

Great Walks on the

CICERONE

# ENGLAND COAST PATH

30 classic walks on the longest National Trail



Andrew McCloy



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**ENGLAND**  
**COAST PATH**

30 classic walks on the longest National Trail

by Andrew McCloy

**CICERONE**

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Front cover: *The beach at Bamburgh castle (Walk 30) (photo: Madeline Williams)*

Page 1: *Dunes on the Sefton coast (Walk 5)*

Page 2-3: *The River Stiffkey near Morston (Walk 25)*



# Contents

Map key .....	4
Overview map .....	5
Route summary table .....	6
<b>Introduction</b> .....	9
Geological treasures and coastal landforms .....	10
An ever-changing coastline .....	11
Nature and wildlife .....	12
An island history .....	13
Trade and Industry .....	16
A coastal culture .....	17
Evolution of the England Coast Path .....	18
How to use this guide .....	21
Getting around .....	23
When to go .....	23
What to take .....	24
Access and waymarking .....	24
Staying safe .....	25
<b>North West</b> .....	27
<b>Walk 1</b> Whitehaven to St Bees .....	29
<b>Walk 2</b> Walney Island .....	34
<b>Walk 3</b> Arnside .....	41
<b>Walk 4</b> Lancaster to Cockerham .....	45
<b>Walk 5</b> Southport to Crosby .....	51
<b>Walk 6</b> New Brighton to Heswall (the Wirral) .....	57
<b>South West</b> .....	65
<b>Walk 7</b> Lynton to Combe Martin .....	67
<b>Walk 8</b> Woolacombe and Croyde .....	73
<b>Walk 9</b> Hartland Quay to Bude .....	78
<b>Walk 10</b> Padstow to Porthcothan .....	85
<b>Walk 11</b> Pendeen to Penzance .....	90
<b>Walk 12</b> The Lizard .....	97
<b>Walk 13</b> Portscatho and the Roseland Peninsula .....	102
<b>Walk 14</b> Prawle Point and Start Point .....	107

Walk 15	Beer and Branscombe .....	112
Walk 16	Lulworth .....	116
Walk 17	Worth Matravers and St Aldhelm's Head .....	121

**South East** ..... 127

Walk 18	Bosham and Chichester Harbour .....	129
Walk 19	Seaford to Eastbourne .....	134
Walk 20	Dungeness .....	140
Walk 21	Deal to Dover.....	144
Walk 22	Tollesbury and the Blackwater Estuary.....	151
Walk 23	Orford.....	157
Walk 24	Walberswick and Dunwich .....	162
Walk 25	Burnham Deepdale to Sheringham.....	168

**North East** ..... 175

Walk 26	Spurn Head.....	177
Walk 27	Flamborough Head.....	182
Walk 28	Scarborough to Staithes.....	188
Walk 29	Seaham to Hartlepool .....	195
Walk 30	Craster to Bamburgh .....	203

**Appendix A** Useful websites ..... 210

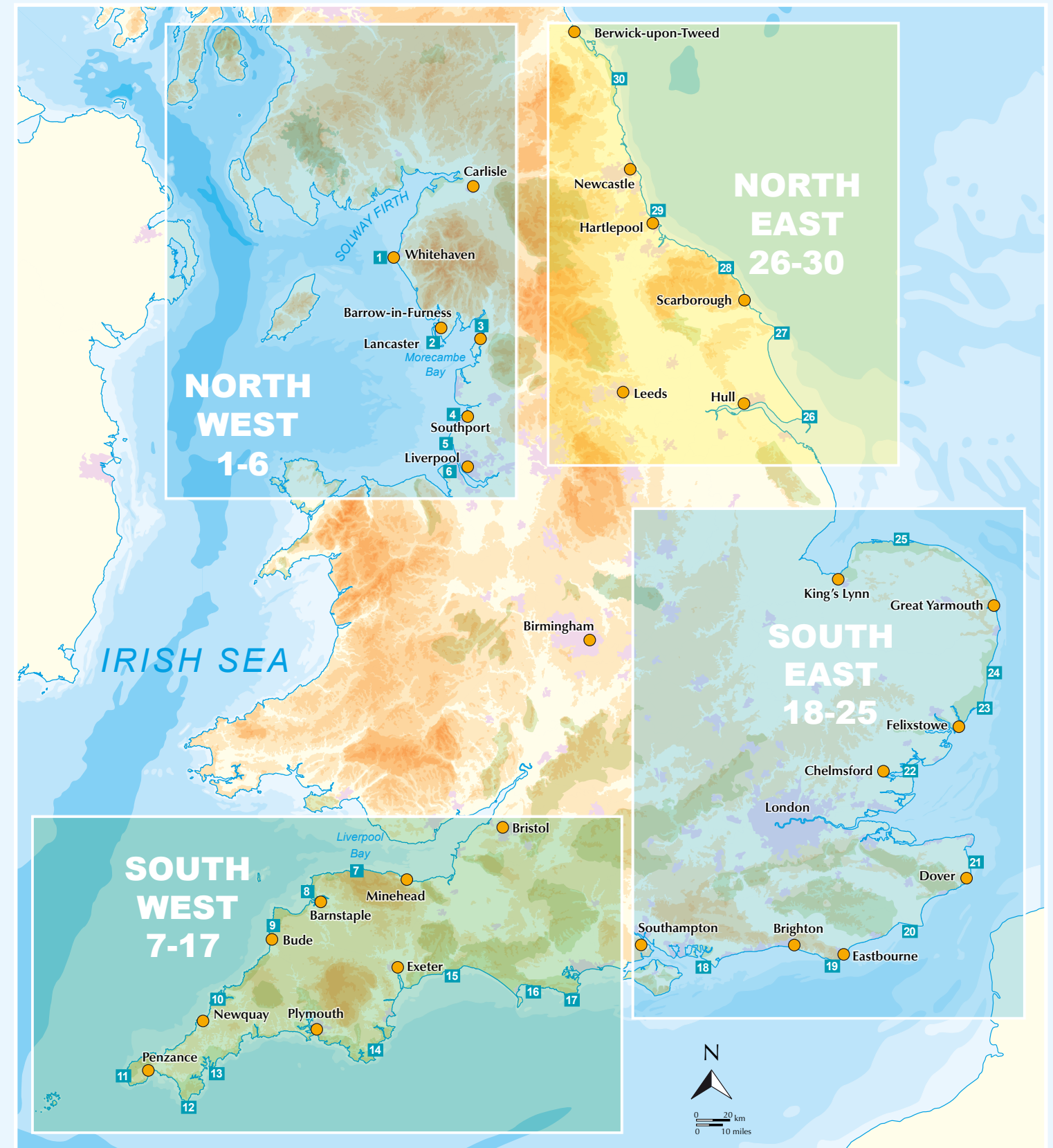
**Appendix B** Further reading ..... 211

Route symbols on OS map extracts (for OS legend see printed OS maps)	Features on the overview map
route	County/Unitary boundary
alternative route	National boundary
extension	Urban area
start/finish point	National Park eg <b>BRECON BEACONS</b>
start point	Forest Park/National Forest eg <b>National Forest</b>
finish point	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty/National Scenic Area eg <b>Dedham Vale</b>
route direction	400m 200m 75m 0m

SCALE: 1:50,000  
0 kilometres 0.5 1  
0 miles 0.5 1

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/989/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/989/GPX).

Top: Branscombe beach and cliffs (Walk 15) (photo: Chiz Dakin)  
Middle: Morecambe Bay from Arnside Knott (Walk 3) (photo: Chiz Dakin)  
Bottom: Morecambe Bay from Arnside Point (Walk 3)



## Route summary table

No	Start	Finish	Distance	Ascent	Time	Page
<b>North West</b>						
1	Whitehaven	St Bees	10.5km (6.5 miles)	505m (1660ft)	3hr 30min	29
2	Walney Island	Walney Island	26km (16 miles)	180m (590ft)	6hr	34
3	Arnside	Arnside	9km (5.6 miles)	260m (850ft)	2hr 45min	41
4	Lancaster	Cockerham	18.75km (11.6 miles)	40m (130ft)	4hr 15min	45
5	Southport	Crosby	31km (19.2 miles)	60m (200ft)	8hr	51
6	New Brighton	Heswall	25km (15.5 miles)	100m (330ft)	5hr 30min	57
<b>South West</b>						
7	Lynton	Combe Martin	21km (13 miles)	1305m (4280ft)	7hr	67
8	Woolacombe	Woolacombe	14.5km (9 miles)	335m (1100ft)	3hr 30min	72
9	Hartland Quay	Bude	23.5km (14.6 miles)	1335m (4380ft)	8hr	78
10	Padstow	Porthcothan	21.25km (13.2 miles)	575m (1890ft)	5hr 30min	85
11	Pendeen	Penzance	45.5km (28.3 miles)	1100m (3610ft)	13hr	90
12	Lizard	Lizard	14km (8.7 miles)	330m (1080ft)	3hr 30min	97
13	Portscatho	Portscatho	15.75km (9.8 miles)	290m (950ft)	4hr	102
14	Beesands	Beesands	23km (14.3 miles)	650m (2130ft)	6hr	107
15	Beer	Beer	9.75km (6 miles)	405m (1330ft)	3hr	112
16	Lulworth Cove	Lulworth Cove	13.75km (8.5 miles)	505m (1660ft)	3hr 30min	116
17	Worth Matravers	Worth Matravers	12km (7.5 miles)	370m (1210ft)	3hr	121
<b>South East</b>						
18	Bosham Quay	Bosham Quay	16.5km (10.2 miles)	10m (30ft)	5hr	129
19	Seaford	Eastbourne	21km (13 miles)	640m (2100ft)	5hr 30min	134
20	Dungeness	Dungeness	14km (8.7 miles)	10m (30ft)	3hr 30min	140
21	Deal	Dover	15.5km (9.6 miles)	500m (1640ft)	4hr	144
22	Tollesbury	Tollesbury	15km (9.3 miles)	70m (230ft)	3hr 30min	151
23	Orford	Orford	10.25km (6.4 miles)	50m (170ft)	3hr	157
24	Walberswick	Walberswick	18km (11 miles)	140m (460ft)	4hr 30min	162
25	Burnham Deepdale	Sheringham	49.5km (30.7 miles)	85m (290ft)	11hr	168
<b>North East</b>						
26	Kilnsea	Kilnsea	13.25km (8.2 miles)	10m (30ft)	3hr 30min	177
27	Bridlington	Bempton	19km (11.8 miles)	595m (1950ft)	4hr 15min	182
28	Scarborough	Staithe	50.5km (31.4 miles)	2025m (6640ft)	12hr	188
29	Seaham	Hartlepool	26km (16 miles)	545m (1790ft)	6hr 30min	195
30	Craster	Bamburgh	22km (13.7 miles)	110m (360ft)	5hr	203





# Introduction



*Morecambe Bay from Blackstone Point (Walk 3)*

How would you like to go for a long walk by the sea? Make that a very, very long walk – say, about 4500km or 2800 miles. That’s the length, give or take a few steps, of the new walking trail around the entire coast of England. It means that every time you set off on one of the routes in this book, you will be walking a little bit of the longest coastal trail in the world!

As an island nation, the coast is in our DNA. Nowhere on the English mainland are you any more than 113km or 70 miles from the sea. We are, as author Patrick Barkham nicely puts it, ‘more edge than middle’. England’s relationship with the sea has defined its history and permeated its culture, with the coast a dynamic, thrilling and occasionally combative landscape, a place where human endeavour comes up against natural forces. Now, with the launch of the England Coast Path, there’s an opportunity to explore all corners of the country’s incredibly diverse and frequently stunning shoreline on foot. The selection of day and weekend routes in this book have been carefully compiled to capture the essence of the new trail, dipping into

the coastal treasure trove to provide drama, challenge, beauty and relaxation. It presents some old favourites, refreshed and improved to rekindle the inspiration, but also introduces less visited stretches of our seaboard, which yield many wonderful surprises.

Wherever you choose to do it, there’s something mesmerising about a walk by the sea. Maybe it’s the constant rhythmic movement of the waves or the play of light on the water; perhaps it’s how all our senses are engaged, from the crashing noise of the waves and screams of the gulls, the salty smell of seaweed and the crunch of shingle beneath our boots or the smooth sand between our toes. Most of us have deep-seated memories of the coast going back to childhood holidays or excursions. It’s a special place to walk.

The 30 walks presented here reflect the amazing variety of habitats and scenery around the coast of England, which means there’s very likely something for everyone. Deserted sandy beaches, remote shingle spits and wildlife-rich salt-marshes contrast with soaring headlands and rollercoaster cliff

## Great Walks on the England Coast Path

paths. There's a little bit of cheeky promenade, some enticing tidal islands and several stunning coastal castles – in other words, the rich, complex and spectacular landscape that is England's very, very long coast.

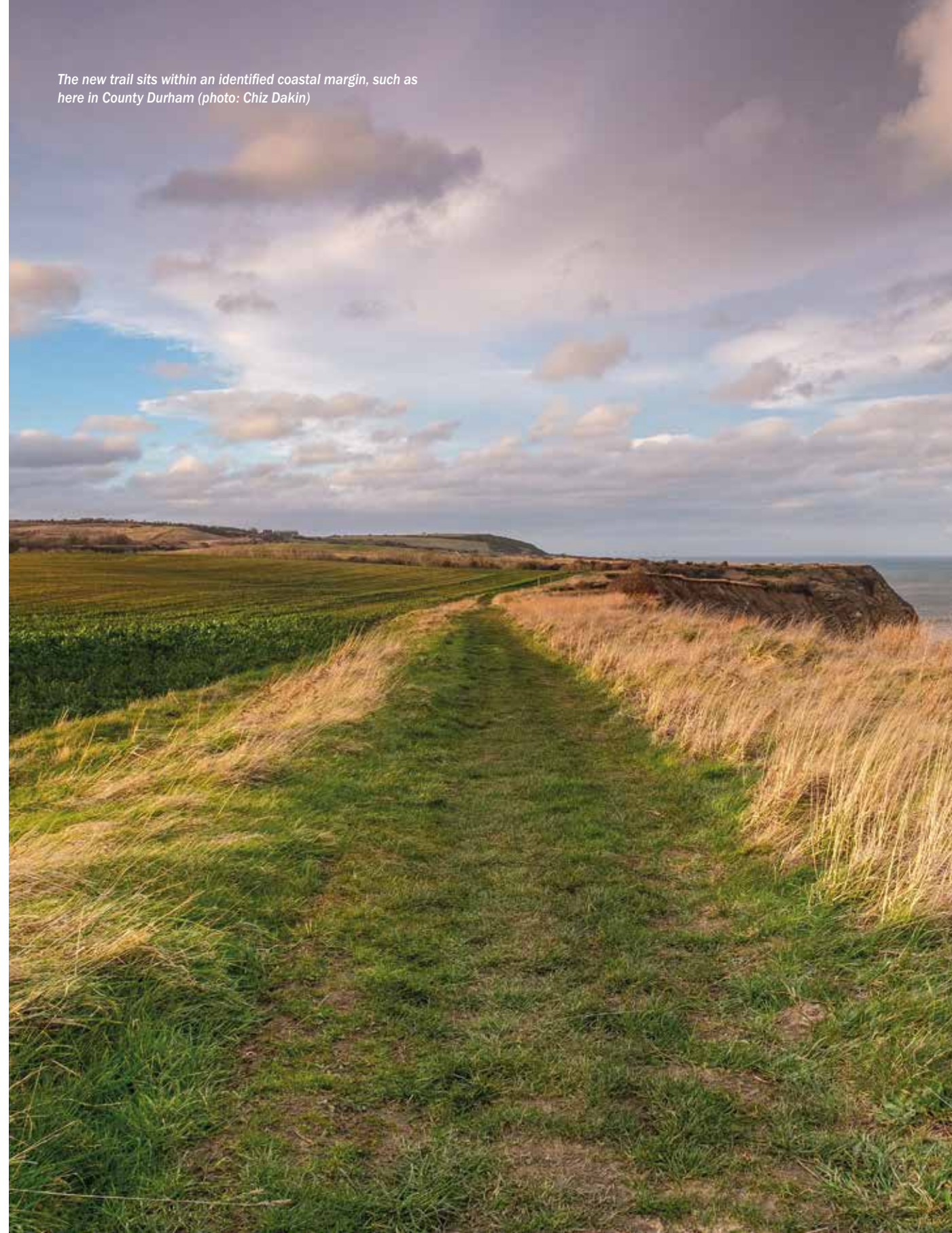
### Geological treasures and coastal landforms

The coast is a great place to appreciate the basics of geology, not least because the rocks are immediate and up close, often exposed in the cliff face right in front of you. Looking down from the coast path at the wave-cut platforms of Robin Hood's Bay, or the folded strata in the cliffs at Hartland Quay, you can see quite clearly what's happened to the rock to make it like it is. Similarly, you can balance on top of the dark dolerite outcrops running across the beach between Seahouses and Bamburgh in Northumberland, or run your hand over the smooth and shiny green stripes of serpentine in the coves of the Lizard. The red sandstone of St Bees Head in Cumbria is as unmistakable as the chalk cliffs of Sussex, where the dazzling white sentinel of Beachy Head and the ripples of the Seven Sisters are as fun to stride across as they are jaw-dropping to stand beneath.

But, as the rocks of the shoreline are revealed, so too are other secrets, such as fossils millions of years old on the beaches of North Yorkshire and the so-called Jurassic Coast of Dorset and east Devon. At Lulworth, the sea has gradually worn away the less resistant rocks to create stunning natural landforms, including arches, stacks and an almost perfectly rounded bay. Elsewhere, on Cornwall's north coast near Padstow, caves have been carved out by the waves or fashioned into spectacular blowholes, booming every time the water rushes in. If every schoolchild had the chance to witness first hand Round Hole on Trevoise Head, or the Devil's Frying Pan on the Lizard peninsula, at full throttle, it's possible that GCSE Geography might be the most popular subject on the curriculum.

The richness of the English coast lies in its wide variety of landforms, and every outing in this book allows you to put in place another captivating piece of the English coastal jigsaw, whether it's the unique vegetated shingle foreland of Dungeness or the pencil-thin sand spit of Spurn Head; Norfolk's vast patchwork of saltmarshes or the muddy creeks of Essex that wriggle like the eels that make their home there. Then there's Morecambe Bay, the UK's largest expanse of intertidal mudflats and sand; or the remarkable (and growing) sand dune system on Merseyside's Sefton coast. In complete contrast is

*The new trail sits within an identified coastal margin, such as here in County Durham (photo: Chiz Dakin)*



## An ever-changing coastline

Exmoor's remote and wild coastline, with not only the highest sea cliffs in England, but also the most extensive broadleaved coastal woodland anywhere in the country. There is simply no better way to understand the make-up of our stunning shoreline, its contrasts and complexities, than to lace up your boots and walk it.

### An ever-changing coastline

Somewhat paradoxically, the one constant with the English coast is that it is always changing. Perhaps the most startling manifestation of this is the walk at Dunwich, on the Suffolk coast (Walk 24), where one of the country's leading medieval ports was simply washed off the map by the destructive power of the sea. There are more recent and equally tragic reminders of what the elements can do, such as the storm surge of 1953 that caused devastating flooding along England's east coast and took the lives of over 300 people. The walk around Start Point in Devon (Walk 14) also visits the site of the former village of Hallsands, which disappeared into the sea one night in January 1917.

Of course, given our maritime climate and position on the edge of western Europe, storms and gales are not uncommon, and certainly not for coastal communities in the path of the Westerlies that regularly rattle in off the Atlantic. It's usually a good idea to pack a raincoat or windproof on most coastal outings.

On some of the walks you can appreciate how the sea actively shapes the setting and profile of the shore, such as the constantly changing channels, mudflats and shifting sandbanks of Morecambe Bay. On the North Sea coast, recent storms at Spurn Head by the mouth of the Humber have seen the sea wash over the narrow spit, potentially creating a new tidal island in the same way that you can walk across to Hilbre Island from West Kirby on the Wirral at low tide.

This sense of constant flux is no doubt accentuated by the fact that Britain has the second highest tidal range in the world, at its most extreme in the Bristol Channel where the difference between mean low and high tide is almost 15m (and even over 9m as far along as the Exmoor coast).

Over the years much effort has been put into repelling the sea, building ever more robust barriers to defend the land from watery incursion. But, as climate change has accelerated, modelling by the Met Office has predicted that in a worst



case scenario sea levels might rise by up to one metre in some coastal locations by 2100, potentially submerging vulnerable parts of England's east, south east and north west coasts. As an alternative to hard engineering, there's growing interest in approaches which work with the sea, not against it. Nature-based solutions include so-called managed retreat, where a coastal defence is deliberately breached to allow the sea to periodically flood pockets of low value grazing land. This forms a natural buffer and dissipates the energy of the waves, as well as being relatively low cost and also of significant benefit to wildlife.

This more enlightened and realistic response to the inevitability of coastal change, whether from rising sea levels or the impact of more frequent and fiercer storms, can also be seen in

how the England Coast Path itself is being aligned and subsequently managed. The legislation includes a 'roll back' provision ensuring that the trail can adapt relatively easily in the event of coastal erosion or realignment – more details on this in the later section Evolution of the England Coastal Path.

### Nature and wildlife

One of the joys of walking along the English coast is its rich natural history, and because coastal habitats are so varied the plant life, in particular, is especially diverse. The tidal marshes of Norfolk and Essex are home to salt-tolerant plants such as shrubby seablite, sea lavender and glasswort; while sea kale, sea pea and yellow horned poppy are a feature of the vegetated shingle of Dungeness and Orford. Near Southport, Ainsdale's

sand dunes and the damp hollows behind them support a surprising wealth of insects and flowers, including orchids, bog pimpernel and the rare field gentian, but they're perhaps best known as a stronghold for the sometimes noisy natterjack toad. As you walk out across Dunwich Heath in Suffolk or Lizard Downs in Cornwall, watch out for adders basking in the sun; while gazing seawards from the Cornish clifftops you may be rewarded with the sight of cetaceans like dolphin, porpoise and several different types of whale. The western approaches to the English Channel are especially rich in marine life, including seals, but for an up-close encounter to see one of England's largest grey seal colonies join a licenced boat trip to Blakeney Point in Norfolk.

Many of the walking routes in this book, including along Norfolk's fantastic shoreline, pass a string of top-level nature reserves that are well known for birdlife, in particular. The Flamborough Head walk in North Yorkshire (Walk 27) ends at the RSPB's Bempton Cliffs reserve where, each summer, an estimated quarter of a million birds create the most wonderful sight, sound and (to an extent) smell of any native wildlife spectacle. Other coastal sites are no less important for birds, including breeding gulls and eider ducks on Walney Island in Cumbria; nesting Arctic and Little terns on the beaches of County Durham and Northumberland; and a variety of wildfowl and waders in the Dee Estuary off the Wirral, including bar-tailed godwit, shellduck, egret and redshank.

Given that the coast is such an important natural habitat, it's no surprise that it's awash with protective designations, too. Six national parks have coastlines: Exmoor, South Downs, New Forest, North York Moors and a tiny part of the Broads and Lake District; and what's known as Marine Conservation Zones offer some limited safeguards for the offshore environments and species.

Some of the walks in this book chart ornithological success stories. Avocets were once extinct from our shores but their successful return is associated with Havergate Island, off Orford in Suffolk, where they still nest. Likewise, Cornwall's emblematic county bird, the chough, can be seen once more along the cliffs between Pendeen and Penzance after a long period of absence.

However, in common with biodiversity loss generally, many species found on our shores and in our seas are in serious decline. Pressure on nature around the coast is relentless,

whether from development, recreation or pollution, and with climate change and population growth it's a problem that is only likely to increase. Indeed, it's been a delicate balancing act for Natural England, the Government's agency tasked with developing the new trail, as it juggles its twin statutory responsibilities for nature protection and public access, trying to plot the route of a coastal path that will allow people to enjoy open air recreation via some of the most sensitive conservation sites in England.

### An island history

Ever since Britain became an island, the sea has played an integral part in our unfolding history. As the sea provides a protective barrier, so the coast defines our physical boundary. Invasion and defence are etched into our collective national psyche, whether it's succumbing to marauding Vikings and conquering Normans or resisting the Spanish Armada and providing the backdrop for Battle of Britain heroics.

Coastal headlands have always provided key defensive sites, from Iron Age promontory forts like Kendijack on the cliffs of west Cornwall, through to the string of sturdy castles on the Northumberland coast that have withstood sieges, feuds and wars. Dover Castle, at the end of Walk 21, can trace 1000 years of history, including its role as a command centre during World War 2. Indeed, standing on the White Cliffs of Kent on a clear day continental Europe seems within touching distance. From the same era come the pillboxes and lookout points on the slopes above Croyde and Woolacombe in Devon, where Allied soldiers practised for D-Day; and observation posts on St Anthony Head, near Falmouth, where beady eyes scanned the waves for enemy craft.

Going a little further back in history, Martello Towers (such as at Seaford and Eastbourne in Sussex) are a peculiar defensive feature of England's south east and Suffolk coast when the threat of invasion was from Napoleonic forces. Equally odd is Bull Sand Fort, marooned in the middle of the Humber Estuary off Spurn Head, built during World War 1 to repel wartime invaders who never came.

Coastal lookouts have had many different motives over time. Fishing folk once stood on the Cornish cliffs to spot massive shoals of pilchards, until over-fishing wiped them out. Lighthouses still warn ships of the dangers of our often notorious inshore waters, and although the 60 or so that remain



## Walk 2

# Walney Island



<b>Start/Finish</b>	Walney Island (Biggar Bank) SD 180 671
<b>Distance</b>	26km (16 miles)
<b>Total ascent</b>	180m (590ft)
<b>Time</b>	6hr
<b>Terrain</b>	Flat shingle and sand foreshore, roads and grassy paths
<b>Map</b>	OS OL6 English Lakes SW/OS Landranger 96
<b>Refreshments</b>	Roundhouse Hub & Café at Biggar Bank, the Crown pub at North Scale and Queen's Arms at Biggar
<b>Public transport</b>	Buses from Barrow serve most parts of Walney
<b>Parking</b>	Biggar Bank (free lay-bys)
<b>Note</b>	Seasonal access restrictions apply to small sections of the walk at either end of the island because of breeding birds. Check in advance on the National Trail website and follow the alternative routes as necessary.



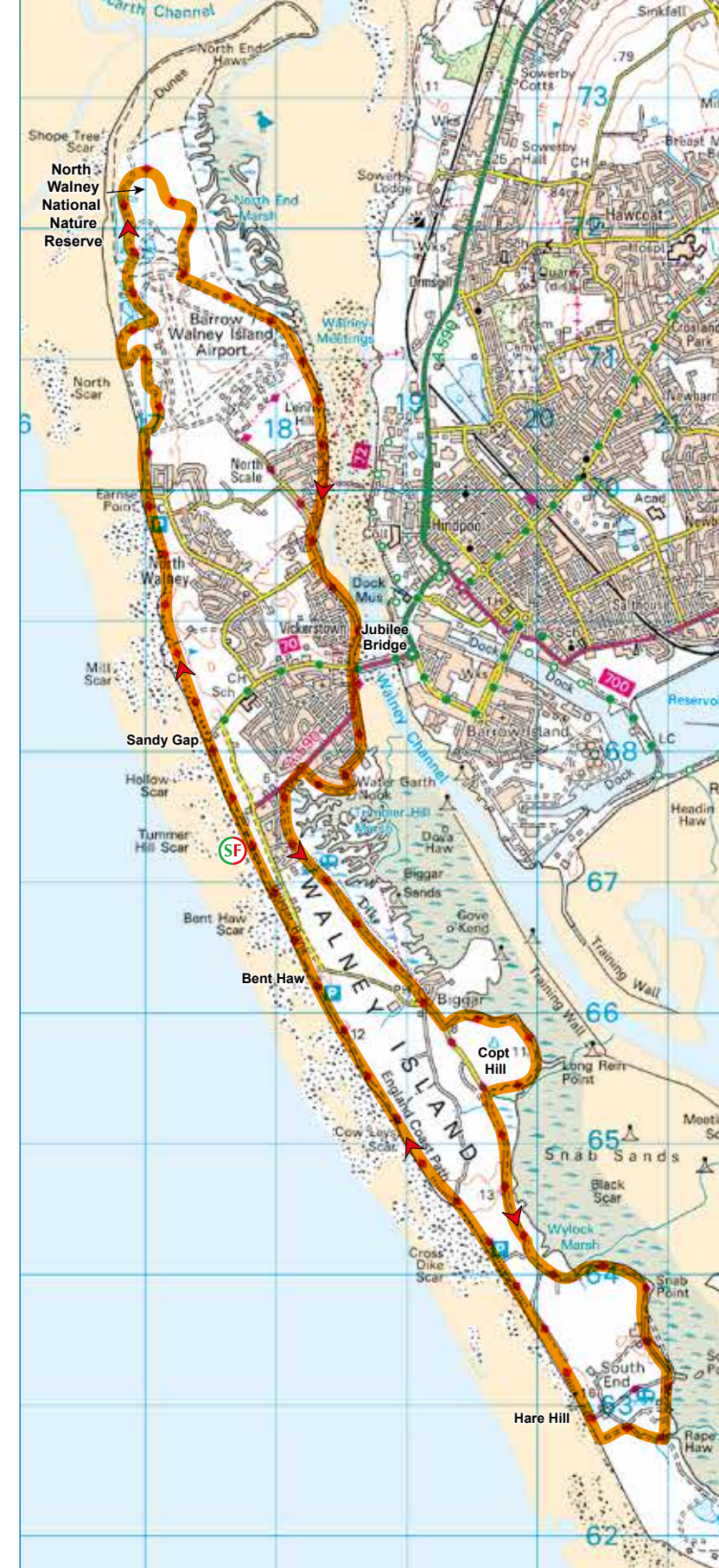
There's something very satisfying about walking around an entire island, especially if you can cover it in a day. Walney is England's eighth largest island (linked to the mainland by a bridge) and is long and narrow with outstanding nature reserves at either end. Its beaches, marshes and mudflats are peaceful and extensive, and since most of the island's housing is squeezed into the centre it can easily be bypassed. More than anything, Walney Island is relatively remote, little known and certainly not on Cumbria's mainstream tourist trail, which is why it makes for such a splendid new section of the England Coast Path. In terms of terrain and route finding it's all relatively straightforward; for the inquisitive and connoisseur coastal walker it's an enthralling outing full of interest and discovery.

From the broad grassy strip beside the sea at Biggar Bank on Walney's western shore, with ample off-road parking and the excellent Roundhouse Café, head north to **Sandy Gap**. From here take a public footpath around the edge of the fairways of Furness Golf Club to reach **Earnse Point**. *The huge expanse of firm sand revealed at low tide, as well as a keen offshore wind, makes Earnse Point a popular venue for kitesurfing.*

Continue along the shore track past caravans then turn half right into a low, scrubby area and follow the clear path, keeping the airfield over to your right. At the end cross an asphalt track for a path opposite back to the shore. Turn right and right again to follow a broad track around the far side of a wet and reedy area. Walk alongside the airfield fence and enter **North Walney National Nature Reserve**.

Now home to natterjack toads and an array of birds, the nature reserve also has a poignant human backstory. **Fort Walney** was a former military training camp and later air gunnery school, and although the airfield was subsequently taken over by local shipbuilding firm Vickers (later BAE Systems) the former practise trenches and firing ranges became overgrown as nature slowly reasserted itself. In 2017 a project called 'Fort Walney, Uncovered' brought together artists, archaeologists and the local community to investigate the site and create a memorial to the fragility of both people and nature. Among the art installations is an

◀ Piel Castle from South Walney (photo: Photo North)





Step out on the longest continuous coastal trail in the world and enjoy a taste of England's stunning and diverse shoreline. These hand-picked routes select from the best of the 2800 mile trail to capture the rich heritage and glorious contrasts of England's coast, from soaring cliffs to wildlife-rich estuaries, huge golden beaches to atmospheric marshes. Locations include Northumberland with its string of coastal castles, the rollercoaster chalk cliffs above the English Channel, East Anglia's wildlife-rich shores, smugglers' coves in Cornwall and the vast sandy beaches and dunes of north-west England.

Whether your passion is for escape and adventure, geology or nature, castles or culture, you'll find it on the England Coast Path. With options for all ages and abilities, the 30 routes in this book will introduce you to England's newest National Trail, help you discover new paths and new locations, and savour memorable days of great walking by the sea.

- linear and circular walks for all seasons
- routes clearly illustrated with OS mapping
- many walks accessible by public transport
- day and weekend routes