

Slapton



Start: | Middle Car Park, Slapton Sands

Distance: | 2.75 miles (+0.5 miles for alternative return route)

Difficulty: | Easy to Moderate. 4 flights of steps. There is a viewpoint with disabled access and adjacent parking, by Slapton Bridge, grid ref. SX 828443. The walk route, however, is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs.

Terrain: | Footpath by Slapton Ley, occasionally uneven, with wet sections along shore after heavy rain; boardwalk; green lane, muddy and soggy in wet weather; surfaced road.

Parking: | Middle Car Park, Slapton Sands. Pay and display.

OS map: | Explorer OL20

Grid Ref: | SX 828 442

Public transport: | See www.travelinesw.com

Refreshments: | In Slapton or Torcross

Toilets: | Public toilets at Torcross Car Park.

This walk is available in the following formats from www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walk



online walk



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South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walks

Directions

Note: Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve request that dogs be kept on leads through the Reserve to avoid disturbance of wildlife.

- 1 From car park, turn right along road. Turn first left signed 'Slapton ½m'.
- 2 After 150m turn left onto public footpath. Follow path along shore.
- 3 Path curves away from ley shore. At fingerpost turn left along boardwalk signed 'public footpath'.
- 4 At end of boardwalk bear left along footpath signed 'Deer Bridge ¼m'.
- 5 At the road turn right up hill.
- 6 Go straight over at Townsend Cross. Bear right, and follow lane down and around to the left. At junction at Brook St Cross turn right.
- 7 After passing Queen's Arms, follow road around to left.
- 8 From edge of village, follow path along side of road back down to Slapton Sands. Alternatively, just past Field Studies Centre turn right down farm track signed 'public footpath'.
- 9 After 250m, by sign reading 'Farm Only', bear right through gate to continue along footpath.
- 10 Path leads you back to retrace your steps around shore of ley to the road. Turn right.
- 11 Cross to right at junction to return to car park.

Further Interest

Heritage

During the Second World War, the whole area around Slapton was used by American forces to prepare for the invasion of Europe. 3000 people from seven parishes had to leave, taking with them everything they owned, and find somewhere else to live for almost a year.

The memorial by the beach recognises the sacrifice of those local residents who had to wrench themselves away from their homes for the war effort.

One casualty of the war was the Royal Sands Hotel, a grand and well known old edifice which once stood where the middle car park is now. The damage began with a stray sheepdog which set off mines close to the hotel. Intensive live artillery exercises on the beach there finished it off.

The village of Slapton has been around for millennia. There were settlements here in the Bronze Age, followed by a fort during the Iron Age. Until recently Slapton – whose name means 'slippery place' – could only be reached along narrow lanes from inland. That, along with the fact that it is invisible from the sea, means that the village has had a fairly peaceful as well as long existence.

The atmospheric tower you can see looming over Slapton Village is now mainly a home for rooks and bats. Centuries ago, though, it was part of a college chantry for priests. Sir Guy de Brian, the local lord of the manor, built the chantry in 1373, on condition that a mass be sung for his soul each year.

Landscape

The shingle ridge of Slapton Sands is mainly made up of flints, washed up from the seabed twenty five miles offshore. Mixed in with them are traces of granite washed down from the moor, and flakes and chips of local rocks, schist and slate.

Slapton Ley is the largest natural expanse of freshwater in South West England. When the shingle ridge of Slapton Sands was pushed up by rising seas after the last ice age, the lagoon formed behind it, fed by streams and the river Gara.

Unusual as a landform, and with rare and important habitats, the area around Slapton Ley is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is also a National Nature Reserve.

As the route leaves Slapton Village, you will pass Slapton Ley Field Studies Centre on the left. The centre hosts school, university and adult groups on courses relating to the environment and biology.

There is a visitor centre for the Reserve here which you are welcome to visit. For more information about the Reserve and the Centre visit www.slnnr.org.uk



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Wildlife

Along the top of the shingle ridge at Slapton Sands grow several rare plants, including Viper's Bugloss. This fabulously named flower throws up spikes of vivid blue blooms. Look out also for the Yellow Horned Poppy. The name describes it well, the 'horned' part referring to its long curved seed pods.

In spring, if you stand on the bridge just outside the reserve entrance and look down you may see the startling sight of thousands of fish. These Roach, Rudd and Perch are massed here to spawn.

There are a bewildering variety of wild birds on the nature reserve at Slapton Ley, coming in all kinds, shapes and sizes. Ideally, take along a pair of binoculars, an identification book, and a bit of patience to make the most of what's on offer. Just after you enter the reserve from the road, a shelter on the left contains a blackboard. This has recent sightings written on which will help give you an idea of the birdlife currently around.

Autumn and spring bring migrating birds pausing here as they pass through. Starlings roost in huge numbers in the reedbeds during the winter, and up to 20,000 Swallows gather here in the Autumn to roost. Wildfowl on the Ley include Pochard, Wigeon, Shoveler, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, and Gadwall.

The Great Crested Grebe is a regal- looking resident of the Ley, with its long neck, plumed head, and chestnut ruff framing a white face. 'Grebe - fur' - the skin and feathers of the bird - once formed a very fashionable part of the wardrobes of wealthy women. It almost became extinct as a result. However, the grebe's plight led to the creation of the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), and its numbers have since recovered.

The 'boom' call of the Bittern is a sound rarely heard in England these days, but if you're lucky you might hear it here. This shy, sizeable bird overwinters on the reserve, skulking about in the reeds where it hunts for fish.

There is a chance you might see another national rarity, the Marsh Harrier, gliding above the reed beds. This large bird of prey has long dark wings and tail. It hunts birds, mammals, and frogs.

Reedbeds are an uncommon and invaluable habitat. Reedbeds are their own worst enemies in that they tend naturally to dry out – and so die out – over time. This makes maintaining them a challenging and sometimes costly job. The reeds here were once widely harvested for thatch, and areas are still cut each year.

The reedbeds are visited in the summer by Reed Warblers. These small, brown, narrow- billed birds are able to cling to the vertical stems of the reeds. They build nests woven around several reed stems. Rarer still, Cetti's Warblers are Slapton residents. You might hear their sudden loud peals of song from amongst the reeds or scrub.

Wildflowers to be found alongside the path by the Ley include Primroses, Celandine, Bluebells and Wild Garlic. The spring and early summer also bring out sprays of white Stitchwort, and of the blushing Red Campion.

In the wet areas around the boardwalk grow miniature carpets of Golden Saxifrage, a plant with tiny yellow- green flowers in the centre of a little nest of leaves. Dwarfing these are the stands of Hemlock Water Dropwort. A poisonous plant, it produces white 'umbrellas' of flowers on tall stems, and has large parsley- like leaves.

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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas has supported Explore South Devon to promote circular walks within the South Devon AONB using the South West Coast Path National Trail.

