

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 5 km (3.1 miles) and is less suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs.



Start at Rye Station and walk to Brede Lock



The walk from Rye Station to Brede Lock is approximately 700 m. Brede Lock is at the start of Rye Harbour Road, with the postcode TN31 7TD.

Directions

As you walk out of Rye Station, follow Station Approach for approximately 100 m before turning right on to Cinque Ports Street. Continue on this road, past the Pipemakers Arms as it becomes Wish Street and leads towards a mini roundabout. At the roundabout go straight across onto Winchelsea Road/A259 and over the River Tillingham. Follow this road for approximately 300 m and turn left into Harbour Road and walk another 50 m towards the bridge over the River Brede.

Brede Lock

As you go over the River Brede on the footbridge you can see the lock gates – these limit the access of the sea into the Brede Valley and there is a water level control structure here now.

Once over the bridge turn right and follow the track around, keeping the Castle Mill cottages on your right. Yes there used to be a windmill just beyond here.

Brede Lock to 11



Castle Farm

All the land between here and Camber Castle is very new land and 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 that are managed each year by the local Internal Drainage Board to keep them clear of reeds and rushes in the winter – you can see the cut material beside the ditch.



Camber Castle

Henry VIII's Camber Castle lies within the nature reserve between Rye and Winchelsea. It was originally located overlooking the shallow sea on a shingle spit which protected the approach to these towns.

Camber means a safe haven (the English fleet could safely anchor behind the castle) derived from the French 'chambre', meaning bedroom.

The nature reserve manages public access to Camber Castle. There are castle open days and wildlife guided walks from Rye that include a visit inside the castle. See our website for more details.

11 Halpin Hide



Follow the fence that heads east from the castle towards some bushes.

The ridges here were created by great winter storms pushing up the shingle about 400 years ago. There is a gate that leads through the bushes to the hide.

Listen to the sounds in summer: up to 7 types of warbler and the deep raucous calls of the adult Cormorants and the high pitch squeaking of their begging chicks, and lots of ducks in winter. You may also hear the "laughing" call of the Marsh Frog, introduced to the area in 1930s and now a favourite meal for Bittern, Marsh Harrier, egrets and the very rare Medicinal Leech.



11 to 13 Gravel Pit



This 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.

On leaving the hide follow the path to the right and head for a single large Willow tree 12, then follow the fence, through a gate towards 13.

The grassland here 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.

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

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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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13 to 14 Marshmallow



As you follow the path towards 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.



14 Old Railway Track



At 14 continue straight on and then turn left and then through a gate to start your walk back to Rye along the old railway that went down to Rye Harbour until 1962.

As you walk along you might see the marks of the old rail sleepers across the path and at the first gateway there is a metal marker with 1829 – this is not a date, but the number of the culvert under the track.



In summer along this path there are the purple flowers of Seaside Thistle.



To the right of the track is an area of plots that show that this land would be very different without sheep grazing. But remember the sea defences... without them this area would still be covered by the sea on very high tides and one day the sea will be back.

At the end of the track you reach the road and can make your way back into Rye.

On the riverside of Brede Lock there is a hidden pillbox – a defence against invasion in 1940s.

At the junction with the A259 look across the road in Martello Close, there is a hidden Martello Tower – one of many built around 1806 as a defence against invasion. No public access.



Back to Brede Lock and Rye Station



Follow the A259 back towards Rye. If you have time, there's much to explore and enjoy in the town. Wander through its charming, cobbled streets and visit historic landmarks like St. Mary's Church and Ypres Tower. Discover local art galleries, boutique shops, and savour delicious local food at the town's restaurants. On a clear day, take in panoramic views from St Mary's Church that look out towards Rye Harbour Nature Reserve and beyond.

Discover
Rye Harbour

Camber Castle Trail

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