

### **Railway Footbridge:** Defence of the Realm

Defence of the Thames Estuary was essential during WW2 and, as you look out to sea, the tripod shapes visible on the horizon are the Maunsell anti-aircraft forts. By the railway crossing, behind the fencing, are the concrete block remains of the WW2 tank traps designed to stall a beach landing, also visible behind Tankerton



For an extended walk, the Trail continues west to Seasalter and finishes at The Sportsman.

For the circular route, head inland and over the railway footbridge, and up some steps to a left turn where the public footpath then heads east offering splendid views out to sea before reaching Whitstable's High Street.

## 2 Old Haven Inlet: Salt and Smuggling

In Roman times this area was no more than a swamp. Evidence also shows people worked here undertaking salt extraction from pans in around 1300. Over time, the effect of longshore drift created a spit and a low marsh behind it, now drained and occupied by Seasalter Golf Club. Before the sea defences, the houses here flooded regularly. Increasing trade led to smuggling (1800s), mainly of French perfume and spirits, and the Coastguard set up on the spit to tackle it.

The accessible route along Island Wall passes Whitstable's traditional fisherman's



houses whilst the path that runs parallel on the beach passes remnants of the fishing industry left abandoned amongst the dinghy's. Near the West Beach tea

rooms, the Trail can be taken towards Highlight 1 or inland over the golf course. The remains of an old slipway for launching boats can still be found below the tea rooms at low tide.

## 3 Shipwrights Lee: Stay Afloat or Sink

For over 500 years the town has been engaged in maritime trade and, historically, ship yards spanned the length of the coastline handling vessels up to 400 tons. Ships were built or repurposed here for oyster dredging, the Coal Run to the North East and for D-Day.

Shipwrights Lee was the site of the last yard, closing in 1985, as steel construction, changing needs for commercial boats

and cheaper labour abroad closed the industry.

this golden era.

Today, our restoration of Gamecock (the last oyster yawl built in Whitstable) in the harbour, represents the return of this trade and the first heritage ship yard in Whitstable since

The route also passes the Blue Plague on Peter Cushing's former house, near the distinctive Wave Crest terrace.





#### 4 Horsebridge, Whitstable Oyster Company and Keam's Yard: A Core Industry



The ships and oysterman may be gone but the Horsebridge remains.



Whitstable's oysters have been in demand for millennia, with records showing they were even exported to Rome during the occupation.

Key to this trade is the Horsebridge; the slipway seen here today which allowed horse and carts to reach the flat-bottomed oyster dredgers at low tide and load the catch destined for Billingsgate Market in London.

The old building at the top of the Horsebridge (now a restaurant) was the base of the Whitstable Oyster Fishery Co. The oystermen would meet in the large room upstairs to discuss business in what was, and remains, a lucrative trade for the town. To see a Whitstable oyster dredger, please visit Gamecock in the harbour where she is being restored by the charity.

### **5** West Quay: An Important Extension

West Quay, built in the 1970s to extend berthing for the busy harbour, is accessed from opposite the Lifeboat Station. It provides stunning views along the coast making it ideal for photography and painting. The weather, light and shipping



Off the end of West Quay is what the locals call 'The Dolphin'. It was used to warp' large vessels into the harbour as they battled either no wind at all or strong wind and tide trying to enter it.

here were depicted by JMW Turner,

regarded by many as Britain's finest

landscape painter.



Today, families enjoy crabbing from the end of the quay and, at low tide, it's possible to walk from the beach on the ground west of the quay and enjoy the experience of being beneath the big expansive skies and in The Swale.

#### **6** The Harbour and Crab & Winkle: The Heart of Whitstable

The Canterbury and Whitstable Railway, opened in 1830, ran from the harbour and

Today, the harbour remains an authentic, exciting and busy working place open

to visitors to see our maritime trade with both a fishing fleet and the aggregate

it was the first ticketed regular steam-powered passenger railway in the world. When the harbour was formally constructed (1832) its main role was to enable coal imports, causing the town to grow throughout the Industrial Revolution.



The harbour also retains the only ship yard in Whitstable with the charity's restoration of the Gamecock oyster yawl available for you to view at Dead Mans Corner. Why the name? Because long ago the tide brought in various flotsam including the odd dead body of an unfortunate seafarer which gathered in the south east corner of he harbour!

# **7** The Street & Tankerton Slopes:

An Interesting Puzzle

Various interesting routes can be taken here, see mini map for options. As the tide falls, a long spit of firm shingle known as The Street reveals itself and a walk on it is entirely possible. Geologists believe it is formed from a circular tidal current at this specific point which means it defies the general movement of



Above The Street, Tankerton Slopes are a very ancient landform. These slopes were here many thousands of years ago, before the sea rose and came to meet them as we find it today. The slopes are a SSSI and home to the rare Hogs Fennel and the moth Agonopterix putridella whose larvae feed exclusively on it.

#### 8 Long Rock: Nature is Key - a SSSI

This most easterly part of the Trail offers both a circular route and a fully accessible path to explore this beautiful marshland.

Long Rock is created by longshore drift which has formed a spit and diverted Swalecliffe Brook (a small stream from Blean, near Canterbury) to create a series of shingle ridges with marsh and freshwater. Long Rock is home to rare plants and animals, including the Water Vole and Fisher's Estuarine Moth, only found in Kent and Essex. Fossils from the last Ice Age found on the beach indicate Woolly Mammoths once roamed here.

As you head west towards Whitstable, the route splits at the first set of beach huts between the higher and lower routes. Choose either as there are plenty of connecting paths between them all along Tankerton Slopes.



Free guided nature walks around the site take place at 8am on the second Sunday of each month, meet at the skate park and Andy (@andyswalecliffe on X, formerly Twitter) will guide you around this fascinating area!