junction with Dunwich Road is reached. Cross the main road and continue along Chapel Road. You will see the pub, please take the bridleway. At the busy A12 road, cross and continue along the footpath (slightly to right), and stay on this path as it bends right towards the church, eventually to join Church Lane, bringing you to the church.

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