

Kingsbridge to Frogmore circular

Creeks and countryside



A 7.5 mile walk over exploring some of Kingsbridge estuary's creeks - Bowcombe and Frogmore. Steep in places but the views are worth the climb!

Start: | Quay car park, Kingsbridge, TQ7 1JD

Distance: | 7.5 miles

Difficulty: | Moderate to strenuous. Steep ascent and descent, 6 stiles

Terrain: | Surfaced and unsurfaced paths

Parking: | Quay car park, Kingsbridge, TQ7 1JD

OS map: | Explorer OL20

Grid Ref: | SX 735 439

Public transport: | Buses to Kingsbridge – See www.travelinesw.com

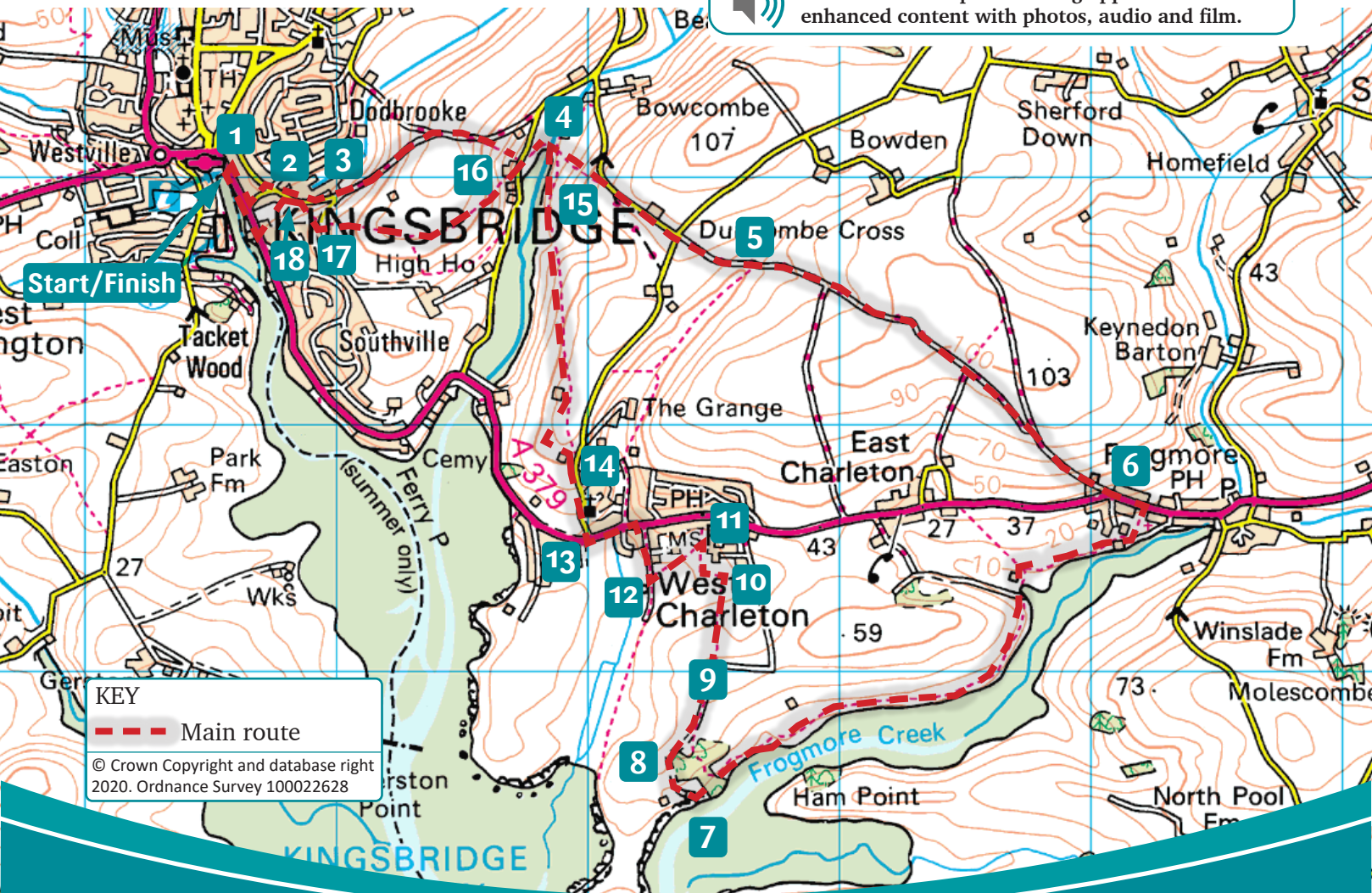
Refreshments: | In Kingsbridge, West Charlton and Frogmore

Toilets: | In Kingsbridge

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 online walk	 downloadable PDF	 downloadable route map onto your device
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South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walks

Directions

- 1** Turn right out of car park along The Promenade. Turn left into Derby Road, and at the crossroad turn right, still in Derby Road.
- 2** At the bottom of the dip follow road up to the left and where road turns sharp right. Ignore this and go straight on up the green lane.
- 3** Climb steadily to the top, and half way down the other side take Public Footpath over stile on right. Descend steeply and cross the road at the bottom by two stiles. Take footpath to the head of Bowcombe Creek. (A bit of paddling here across stepping stones if it's very wet.)
- 4** Cross the causeway and take footpath straight ahead up the hill. When you reach the road, turn right and follow it up to Duncombe Cross. At the Cross go straight on along the green lane.
- 5** In 1 mile another lane joins from the left. Keep on down the hill to the main road. Turn left and walk towards the village, taking great care on this busy main road.
- 6** Turn right onto public footpath signed for Frogmore Creek and West Charleton. Follow path around field edge and along above creek.
- 7** Eventually the path drops down onto the foreshore. After 200m follow the 'Public Footpath' sign inland.
- 8** When you meet the lane go straight on.
- 9** On the corner by the fire beacon basket turn left through metal gate and down public footpath through field.
- 10** At the bottom the path follows the field edge left, then turns right through the hedge bank.
- 11** Walk up field to next waymarker, then sharp left onto public footpath following farm track through field.
- 12** At the lane turn right. At main road turn left along the footpath.
- 13** Turn left along the road to the church. Turn right up Church Lane.
- 14** Take the footpath to the left, just before the allotments. Walk 3/4 mile back to the head of Bowcombe Creek.



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- 15** Turn left onto the bridge and follow the footpath back to the road.
- 16** Take the left hand footpath across and up the steep field. Cross the stiles, keeping to the hedgeline back towards the Rugby club.
- 17** Keep right through rugby club car park. Cross road and stile onto footpath down steep scrubby field.
- 18** Join the road left, then turn immediately left through the recreation ground. At the road, cross and turn right to follow the creek back to the car park.

Further Interest

Heritage

Kingsbridge gets its first historical mention in a charter of 962, and the town was at one time owned by Buckfast Abbey. Trade was via the sea. Ships plied between the estuary and south west France in mediaeval times, and at one time clippers, schooners and barges were all built here. Later still, packet steamers loaded and landed goods at the Quay. The advent of steel ships finally put paid to Kingsbridge as a port.

Bowcombe Creek was once a busy transport route, with boats taking slate from the nearby quarry, and cider produced on local farms. They travelled up to the head of the creek at the tidal limit. There is still a bridge here but the creek is very silted up and a reed bed is growing. In 1824 an Act was passed to build a turnpike road between Frogmore and Kingsbridge at a cost of £1,402 and in 1828 works commenced to build an embankment and a stone bridge. In 1845 the drawbridge section was replaced with a swing bridge which pivoted on 12 cannonballs! With improved roads and the extension of the railway to Kingsbridge in 1893, water transport from Bowcombe was obsolete and the opening section was replaced with a stone arch.

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Frogmore, like many of the villages around the Salcombe- Kingsbridge Estuary, is a very old settlement. Its name is a Saxon one and means ‘the frog’s pool’. This sleepy backwater once functioned as a bustling quay, and the spring tides would bring quite large sailing ships right up the creek. Coal and corn were loaded on the wharves here until well into the 1800s. A limekiln stands down by the foreshore near Frogmore. Like many others it was situated close to the water because the limestone burnt in it was brought in by boat from Torbay and Plymouth. There are 27 of these kilns dotted around the shore of the estuary.

The long green lane along which you walk towards Frogmore was once the main turnpike road from Kingsbridge to Frogmore. The turnpikes were toll roads, and unpopular among many. These routes often had a soldier’s pike set as a barrier across the road by the toll house, which is how they got their name. The lane here would almost certainly have been a packhorse route well before the turnpike was built in 1824.

Landscape

The Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary is unusual because it has no large river feeding it, just a series of small streams from Frogmore, Bowcombe, Batson, East Allington, Sherford and other surrounding villages, rising at springs some 140 metres above sea level. It is tidal up as far as Kingsbridge, the bridging point five miles inland. Like the other estuaries of South Devon, the original deep river valley has been flooded as sea levels rose after the last ice age.

As well as being part of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the estuary is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a local nature reserve and lies within the South Devon Heritage Coast. Two tides a day fill this ‘ria’ or drowned river valley with sea water. With no river input the estuary is almost entirely a marine system which has brought about some rare and important habitats and species. Reed beds, mudflats and eelgrass beds all help to support the abundance of wildlife that inhabits this special estuary.

You may notice the greyish stone along the back of the foreshore on Frogmore Creek. This rock is called Meadfoot Slate. Where the route leaves the foreshore

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to head inland, you pass the old Geese Quarries. The stone which built the tower at Dartmouth Castle was hewn here in the 15th century, and this quarry also provided the raw material for West Charleton church and many other local buildings.

Wildlife

The shady green lane from Washabrook abounds in characteristic hedgerow plantings such as Hazel and Blackthorn, along with Elder. All are hung with edible fruits in the autumn. Ferns include the prolific strap-like Hartstongue, and there are Cuckoo Pints along the banks. These shade-loving plants are also known as ‘lords and ladies’. They have a distinctive form, with a finger-like purple flower spike framed by a pale greenish cowl, which gives way later in the summer to a cluster of bright red berries atop a fleshy stalk. Butterflies to be found along these lanes include Red Admiral and the delicate brown Speckled Wood with its cream markings and black ringed ‘eyes’.

The mud exposed at low tide along the creek may not always look particularly appealing, but it contains a greater density of life than a tropical rainforest! There are so many organisms that they use up all the oxygen in the mud within the top few millimetres. This mud is a 24- hour restaurant for wildlife. Fish feed on the organisms on and near the mud’s surface when the tide is in. When it goes out, wading birds come in to pick and probe for edible goodies.

The rocky foreshore is rich in seaweeds. There are less of them down on the mud, as most seaweeds need something – a stone or pebble – to hold on to. You may be able to spot Egg Wrack, which has large bladders along its olive- green fronds, and reproductive bodies that look a bit like pale raisins on stalks. This seaweed produces a bladder each year, so you can work out its age – some plants in the estuary are reckoned to be over 100 years old!

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The bleached- looking shells of cockles are often sprinkled along the shore of the creek. They have a classic shell shape – curved, with ‘ribs’ spreading out and round from a tucked-in point at the bottom, and a serrated top edge. If you’re lucky you may find two still joined together to form the case in which the soft-bodied animal once lived.

The estuary is a haven for birdlife. Wildfowl overwinter here – you might see the brown headed, red eyed Pochard, or a Goldeneye, with its glossy green head, white patch by the beak and yellow eye. You’re unlikely to get through a walk along the shore without seeing a wading bird or several. Frogmore Creek is a great place to see a Greenshank in particular. This graceful bird has elegant grey-green legs and a long, slightly upturned bill.

The Shelduck is another ever-present around the creek. It is a beautiful and bold sight, with a red bill and black head on a bright white body with black and orange stripes and bands. Unusually, shelduck often nest in holes in the ground, and here they make their nests in old rabbit warrens along the creek banks.

Ospreys divide their time between Africa and Scotland. In spring, and particularly in autumn though, you might spy one having a few days’ break by the estuary during its migration. They are large birds of prey with broad wingspans, and are almost always seen near water. Ospreys feed on fish, which they catch in their large, strong talons.

Bowcombe Creek is a refuge for many birds. The trees across the creek used to house a huge heronry. This has now gone, but the odd Heron may still be seen standing motionless by the water. Brilliant white Little Egrets are a common sight both here and by the creek in Kingsbridge. Buzzards are often seen overhead, rising on the thermals on broad fingered wings, as is the swifter, smaller Peregrine Falcon.

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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 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.