The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is one of Britain’s finest landscapes. It extends from the Stour estuary in the south to the eastern fringe of Ipswich and, in the north, to Kessingland. It covers 403 square kilometres, including wildlife-rich wetlands, ancient heaths, windswept shingle beaches and historic towns and villages.

A partnership of 26 organisations cares for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths, coordinated by the AONB Unit. The Unit acts as a champion for the AONB, working to conserve the area’s natural beauty and encouraging sympathetic, sustainable use. AONBs are part of the UK’s ‘family’ of protected areas that includes our National Parks and Heritage Coasts. All receive special protection because of their quality and importance.

Visiting Snape

Snape is accessible from the A12 trunk road and is within easy cycling distance of the East Suffolk Railway line, which provides a regular service between Lowestoft, Ipswich and London. Snape is also served by local buses.

To find out more and plan your journey, visit:
www.travelineeastanglia.co.uk

Snape Explorer has been produced jointly by the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Snape Maltings, with funding from the Sustainable Development Fund and others.


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Contact: Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB  Tel: 01394 384948  www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org

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Snape walks

The River Alde is little more than a stream until it reaches Snape Sluice, just to the west of the Maltings. Here the river becomes tidal and its character changes, broadening into a wide estuary. It’s a place of glistening mud and shallow open water, filled twice a day by the incoming tide and rich in wildlife throughout the year.

The Snape Maltings complex and the nearby village of Snape offer excellent facilities for visitors, making them an ideal base from which to explore this fascinating area, which is part of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Snape Explorer consists of two trails, taking in the river, Snape village and the Alde valley.

Both Snape Explorer trails start from the Snape Maltings complex. The Maltings was built in the mid-19th century and was once one of the largest barley maltings in Suffolk. Its location at the head of the estuary had nothing to do with chance. Barges were able to navigate as far as Snape, providing easy transportation in an era before road transport. Since its closure as a maltings in 1965, the site has been progressively redeveloped as a unique arts, leisure and shopping complex.

Looking east from the Maltings, the river flows through a wide, barely discernable valley. The countryside here is highly characteristic of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB, an intimate mosaic of wetland, woodland, farmland and heath that makes the area so special and deservedly recognised as one of Britain’s finest landscapes.

The River Alde and its surrounding countryside has long been important for people, with signs of habitation dating back to at least the time of the Romans. Today, Snape village remains a thriving rural community whilst Snape Maltings is an excellent example of how an enterprising business can flourish within a protected landscape. Using the existing buildings sympathetically, they are making a significant contribution to the local economy.

The higher ground on either side of the river is part of the Sandlings plateau, a narrow band of light, sandy soil that runs roughly north-south from Southwold to the eastern fringe of Ipswich. Originally the countryside around the river would have been woodland, but its use by people over thousands of years has led to the more varied landscape we see today.

The local sandy soils were unsuitable for more intensive forms of agriculture, so sheep grazing dominated farming in the area for many centuries. This led to the development of large expanses of heathland, a landscape of grassland, scattered trees and heather through which huge flocks of sheep would have roamed. In the last century, modern farming methods, forestry and the growth of local towns and villages has brought change to the Sandlings and much of the area’s heaths have now been lost. Fortunately, fragments can still be seen in the Alde valley and elsewhere in the AONB.

The land in the valley floor has always been more fertile than the higher ground surrounding it. In places, land has been reclaimed from the river to create more areas for cultivation and grazing. Some of the walls protecting these areas were destroyed by the infamous 1953 flood and the remains of these defences can still be seen reaching out into the estuary.

As well as being very beautiful, the Alde estuary is vitally important for wildlife and, in particular, migratory wading birds and wildfowl. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and, because of its international significance, a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar wetland site. Many of the species for which it is important can be seen on the Snape Explorer trail and, by visiting at different times of the year, you can enjoy a wonderful wildlife spectacle that changes with the passing seasons.

Two trails have been created to accompany this leaflet, one on each side of the river. All the paths are simple to follow and provide easy walking, although boots are recommended in winter. Look overleaf to find out more...
Snape Explorer includes two trails, one to the north of the River Alde and one to the south. Look out for information boards at Snape Maltings, Snape Warren and Iken picnic site that accompany this leaflet.

North trail

Distance: 2.0 miles (3.2 km)
Terrain: Easy – Ground under foot fairly flat, part of route on minor public road, one stile

From the Plough and Sail pub in front of Snape Maltings, cross Snape Bridge and then turn right onto the grassy embankment with the river Alde on your right. This lovely circular walk follows the north bank of the river, winding through grazing marsh, reed beds and marshy scrub until it reaches Snape Warren. Here, the Snape Explorer trail turns left, following a path through the wood for approximately 250m, before turning left once more and continuing through marshland to Snape village. Once the crossroad in the centre of the village is reached, turn left and follow the road back to Snape Maltings.

The walk can easily be extended by adding a loop around Snape Warren, following the footpaths through the woods, foreshore and heathland.

South trail

Distance: 2.0 miles (3.2 km)
Terrain: Easy – Ground under foot fairly flat, part of route on minor public road

It’s easy to extend the walk by continuing along the riverside footpath beyond the picnic site, and this provides excellent views of the river, its birdlife and Iken Church in the distance. You can walk all the way to the church but be aware that the footpath can be very muddy in places particularly in the winter.

Countryside Code

The area has an excellent network of footpaths and bridleways and we have marked two suggested walks on this map. We also have a few simple suggestions to help you enjoy the area safely and assist our work to care for it – follow the Countryside Code www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk:

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave things as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, prevent fires and take your litter home
- Dogs are very welcome – please keep them under control