



Royal
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Shifting sands

A self guided walk around Rye and Winchelsea



Explore the changing fortunes of two historic East Sussex towns
Find out how land and lives were shaped by the power of the sea
Visit a harbour inland, a castle that moved and a port that vanished
Discover how people have adapted and thrived in an unusual landscape

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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Shifting sands

Explore the changing fortunes of Rye and Winchelsea

Introduction

A harbour two miles inland. A town that fell into the sea. Sheep that like to live by the coast. Smugglers sneaking across tidal marshes. Pilotless planes appearing from across the water. A coastal walk where you only glimpse the sea from afar.

Some surprising stories await you on this walk around the historic towns of Rye and Winchelsea in East Sussex...

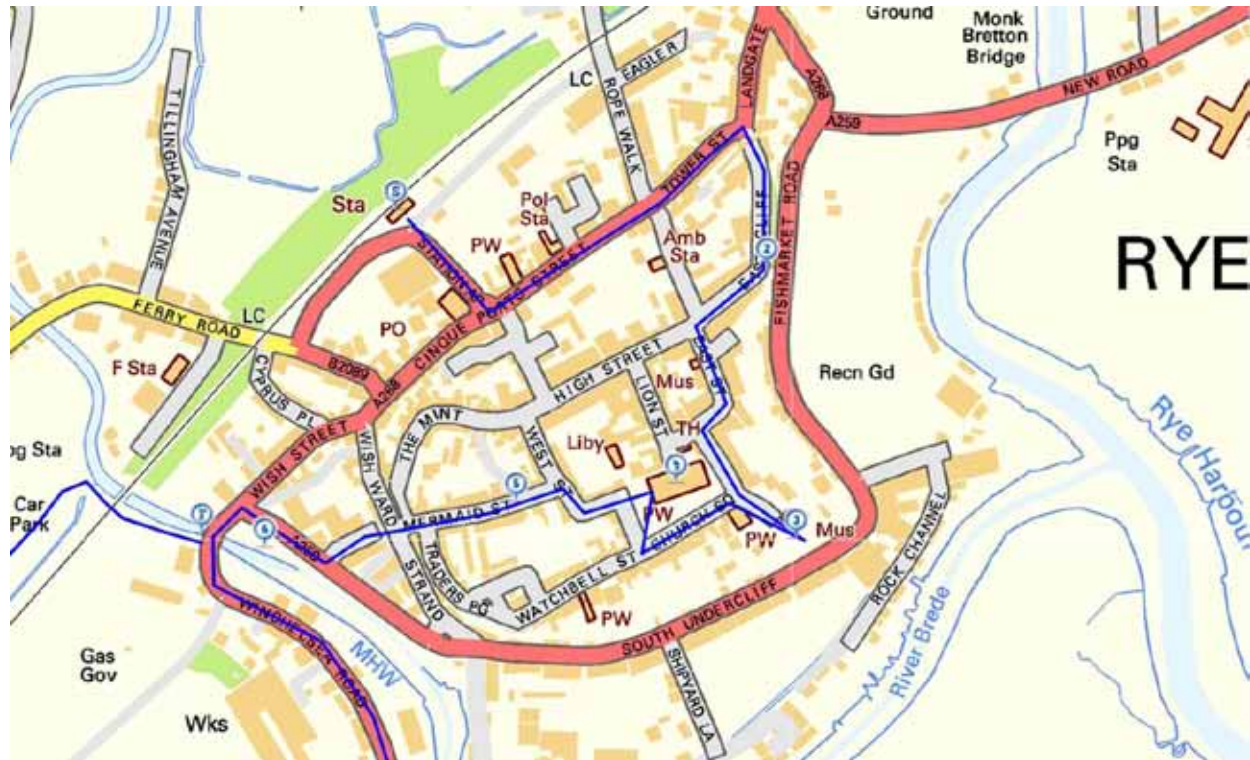
Discover how coastal processes – tides, waves and currents – have created a distinct physical landscape. Find out how people have made a living from an ever-changing environment subject to the whims of the sea. Also explore how the coastal position has influenced military fortifications and defences.

This walk is a fascinating story of human resilience, adaptation and survival in response to the forces of nature.

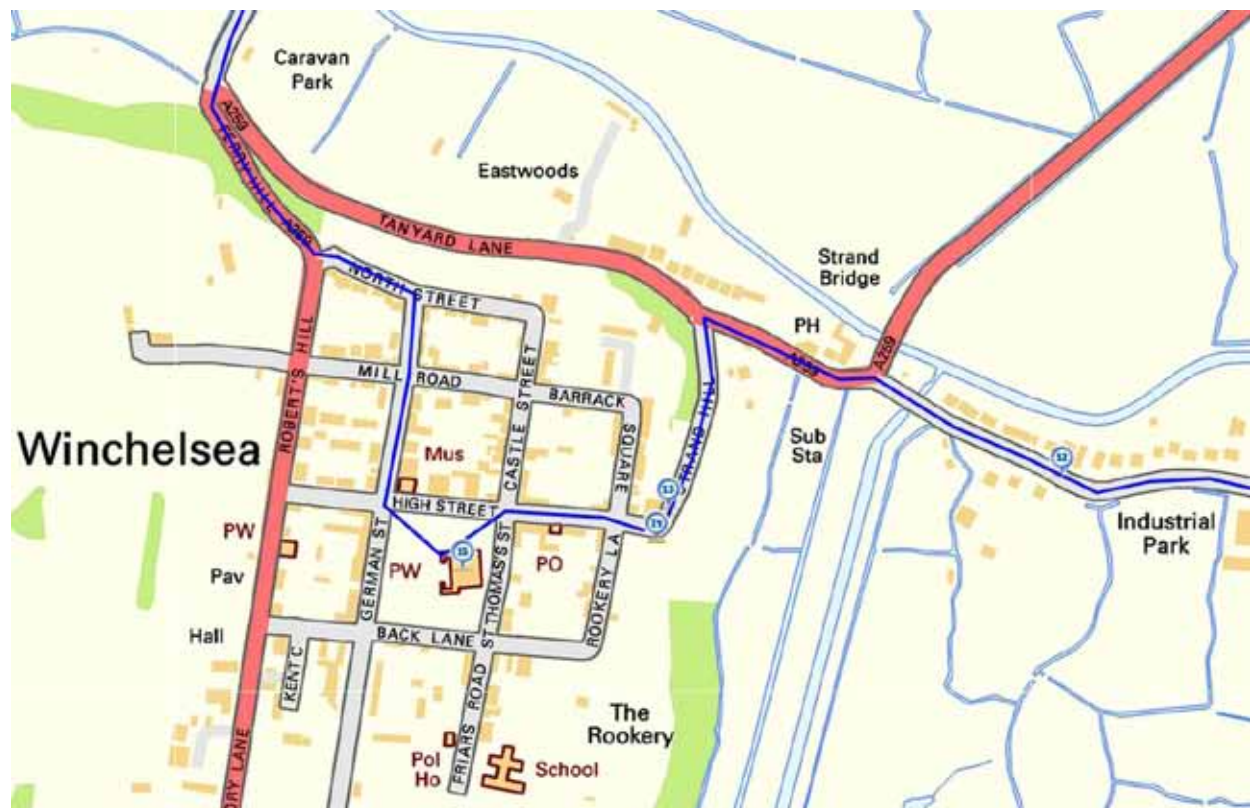


Rye old harbour (top) and inland shingle ridges
at Camber Castle (bottom)
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

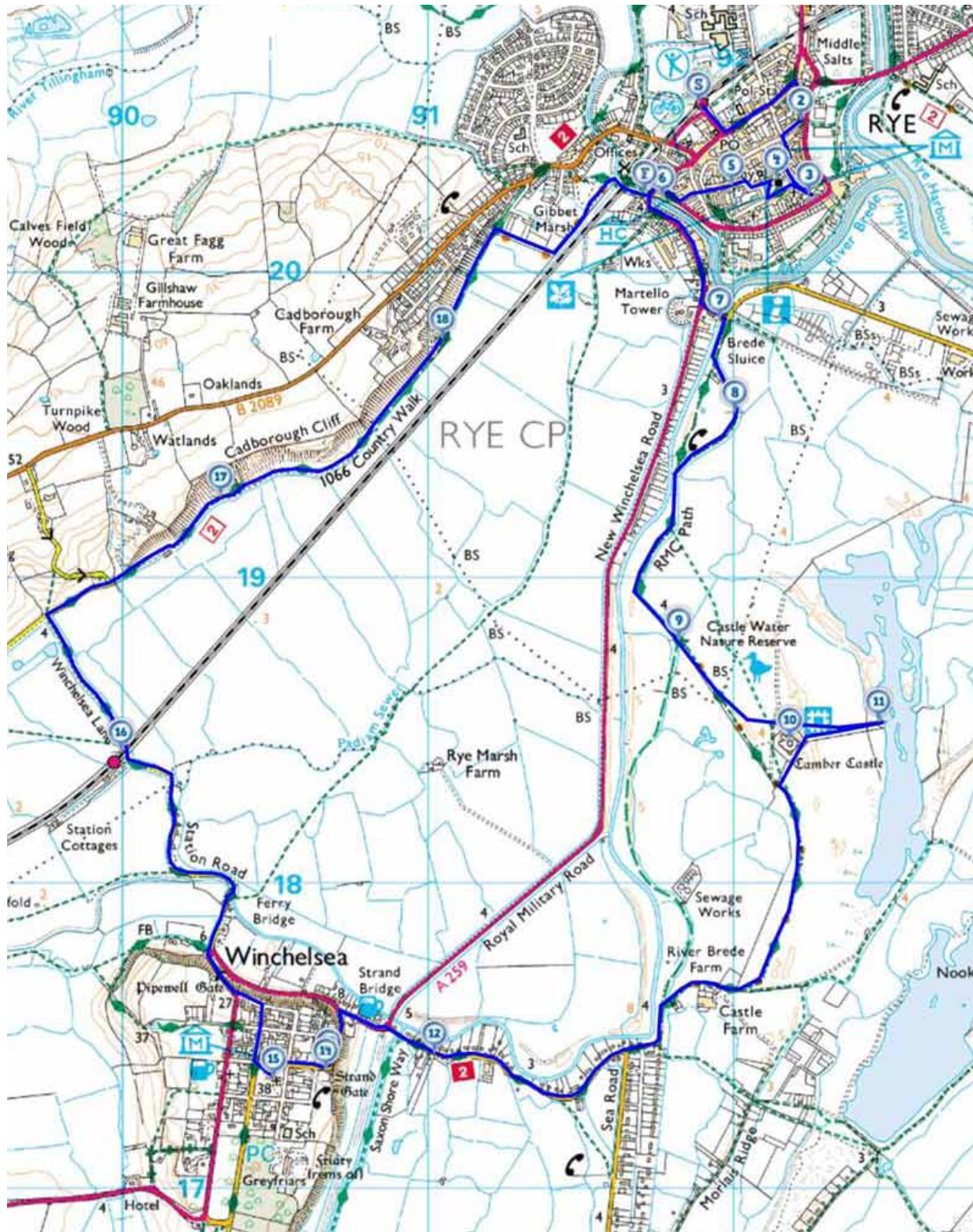
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbsbs.2023.100001>



Detail of the route in Winchelsea



Route overview



Stopping points

1. Rye railway station
2. The Lookout, Hilder's Cliff
3. Gun Gardens, next to Ypres Tower
4. St Mary's Church
5. Mermaid Street
6. Old Rye harbour
7. Bridge and lock over the River Brede
8. Path beyond Castle Cottages
9. On footpath towards Camber Castle
10. Camber Castle
11. Castle Water Nature Reserve bird hide
12. Sea Road
13. Strand Gate
14. The Lookout, beside Strand Gate
15. Winchelsea Church
16. Winchelsea railway station
17. Footpath beneath Cadborough Cliffs
18. Footpath beneath Cadborough Cliffs
19. Rye old harbour

Practical information

Location	Rye and Winchelsea, East Sussex, Southeast England
Getting there	<p>Train - Rye is on the 'Marshlink' line with Hastings and Ashford International (two trains per hour)</p> <p>Bus - Stagecoach routes 100 and 101 run to Rye via Dover and Hastings (one bus per hour). There are also local routes from Tenterden and Tunbridge Wells. The nearest bus stop is outside Rye train station.</p> <p>Car - Rye is on the A259 between Folkestone and Hastings. The town is accessible from the M20</p> <p>Bicycle - located on National Cycle Network Route 2</p>
Start point & postcode	Rye railway station, TN31 7AB
Finish point	Rye old harbour
Onward journey	The route is almost circular. To return to Rye station from the end of the route please use the directions on page 14.
Distance	6½ miles
Level	Moderate – a mostly flat route with some steep hills in the two towns. Mixture of paved roads, cobbles and grassland.
Conditions	<p>Wear good walking shoes and watch your footing on the grazing land before Camber Castle. The Brede Lock and Camber Castle section can be very blustery.</p> <p>Take great care when crossing the railway line at Winchelsea station.</p>

Suitable for

Families – plenty to explore in the towns plus stories of smuggling to entertain children

Dogs – keep on a lead by the towns, roads and grazing land

Refreshments

There are plenty of cafes and pubs in Rye, including The Mermaid Inn (at Stop 5)

In Winchelsea, The New Inn pub on German Street serves lunch and evening meals (Tel: 01797 226252)

There are no refreshments between the towns so you may want to prepare a picnic / buy provisions in Rye

Facilities

Public toilets opposite Rye station and at Rye old harbour

Other info

Rye Heritage Centre houses the famous Rye Town Model and a collection of antique amusement machines (see Tourist information below)

Rye Castle Museum is based at 3 East Street and the Ypres Tower (Stop 3). The Museum is open weekends and Bank Holidays, the Tower is open 7 days a week subject to weather conditions. Small entry fees for both (Tel: 01797 226728)

St Mary's Church tower (Stop 4) is well worth a visit for views across the town and to see the bells. Open subject to weather. Tickets on sale at the tower base.

Rye Farmer's Market is held each Wednesday from 10am at Strand Quay

Binoculars are recommended for birdspotting at **Rye Harbour Nature Reserve** (www.wildrye.info)

Tourist information

Rye Heritage Centre, Strand Quay, Rye TN31 7AY
(Tel: 01797 22 66 96, website: www.ryeheritage.co.uk)

Directions

These directions are for use with the Rye & Winchelsea walk audio commentary. Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

1. Shaped by the sea Rye railway station

Directions 1

Follow the road immediately outside the station. Turn left along Cinque Ports Street, which becomes Tower Street. Turn right through the Landgate and walk up Hilder's Cliff. Stop at the viewpoint on the left hand side and listen to Track 2.

2. Welcome to Rye The Lookout, Hilder's Cliff

Directions 2

From the lookout, continue along the High Street. Take the first left into East Street. At the top, follow the road along to the right. Take the first left into Church Square. Follow the cobbled street down to the Ypres Tower. Go through the stone archway to a lookout point where there are some cannon. Stop there and listen to Track 3.

3. Defending the realm Gun Gardens, next to Ypres Tower

Directions 3

Retrace your steps through the arch. At the corner of the churchyard, turn left along Church Square. As you walk, take time to admire the wonderful medieval houses. At the far corner of the churchyard, turn right into the churchyard and listen to Track 4.

4. Stolen bells St Mary's Church

Directions 4

When you leave the church by the main door, turn left and walk along the right hand side of Church Square. Continue straight along West Street, which is a narrow cobbled street. Follow it round to the right and then take the first left down Mermaid Street, which is also narrow and cobbled. Stop outside the Mermaid Inn and listen to Track 5.

5. A smuggler's song

Mermaid Street

Directions 5

Continue down Mermaid Street. At the bottom of Mermaid Street is Rye Heritage Centre. Cross over Strand Quay to the banks of the harbour and listen to Track 6.

6. Changing fortunes

Old Rye harbour

Directions 6

Cross over the harbour at the road bridge and follow Winchelsea Road round to the left. Continue along the pavement for about 400 yards. Where the main road bends to the right, note the entrance to Martello Close; you might be able to see a Martello Tower which is now a private house. Turn left along Harbour Road, following the signs for Rye Harbour. Stop at the bridge and look on the River Brede and listen to Track 7.

7. Fighting the French

Bridge and lock over the River Brede

Directions 7

At the lock, turn right following the signs for Winchelsea Beach. Follow the track to the left of the cottages and go through the gate. Where the path bends to the right near a solitary tree, stop and listen to Track 8.

8. Sheep and smuggling

Path beyond Castle Cottages

Directions 8

Keep following the footpath. After the last of the houses on the other side of the canal, the path takes a left turn and heads straight towards Camber Castle. Stop at the metal gate half way to the castle and listen to Track 9.

9. Defence and deception

On footpath towards Camber Castle

Directions 9

Continue along the footpath directly towards Camber Castle. Stop when you reach the castle entrance and listen to Track 10.

10. Cannon fire on a moving coast

Camber Castle

Directions 10

Go clockwise around the castle but do not go through the gate. Follow the path leading away from the castle keeping the fence on your right. Head towards the trees and look for the bird hide. Go inside the hide and listen to Track 11.

11. Shingle life

Castle Water bird hide

Directions 11

Retrace your steps back towards the castle. Go round the left side of the castle through two gates and over a stile. Don't forget to look for the gravel ridges which show where the beach used to be.

Follow the track across the field towards farm buildings in the far distance. Follow the track through Castle Farm. Pass a row of houses and continue along the tarmac lane. Look out for the donkey sanctuary on the right hand side and a wartime pillbox on the other side of the canal. At the junction with Sea Road, turn right towards Winchelsea. Shortly after Sutton's Shop, there is an opening in the trees on the left hand side of the road with views across the flat expanse to Winchelsea Beach. Stop here and listen to Track 12.

12. The town that fell into the sea

Sea Road

Directions 12

Continue along Sea Road to the junction. It can be busy here and the pavements are narrow so take great care. Turn left following the signs for Hastings and go past The Bridge Inn. Then turn left up Strand Hill into Winchelsea. Stop at the Strand Gate and listen to Track 13.

13. Searching for the sea

Strand Gate

Directions 13

Go round the side of the Strand Gate to "The Lookout", a good view point with a bench and shelter. Stop here and listen to Track 14.

14. Coastal power

The Lookout, beside Strand Gate

Directions 14

Walk up the High Street into the town. Enter the grounds of the Parish Church on the left hand side and listen to Track 15.

15. The smallest town in England?

Winchelsea Parish Church

Directions 15

When you are ready, leave the churchyard at the corner by The New Inn. Take the road opposite with the museum (old court house) on your right. At the bottom, turn left along North Street to the Pipewell Gate. Turn right down Ferry Hill. Take care here as the pavement is very narrow. At the bottom of the hill where the road doubles back, go straight across, following the signs for Winchelsea Station. Although this is a quiet road, there are no pavements so please be aware of traffic. Stop at the station and listen to Track 16.

16. Transport revolution

Winchelsea railway station

Directions 16

Continue along Station Road. At the junction, turn right on Dumb Woman's Lane towards Rye. Follow the road until it bends sharply to the left. Continue straight on here onto the footpath at the base of the slope. Cross over the cattle grid and continue along the path. Stop at the first gate and listen to Track 17.

17. Bad air

Footpath beneath Cadborough Cliffs

Directions 17

Continue along the footpath beneath the cliffs. When you begin to see houses on the cliff top, listen to Track 18.

18. Cliff top position

Footpath beneath Cadborough cliffs

Directions 18

Continue along the footpath. Just after the pumping station and before the houses, turn right along a footpath. Continue following the footpath back towards the town.

Go past Gibbet Marsh car park, turn right at the windmill and cross over the railway. This brings you back to the old harbour. Stop by the harbour and listen to Track 19.

19. Walk through time

Rye old harbour

Directions 19

From the old harbour you may wish to take time to explore more of Rye. To return to the railway station, take Wish Street from the roundabout. At the first main traffic junction, continue straight along Cinque Ports Street and then turn left into Station Approach. The station will be straight ahead.

Credits

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- **Raymond Molony FRGS** for creating the walk and providing photographs
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- **Laura Shawyer** for testing the walk



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