

Welcome to Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve is one of the largest and most important wildlife sites in England, set in an exceptional coastal and wetland landscape and home to more than 4,500 species of plants and animals including 300 that are rare or endangered.



Whether you're a regular visitor or it's your first time, we hope this activity trail inspires you to connect with the reserve in a unique and interesting way.

The approximate distance for this trail is 9.7 km (6 miles) including a walk to Camber Castle, the birdwatching hide nearby and the viewpoint.

Start at the Discovery Centre

Just 500 m down a private road from the Rye Harbour car park is the ideal starting point for your 6 mile circular walk of this nature reserve and landscape that is nationally and internationally recognised for its wildlife. It also has a rich history that includes 3 periods of military defence.

Outside the Discovery Centre is saltmarsh that was re-created in 2011 by letting the sea in through a culvert under the road. This channel is good for seeing wildlife up close:

Look for
Kingfisher, Little Egret, Grey Mullet, gulls, Curlew, Redshank, Brent Geese and Spoonbill.



Walk towards 1 River mouth

On the way to **1** the fenced areas protect many types of wetland birds. For closer views you can pop into the Gooders Hide and in summer you may see the star bird, the Avocet. The fences reduce disturbance and keep Foxes and Badgers away from nesting and roosting birds.

The compound at the river mouth is where shingle, shifted along the coast by longshore drift, is trapped by the massive concrete wall. In winter the Environment Agency move the shingle in lorries along this road back to Pett Level.

Within a kilometre of the red beacon is probably where the original town of Winchelsea was located on a shingle beach. It was a large shipbuilding town of 5,000 people, 2 churches and 50 inns that washed away in storms in 1287. These storms also moved this river from New Romney, the other side of Dungeness.

If you visit the pillboxes, mind your head on the low doorways.

Look for
Harbour Seal, Turnstone and six different types of gull.



Ternery Pool between 2 and Crittall Hide

The large pool is named after the Common Terns that have nested here since the reserve was established in 1970. They nest on the islands that have been created for them.

The birdwatching hide was first opened in 1973 and is named after Guy Crittall, the first chairman of the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve. The hides are always open for a closer view of the birds.

Look for
Cormorants and ducks in winter and nesting terns and gulls in summer.



5 Gasson's Ruin

All that remains of this building is the concrete wall in front of you. Look out for the interpretation board that shows a photo of the original building, taken in the 1930s.

This is also a good area for some shingle flowers.

Look for
Yellow Horned-poppy, Viper's Bugloss and Sea Kale.



5 to 6 Mary Stanford Lifeboat House

On 15th November 1928, the Mary Stanford lifeboat was launched to save a stricken vessel. Facing extreme weather conditions, the crew of 17 brave men never returned to shore, resulting in the biggest loss of life from a single lifeboat in the history of the RNLI. The Lifeboat House still stands but was never used again.

This was the closest point to Rye Harbour that the crew could reach the shore. All the land behind the shingle ridges would have been saltmarsh.

6 The Gabion Wall

This wall of baskets filled with rock is to stop the shingle from flowing across this low point in the road and blocking it during exceptional storm events. Gabion is from Italian gabbione meaning "big cage",

Along the shore there are the remains of decaying wooden groynes that once slowed the movement of shingle.

7 Rye Harbour Farm

The large grassy bank is actually a primary sea defence, improving the flood protection for people, houses, industry and freshwater habitats. It was built in 2005 with clay and soil from the farm that had been arable until 2002. Digging this material also created new ponds and deeper pits which are now home to animals and wetland plants, such as the rare Saltmarsh Goosefoot and the more common Sea Milkwort.

The land is grazed by Romney sheep to maintain short grass for many wading birds, Skylark and Grey Partridge.

8 Gravel Pit to Wood

This enormous gravel pit is known to some as the Long Pit and also the Ocean – the gravel was extracted from 1930s to 1970s and the deep water is home to diving ducks such as Pochard and Tufted Duck and Great Crested Grebe and egrets. In the autumn thousands of Swallows, Swifts and House and Sand Martins will feed on the insects here before migrating south.

The wooded area is a mosaic of plots created after World War I. Walk through it and turn right at **8** by a green phoneline box, past a little cottage and into the open sheep grazed fields to a gate at **9**.

Find out more by visiting:
rye.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk

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Rye Harbour Discovery Centre, Rye Harbour
Sussex TN31 7FW. Phone: **01797 360960**

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve welcomes all visitors
and we work hard to make sure our facilities are
accessible to everyone. For more information
about accessibility, please visit our website.



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10 Castle Water and 11 Halpin Hide



After gate **9** turn right until you come across the large gravel pit called Castle Water – then keeping this pit on your right follow the path through the Gorse bushes to reach **10**.

This deep pit was created by pumping the shingle out on barges for the building industry from 1930 to 1970. Since then, Sussex Wildlife Trust has landscaped it for wildlife and created new reedbeds and 150 new islands. It is home to many special plants and animals.

Near a small group of Oak trees you will pass a stone memorial to Flight Lieutenant Harry Raymond Hamilton who died on 29th August 1940 when the Hurricane he was flying crashed near the ruins of Camber Castle.

At **11**, hidden in the bushes is the Halpin birdwatching hide where you can see all sorts of wetland birds. The star birds featured here are the egrets and herons, but the most numerous and noisy are often the Cormorants – the deep raucous calls of the adults and the high pitch squeaking of their begging chicks.



Camber Castle



Follow the fence towards the castle. The ridges here were created by great winter storms pushing up the shingle about 400 years ago, so that the castle got further from the shore and was abandoned. The exterior of the castle can be viewed during any reasonable daylight hours and Sussex Wildlife Trust also run guided tours of the site – visit our website for further details or look out for the interpretation board at the castle gate.

On leaving the castle head towards a single large Willow tree next to a gate, that is just to the right of a wonderful view of the town of Rye. This is trail point **12**.

Castle Farm

All the flat between the old shingle ridges and Rye is new land that would have been the open sea when the castle was built over 500 years ago. Later it became saltmarsh until all the sea defences were built along the river. Many of the ditches would have been saltmarsh creeks, but are now freshwater drainage ditches.

You may hear the “laughing” call of the Marsh Frog here, introduced to the area in 1930s and now a favourite meal for Bittern, Marsh Harrier, egrets and the very rare Medicinal Leech.

13 Grassland



After going through the second gate the grassland is not grazed from April to August so is very good for many flowers.

Look for
Pyramidal Orchid, Ladies Bedstraw, Strawberry Clover.



In the marshy margins of the pit look for the round leaves of Marsh Pennywort and the purple flowers and smelly leaves of Water Mint.

Growing out of the shallow water are the very tall feathery Common Reeds and the cigar shaped seedheads of Reedmace.

14 Marshmallow



As you follow the path and near **14** there are metre high plants that look like garden Hollyhocks, but with pinkish white flowers and very soft leaves. This is the Marshmallow plant which has been encouraged to grow where the sheep cannot graze. It's a good plant for bumblebees, but also for the extremely rare Marshmallow Moth.

The plant is the origin of the sweets that were originally made from the roots of Marshmallow.

At **14** turn and walk towards Rye Harbour village. This area is next to industrial land that has left a legacy of pollution in the ground, so do not be tempted to eat the Blackberries. The sand here was a waste product of the shingle extraction, but after many decades it has become home to many rare insects including a very rare weevil, *Limobius mixtus* and several types of mining bee.



15 Reedbed viewpoint



Before you get to the road at **15** there is a path off to the right that leads to the wooden platform where you can overlook the reedbed and watch and listen to its special wildlife. Reed Warbler, Reed Bunting, Cettis Warbler, Bearded Tit, Marsh Harrier and Bittern.

Reach the road at **15** and walk back to Rye Harbour village.

Rye Harbour Church

The Church of the Holy Spirit, built in 1849 in the gothic architectural style, underwent an expansion in 1912, incorporating elements of the Arts and Crafts style. Here you find a memorial to the crew of the Mary Stanford lifeboat who died when their boat capsized in 1928.

Rye Harbour Village



As you pass the Old Vicarage, look out for the blue plaque honouring the children's author Monica Edwards. As you return towards the car park, you will see the modern-day lifeboat station at Rye Harbour that operates an inshore lifeboat.

Getting here

Visiting the Nature Reserve by public transport is easy with a train station in nearby Rye.

From the station you can take a long circular walk or cycle around the whole reserve. If you just want to visit the Beach Reserve, catch a bus or taxi to Rye Harbour village or Winchelsea Beach.

Train

Just 68 minutes from London or 100 minutes from Brighton. Rye is on the Marshlink line between Eastbourne and Ashford International stations and trains arrive hourly from both. Visit the National Rail Enquiries website for timetables and a journey planner or call: 0845 748 4950.

Bus

There is usually a bus an hour from Rye station to Rye Harbour village and Winchelsea Beach. Traveline website or call: 0870 608 2608.

Taxis

Taxis wait outside Rye Station and meet all trains.

Discover
Rye Harbour



Big Discovery Trail