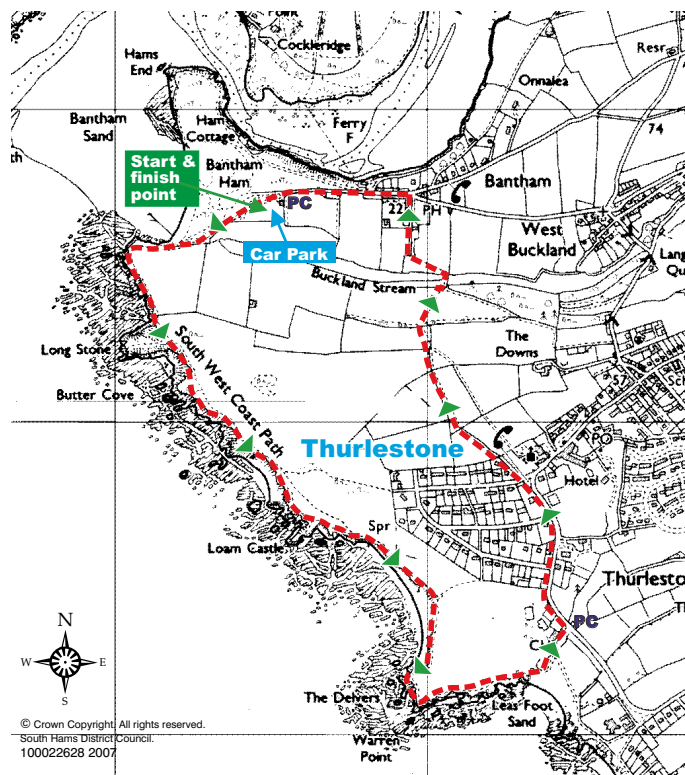


Bantham to Thurlestone

Take in the old haunts of Saxons and smugglers, lush coastline and glittering sea, then amble back through the green fields of South Devon.

Start:	Bantham beach car park
Distance:	3.5 miles
Circular Walk:	Yes
Grade:	Moderate
Terrain:	Fairly even coastal footpath; surfaced roads; fields and footpaths.
Obstacles & Steep Gradients:	6 stiles, 1 fairly steep climb and 1 steep descent.
Public transport:	Bus service 162 between Kingsbridge and Thurlestone. From the bus stop in Thurlestone, walk 50 metres to the war memorial opposite the church, and pick up the route there. For information on public transport in South Hams please call Traveline on 0870 6082608 www.traveline.org.uk .
Refreshment stops:	Village Inn at Thurlestone 01548 563525; Sloop Inn at Bantham 560489. Bantham Stores includes a small coffee shop, 100 meters up the hill through the village from the Sloop Inn.
Toilets:	Public toilets at Bantham beach car park and across the road near Leasfoot Sands, past the golf clubhouse
Parking:	Private car park at Bantham beach. Charges apply.
Accommodation:	Please contact Kingsbridge Information Centre on 01548 853195 www.kingsbridgeinfo.co.uk
Other facilities:	Phone boxes just off the route in both Thurlestone and Bantham. Thurlestone also has a Post Office and village stores. Bantham has a small village stores.
OS map:	Explorer 0L20
Grid Ref:	SX665437



Directions

1. Follow the main track through the car park. This leads past the lifeguards' hut and through a kissing gate onto the coast path signed for Thurlestone.
2. Follow the waymarked path alongside the golf course and past Broad Sands and Yarmouth Sands.
3. When you reach Leasfoot Sands, turn left by the beach safety sign. Go past the golf clubhouse, and turn left onto the road up to Thurlestone.
4. At the war memorial, leave the road and continue straight on along a track signed 'Public Footpath Bantham 3/4 mile'. (Alternatively, you can take a short detour along the road to the right here for local facilities and refreshments).
5. Cross over the stone stile beyond the church and follow the waymarked path across the fields and steeply down to the valley bottom.
6. At a stile with a large granite block base, cut diagonally across the field to the left, then over another stile onto the path into Bantham.
7. Turn left at the Sloop Inn, and follow the road back to the car park.



Heritage

From the surf life saving club hut beyond the car park at Bantham, you can look across to Bantham Ham, the spit of land that extends behind and beyond Bantham beach. Excavations on the Ham have revealed evidence of settlements there from around the 5th to 7th centuries. Hearths from this time have been found, along with fragments of iron and pottery, shells and bones. Imported fragments such as spindle whorls and bone combs have also been found on the Ham, suggesting that the site may have served as a trading port.

It is thought that the Danes invaded at Bantham Ham in the 9th century, but were defeated in a bloody battle.

Across the estuary is Bigbury, with Burgh Island standing just off the shore. The local area used to be a centre of pilchard fishing, until overfishing put paid to the industry in the late 1800s. A lookout was stationed close to the Pilchard Inn on

Burgh Island to keep watch for shoals of Pilchard and to summon the fishing boats.

The village of Thurlestone is first mentioned - with its Saxon name 'Torlestan' - in a charter of 846. The first record of a church there appears in the

Domesday Book of 1068. A fire-pan on top the tower served as a lighthouse in former times, and is said to have been lit as a beacon fire upon the sighting of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Timbers taken from one of the Armada ships wrecked on the coast nearby - the San Pedro el Major - are built into the Village Inn.

Landscape

The golf course skirted during the walk was created in 1897 from a stretch of coastal scrub. It was originally grazed by sheep, and maintained using rollers pulled by horses wearing special shoes to protect the fairways.

The slates, gravels and sands which make up the coast here are 'soft'. They are vulnerable to erosion from the sea, which is pushing the coastline inland little by little over time.

At Leasfoot Sands, the eroded dunes behind the beach have been stabilised by fencing off small areas. These enclosures were filled with discarded Christmas trees. The trees slowed down the passing wind, causing it to drop the sand it was carrying.



This dropped sand gradually reformed the dunes.

Thurlestone Rock can be seen as you walk towards Leasfoot Sands. This is the stone arch standing just out to sea as you look along the coast. The Rock is a remnant of

New Red Sandstone, the type of rock which once would have covered all of the South Hams. The village of Thurlestone takes its name from the Saxon term for this pierced, or 'thurled' stone.

Wildlife

The coastal section of the walk is rich in wildflowers.

Depending on the season, you may see the clustered yellow flowers of Kidney Vetch, or even lower lying yellow and deep blush Birdsfoot Trefoil, also known as 'eggs and bacon'. The distinctive Sea Campion is also to be found here. Behind its white flower is a small bladder-like sac, formed from the fused sepals. Other finds include the pink bobbing heads of Thrift, and the large lacy rosettes of Sea Carrot.

Along the sea cliff and the golf course the Stonechat is a common sight. This is a small chunky bird with a white patch at the neck and a 'chack' call that sounds like two stones being tapped together. The black and white Pied Wagtail is also found here, as is the Wheatear, a small bird with a black patch through its eye and a distinctive white rump.

Seabirds include the Fulmar, a baby-faced gull-like bird which glides effortlessly on the sea wind off the cliffs. On the rocks

below the cliffs, the dark, rather prehistoric shapes of Shags can often be seen gathered.

