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MARITIME
Coastal Trail

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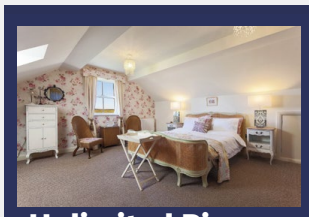
WHITSTABLE COASTAL TRAIL

A bespoke trail for walkers, cyclists, runners and anyone with mobility limitations to explore the local landscape & maritime heritage.

For more information please visit: **www.whitstablemaritime.org.uk**



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The tidal River Thames is looked after by the Port of London Authority (PLA).

As a Trust Port, the PLA reinvests all income into the river. It has no shareholders and operates for the benefit of customers and stakeholders - now and in the future. Our operations cover 95 miles of the River Thames, from Teddington to the North Sea, and we work to keep commercial and leisure users safe, protect and enhance the environment, and promote the use of the river for trade and travel.

Thames Vision 2050 sets out the long-term, strategic plan for the River Thames and reflects the ambition and priorities for the river, shaped by consultation with stakeholders and led by the PLA.

It is available at https://pla.co.uk/thames-vision-2050

The **Active Thames** partnership programme supports the development of watersports and walking in London, Kent and Essex. It has provided over £400,000 of funding to over 50 clubs between 2021-2024, encouraging clubs to be more inclusive and specifically supporting coach development, and opportunities for underrepresented audiences such as people with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

You can find out more about Active Thames and the impact on community clubs at https://activethames.co.uk

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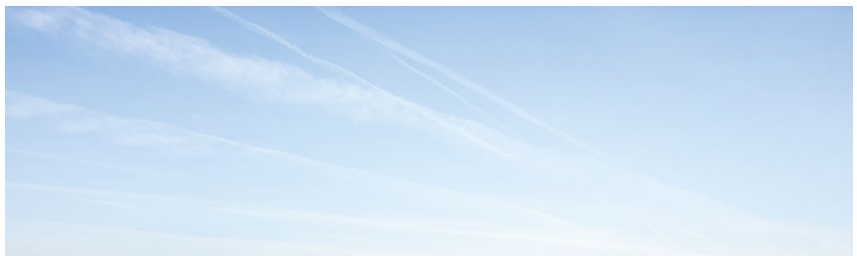
Welcome to the Coastal Trail

5km of History, Nature and Seascapes

The Whitstable Coastal Trail offers a bespoke route for cycling, running, walking, family adventure and health and wellbeing. This leaflet provides a map and information about local history, nature and geography, as well as suggestions for where to eat and drink.



The Trail's 8 Highlights are spread along the route and you can easily adapt its length to suit your available time, where you wish to explore, or the need for coffee and ice cream! The map also indicates public car parks, accessible toilets and sections unsuitable for wheelchairs, with alternative routes included.

We hope you enjoy exploring Whitstable and Tankerton via the Coastal Trail.

The Trail follows a beautiful route by the sea with options for exploring lesser known paths & places

Trail themes & features

Archaeology: The coast near Whitstable has been inhabited for over 10,000 years, with flint artefacts found dating from between about 10,250 and 5,500 years ago when sea level was around 10m lower than now. Artefacts of Bronze Age, Iron Age and through to the Roman Age have all been found.

Geology and Environment: The North Kent coast is formed predominantly of London Clay. To the west of Whitstable it is covered by salt marsh, created as sea levels rose over the last 6000 years.

Whitstable's beach is shaped by longshore drift carrying shingle westwards. The groynes are there to control this flow of material. The beaches they protect help to break the force of the waves during winter storms which used to flood the town!

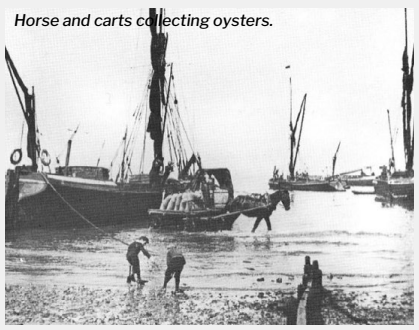
Significantly, two sections of the Trail are Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Long Rock and Tankerton Slopes.

Ecology and Wildlife: A large number of animals, birds and plants can be seen along the coast, although what can be seen will depend on the season. Two birds that are present all year on the foreshore are the Oyster Catcher and Turnstone. Plant-wise, you may see the Yellow Horned-Poppy, a specialist of coastal shingle habitats, or Hog's Fennel.

Animal life in the sands and muds is abundant; over a hundred species live in or on it which range from worms to large shellfish. If you see the piles of neatly curled sand it's from the ragworm which lives in a burrow in the mud reaching out to feed on the nutrient rich sediments.

Guided walks on the second Sunday of each month, contact @andyswalecliffe on X, formerly Twitter.

Thames Barges on the Swale.



Horse and carts collecting oysters.

Gamecock oyster yawl restoration at Highlight 6.

History and Industry: The more recent history includes evidence of a Copperas industry, fish traps, an Anglo-Saxon boat, a Tudor ship wreck, and a range of WW2 military defence works. It also includes what some call the last armed battle against an enemy that took place on British soil – The Battle of Graveney Marsh.

A plaque explaining more about the Copperas industry can be found on the trail at Tower Tea Gardens, opposite Whitstable Castle (see map).

Maritime Heritage: Whitstable supported a large oyster fleet and a busy ship building industry. All along the trail, from Highlights 3-8, yards were making and repairing vessels.

In this period, before deep water vessels, Whitstable harbour was one of the UK's largest and busiest ports.

To experience our heritage craft and take to the water, the harbour accommodates three boats available to the public. 'The Greta' is a Thames barge available for day sailing trips along with 'The Chieftan' (the old RNLI boat) offering shorter experiences. To book, please contact them in the harbour or online.

Once restored, the charity aims to launch Gamecock to offer a unique experience of the sea themed around oyster dredging and sailing Whitstable's last remaining oyster yawl. In the meantime, you can visit her and see her restoration in the harbour.

Where to eat & drink

The Coastal Trail offers plenty of great places for food, drink and ice cream.

Suggested Routes

The trail has two sections east and west of the harbour and each can be taken

This guide also includes exclusive discounts available from the businesses you see advertised.

Highlights 1 & 2

At West Beach, by the caravan park, is **West Beach Bar & Tea Rooms.** From here the Trail extends west towards Seasalter where it passes **The Oyster Pearl;** the first pub on the Trail. At Highlight 2, the trail passes **Windy Corner Café.**

Highlight 3

Sunset views from the Old Neptune

Here, the iconic **Old Neptune** pub is impossible to miss, also serving food with seats on the beach overlooking The Swale.

Highlight 4

Here you'll pass **Gelateria Whitstable** and a little further west **The Pearson's Arms** (including outside bar in the summer) and the **Whitstable Oyster Co**. As you pass Whitstable Yacht Club, **Keith's Coffee Hut** and **The Forge** offer hot food, drinks and doughnuts.

Highlight 6

The Harbour is full of places to enjoy food & drink. **The South Quay Shed** (indoor, with seating) and **Harbour Market** (outdoor only) offer various fresh foods, drinks, arts and crafts. Al Fresco (summer) dining is at **The Harbour Garden.** There is also **The Lobster Shack** (serving classic Fish & Chips too) on the East Quay by The Paddock beach.

Highlight 7

On Marine Parade is the **Tankerton Ice Cream Parlour** and **The Marine Bar and Hotel.** Just west of 'The Street' is **The Bubble Café** and **Tower Tea Gardens** (summer only) serves ice creams & hot drinks/snacks.

Food & drink outside The Royal

Highlight 8

West of the skate park, the route passes **Jo Jo's Meze** (Mediterranean food) and **Sea View Café**. Further on is **The Royal**; a pub with sea views, outside seating and local beers.

as a separate 'loop' if the whole trail is too much for one outing.

The Eastern Loop (5.25Km): This route starts in the harbour at Highlight 6 and heads east to Highlight 8; Long Rock. There are plenty of footpaths all along Tankerton Slopes which connect the lower route with the top of the slopes so you can easily shorten this part of the route.

The Western Walk (from 2.5Km): Starting in the harbour at Highlight 6, head west and explore West Quay (Highlight 5) and the beaches with views across The Swale. From Highlight 2, the route is either along the beach or along Island Wall (fully accessible) towards Highlight 1.

The route from Highlight 1 over the footbridge and past the golf course provides some stunning, elevated, views of the Thames Estuary before dropping down to the next footbridge and the route towards Nelson Rd.

Coastal Trail - 8 Key Highlights

The Coastal Trail will help you explore and discover Whitstable and Tankerton's rich maritime heritage and environment via 8 Highlights. Due to its proximity to Gorrell Tank car park (just behind the Harbour), it is recommended to enter the Trail here, at Highlight 6.

Please come and pay us a visit in the harbour and see Gamecock, the last oyster yawl built in Whitstable, being restored in our heritage shipyard! Below are suggested routes for the trail and an overview of the excellent pubs and cafés offering food & drink at various points.

Finally, don't forget to take advantage of the exclusive discounts within the guide available from our Coastal Trail partners!

❶ **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 Sailing Club.

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.

❷ **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.

❸ **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.

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 this golden era.

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

❹ **Horsebridge, Whitstable Oyster Company and Keam's Yard:** A Core Industry

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.

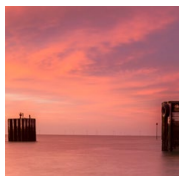
The ships and oysterman may be gone but the Horsebridge remains.

❺ **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 here were depicted by JMW Turner, regarded by many as Britain's finest landscape painter.

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.

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.



❻ **The Harbour and Crab & Winkle:** The Heart of Whitstable

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

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 processing plant that rises high on the east quay.

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 the harbour!

❼ **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 material by longshore drift.

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.

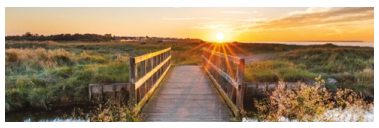
❽ **Long Rock:** Nature is Key - a SSSI

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!



WHITSTABLE **MARITIME**
Celebrating Our Coastal Communities

"A charity using the power of maritime heritage and the local environment to positively change people's lives"

Using our strong past and present connections to the sea, Whitstable Maritime offers a range of fun, healthy and educational activities for people to benefit from.
Examples of our charitable work are:

- Restoring Gamecock, the last oyster yawl ever built here, for people to benefit from through a range of activities.
- Free Coastal Trail Guide - a beautiful map for exploring the coast and discovering our maritime heritage and environment at 8 Highlights. The trail encourages healthy activity and supports our coastal businesses.
- Working with Kent Wildlife Trust and Marine Conservation Society to promote conservation, learning and healthy activity through a range of initiatives open to the community.

We fund raise to make these activities available to as many people as possible, including people with any disadvantage, so they can be free or subsidised.

Please explore our work in more detail using the website and if you'd like to get involved with what we do or donate we'd be delighted to hear from you.

Please help support future print runs through giving anything you feel able to. Just head to the Donate page on our website.

If you are a business on the Coastal Trail and would like to be featured in the leaflet, please contact us via our website.

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