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 Thorpeness

Ordnance Survey Explorer Map No 212
The village of Thorpeness is approximately 3km north of Aldeburgh. The village itself is served by the 164 bus service, while Aldeburgh is accessible via the 164/165 bus services.

For travel information see www.suffolkonboard.com or Tel 0845 606 6171

Thorpeness Explorer has been produced with the generous support of Thorpeness and Aldeburgh Hotels Ltd.
Thorpeness walks

The popular coastal village of Thorpene
ss is a great place to visit in its own right,
but it is also an excellent location from which to explore the landscape and wildlife
of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The low-lying countryside around the village
is a varied mixture of marshland, heath,
wood and shingle beach, very typical of this
nationally important landscape. Our
Thorpeness Explorer leaflet includes two
easy circular walks, designed to give you a
perfect introduction to the area.

Thorpeness was little more than a tiny
fishing hamlet until the end of the 19th
century. However, in 1910, Glencairn Stuart
Ogilvie, a Scottish barrister, bought a large
area extending from north of Aldeburgh to
Minsmere, and inland as far as Aldringham
and Leiston. Much of this land was used for
farming but Ogilvie had big plans for
Thorpeness, which he gradually developed
into a private fantasy holiday village – one of
the first purpose-built holiday developments
in the world. He built the pretty mock Tudor
and Jacobean houses and also created a
water tower disguised as a house, the
famous House in the Clouds (now a holiday
let). Ogilvie also moved a windmill from
Aldringham to Thorpeness to pump water,
there being no mains water until the 1960s.
The famous Meare, inspired by the Peter Pan
story of J M Barry, was also created in the
1910s. The Ogilvie family are still
landowners in the area but most of
Thorpeness village was sold off in the 1970s.

Today, Thorpeness retains the character of
the original holiday village development, but
is now a thriving community. The village is as
enjoyable to visit now as it was when
originally conceived, boasting an excellent
range of facilities for visitors that are open
throughout the year.

At the height of its popularity, Thorpeness
was served by a railway, a short branch of
the East Suffolk Line that terminated at
Aldeburgh. The line opened in 1859 and a
station for Thorpeness was added in 1914 to
serve the holiday village. Sadly, the line
closed to passengers in 1966 and today only
serves Sizewell Nuclear Power Station. Part
of our route follows its former course.

becomes much drier. This is the edge of the
historic Sandlings, a narrow strip of light,
sandy acidic soil that occurs between
Ipswich and Southwold. This landscape was
traditionally grazed with sheep, resulting in
the patchwork of parched grassland and
heather heath that is so characteristic of the
AONB. Traditional grazing has been
reintroduced by conservationists as a way of
managing this landscape. The ‘sheep walks’
to the north of Thorpeness provide a flavour
of a man-made landscape that has existed
almost unchanged for hundreds of years.

Highlights of the Thorpeness Walks

Much of the landscape between Aldeburgh
and Thorpeness is part of North Warren and
the Haven Nature Reserves, an area owned
and managed by the Royal Society for the
Protection of Birds (RSPB). North Warren is
one of the oldest RSPB reserves. The RSPB
first bought land here in 1938, and today
owns more than 220 hectares. The southern
Thorpeness Explorer walk takes in part of this
excellent reserve.

The grazing marshes to the south of the
village are a wonderful example of a type
of managed landscape that is now
increasingly rare. The farming of livestock on
wet grassland has been an important feature
of the coast and river valleys in Suffolk, but
many of these areas have now been
converted to arable. Where traditional
management continues, it is an important
feature of the AONB and very beneficial
for wildlife.

Away from the coast, the grassland gives
way to areas of fen and wet woodland, but
as the land gradually rises, so it also

Images: Front cover - Thorpeness Meare
1 Bitterns are among North Warren’s wildlife ‘stars’
2 The beach immediately south of Thorpeness hosts rare
shingle plants such as Sea Pea
3 In early summer Hairy Dragonflies breed in the grazing
marsh dykes
4 The House In The Clouds
Thorpeness Explorer includes two trails. The southern route takes in the grazing marshes and fen of North Warren RSPB reserve, while the northern route visits Aldringham Walks, part of the historic Sandlings heaths, before returning along the Suffolk Coast Path.

**Thorpeness walks**

**North walk (longer)** inc beach 6.8km/4.2 miles

**North walk (shorter)** 5km/3.1 miles

**South walk** 5km/3.1 miles

**Terrain:** Both routes are mainly flat on rural footpaths, bridleways and permissive paths. There is some walking on shingle beaches and the section of path between Thorpeness Hotel and Golf Club and the disused railway line can be muddy after wet weather. Please note that the northern beach route may be impassable at high tide – if using this route please check the tide times before you set off.

**Both walks**

Both walks start at the Suffolk County Council Car Park in Thorpeness, just south of the Meare. From the car park, turn right and walk past the Meare. After another 50m, turn left B1 and follow the footpath on the unmade private road which leads past the windmill and House in the Clouds. When you reach Thorpeness Hotel and Golf Club, continue straight on, keeping the club buildings and Meare on your left until you reach a junction where our path meets the old railway line C. Here, our routes separate, but it’s worth pausing for a moment to enjoy the excellent view across North Warren’s fen.

**North walk**

For the North walk, turn right and follow the footpath until you reach the B1335. Cross the road and follow the bridleway to the right of the house. The bridleway takes a sharp right turn after a short distance D and then continues across Aldringham Walks. You then have two options E.

For the longer walk, remain on the bridleway for approximately 2km until you reach a minor road F. Turn right onto a footpath that leads past the Dower House and continue to the beach. Turn right G and follow the Suffolk Coast Path along the beach back to Thorpeness. Due to coastal erosion the beach is constantly changing and the route at this point may be impassable at high tide, particularly during the spring and autumn.

For a shorter walk, turn right G onto the footpath, then right again to follow the byway across Thorpeness Common to the village. Continue through the village back to the car park.

**South walk**

For the South walk turn left and follow the route of the old railway line. Continue for approximately 1.5km until you reach an obvious path crossing your route H. Turn left and follow this footpath through the grazing marshes until you reach the coast road I. Cross the road and turn left, walking along the beach back towards Thorpeness, keeping the houses on your left.

**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**
- **Dogs are very welcome –** but please keep them under control

Contact: Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Tel: 01394 384948

www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org