

renowned for its plant and animal life. In 2003 it was placed at the heart of the UK's first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The designated was made to celebrate the 'communities living and working in harmony with nature, encouraging sustainability in the local natural and economic environment'. As well as featuring the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Biosphere incorporates no fewer than 63 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 671 County Wildlife Sites and 4 Local Nature Reserves.

Over 400 different species of plant have been recorded in Braunton Burrows, including some very rare ones growing in abundance. In the dunes themselves, the sand-loving plants, such as sea cabbage, sea rocket, sea spurge and sea holly, have long roots and rubbery leaves in order to reach and conserve water. Around the dunes, the grass is cropped short by grazing rabbits and fragrant with the scent of wild thyme and water mint. In summer it is alight with colourful flowers such as dandelions, buttercups, and pink and white clover. Tall stands of pale yellow evening primrose and speckled pink foxgloves tower over creepers such as silverweed, vivid yellow bird's foot trefoil and pink-flowered restharrow. The flowers attract many butterflies and moths, while the beetles and grubs at their roots bring in songbirds. Watch out for lizards in the sand, and take care not to disturb a sleeping adder, easily recognised by the V markings on its skin. Overhead skylarks and meadow pipits trill, and buzzards wheel in search of prey.

**6. Reaching the car park at the end of the American Road, leave the Coast Path as it peels off to the left, and instead carry on ahead along the road to the first junction.**

**7. Turn right here and follow this road as it winds through Braunton Marshes beside the stream.**

If you have walked from the Saunton Sands hotel to this point then turn left (not right!) and follow this road as it winds through Braunton Marshes beside the stream.

**8. At a right-hand bend, a track leaves on the left, heading through the Great Field. Carry on along the road past it.**

**Braunton Great Field is one of the last surviving areas of land still farmed today in narrow, unfenced strips of land as it was in Saxon times.**

**9. When a road leaves on the right to the toll-house, carry on ahead to return to Velator Quay. From the car park return back to the Saunton Sands Hotel reversing the directions at the beginning of this walk.**

*For those who walked from Saunton Sands Hotel turn right onto the road to the toll-house. At the Toll House turn right onto the South West Coast Path. You should now be at Point 2 of the Route Description. When you reach Point 7 then follow the South West Coast Path and retrace your steps back to the Saunton Sands Hotel.*

## Other useful information

To download a digital version of this walk go to [www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/walksdb/832](http://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/walksdb/832)

**Public Transport** Bus Service Stagecoach South West 21A from Barnstaple and Braunton to Croyde. For timetable information visit Traveline or phone 0871 200 22 33.

**Nearest car park** Velator Quay, at the start of the walk

## Support the South West Coast Path

The South West Coast Path Association is the charity that protects and champions the Path for everyone to enjoy. You can help us do this by becoming a member. Sign up and you will receive:

- A free copy of the Complete Guide to the South West Coast Path guidebook
- 2 members magazines a year
- Monthly e-newsletters
- Car sticker
- Satisfaction – you're helping us to protect and conserve this beautiful Path!

Find out more at [www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk](http://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk), call us on 01752 896237 or email [hello@southwestcoastpath.org.uk](mailto:hello@southwestcoastpath.org.uk)



**South West Coast Path Association**  
Unit 11, Residence 2, Royal William Yard, Plymouth, PL1 3RP  
Reg. charity no. 1163422



Start/finish: Velator Quay  
Distance: 11.3 miles (18.2 km)  
Difficulty: Challenging

# Braunton Burrows Walk



A long walk, but over easy ground. Starting at either Saunton Sands Hotel or at Velator which was once a bustling quay, the route passes through Braunton Burrows, one of the UK's largest sand dune systems, with a unique diversity of species. As well as being a National Nature Reserve, the Burrows are at the core of the UNESCO-designated North Devon Biosphere Reserve, which celebrates man and nature working together in harmony in a peaceful pastoral landscape. Heading inland around Braunton Marshes, a large area of wet pastureland reclaimed from the sea in the nineteenth century, the walk also passes the Braunton Great Field, one of only three medieval strip farming fields remaining in England. Take a picnic and plenty of drinks to sustain you on the way. The path is on level ground but which may be muddy, sandy or stony. It also takes on a track and quiet country road.

This leaflet is produced by the South West Coast Association to help the guests of Saunton Sands Hotel enjoy their stay.

## Braunton Burrows Walk

11.3 miles (18.2 km)

There are two options for this walk – walking or drive and walk.

**Walk from the Saunton Sands Hotel** for a challenging day out and join the route description between points 6 and 7.

**Walking from the Saunton Sands hotel will add an extra 6 miles and over 2 hours to this walk.**

If walking, leave the Saunton Sands Hotel and take the South West Coast Path as it weaves its way below the Hotel and eastwards towards the golf club. The coast path joins the main road for a brief spell before turning right immediately after passing the golf club car park entrance. Follow the path, past some houses and then as it travels alongside and through the golf course. Eventually, the Coast Path leaves the golf course and turns left towards Sandy Lane carpark. The carpark is situated between Points 6 and 7 on the walk. Turn left and follow the Sandy lane until the first junction. Now you are at Point 7.

**Drive by car to the Velator Quay parking area and then walk.** To do this, leave the Saunton Sands Hotel and head inland on the B3231 to Braunton. In the middle of Braunton, turn right onto the A361. At the next roundabout, turn right onto Vellator Way, signposted Vellator Industrial Estate and Braunton Burrows. Go straight ahead at the next roundabout. Continue on this road until you see the Velator Quay parking area on your left.

**1. From the parking area at Velator Quay go up onto the bank alongside the river and turn right, walking away from Braunton, along the top of the bank. The path soon crosses an old slate stile and continues alongside the waterway known as 'The Pill'. As the road draws away to the right the path carries on along the riverbank to a toll house.**

'Pill' is a common Westcountry name for creeks, possibly from the Cornish word 'pol', meaning 'pool' and often used to denote any body of water. In the nineteenth century, Velator Quay was a thriving port, with sometimes as many as a hundred vessels using it at any given time.

**2. From the toll house, the bank crosses the mouth of a tidal inlet known as 'Inner Marsh Pill' and continues above the privately-owned toll road. Carry on ahead to where the path forks.**

To your right is RMB Chivenor, the Royal Marine base whose servicemen's wives achieved national fame at Christmas 2011 with their Number One hit 'Wherever You Are'. The song was created using extracts of correspondence between choir members and their spouses in Afghanistan, and the single sold 556,000 copies within a week of launch, with a percentage of profits going to Forces charities.

Originally a civil airfield, Chivenor was designated an RAF Central Command Station in 1940. After the war it was used for training, primarily weapons training, flying Hunter aircraft. In 1974 the RAF moved out, returning in 1979 to re-establish flight training using Hawks. The Royal Marines moved in at the end of 1995 when the RAF departed again. Today the yellow Sea Kings of the 22 Squadron Search and Rescue unit are the only aircraft permanently based here, and the Vigilant motor gliders of the 624 Volunteer Gliding Squadron, which trains air cadets. By 2015 the Sea Kings too will have been stood down, as the private sector takes over the Search and Rescue role.

### 3. The right-hand fork travels along a boundary drain.

To your left is Hornsey Island renowned for a large number of over-wintering bird species that feed here. Occasionally a rare osprey is spotted fishing over the estuary.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Braunton Marshes were used for cattle grazing. However, as a tidal zone, it was subject to flooding during storms. As well as sometimes being dangerous, it provided poor quality grazing. After a surveyor was sent by the Board of Agriculture in 1808 to consider reclaiming the land a scheme was set up to enclose the marshes and drain them. The Great Sea Bank that you are walking on was built and a series of gravity-fed drainage channels were dug, with sluice gates to control them. These gates can still be seen around Horsey Island.

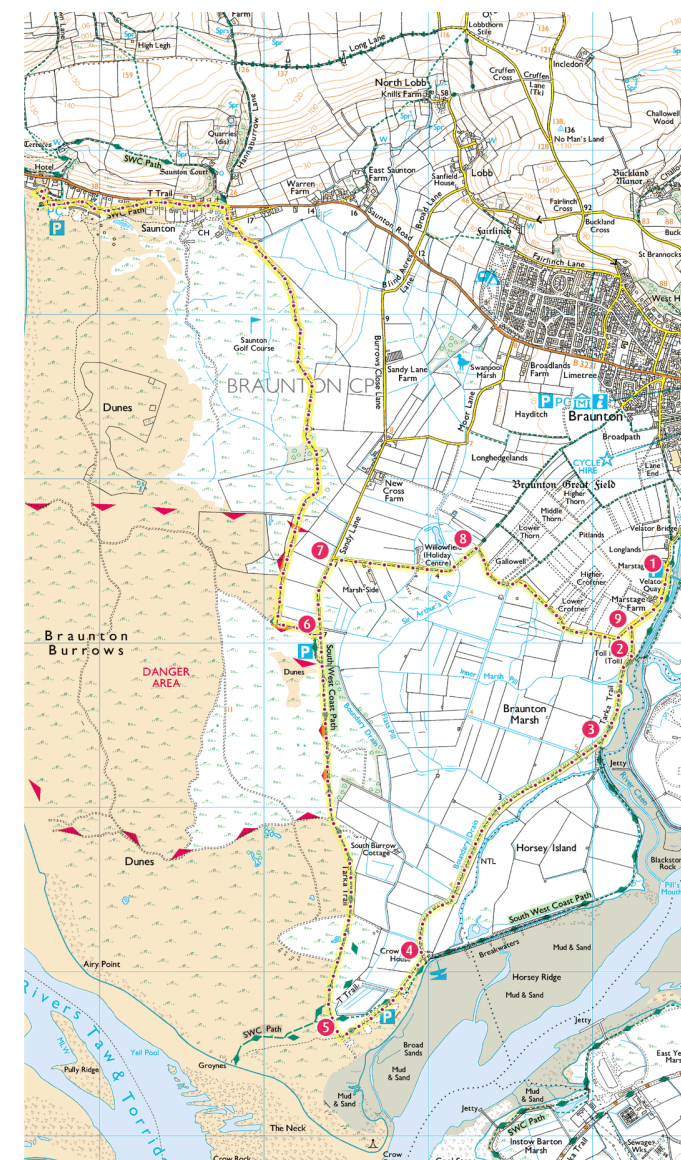
The River Taw flows into Bideford Bay along the estuary here, having arrived via Barnstaple and the Taw Valley from its source on Dartmoor. As you continue along the open part of the riverbank you can see the River Torridge joining it from the Bideford direction. Across the water, Fremington Quay was once a bustling port in its own right, and the infrastructure from the power station at Yelland can still be seen.

At the mouth of the Torridge, the Victorian seaside resort at Instow is still linked by ferry to the old fishing village of Appledore; while the greater mouth of the estuary combining the two is flanked on one side by the shingle beach at Westward Ho! and on the other side by the long golden strand of Saunton Sands.

**4. At the White House stay with the South West Coast Path as it drops behind the beach and runs parallel to it until you reach the start of the old American road at Crow Point.**

There was once a ferry path running the length of Braunton Burrows, from Sandy Lane to Crow Point, and this was straightened and widened during the Second World War to enable American troops to reach the ferry stance. Tucked away in the dunes a short distance down the track, ramps and other concrete constructions are still visible in the area used by US troops to train for the Normandy landings.

Crow Point Lighthouse gives a guide to vessels navigating the Taw and Torridge estuary in North Devon. It is a small 5-metre high



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tubular steel structure, 7.6 metres above the sea at high water. Its light flashes every 2.5 seconds and can be seen for 6 nautical miles. It was originally powered by acetylene gas but was converted to solar power in 1987.

**5. Turn right onto the track at Crow Point and follow it through Braunton Burrows, to the car park at the far end.**

The dune system at Braunton Burrows covers over 2000 acres, with some of the dunes over 30 metres high. It is internationally