

THE EEL'S FOOT MINSMERE AND DUNWICH TRAIL, EASTBRIDGE, SUFFOLK



Easy Terrain

The Eel's Foot is a traditional, cosy inn set in the heart of Suffolk's Heritage Coast and the ideal place for refreshments before or after your walk.

A 5 mile circular pub trail from the Eel's Foot in Eastbridge, Suffolk. The walking route performs a simple loop out to the coast and back, taking in stretches through Minsmere Nature Reserve, the Suffolk Coastal Path and Dunwich Heath along the way. There are beautiful views to enjoy, lots of birdlife within the reserves and a chance for a paddle in the sea.

Getting there

The walk starts and finishes from the Eel's Foot pub in the hamlet of Eastbridge, near Leiston in Suffolk. Travel north on the B1122 from Leiston and, after passing the ruins of Leiston Abbey, you'll see the signs for the pub to the right. Follow the narrow lane (with passing places) for about a mile and it will lead you directly to the pub, which has its own car park.

Approximate post code **IP16 4SN**.

Walk Sections



Start to Dovehill Plantation



Leave the pub car park and turn left along the village lane passing in front of the pub, taking care of any occasional traffic. Immediately after the last cottage on the left, turn left onto the signed footpath to Minsmere Sluice, a wide stone track. A few yards before the track bends left, turn right down a narrower stone path (signed FP for footpath) with fenced fields each side. The path

Access Notes



- 1. The walk has just a few gentle gradients and follows woodland, heath and beach paths which can get a bit muddy after rain and in winter.*
- 2. There are no stiles on route, just a few kissing gates to negotiate.*
- 3. Dogs are welcome along the entire route, but they must be on short leads in Dunwich Heath in order to protect the ground nesting bird populations.*

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ADNAMS
SOUTHWOLD

winds between fences and then emerges to follow the left-hand edge of a crop field.

At the end of the first field, follow the path as it narrows between gorse bushes (at the end of a belt of woodland) and then continue ahead on the grass path between open fields. The views have now opened up ahead so take time as you walk to appreciate the views across the surrounding area. At the end of the field, pass through the wooden gate ahead. Follow the footpath as it swings left and then right to become a track with Dovehill Plantation to the right and Lower Abbey Marshes to the left.

1 → 2 Dovehill Plantation to Minsmere Sluice



Keep ahead on this track, keeping your eyes peeled for wildlife in the marshes to the left. Otters make the marshes their home, a welcome return after they became extinct within Suffolk during the 1970s. Likewise, marsh harriers (a bird species reduced to just one pair in the UK by 1971), are another local conservation success story, frequently seen hunting within the marshes.

A little further along pass through the kissing gate and keep ahead on the track. You are now entering Minsmere Nature Reserve which is managed by the RSPB and is known as one of the UK's premier bird watching sites. Follow the wide grass track between reed beds and, as the views open up to the right, you'll be able to see the dome of Sizewell power station above the tree line.

At the end of this long straight grass track, you'll see a gate ahead with the remains of a chapel in the field beyond. The chapel remains mark the spot of the original Leiston Abbey founded in 1182. The increased risk of flooding led to the Abbey being abandoned in favour of the site further inland (now just beyond the B1122). The chapel was probably built when the abbey was relocated and stands in the site of the original monastic church.

Swing left in front of the gate, passing between a pair of posts, and then bear right to follow the path with the dyke running directly on the right. Continue through the open grass area, staying close to the lines of gorse and reeds to the right. The grass track soon draws level with another path to the left, simply keep ahead and you will emerge to the large red brick Minsmere Sluice.

2 → 3 Minsmere Sluice to East Hide

Pass through the gate onto the sluice and bear right to reach a three-way sign post. Turn left here, heading north along the coastal dunes with the fence line for the marshes running to the left. Follow this path (the Suffolk Coast Path) with the gorse and



beach dunes to the right. Within the dunes you'll see concrete cubes, tank trap defences laid in World War II.

A little distance along you'll see a set of steps (within wooden fencing) on the left, these lead you over to a viewing point for the Scrape. The Scrape is an artificial salt water lagoon, created in 1962 to attract wading birds. Take a moment to enjoy the birds here should you wish. The greatest success story is that of the avocets (the black and white bird which is the logo for the RSPB). Having become extinct in Great Britain in 1840, avocets have bred here every year since the Scrape was created. Common terns and gulls also breed on the Scrape's islands. Soon after the viewing platform you'll come to the access steps for the East Hide, another place from which to enjoy the Scrapes' birds.

3 → 4 East Hide to Dunwich Heath



Continue along the sandy track and soon the coastal dune bank to the right levels out a little. This is a great place to veer across to the right and get a view of the sea (or even take time for a paddle!).

Follow the path along the dunes ridge and, where the sand dunes end, you'll see a wide pebble beach ahead. Keep ahead for just a short distance further and, before you reach an area of scrub, fork left onto a fenced path (marked with a National Trust arrow). Follow this fenced path (heading for the white coastguard cottages up on the cliffs ahead) along the back of the beach to reach a T-junction. Turn right down the steps (signed Coastal Path) and swing left and then left again to join the shingle path marked as a brideway.

Follow this path steadily uphill, up a series of shallow steps. (Note: dogs will need to be on a short lead from this point to protect the ground nesting birds). At the top of the path you'll emerge out alongside a vehicle barrier to reach a tarmac road. Keep ahead in the same direction to reach a four-way signpost to the left of the white coastguard cottages, the Dunwich Heath National Trust visitor centre. (Note: there are public toilets down

to the left here should you wish to use them.)

4 → 5 Dunwich Heath to Woodland Gate



Keep straight ahead on the tarmac lane, passing through the gateway, signed 'To the heath'. Pass the end of the terraced white cottages and immediately afterwards, turn left down the signed footpath, with the Heath Barn field study centre to the left.

After the barn you'll come to a collection of picnic benches. Ignore the Suffolk Coast Path which forks right here, instead keep straight ahead on the main stone track, passing between small wooden posts. Now follow this wide stone path for some distance as it winds through the centre of Dunwich Heath, ignoring any smaller paths off to the left and right.

Lowland heath remains a rare habitat in the UK, and areas such as this are important to specialist species including ground nesting birds such as the Dartford warbler. Dartford warblers, named after Dartford Heath in Kent, were reduced to just 10 pairs in the UK in 1963 and conserved areas of heath provide an invaluable habitat for nesting. The song of the Dartford warbler is a distinctive rattling warble.

Continue until you reach the edge of a section of woodland where the main track swings right. Fork left here, down the shallow steps (signed for Sandlings Walk) and at the junction keep ahead through the kissing gate.

5 → 6 Woodland Gate to Hangmans New Wood

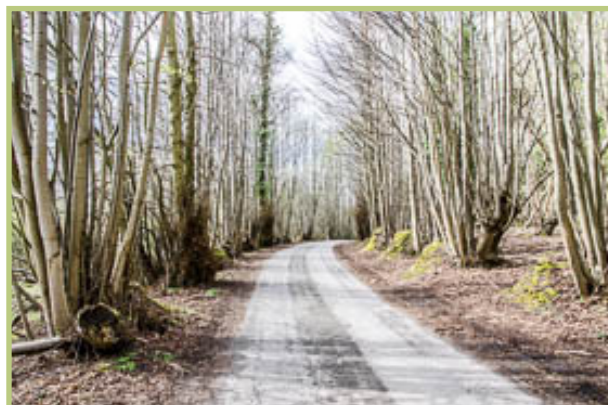


Here you leave Dunwich Heath (good news for dogs!), cross a stream and join a path through woodland. Soon you will be

walking through a dense section of silver birch trees with their striking silver trunks. Birch trees are often cultivated for their appearance or timber, but the sap is also of use. The sap can be tapped from trees (don't try this as an amateur though!) and with a 1% sugar content it can be brewed into wine.

You will eventually emerge to a T-junction. Turn left onto the bridleway, still signed as the Sandlings Walk. As you emerge from the woodland you'll reach a crossroads with a tarmac lane. Keep straight ahead to take the grass path directly opposite. Across the open fields to the left you'll have lovely views across to the sea. The path soon leads you into a section of woodland, Hangmans New Wood.

6 → 7 Hangmans New Wood to End



Follow the path left and then ahead through a pretty section of woodland. Continue straight on as the path merges with a quiet tarmac access lane (taking care of occasional traffic). The lane is lined with pretty coppiced beech trees, giving it a strange enchanted feel.

At the end of the avenue of trees, follow the tarmac lane as it swings left passing Four Winds House on the right. Follow the lane over Dam Bridge, crossing the waterway Minsmere New Cut, and a little further along you'll come to the Eel's Foot on the left for some well-earned hospitality.

Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.

