

Walberswick Walk Guide



Explore a mosaic of unique landscapes including reedbed, woodland, heathland, marsh and shingle coast, which sustain a large diversity of wildlife.



The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of Britain's finest landscapes. It extends from the Stour estuary in the south to the eastern fringe of Ipswich and then north to Kessingland. The AONB was designated in 1970 and covers 403 square kilometres. It is a diverse and ever changing landscape which includes low-lying coast of shingle and sand, ancient woodland, forest, lowland heaths, farmland, valley meadowlands, estuaries with saltmarsh and intertidal flats, marshes with reedbeds and wooded fens, and historic towns and villages.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB is a partnership of organisations which works to conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty by encouraging sympathetic, sustainable use. AONBs are part of the UK's "family" of protected areas that includes National Parks and Heritage Coasts. All receive special protection because of their quality and importance.



Key to Map

- AONB area
- Additional project area
- Towns and villages
- Woodland
- Heathland
- Main roads
- Railways/stations
- Suffolk Coast Path/Stour and Orwell Walk
- Sandlings Walk
- Sailors' Path



Walberswick Highlights

This Outstanding Landscape and its wildlife is part of a network of habitats that are considered rare and significant, and are the reason for the **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** designation. Within the AONB are many site-specific conservation designations, helping this remain an Outstanding Landscape, for now and future generations. The area around Walberswick includes four of these designations:

 **Special Protection Area (SPA)** – strictly protected sites classified for rare and vulnerable birds.

 **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** – represent the country's best



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wildlife and geological sites, supporting plants and animals that are rarely found elsewhere. All SSSIs are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

 **Special Area of Conservation (SAC)** – strictly protected sites designated under the European Habitats Directive, to protect listed habitats types and species.

The wetlands are of international importance especially as a waterfowl habitat and are therefore listed as a **Ramsar Site**. You can help to protect these habitats and their wildlife by remaining on Public Rights of Way and clearly signed permissive paths and by not allowing you or any dogs to cause disturbance at any time of the year. Please follow the countryside code and any information signs displayed.

1 Walberswick. The ever changing fortunes of Walberswick are profoundly dictated by coastal change and tidal flooding. In the 14th century Walberswick's wealth increased when storms destroyed much of the port at Dunwich and at the same time a new river channel was forged directly out to sea at Walberswick. The town was able to thrive on trading with Europe, fishing and shipbuilding, but declined as the river silted up. The church of St Andrew fell into decay so was partly dismantled and restored as the smaller church that now stands within the ruins of its previous structure.

2 Suffolk Coast National Nature Reserve. Managed by Natural England, this reserve offers a mosaic of habitats including one of the largest reedbeds in Britain; grazing marsh; hay meadows; heathland; woodland; intertidal mudflats and the Blyth estuary. The landscapes that we see here today continue to evolve as they have done over the centuries due to the changing coastline and different land use by man.

3 Westwood Lodge is an interesting large manor house with a turret. Although the present building dates from the 16th century, a manor has stood



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here since at least the 14th century. The manor once sat in 240 acres of parkland which is now farmland. In the 16th century John Brooke inherited the house. He was nicknamed The Great Troubler due to his constant meddling in local affairs including enclosing the Common Land and his harsh treatment of his servants. He passed away at the age of 26 and his ghost, sometimes on horseback, is said to haunt the area.

4 Westwood Marshes The footpath takes you through open areas of reeds and Blackthorn scrub. It is a great place to listen for birds including the Cetti's Warbler with its distinctive loud bursts of song and male Bitterns booming in the spring. Look out for Marsh Harriers displaying in the sky. This large and rare harrier breeds here feeding on small birds and mammals. Bearded Tits can be seen, usually flying rapidly across the top of a reedbed. The beard is in fact a 'moustache' and part of the male plumage. They are sociable and noisy, their 'ping' calls often being the first clue to their presence. Many species of wildfowl rely on the food, shelter and breeding grounds here including the rare Gadwall, Teal, Shoveler and Greater



harsh environment but they can easily be destroyed by trampling and the adverse effect from dog poo & BBQs.

6 Dunwich Forest is owned by the Forestry Commission (FC) who purchased what was once heathland for a plantation during the 1920s. During WW1 Britain realised that its dwindling timber stocks would not be able to cope with demand and imports could not be relied upon. Much timber was required for pit props in mines whose coal supplied heavy industry. The forest is now managed jointly with the FC, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the RSPB, and a rewilding programme is underway to transform the pine plantation into a mosaic of broadleaved woodland and heath. Some of the conservation work is done by a herd of Dartmoor ponies that graze the forest to create and maintain open areas. This route offers plenty of opportunities for fantastic views over the marshes and out to sea, welcome shade in the summer and hosts of butterflies enjoying the bramble bushes.



Front Cover) Walberswick Windpump in winter; **A)** Walberswick Green; **B)** Looking south over the marsh; **C)** View from Westwood Lodge; **D)** Bearded Tit © FLPA; **E)** Sea Pea on Shingle Beach; **F)** White Admiral butterfly in Dunwich Forest.

white-fronted goose. The route through the reedbed is a fantastic place to see dragonflies in the summer.

5 Vegetated Shingle is the term for a beach with shingle stable enough to support vegetation. These rare and fragile habitats are seldom found outside North West Europe, Japan and New Zealand. Plants are specially adapted to conditions



where there is no soil, it is very windy and salty and there is little fresh water. Yellow Horned Poppy has waxy leaves and fine hairs that restrict water loss and act as a sunscreen; Sea Pea grows very low to the ground

to avoid the wind and its seeds can survive for 5 years in the sea and Sea Kale has long thick tap roots to reach freshwater and leaves that reflect sunlight. These plants are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and must not be picked, they have adapted to survive this

Around the Marshes with the option of going through the reedbed or the forest.

Start: Public Toilets, near the village hall, Ferry Road, Walberswick IP18 6TU. TM498746

Walking distances and times:

Route via the reedbed: 7.6miles/12.2km
Route via the forest: 8.3miles/13.3km
Allow 4hrs to enjoy each walk.

Terrain: Mostly flat. Routes follow Public Rights of Way, including footpaths, bridleways and byways and also permissive paths, with boardwalks in places.

Caution: There is a 1 mile (1.6km) stretch along a quiet road. Routes can be very muddy in places.

Start at the toilets. Take the footpath (FP) between the toilets and the dyke which runs parallel to the beach huts in the distance. The FP bears right at the start of a caravan park. It then bears left at the bottom of a set of steps. At a junction of paths turn



left towards the coast. **The iconic dome of Sizewell B, the UK's only pressurised water reactor (PWR) nuclear power station, can be clearly seen from here.** At the corner of a field bear right and then keep straight ahead. On reaching a T-junction turn left onto a bridleway. Bear right when you emerge from the avenue of trees and out onto the Oldtown Marshes. At a WWII Pill Box bear right and then turn left at a T-junction of paths. At the next junction bear right. **From this high point enjoy the views over the nature reserve.**



The path gently undulates and winds through an area of scrub woodland and then emerges onto a boardwalk to cross the reedbed. At a T-junction of paths turn right and continue straight ahead. After approx. 200m take the FP on the right, across a boardwalk through the reeds and then turn left onto a bridleway. On reaching a dirt track bear right and head towards the road. **This track is used by local reedcutters to access the marshes and cut reeds for thatching; the areas cleared of reeds provide pools for bitterns and herons to feed on fish and**



amphibians. Turn left along the road to join a stretch of the Sandlings Walk (SW). **This is long distance route of 60 miles from Ipswich to Southwold which explores what remains of the once extensive Sandlings Heaths.**

A grass car park area on the left offers lovely views. The metalled road becomes a gravel track and Byway. Turn left through a kissing gate and immediately right onto the FP. **This area is grazed by Highland cattle to maintain the acid grassland so please stay on the FP and keep dogs on leads.**

The path leads through a damp woodland area and then back onto the byway through a kissing gate on the right. Before reaching a car park turn left at the SW waymarker post. There are now two options to proceed. Both routes converge at a junction of FP's before the wind pump.

Route through the reedbed

Continue straight ahead towards the trees. The FP takes you through an area of wet woodland with Willow and Alder trees along a boardwalk and then through dryer Birch and Oak woodland before emerging into the reedbed. On reaching a flood defence wall turn left and then immediately right. **Do not linger on the wall as this disturbs the birds which may lead them to abandoning chicks or interferes with them feeding.** At a T-junction of paths turn left to walk past the old wind pump.

Route through Dunwich Forest

Turn right at the start of the Birch trees to remain on the SW. Pass through a gate with a cattle grid.

At this point continue straight ahead to join the St Helena Trail, which is marked with white and orange discs, through the north section of Dunwich Forest. When the St Helena Trail splits, turn left. **When the trail turns right you can take a short detour to the left and discover the hide, a great place for wildlife watching.** The path winds up a gentle slope with fine views across the



reedbed. On reaching a gravel track where the St Helena trail turns right you turn left, towards a cottage. Pass through the gate on the right of the cattle grid. At a T-junction of tracks, turn left onto a FP. You now join the Suffolk Coast Path. **This is a long distance route of 60 miles between Lowestoft and Felixstowe which is marked by blue and yellow discs.** You follow this route as far as the beach huts in Walberswick. **High points along the track give views of Dunwich and the sea as well as the marshes and Walberswick Church. The small woodland is worth a visit in spring to see the wild Daffodils.**

Pass through a gateway and after 200m bear right, this path will lead you out onto the reedbed. At a T-junction of paths turn left. **Some areas of the shingle beach ahead of you are fenced off in the summer to protect the nesting Little Terns and**

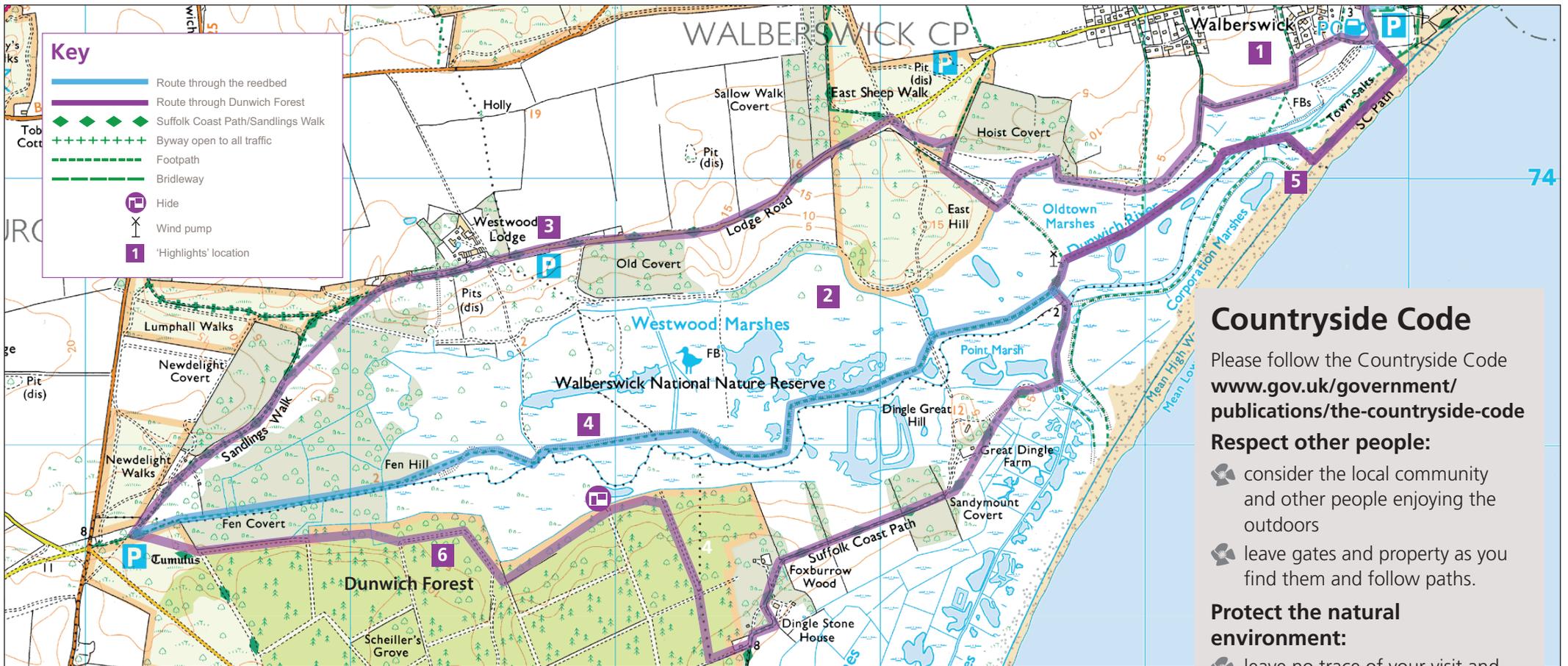
shingle vegetation. Follow the path along the river towards the wind pump.

The wind pump was built in the 1800's and was used to drain the salt marshes and grind feed for horses; it was burnt out in the 1960's. Just past the wind pump turn right to cross a bridge, keeping the river on your right towards the coast.

Follow signs for coast path and at a T-junction of paths turn right. Cross over the river at the bridge. Ascend the shingle ridge and turn left to head north back towards Walberswick. Turn left just in front of the beach huts, cross back over the river and turn right to follow the track back to the public toilets.

G) Look out for Dragonflies like this Common Darter; **H)** Sandlings Walk Sign; **I)** Sunlight through Birch trees; **J)** Walking on the St Helena Trail; **K)** Looking north over the marsh; **L)** Walberswick beach huts and view of Southwold.





Countryside Code

Please follow the Countryside Code www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code
Respect other people:

- consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths.

Protect the natural environment:

- leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- fires can devastate wildlife, habitats and property – so be careful with naked flames and cigarettes at any time of the year
- keep dogs under close control at all times, especially when amongst livestock and during bird nesting season. Release your dog if chased by cattle. Wherever you are, clean up after your dog.

Enjoy the outdoors:

- plan ahead and be prepared
- follow advice and local signs.

Visiting Walberswick

- Ordnance Survey**
Explorer Map No. 231 (Southwold and Bungay).
- Walberswick** is at the end of the B1387 and approximately 3 miles/5 km from the A12 at Blythburgh.
- Ferry Road** pay & display - IP18 6TU;
Harbour pay & display - IP18 6TJ.
- Public transport information:**
www.suffolkonboard.com or call **0345 606 6171**. Local buses serve Southwold from Halesworth, Beccles

& Lowestoft; you can then walk to Walberswick (30mins).

Connecting communities: This is a local book in advance travel service which links to public transport **01728 635938**.

Nearest train station Darsham.
www.nationalrail.co.uk Tel: **08457 484950**

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Disclaimer: Whilst the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of maps and information within this publication, they are provided as guidance only and we cannot accept any liability for their interpretation and use.

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