



The coastal village of Walberswick. Photo: Gill Moon

A wander in Walberswick

Enjoy a walk around beloved Walberswick village, with its open coastline, popular pubs and idyllic scenery

WORDS: Discover Suffolk

There has been a settlement at Walberswick since at least the time of the Saxons. The name Walberswick is believed to derive from two Saxon words, 'Waldbert' – probably the name of a landowner – and 'wyc', meaning shelter or harbour.

Walberswick is located on a spur of high ground, close to the natural haven of the River Blyth. Whilst the landscape appears unchanging, history shows that coastal change and tidal flooding were ever present.

In 1328, a severe storm destroyed much of the ancient port of nearby Dunwich and the River Dunwich then forged a new path to the sea via Walberswick. Walberswick became a centre for fishing and shipbuilding, but its fortunes varied.



Hop aboard the ferry. Photo: Gill Moon

St Andrew's Church fell into such disrepair that it was partially demolished and a smaller church was built within its remains.

The Southwold to Walberswick Ferry is well known. In 1885, following the formation of the River Blyth Ferry Company, a pontoon that could carry a horse and cart was used to cross the river, hand operated by means of chains.

In 1911, a larger steam driven chain ferry was commissioned. This ran until the outbreak of the Second World War, when the ferry was anchored midstream as part of anti invasion measures – but it broke free and sank.

Since then, a popular rowing boat ferry service has operated between Southwold Harbour and Walberswick. For up to date times and prices, visit walberswickferry.com.

In 1879, a narrow gauge railway opened between Halesworth and Southwold and included a station at Walberswick. The railway followed the southern side of the Blyth valley then crossed the river via a swing bridge. The line connected to the East Suffolk Railway, serving holidaymakers and the fishing industry.

A link was added to Southwold Harbour in 1914, but the decline of the fishing industry swiftly followed. Increased competition from road transport and ageing equipment also took their toll and the railway closed in 1929. After the Second World War, the Bailey footbridge replaced the railway swing bridge and this bridge provides pedestrian access between Walberswick and Southwold to this day. Visit southwoldrailway.co.uk

Grazing marsh and reedbed characterise the coast between Walberswick and Dunwich. Dingle, Reedland, Westwood, Corporation and Oldtown Marshes lie in the Dunwich River valley where deep peat overlies river and marine alluvium. The area was used for fairs in the 1380s. Westwood Marsh was claimed from salt marsh around 1590.

The mid-20th century saw much re-flooding and the area is now part of the Suffolk Coast National Nature Reserve. The landscape features grazing cattle on low intensity wet grassland and is dissected by a network of dykes, with some scrubby areas. ●

THE WALK

1 Start on Walberswick village green facing Ferry Road. Turn left and then left again onto the road at the top (north end) of the village green (Leverett's Lane). Take the second track to your right, signed Bridleway.

2 Follow this track and bear right onto a footpath when you reach the Footpath sign. Follow this path across Walberswick Common and bear right again down a track (Palmer's Lane) when you reach another Footpath sign.

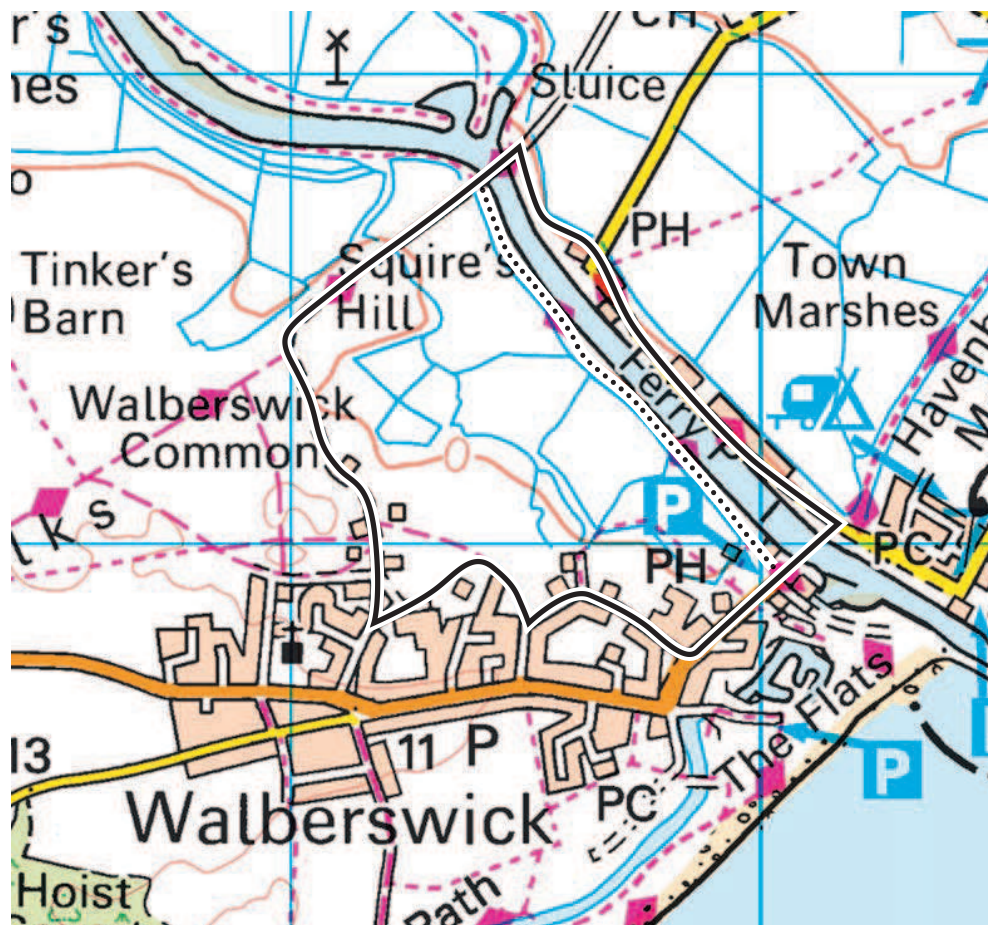
3 Bear right at the next Footpath sign and head towards the river and Southwold, following the route of the former Southwold Light Railway. Look out for the disused windmill.

4 Cross over the Bailey Bridge and turn right, keeping the River Blyth on your right. Go past the boatyards, chandlers and fishermen's sheds of the harbour and cross over the river on the foot ferry to bring you back into Walberswick.

Note: When the ferry is not running, it is possible to do a similar walk by keeping to the Walberswick side of the River Blyth instead of crossing the river on the Bailey Bridge. On leaving the ferry, turn left. You soon reach Ferry Road, which runs between the two car parking areas. Keep walking along Ferry Road; it takes you back into the village and the green.



Discover the idyllic village green.
Photo: Discover Suffolk



COMPASS POINTS

CAR: Parking available at Ferry Road or Cliff Field car parks.

BUS INFORMATION:

Visit traveline.info or suffolkonboard.com. The nearest train station is Darsham (7 miles away).

TERRAIN: Paths and tracks.

This walk takes you onto public highways. High visibility clothing is recommended.

DISTANCE: 3 miles (5 km)

TIME: 1 hour 30 mins, depending on ferry crossings (summer only).

REFRESHMENTS:

The Bell, The Anchor, The Black Dog Deli.

