

# Southern England Long-Distance Paths

This chapter covers two of the longest and best-known long-distance paths (LDPs) in southern England – the South Downs Way and the South West Coast Path. These sharply contrasting routes have their own chapter simply because they do not fit neatly into any other chapter in this book.

For most walkers, the South Downs Way takes around a week. It starts in historic Winchester, winding gently at first through farms and woodland then gathering pace and confidence as it leaves the trees behind to stride across rolling, grassy hills, with great views and big, dramatic skies, to finally plunge to the English Channel at the seaside resort of Eastbourne.

At the other end of southern England, the South West Coast Path is the longest national trail in Britain – a whopping 630 miles – easily taking a couple of months to complete. In this book, we've described the most popular two-week section, taking in beaches, cliff tops and fishing ports along the way. One walker we heard from who'd done both routes said he 'loved the contrast between the neat hills of the posh Southeast and the wild coast of raggedy Cornwall'.

For all you mile-eaters out there, the South Downs Way and South West Coast Path are by no means the only long-distance options in southern England. Other LDPs described in this book are the Ridgeway (p83), the Cotswold Way (p109) and the Thames Path (p64 and p88), and further ideas are given in the More Long-Distance Walks section on p148.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Wandering the atmospheric main street of **Alfriston** (p131)
- Watching the waves crash around the **Beachy Head lighthouse** (p133)
- Stopping for a quick dip at any one of the north coast's fabulous golden beaches on the **South West Coast Path** (p133)
- Turning the corner at **Land's End** (p143) and then heading along exhilarating granite cliff tops

## THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY

<b>Duration</b>	8 days
<b>Distance</b>	107 miles (172km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start</b>	Winchester (p76)
<b>Finish</b>	Eastbourne (p124)
<b>Transport</b>	train, bus
<b>Summary</b>	Follow the ancient chalk and flint highway along the ridges of rolling downs, past picture-perfect villages and prehistoric sites.

There's something quintessentially English about the South Downs Way (SDW). From high on the ridges of the downs (grassy chalk hills), Albion's pastoral idyll stretches out as far as the eye can see. It's difficult to resist the word 'quaint' when describing the villages strung along the route, nearly all with their own Norman church, 500-year-old pub and cottages of flint, wood and thatch. And as if the Shire-like surroundings weren't Tolkien-esque enough, the place names compound the impression – Long Bottom, Cheesefoot Head, Ditchling Beacon, the Rivers Arun and Adur, Big Bottom, Devil's Dyke, Cocking, Didling and Fulking.

This ancient route was first used by Neolithic people, keen to avoid the marsh and dense forest below the downs. Later settlers all left their marks, including Bronze Age burial barrows, Iron Age hillforts and a Roman road, now part of the track. As you leave Hampshire and head into Sussex the views become increasingly panoramic, over chequerboard farmland to the north and south to the sea.

Waymarking is generally good, although there are a few points where signs are missing and vigilance is required. At any branch of the trail, look around for either the wooden signs or the plastic disks marked with an acorn. There are also disks pointing to bridleways, public footpaths and other walks, so always check that you're following the right path. Where there are no SDW markers it's generally safe to assume that you can keep marching straight ahead on the most obvious trail.

Walkers share much of the route with bicycles and the occasional horse, although there are large segments where nonwalk-

ers are diverted away from the main path (including the whole of the last leg from Alfriston).

## ENVIRONMENT

The South Downs fall within two official Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – East Hampshire and Sussex Downs – and there have been moves for a number of years to have the area designated as a national park.

This is farming land, where crops and livestock have coexisted for centuries. Grazing plays an important part in preserving the downland environment, keeping back the scrub and allowing wild flowers such as orchids and bluebells to bloom. However, intensive farming methods, involving the use of fertilisers, herbicides and the introduction of imported ryegrass, continue to threaten the native turf. The National Trust has been trying to turn the tide by reintroducing sheep grazing on its estates along the SDW, while a **Sustainable Development Fund** ([www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk)) seeks to encourage other landowners to do the same.

There are a few wild patches of woodland along the way, some dating back to the Iron Age. If you're lucky (and quiet) you might spot deer. Keep an eye out for peregrine falcons and fulmars along the cliffs on the last day.

## PLANNING

Finding accommodation along the SDW can be a problem. Campers will struggle to find an official site every night and there are few hostels. B&Bs may be your only option, but it pays to book early, as even these are thin on the ground. If there happens to be a wedding or major polo game on, you might find all the available beds booked up in villages for quite a radius.

While you can follow the path in either direction, our description goes west to east, with prevailing winds propelling you from the more enclosed part of the trail to open and dramatic scenery, with a spectacular cliff-top finish.

There are no baggage services along the SDW so you'll have to be your own mule.

Cycling the route should only take three days, but be sure to bring a puncture kit, as the sharp flint can be murder on your tires.

The walking days as we've described them are as follows:

Day	From	To	Miles/km
1	Winchester	Exton	12/19.5
2	Exton	Buriton	14/22.5
3	Buriton	Cocking	12/19.5
4	Cocking	Amberley	12/19.5
5	Amberley	Steyning	13/21
6	Steyning	Kingston-near-Lewes	20/32
7	Kingston-near-Lewes	Alfriston	12/19.5
8	Alfriston	Eastbourne	12/19.5

## Alternatives

Our itinerary is fairly gentle, except for Day 6. You could split this leg up by catching the bus from Pyecombe to Brighton and staying overnight there. If you're feeling strong, more challenging combinations are possible; for instance, amalgamating Days 3 and 4, or Days 4 and 5. If you're short of time, you can omit the first two days and get the best of the route by joining at Buriton.

As with all LDPs, you can do just a single-day linear section of the SDW, or a circular route taking in a stretch of the main track. See the boxed text on p132 for suggestions.

## When to Walk

Since the land is generally well-drained and the climate mild, the SDW can be walked at any time of year, although spring and summer unleash a riot of wildflowers and butterflies.

## Maps

Harvey Maps produces an excellent 1:40,000 *South Downs Way* strip map, which covers the whole route on one sheet. Like all strip maps it's useless once you get a few miles away from the trail but does include most of the walkable towns and villages where accommodation is available. The SDW is covered by Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger 1:50,000 maps No 185 *Winchester & Basingstoke*, 197 *Chichester & the Southern Downs*, 198 *Brighton & Lewes* and 199 *Eastbourne & Hastings*.

## Information Sources

The South Downs Way official website ([www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Southdowns](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Southdowns)) is an excellent resource, with information on

the route, maps, photos, accommodation listings and links to public-transport sites. Also covering accommodation and transport is [www.visitsouthdowns.com](http://www.visitsouthdowns.com), with a particular focus on sustainable tourism.

The **Winchester tourist office** (☎ 01962-840500; [www.visitwinchester.co.uk](http://www.visitwinchester.co.uk); The Guildhall, High St; ☹ closed Sun Oct-Apr) sells walking maps and can assist with finding accommodation along the route for a £5 fee plus 10% of the total booking.

## NEAREST TOWNS

For Winchester, see p76.

## Eastbourne

pop 106,562

At the end of the route, Eastbourne's a bit like Brighton for the over-60s, who make up 30% of the population. There's not a lot to see or do here and, given its large community of retirees, it's hardly a party town. Its tidy buildings are riddled with hotels and B&Bs that hug the seafront, especially around the pier. The **tourist office** (☎ 0906 711 2212; [www.visiteastbourne.co.uk](http://www.visiteastbourne.co.uk); Cornfield Rd; ☹ closed Sun Nov-Apr) has a number of free pamphlets, as well as maps and guides for sale. It charges slightly less for booking accommodation than other tourist offices (£3 fee plus 5% of the total booking).

## SLEEPING & EATING

Eastbourne's surfeit of accommodation makes for some good bargains.

**Channel View Hotel** (☎ 01323-736730; [schanvw7@nildram.co.uk](mailto:schanvw7@nildram.co.uk); 57 Royal Pde; s £21, d £24-28) is right on

### WARNING

There's no shelter from the elements along the ridges, so the sun and wind can be brutal and electrical storms rather scary. If you hear thunder you're best to leave the ridges and seek shelter in a building. If you can't find one, go to a low-lying, open place away from trees or poles and squat low to the ground.

Make sure you pack plenty of water, as all the villages are at the foot of the downs and you won't fancy leaving the path to refuel. Taps are provided along the trail (and marked on some maps), but it's still worth carrying 1L with you.

the main seaside promenade and has some rooms with balconies.

Just back from the water, **Cromwell Private Hotel** (☎ 01323-725288; [www.cromwellhotel.co.uk](http://www.cromwellhotel.co.uk); 23 Cavendish Pl; s £27-32, d £54-64) has eight rooms in a Victorian townhouse not far from the pier.

You can rest your weary legs in a canopied bed at the elegant **Albert & Victoria** (☎ 01323-730948; [www.albertandvictoria.com](http://www.albertandvictoria.com); 19 St Aubyns Rd; s £30-40, d £70-80), although it doesn't take single-night bookings on the weekend.

If you're looking for a supermarket, there's a **Sainsbury's** (☎ 01323-639344; 63 Arndale Centre) in the mall next to the train station.

**Pomodoro e Mozzarella** (☎ 01323-733800; 23-24 Cornfield Tce; mains £6-15; ☹ lunch & dinner) serves traditional Italian food with plenty of vegetarian options.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Trains are the best option. **Southern** (☎ 0845 127 2920; [www.southernrailway.com](http://www.southernrailway.com)) operates direct lines from Brighton (40 minutes, 14 daily) and London Victoria (1½ hours, 11 daily), stopping at Gatwick airport.

**National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; [www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com)) has one daily coach from London (2¾ hours) and two from Brighton (45 minutes).

By car, take the A22 from London or the A27 from Brighton.

## THE WALK

### Day 1: Winchester to Exton

4–6 hours, 12 miles (19.5km)

*Ease into the walk with a gentle stroll through woods, farms and fields.*

Start the route with a right royal send-off, at the grandiose statue of **King Alfred the Great** at the end of the high street. Cross the bridge and turn right into Chesil St. After 200m turn left up East Hill then bear right along Petersfield Rd, through leafy suburbs. At the 'Welcome to Highcliffe' sign, veer right onto Fivefields Rd and continue straight ahead along the footpath when the road ends at a cul de sac. Once you clear the houses, turn right, take the footbridge over the busy M3 motorway, veer left at the end and you're on your way. Relax – there are no navigation problems for several miles as the trail follows tracks and lanes through farmland.

A natural resting point is the **Milbury's** (☎ 01962-771248; [www.themilburys.co.uk](http://www.themilburys.co.uk); Beauworth;

mains £6-15; ☹ lunch & dinner), a 17th-century pub serving hearty food about 8 miles along the path. From here, further easy walking takes you to wooded **Beacon Hill** (there are more such hills to come, where fires were lit four centuries ago to warn of the approaching Spanish Armada) and the route's first tricky bit of navigation. At the car park the path splits, with cycles and horses directed to the northeast and walkers to the southeast. This takes you through a wheat field where, after 50m, a pile of flint (with no sign) marks the point where you should cut diagonally across the field on a path no more than 1ft wide. At the end, a stile leads onto a road where, before long, another stile directs you across more fields. From here the route is clearly marked, taking you over several more stiles (some crossing electric fences) and through open farmland heading down towards Exton.

## EXTON

Accommodation is extremely limited in this quiet village and its twin sister Meonstoke across the river.

The **Buck's Head** (☎ 01489-877313; Bucks Head Hill, Meonstoke; s/d £45/65, mains £7-14; ☹ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) offers B&B in a cosy pub with good beer and reasonable food.

Although it's about 1.5 miles southwest of the village, the friendly folks at the **Copper Room** (☎ 01489-877506; Corhampton Lane Farm; camp sites for 2 £10, s/d £35/60) will collect you from Exton and return you the next day. The sheltered camp site has access to a toilet but no shower.

There are further accommodation choices in Droxford, 2 miles south along the A32.

In Exton village, the **Shoe Inn** (☎ 01489-877526; Shoe Lane; mains £9; ☹ lunch & dinner) is a flash pub serving meals and bar snacks, with more tables in a small garden across the road.

The **Meonstoke Post Office** (☎ 01489-877374; Warnford Rd, Meonstoke) doubles as the village store and sells just about everything you might possibly need.

### Day 2: Exton to Buriton

4–6 hours, 14 miles (22.5km)

*The path yo-yos through pastures and fields, with a couple of stretches of woodland and the (literal) high point of the route.*

The irony of the Downs is that there are at least as many ups, which is something

you begin to appreciate today. From Exton the trail climbs to **Old Winchester Hill**, the most impressive Iron Age fort on the route. It's an excellent viewpoint; you can look over the Meon Valley to the New Forest and the silver line of sea that splits the Isle of Wight from the coast.

After Salt Hill, hurry past HMS Mercury, a landlocked naval station with grim razor-wire fences and derelict outbuildings. Of more interest is the nearby **Sustainability Centre** (☎ 01730-823166; www.earthworks-trust.com; Droxford Rd, East Meon; admission free; ☞ 10am-4pm), where you can examine different technologies relating to environmentally friendly living. Its **Wetherdown Hostel** (☎ 01730-823549; hostel@earthworks-trust.com; camp sites for 2 £7, s/d/tr tepees £15/20/30, dm/s £20/25) uses solar energy and a wood-chip biomass boiler.

Next comes butt-crunching **Butser Hill** – at 270m the highest point on the SDW, although the path skirts about 20m below the peak. Savour a rolling descent, heading under the A3 to reach the **Queen Elizabeth Country Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 02392-595040; www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/qecp; ☞ closed 21 Dec-6 Jan),

with a café, toilets and shop. Carefully follow the SDW signs (ignore the multicoloured waymarks for circular trails in the forest) until you reach Hall's Hill car park, where a lane drops down to Buriton and bed.

### BURITON

This village could hardly be cuter if it tried. There's a fine 12th-century Norman church set alongside a duck pond, an impressive manor house, flint cottages and two pubs, both offering food and accommodation.

The more atmospheric of the two is the **Five Bells** (☎ 01730-263584; www.fivebellsburiton.co.uk; High St; s £50-60, d £70, mains £8-10; ☞ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat), parts of which date from the 16th century, although it was heavily altered 200 years later. It serves an interesting menu, including vegetarian options and a great wine list, in its low-beamed dining room (which once was the village butcher, and occasionally doubled as the morgue) and in the garden. Accommodation is provided in self-catering cottages next door.

The **Master Robert** (☎ 01730-267275; master.robert@btconnect.com; 1 Petersfield Rd; s/d £40/50, mains

£7-8; ☞ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) attracts a younger crowd, but is rather less impressive.

A better option for B&B is **Nurstead Farm** (☎ 01730-264278; s/d £22/44), just outside the village in a 17th-century farmhouse.

If you get stuck for a place to rest your weary legs, catch a taxi 3 miles north to the attractive town of Petersfield where there are several more options.

### Day 3: Buriton to Cocking

4–6 hours, 12 miles (19.5km)

*A couple of steep climbs don't dent a wonderful day's walk along the ridge of the Downs proper, with the best views thus far.*

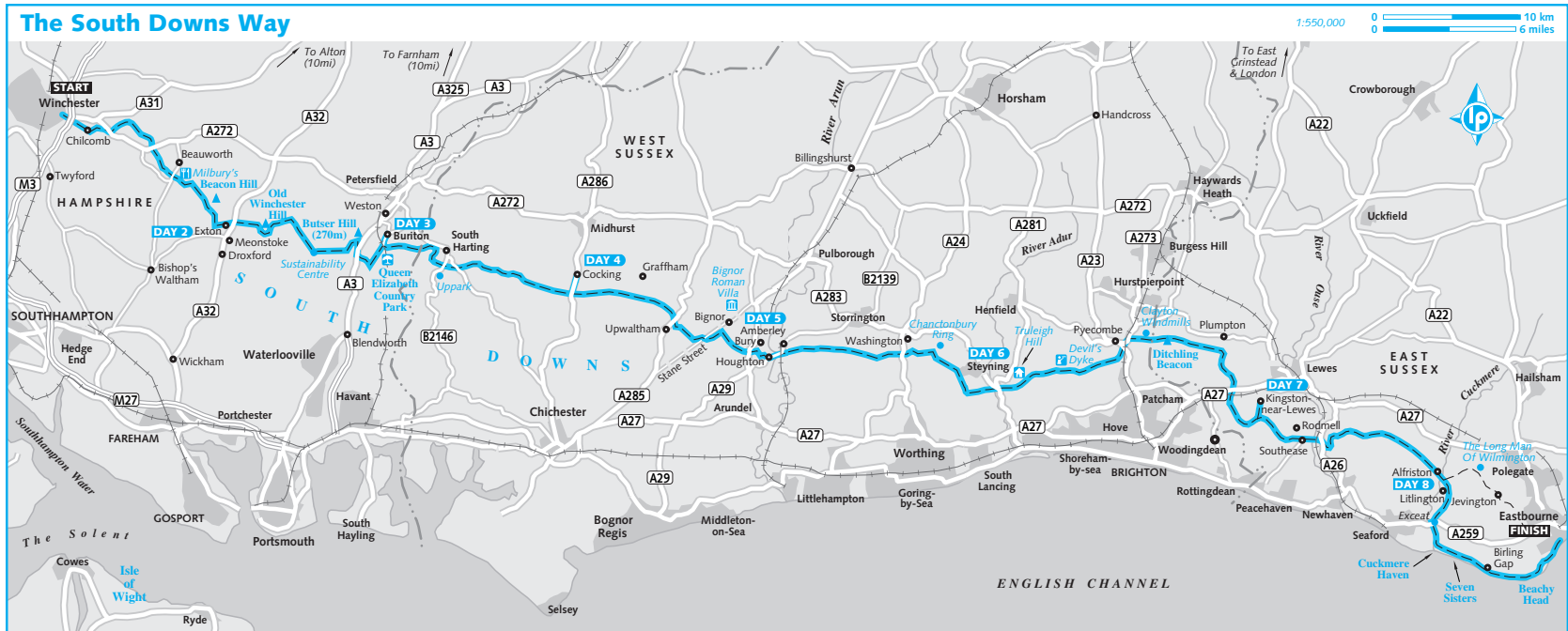
Upon regaining the trail from Buriton you'll find yourself on wooded paths, skirting around farms for around 4 miles before you cross the B2146, just south of South Harting. A 200m diversion south along this road will bring you to the gates of **Uppark** (☎ 01730-825415; www.nationaltrust.org.uk; admission to house adult/child £7/4, garden only £3/2; ☞ 11.30am-5pm Sun-Thu Apr-Oct), a handsome 17th-century manor house with terrific gardens and amazing views. You can easily indulge in a

quick look around and an early lunch at the restaurant before heading back to the trail.

You'll be glad of the rest once you reach the succession of steep, grass-covered domes, including Tower Hill and Harting Down. At Beacon Hill (yes, another one) and a place called Devil's Jumps, take care as the SDW switches back sharply on itself – it's easy to go striding straight on. After this you'll pass through a wonderful patch of wild woods, where you may get to see some ostentatiously antlered stags. As you leave the woods, look out for a cluster of grassy mounds that are actually Bronze Age **burial barrows**. Back into the open, it's time for the first long, straight stretch of high ridge, passing grazing sheep and breathtaking views out to sea. You'll see the neat village of Cocking to the north as you come down the hill towards the busy A286; follow the road into the village.

### COCKING

Any day, another perfect village – complete with a Norman church, popular pub and flint cottages. A unique new attraction is



the **History Column**. Erected for the millennium, bronze images of 14 centuries of village life twist their way around and up the structure like a mini Trajan's Column.

You'll be cocking up (hey, there had to be one bad pun) if you don't try to stay at the super-friendly **Moonlight Cottage** (☎ 01730-813336; www.moonlightcottage.co.uk; Chichester Rd; s/tw/d £33/55/60), which goes so far as to offer a foot spa in some rooms. If you're not lucky enough to find a vacancy here, you can still enjoy scrummy cakes, sandwiches and meals in the tearooms.

The **Blue Bell Inn** (☎ 01730-813449; www.thebluebell.org.uk; Chichester Rd; s/d £40/60, mains £8-12; ☺ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) has a friendly pub, excellent grub (including veggie options) and comfortable B&B accommodation.

While the eccentric **Cinque Port** (☎ 01730-813594; Bell Lane; s/d £28/56) is rather cluttered, the enigmatic hostess proffers wonderful hospitality and an excellent yarn.

Next door, the walker-friendly **Downsfold** (☎ 01730-814376; www.downsfold.co.uk; Bell Lane; s/d £33/55) has attractive rooms and a lovely garden.

There are more B&B options (several of which do pick-ups) in the small town of Midhurst, another mile north, and in the village of Graffham, 3 miles east of Cocking and 1 mile north of the trail.

#### Day 4: Cocking to Amberley

4–5 hours, 12 miles (19.5km)

*Today, all Roman roads lead to, well, Eastbourne, as you continue to follow the escarpment along the Down's flinty spine.*

The first section of today's walk cuts through forest before opening up to more stunning pastoral views. Between Sutton Down and Bignor Hill you'll find yourself walking in the footsteps of legionnaires and other sundry sandal-wearers as the path

follows Stane Street, a Roman road dating from AD 70 that ran between London and Noviomagus (New Port), today called Chichester.

If you're interested in further exploring the area's imperial connections, the **Bignor Roman Villa** (see the boxed text, below) is 2 miles north of the route. Just to the south, the wondrously named **Gumber Bothy** (☎ 01243-814484; Gumber Farm, Slindon; camp sites per person £8, dm £8) has camping and bunk beds in a barn. Facilities include a shared kitchen.

Pressing on, allow yourself some contentment as you cross the busy A29, in the knowledge that you're at the halfway point of your journey. The cluster of impossibly sweet villages in the Arun Valley below provides your choice of stops tonight. Head down the hill and south at Houghton Lane for Amberley Station/Houghton Bridge, continue on the SDW until you reach the river and follow it south. For Amberley proper, stick on the path until you reach the B2139 and head north.

#### AMBERLEY

Norman church? Check. Historic pubs? Check. Pretty flint cottages? Too many to count, most with a thatched roof to boot. Anything else? Well, this one's got a ruined castle, although you can't get close, as its private owners have barricaded it from the village with high walls, foreboding signs and a *Sleeping Beauty*-like wall of blackberry and nettles. Built in 1103, it was, in the 13th century, the home of St Richard, the unwitting librettist of *Day By Day* from '70s Christian-hippy rock-opera *Godspell*. The firmly locked Richard's Gate once connected the castle to the village's 12th-century **St Michael's Church**, which has the remains of frescoes and some interesting stone columns.

#### BURIED TREASURES

In 1811 a local farmer got more than he bargained for when ploughing his field. Excavations revealed the remains of a lavish Roman villa with some wonderfully preserved mosaics, including a 24m intact section of corridor. With the finds properly protected and displayed, **Bignor Roman Villa** (☎ 01798-869259; Bignor; adult/child £5/2; ☺ closed Nov-Feb & Mon Mar & Apr) makes an interesting detour. You can still see parts of the original walls and underfloor heating system, plus a collection of tools, coins and domestic items. Best of all are the mosaics: Venus, winter-snug in a warm cloak, eyeing up a pair of gladiators; a Rasta-haired Medusa; and Ganymede, the androgynous shepherd boy.

**Stream Cottage** (☎ 01798-831266; www.streamcottage.co.uk; Church St; s/d £50/70) offers B&B in a thatch-roofed, fairy-tale setting.

Just opposite, parts of the **Black Horse Inn** (☎ 01798-831552; www.theblackhorseinnamberley.co.uk; High St; mains £10-17; ☺ lunch & dinner) date from the 17th century. The pub has a large beer garden and the restaurant has home-cooked veggie options.

The **Amberley Village Stores** (☎ 01798-831171; The Barn, High St) also doubles as the post office.

A five-minute walk to the east of the village will bring you to Cross Gates, where, behind a beautifully trim garden, **Woodybanks** (☎ 01798-831295; www.woodybanks.co.uk; Rackham Rd; s £27-32, d £50-65) has two tidy rooms with a shared bathroom, run by a friendly Christian couple.

Next door, there's another pub, the **Sportsman** (☎ 01798-831787; www.amberleysportsman.co.uk; Rackham Rd; s/d/tr £45/70/90, mains £7-10, ☺ lunch & dinner), with great views back over the Downs, basic meals and comfortable rooms.

Near the Amberley train station there's a cluster of traveller-friendly activity around the pretty Houghton Bridge.

**Riverside House** (☎ 01798-831558; s/d/st £35/70/90) is a friendly place to stay in an idyllic setting. The owner also runs the **café & bistro** (mains £8-9; ☺ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sat) next door, with tables right by the river – a great spot to enjoy a late summer sunset over the Downs.

Across the road, the **Bridge Inn** (☎ 01798-831619; mains £9-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) is a welcoming pub, serving a mix of sandwiches, traditional pub fare and, bizarrely, Greek dishes.

An altogether fancier option is the **Boat-house Brasserie** (☎ 01798-831059; set 2-course lunch/dinner £17/19).

In Houghton, the friendly **Houghton Farm** (☎ 01798-831327; s/d £33/60) offers B&B with shared amenities.

Nearby, the **George & Dragon** (☎ 01798-831559; mains £7-10; ☺ lunch & dinner) is a compulsory pit stop. Built in 1276, Charles II stopped here for an ale in 1651 while on the run from Cromwell. It even has a resident ghost who moves glasses around – a young boy called Charlie who got stuck and died while sweeping the chimney.

There are further B&B options in Bury and a **YHA hostel** (☎ 01903-882204; www.yha.org.uk; Warningcamp; dm/d/tr £23/50/72) 4 miles off the route in Arundel.

#### NOT SO HEAVY INDUSTRY

**Amberley Working Museum** (☎ 01798-831370; www.amberleymuseum.co.uk; adult/child £9/5; ☺ Wed-Sun mid-March–Oct) spreads over 36 acres of former chalk pits, focusing on the industrial heritage of the area. You can take a ride on vintage buses and trains, and watch craftspeople at work.

#### Day 5: Amberley to Steyning

4–6 hours, 13 miles (21km)

*Once you've conquered the initial ascent, relax into another enjoyable, none-too-strenuous day's walk along the backbone of southern England as the views get better and better.*

By now you'll be accustomed to the initial steep trek up to the top of the ridges. Once you're here it's fairly easy going as the path leads through classic, wide-open downland scenery – beautiful in clear weather but exposed in wind and rain. At a fork by a barn (the first feature for several miles), make sure you keep left, nearer the edge of the Downs, before dropping down to scuttle across the A24 just south of Washington.

From here it's a stiff push up to **Chanctonbury Ring**, a coppice of beech trees planted in 1760 by a local landowner on a site that probably dates back to the Neolithic. It gained earthen ramparts around the 6th century BC and later a Roman temple, although there's not a lot to be seen from vaulting the unpopular barbed-wire fence added by the present landowner. For more on this fascinating site, linked in folklore to witches, fairies, druids, ghosts, UFOs and, predictably, the devil, there's a fascinating article at [www2.prestel.co.uk/asp/sussex/chanctonbury.html](http://www2.prestel.co.uk/asp/sussex/chanctonbury.html).

It's an easy 2 miles from here to Steyning. Turn off the path when you reach the memorial to a local farmer and take the incredibly steep road 1 mile down into town, turning left into the high street. Alternatively, to shorten tomorrow's tough walk, you may consider pressing on a further 4 miles to the **Truleigh Hill YHA Hostel** (☎ 01903-813419; www.yha.org.uk; Tottington Barn; dm/d £17/34).

#### STEYNING

Not a village this time but a proper town, the biggest since Winchester. It's still unbearably quaint (flint cottages, pubs, churches,

ruined castle – you know the drill), but it's also got banks, shops and a supermarket.

There's basic camping available (no showers) at **White House Caravan Site** (☎ 01903-813737; Newham Lane; sites for 2 £6).

**Springwells Hotel** (☎ 01903-812446; www.springwells.co.uk; 9 High St; s £41-62, d £69-117; 🍷) is an attractive building on the main street, offering a choice of en suite rooms or cheaper rooms with shared bathrooms.

Further along, **Chequer Inn** (☎ 01903-814437; www.chequerinnsteinying.co.uk; 41 High St; s/d/tr £45/70/80, mains £6-11; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) has rooms above an atmospheric, wood-beamed, 500-year-old pub, which serves food. On the southern outskirts of town, technically in Bramber village, there are more rooms at the **Castle Inn Hotel** (☎ 01903-812102; www.castleinnhotel.co.uk; The Street, Bramber; s/d £50/70, mains £6-11; 🍷 lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat).

For a break from pub food, and a magnificent one at that, the misleadingly named **Saxons** (☎ 01903-813533; 76 High St; mains £6-15; 🍷 lunch & dinner), serves the best Indian food this side of Brick Lane.

### Day 6: Steyning to Kingston-near-Lewes 7–9 hours, 20 miles (32km)

*By far the toughest day of the route; a number of steep climbs towards the end will test your endurance.*

Rather than retracing yesterday's steep steps uphill, it's not really cheating to pick up the trail where it dips to the River Adur. Follow High St south then southeast past

the roundabout. After 800m you'll cross the river, where you'll find the SDW just after the next roundabout.

After your first climb of the day, Brighton appears on the horizon and there are sea views for most of the way. The view from **Devil's Dyke** attracts tourist buses to its large pub. A few miles from here, the path descends rapidly to cross the extremely busy A23 linking London and Brighton. Although it's not scenic, the **Plough Inn** (☎ 01273-842796; London Rd, Pyecombe; mains £7-9; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a convenient lunch stop.

The route skirts a golf course and passes near **Clayton Windmills**, more popularly known as Jack and Jill, then climbs steeply to **Ditchling Beacon**, the site of another Iron Age fort. Like Devil's Dyke, this area is popular with day-trippers. It's busiest on weekends when there's a bus that runs from Brighton to both sites.

Quickly the path becomes more isolated. Take care not to go straight on just after a hill called Plumpton Plain, but follow tracks zigzagging endlessly through the fields and a patch of woodland to meet the A27, 3 miles west of Lewes (pronounced 'lewis'). After backtracking to an overbridge the path turns east along the motorway and then – just when you think you've finished – sharply south under the railway tracks, through some woods and then up a ridge, climbing a soul-destroying 200m before circling back, high above Kingston-near-Lewes.

### BRIGHTON & HOVE

Simultaneously tacky and elegant, trashy and refined, the conjoined city of Brighton & Hove is like no other place in England. **Brighton Pier** is all funfair flashing lights and rock candy, jutting over the broad sweep of the popular pebbly beach. The **Royal Pavilion** (☎ 01273-292820; www.royalpavilion.org.uk; adult/child £8/5), right in the centre of town, is a mad Orientalist fantasy – Indian exteriors and Chinese interiors, complete with the nodding heads of Mandarin mannequins. Built by George VI when he was still Prince Regent, the future king's exploits gave the town a reputation as the home of the dirty weekend.

This libertine tradition may have created the environment that has resulted in Brighton having the highest concentration of gays and lesbians of any British city, with the community based around the beachside suburb of Kemptown (aka Camp Town, Tramp Town or Soho-On-Sea). Music has also played a part in the city's mystique. In 1964 there were riots between mods and rockers, immortalised in The Who's rock opera *Quadrophenia*. Dance-music legend Fatboy Slim is one of the city's favourite sons, entertaining a crowd of 250,000 people in a free concert on the beach in 2002.

If you want to break up Day 6 of the walk into more manageable chunks, Brighton would make an excellent overnight option – see p124 for details.

### KINGSTON-NEAR-LEWES

The sight of this leafy little village at the foot of the Downs will come as a great relief after an exhausting day.

From **Settlands** (☎ 01273-472295; diana-a@solutions-ink.co.uk; Wellgreen Lane; s/d/tw £40/58/60) there are views back over the South Downs Way.

Both **Bethel Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 01273-478658; www.lewes-area-bed-and-breakfast.com/bethel; Kingston Ridge; s/d £45/65) and **Nightingales** (☎ 01273-475673; www.users.totalise.co.uk/~nightingales; The Avenue; s £45, d £65-70) offer comfortable rooms in quiet properties surrounded by gardens and trees.

The nearby village pub, the **Juggs** (☎ 01273-472523; mains £7-14; 🍷 lunch & dinner), dates from the 15th century. With a great beer garden and an excellent and varied menu, once you sit down you may have trouble getting up again.

Nearby Lewes is a very interesting town, well worth a visit in its own right. If you get stuck for accommodation in the village, it has plenty more options. If you can't face the 2-mile walk, ask nicely at the pub for someone to call you a cab.

### Day 7: Kingston-near-Lewes to Alfriston 5–7 hours, 12 miles (19.5km)

*On this penultimate day, the route finally leaves the spine of the Downs behind. It's a simply spectacular farewell.*

From Kingston-near-Lewes you stride along a gently undulating route, with a few short, sharp dips and rises, enjoying your last extensive views north over the Weald before dropping down to skirt the little village of Southease. In nearby Rodmell, the **Abergavenny Arms** (☎ 01273-472416; mains £6-12; 🍷 lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) does good pub food. Although it's only 5 miles from Kingston, there are few other options for lunch. About 2 miles south is **Telscombe YHA Hostel** (☎ 01273-301357; www.yha.org.uk; Bank Cottages; dm £12).

From Southease the trail follows a lane over flat floodplains then across the surprisingly large River Ouse on a bridge. South-east train station also comes as a surprise, but the hourly trains are handy for accessing Lewes or Brighton.

It's a tough haul up the east side of the valley, before a final stroll along the tops and a descent into Alfriston.

### THE LEWES REVOLUTIONARY

Tom Paine, a major intellectual inspiration for the American Revolution, lived at Bull House, 92 High St, and expounded his ideas to the Headstrong Club at the **White Hart Hotel** (☎ 01273-476694; www.whitehartlewes.co.uk; 55 High St; s/d £65/94), where you can still see a copy of the *Declaration of Independence*. His seminal work, *Rights Of Man*, was written in defence of the French Revolution, and he later had a hand in drafting the French constitution.

Ironically, Lewes is also well known for its events celebrating the execution of another would-be revolutionary. More than 70,000 people turn out annually to watch Lewes' bonfires on 5 November, marking the foiling of the 1605 plot by Guy Fawkes to blow up parliament.

In another American connection, John Harvard, founder of the American university of the same name, also lived here.

### ALFRISTON

At risk of sounding like a broken record, Alfriston ticks all the 'quaint' boxes, just like other villages on the route, but somehow outdoes them all in sheer English, chocolate-box cuteness. The high street is a procession of characterful pubs lined up like choirboys in front of a Norman church with a grassy moat, for heaven's sake!

Even the **Alfriston YHA Hostel** (☎ 01323-870423; www.yha.org.uk; Frog Fille; dm/d/tr £17/38/46), about 1 mile from the village centre, is housed in a Tudor flint cottage.

Only three houses from the SDW, **5 The Broadway** (☎ 01323-870145; janetandbrian@dingley5635.freemove.co.uk; s/d £30/60) is a walker-friendly B&B.

**Chestnuts** (☎ 01323-870298; 8 High St; s/tw/d £35/48/55, lunch £3-7) is in a rambling 18th-century house with shared facilities, and doubles as tearooms.

Dating from 1397, the **George Inn** (☎ 01323-870319; www.thegeorge-alfriston.com; High St; s £50, d £80-120, mains £10-15; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a spectacularly character-filled place to spend your last village night. It also serves candlelit meals, ranging from pork belly to tofu with noodles. Across the road, the **Star Inn** (☎ 01323-870495; www.star-inn-alfriston.com; High St; s £69-109, d £98-158, 2-course meal £23; 🍷 lunch & dinner),

### THE LONG MAN OF WILMINGTON

Carved into the chalk-face around 2 miles east of Alfriston, the Long Man of Wilmington stands nearly 70m tall, looking rather like an enthusiastic English rambler holding oversized walking poles. In 1874 the outline was lined with bricks to maintain the image. These had to be painted green during WWII to prevent German planes using it for navigation, and eventually they were replaced with white-painted concrete blocks, which are repainted annually.

The jury is still out on his age, purpose and what he's holding in his hands. Were they once tools, Roman standards, spears, or is he standing in a doorway? Has he been standing there since the Iron Age (somebody get the man a chair)? Does shagging on his outline increase the chance of conception (as suggested by some neo-pagans)?

Given the ambiguity, we can adopt him as the first SDW walker with impunity. And shagging on his outline couldn't really hurt, either. The best view of our man is from the road leading into Wilmington village, a 45-minute walk from Alfriston.

with its frontage covered in wonderful painted wooden carvings of dragons, saints and serpents, is around the same age and reputedly haunted. There are a few character rooms remaining, but there is a chain hotel feel to the remainder.

By comparison, the upmarket Victorian villa **Wingrove House** (☎ 01323-870276; www.wingrovehousehotel.com; tw £95, d £120-150, mains £11-15; ☞ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) is a youngster – it has a great terrace for summer dining.

There are more ghost stories associated with Ye Old Smugglers Inne on Waterloo Sq and Deans Place, once a moated manor house and now an expensive hotel. A common ghost story throughout the Downs is of ghostly black dogs with red eyes wandering the paths at night.

### Day 8: Alfriston to Eastbourne

4–6 hours, 12 miles (19.5km)

You have (if only in principle) a choice today. You could take the inland bridleway, but this is best left to mountain bikers. Or

*you can follow the walkers' route, which, with an exhilarating finale along the cliff tops, is undoubtedly the better option.*

The trail leaves Alfriston from the old Market Sq and crosses the River Cuckmere. Where the bridleway goes straight on, you go right and south along the riverbank to Litlington, then through the woodland of Seven Sisters Country Park to rejoin the Cuckmere at Exceat – the park visitor centre, with toilets and a **café**. The trail then continues south with views over the meandering river. You pass near **Foxhole Bottom Camping Barn** (☎ 01323-870280; www.sevensisters.org.uk; sites for 2 £5, dm £8), where you can pitch a tent or sleep in the dorm. Bookings are recommended.

Route and river meet the open sea at Cuckmere Haven, where the home stretch lies before you. Turning east to follow the coast, the trail soon climbs steeply to the crest of Haven Brow, the first of the **Seven Sisters** cliffs (there are, in fact, eight but this doesn't alliterate so neatly). With stagger-

ing views over the English Channel, the Sisters can't fail to thrill.

About halfway along, you'll pass the small hamlet of Birling Gap. Press on to **Beachy Head**, where the Downs finally tumble into the sea. Here the candy-striped lighthouse below makes a fine landmark for the end of the route, and the nearby **Beachy Head Pub** (☎ 01323-728060; Beachy Head Rd; mains £6-12; ☞ lunch & dinner) may tempt you for a celebratory pint or meal.

Savour all this because the official end of the trail, a couple of miles further on at the edge of Eastbourne, beside a snack bar, is a complete anticlimax. For a proper finish, continue along the promenade and proudly put down your backpack at the end of Eastbourne's fine **19th-century pier**.

### THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH (PADSTOW TO FALMOUTH)

<b>Duration</b>	14 days
<b>Distance</b>	168 miles (268km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate–demanding
<b>Start</b>	Padstow (p136)
<b>Finish</b>	Falmouth (p136)
<b>Transport</b>	bus, train

**Summary** An inspiring, invigorating and sometimes strenuous journey that includes cliff tops, beaches and resort towns, plus some rural inland sections.

Always exhilarating and with ever-changing views, the South West Coast Path (SWCP) is a tough proposition, but the rewards are plentiful. This is Britain's longest national trail – 630 miles (1014km) – and one of the longest continuous footpaths in the country. It follows the coast of the Southwest Peninsula from Minehead in Somerset, along the north Devon coast and around Cornwall, turning the corner at Land's End on the way. After Cornwall the SWCP traces its way along the south Devon coast to Poole in Dorset.

The Cornwall section of the SWCP is the most popular, not least because of the drama and beauty of the county's coastline. From Padstow to Falmouth is a particularly beautiful part and is described here in detail. (The other sections of the SWCP are outlined briefly in the boxed text on p134.) The views along the way are often breath-

taking. The cornucopia of dramatic cliffs, sandy beaches, remote coves, ancient burial chambers, castles, disused mineral mines and engine houses, plus the chance of spotting seals, dolphins and a wide range of bird life, makes binoculars a necessity.

### ENVIRONMENT

About two-thirds of this beautiful coastline is designated Heritage Coast and one-third is in the care of the National Trust. The trail passes through several Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of Special Scientific Interest. One section skirts the Exmoor National Park, while the mining coasts of West Cornwall are part of a World Heritage Site. Adding balance to all this wilderness splendour are the several large seaside resorts, picturesque fishing villages and working ports through which the trail passes.

Bird life along the coast is particularly impressive. There are chances of spotting peregrine falcons as well as a range of sea birds, including gannets, fulmars, kittiwakes and guillemots. On the north coast of the Land's End Peninsula, and in the Lizard area, Cornwall's 'national' symbol, the glossy-black, red-beaked, red-legged chough, has been reintroduced and is reported as having bred successfully, although sightings are still rare (but enthralling). Seals, dolphins and huge basking sharks are often seen close inshore, especially in the far west.

Cornwall's wildflower extravaganza is outstanding in spring and summer. Expect acres of pink thrift and creamy bladder campion, and a palette of purple heather, yellow gorse, orchids, squill, wild carrot and foxgloves.

### PLANNING

Accommodation, food and drink are often found just off the trail, but there are sections where there are no conveniences for several miles at a time. It's essential to book accommodation in advance for Easter, July and August. We have quoted average prices in this section, but some places charge more in August and sometimes less in winter.

The route is well served by camp sites (some open only from Easter to October), YHA hostels and several independent backpackers hostels.

### THE BEST BITS

If you want to get a feel for the South Downs but you have only a couple of days to spare, the most spectacular section is at the end. One option is to catch the train via Lewes to Southeast and pick up the itinerary partway through Day 7, overnighing in Alfriston before heading on to Eastbourne.

An alternative is to follow a circular route, starting in Eastbourne and heading north through Jevington (allegedly the home of the banoffee pie), continuing over the head of the Long Man of Wilmington (see the boxed text, above) and down into Alfriston. This follows the official alternative part of the trail that bikes and horses are required to take. The next day, continue on the Day 8 itinerary back to Eastbourne.

Both these options give something of the essence of the walk: some excellent downland ridge walking, an overnight stay in a pretty village and the finale of the Seven Sisters cliffs.

The trail is waymarked with national-trail acorn symbols, but these are often missing. Transiting towns and large villages can be complicated in a few instances. Junctions with other paths crossing the area can sometimes be confusing; careful checking of maps is strongly advised.

GPS-based measurement, by the authoritative and well-informed South West Coast Path Association (SWCPA), of the trail as described here gives a distance of 168 miles (268km). Accurate distance over the ground is only half the story, however; the coastline of the Southwest Peninsula is a

### THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH

The 600-mile (966km) South West Coast Path is one of the longest routes in Britain, usually divided into four handy sections – each of them considerable undertakings in their own right. We describe the Padstow-to-Falmouth section in this chapter. If you're thinking of doing the whole thing, these basic outlines will be useful.

#### Minehead to Padstow

Passing through a part of Somerset, along the coast of north Devon and into north Cornwall, this section leads from the official start of the SWCP at the seaside resort of Minehead, whose delights are soon left behind as you enter Exmoor National Park, where steep, hogback hills make for strenuous coastal walking.

The delightful Devon villages of Lynton and Lynmouth soon follow and then the steepness eases as you head for Ilfracombe, the exclamatory Westward Ho! and lovely Clovelly, perched like a postcard on steep cliffs.

Cornwall greets you with more high cliffs that relent at the popular beach resort of Bude before rising again at Tintagel, where dramatic ruins are awash with Arthurian fancy. From here a beautiful, lonely coast leads to tiny Port Isaac and then the village of Rock and a ferry across the River Camel to Padstow.

#### Padstow to Falmouth

This section of the SWCP is covered in the main walk description in this book, beginning on p133.

#### Falmouth to Exmouth

From Falmouth, you can cross by ferry to St Mawes, before heading along the delightful Roseland Peninsula to the archetypal fishing village of Mevagissey.

The popular resorts of Fowey, Polperro and Looe follow and then you reach Cornwall's border at the River Tamar and a ferry from Cremyll to bustling Plymouth. Beyond the city the trail leads to Bigbury-on-Sea and the South Devon Heritage Coast, through pretty Bantham, the busy yacht haven of Salcombe, and then on to delightful Dartmouth, where a ferry crosses the River Dart to Kingswear. The trail then takes you to Brixham and the busy resorts of Torquay, Teignmouth and Dawlish, and finally the broad estuary of the River Exe to end at Exmouth.

#### Exmouth to Poole

This section leads along the coast of east Devon, with the SWCP rambling pleasantly above red sandstone cliffs and through the resorts of Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth and Seaton before passing through the deeply wooded 'Undercliffs' to reach Dorset at Lyme Regis.

East again is pretty, thatched Abbotsbury, with its unique swannery. The next feature is Chesil Beach, a huge curving bank of stones, which eventually leads you to Portland Bill and the large town of Weymouth.

East of Weymouth there's more stunning coastal scenery at Lulworth Cove, Kimmeridge Bay and Durlston Head until the resort of Swanage is reached. A short hop north from here is Studland Point – the official end of the SWCP – from where a ferry ride brings you to Poole and a well-deserved journey's end.

gloriously corrugated and undulating entity and the SWCP includes numerous steep ascents and descents where streams and rivers slice their way to the sea and where sandy bays bite into the land. Brace yourself for a glorious switchbacking trek and toss the slimming diets out the window – you'll lose plenty of weight just walking this route.

Fit, experienced walkers can cover the distance in two weeks, although you might want to add a few more days to spread the load, or for sightseeing. For a 14-day walk the following is an ideal itinerary:

Day	From	To	Miles/km
1	Padstow	Treyarnon	10.9/17.5
2	Treyarnon	Newquay	12.8/20.5
3	Newquay	Perranporth	10.9/17.5
4	Perranporth	Portreath	12.5/19.6
5	Portreath	St Ives	17.9/28.7
6	St Ives	Pendeen	13.9/22.5
7	Pendeen	Sennen Cove	9.3/14.6
8	Sennen Cove	Porthcurno	6.8/10.6
9	Porthcurno	Penzance	11.8/18.6
10	Penzance	Porthleven	13.9/22.4
11	Porthleven	Lizard	14/22.4
12	Lizard	Coverack	10.4/16.7
13	Coverack	Helford	13.6/21.4
14	Helford	Falmouth	9.3/14.8

### Alternatives

A worthwhile shorter section is the stretch from St Ives to Lizard Point. It takes in some of Britain's finest coastline in just five days. You can also do single-day linear sections of the SWCP, or a circular day route, taking in a stretch of the main route. From about Easter to mid-September seasonal buses often link points convenient to the coast path.

### When to Walk

The route can be walked at any time of the year, but the best period is from April to September. In winter, conditions underfoot can be very wet and muddy in places. Severe gales should be expected during winter.

Cornwall's main tourist season is Easter to the end of September, and some B&Bs and cafés close outside this time.

### Maps

The OS Explorer 1:25,000 maps are by far the best maps for this section of the SWCP. They show contours and field boundaries

that often adjoin the path and make navigation easier. The relevant maps are Nos 106 *Newquay & Padstow*, 104 *Redruth & St Agnes*, 102 *Land's End & Isles of Scilly* and 103 *The Lizard, Falmouth & Helston*.

### Books

The very useful *South West Coast Path Guide*, produced every year by the SWCPA, features a route outline, accommodation lists, transport information, planning tips and even tide tables. For step-by-step details on the route, the SWCPA produces a series of *Path Description* leaflets. Both the guide and leaflets are available from the **SWCPA administrator** (☎ 01752-896237; info@swcp.org.uk; Bowker House, Lee Mill Bridge, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 9EF).

The official National Trail Guide is the *South West Coast Path – Padstow to Falmouth* by John Macadam. Also recommended is *Cornwall Coast Path* by Edith Schofield (updated by Jim Manthorpe), covering the route from Bude to Padstow and on to Falmouth, with thorough text and very detailed line maps that are hand-drawn and include useful details on difficult junctions and sections of the route. It also covers useful sleeping and eating options.

The National Trust publishes an excellent series of *Coast of Cornwall* leaflets, giving fascinating details about parts of the walk that traverse National Trust property; they're available from tourist offices. Those of particular relevance to the Cornwall coast route are Nos 8 to 16.

### Accommodation

In Cornwall, most B&Bs have only double rooms. For single accommodation in a double room, it is best to check ahead on price.

### Information Sources

See the walk description for tourist offices on or near the route. The website of the indomitable **SWCPA** ([www.swcp.org.uk](http://www.swcp.org.uk)) is full of information about all aspects of the route, and even includes a photo 'tour' of the entire trail.

The official national trails website for the SWCP is [www.nationaltrail.co.uk/southwestcoastpath](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/southwestcoastpath). It offers some excellent general information and regular updates, as well as accommodation and other relevant websites.

## Baggage & Pick-up Services

Several B&Bs along the route will arrange baggage transport to your next destination, usually for around £6 to £10. Within reason, some establishments will pick up and deliver walkers from and to a convenient point on the coast path. Ask about these services when you book.

## NEAREST TOWNS

### Padstow

pop 2450

The old fishing port of Padstow is located on the west bank of the broad, sandy expanse of the Camel Estuary. Fishing still plays a part in the town's vibrant, colourful life, although tourism is now a major industry, enhanced by Padstow's picturesque harbour and narrow, wriggling streets and alleyways. The **tourist office** (☎ 01841-533449; www.padstowlive.com; North Quay) is very helpful and friendly, reflecting Padstow's popularity.

### SLEEPING & EATING

The tourist office offers a useful book-ahead scheme for coast-path walkers.

For a budget option, **Dennis Cove Camping** (☎ 01841-532349; www.denniscove.co.uk; sites for 2 £16) is on the south side of town, close to the river-side Camel Trail and cycleway.

Worthwhile B&Bs include **Woodlands Close** (☎ 01841-533109; john@stock65.freeserve.co.uk; Treator; d £50), located just over 800m from the coast path; **Hemingford House** (☎ 01841-532806; www.padstow-bb.co.uk; 21 Grenville Rd; d from £60), where the owner has good information on walking; and the charming **Kellacott**

(☎ 01841-532851; shaunrevely@compuserve.com; 29 Church St; s/d £30/50).

Padstow is high in the culinary firmament thanks to the stellar reputation of celebrity chef Rick Stein, whose **Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 01841-532700; Riverside; meals £40-85) offers equally starry fare at starry prices. There are numerous other fine eating places around the town as well as plenty of snackeries.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The nearest train station to Padstow is Bodmin Parkway, from where buses go to Padstow (55 minutes, 14 services Monday to Saturday, five Sunday). **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) has regular coach services from London and other parts of the country to Wadebridge (seven hours); local buses connect from Wadebridge to Padstow (25 minutes, nine daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

If travelling by car, Padstow is reached by following the A389 west from the A30 at Bodmin, bypassing Wadebridge on the A39, and then taking the A389 once more.

**Cornwall County Council's** (☎ 01872-322003; www.cornwall.gov.uk/buses) summer and winter bus timetables also contain very useful river ferry information. Copies of this and a *Public Transport: Map & Frequency* guide can be had from local bus stations and tourist offices, or direct from the council.

### Falmouth

pop 28,800

Friendly, bustling Falmouth has a formidable history, not least because its huge

estuary: the Carrack Roads is the world's third-largest natural harbour. Ship repairs still go on at Falmouth Docks and the town is the venue for the splendid **National Maritime Centre** (☎ 01326-313388; www.nmmc.co.uk; Discovery Quay; adult/child £7/5), a celebration of Britain's seagoing heritage. Falmouth's helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01326-312300; Killigrew St) has masses of local information.

### SLEEPING & EATING

A good budget bed, just off the southern seafront, is **Falmouth Lodge Backpackers** (☎ 01326-319996; www.falmouthbackpackers.co.uk; 9 Gyllynqvase Tce; dm/s/d £15/19/34).

Good-value B&Bs include **Castle Crest** (☎ 01326-313572; www.cornwall-online.co.uk/castle-crest; 23 Castle Dr; s/d £27/54), with views across Falmouth Bay.

Nearer the centre is the comfy **Ivanhoe** (☎ 01326-319083; www.ivanhoe-guesthouse.co.uk; 7 Melville Rd; s/d £24/54); **Melville House** (☎ 01326-316645; melvillehouse@btconnect.com; 52 Melville Rd; d from £54); and the walker-friendly **Rosemary** (☎ 01326-314669; www.rosemaryhotel.co.uk; 22 Gyllynqvase Tce; d from £64).

For food, Falmouth's main drag is awash with decent eateries and pubs, one of the best being the colourful and central **Kings Head** (☎ 01326-319469; Church St; meals £4-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) pub.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Falmouth is linked by rail branch line to Truro's mainline station (20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday). Regular buses run between Truro and Falmouth (45 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday). For something completely different, ferries operate between Truro and Falmouth (one hour five daily Monday to Saturday May to September) on the scenic Truro River.

## THE WALK

### Day 1: Padstow to Trearynon

4–6 hours, 10.9 miles (17.5km)

*This stage is a fairly easy introduction, but also a taster for the general robustness of the path to come.*

The route leaves Padstow harbour near the tourist office on North Quay and winds up to the headland of St Saviour's Point, where there is a granite war memorial. Descend to St George's Cove and Hawker's Cove then climb to the circular Pepperpot

Tower, a navigational 'day mark' on **Stepper Point**, from where there are superb views.

Next comes Butter Hole Cove and Gunver Head, with views of the rocky offshore stacks of the Merope Islands. On the grassy slopes just inland from the coast path at Roundhole Point is the spectacular **Round Hole**, a gaping void caused by the collapse of the upper roof of a sea cave. It is well away from the path, but be careful if you approach its rim. The main path leads securely downhill to Trevone car park and a nearby **café**.

Just inland at Trevone is the **Well Parc Hotel** (☎ 01841-520318; www.wellparc.co.uk; meals £6-11; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☑) From Trevone the trail follows the coastline round to the beach at Harlyn Bay, where you can camp at the well-run **Higher Harlyn Caravan Park** (☎ 01841-520022; pbharlyn@aol.com; sites for 2 £16) or get B&B at the handy **Harlyn Inn** (☎ 01841-520207; www.harlyn-inn.com; s/d £42/64).

From Harlyn the path continues to Trevoose Head lighthouse and then sniffs its way round Stinking Cove (odour-free in fact) before turning south above the surfing beach of Constantine Bay to reach Trearynon.

### TREARYNON

At this little beachside village the **YHA hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6076; www.yha.org.uk; Tregonnan; dm £16) is the best bet, or there's camping at the **Trearynon Bay Caravan and Camping Park** (☎ 01841-520681; www.trearynonbay.co.uk; sites for 2 £12). There is a beach-side **café** as well.

### Day 2: Trearynon to Newquay

5–7 hours, 12.8 miles (20.5km)

*This is a moderately tough day's walking, but always with superb views, bracing air and constant interest.*

From Trearynon Bay the trail follows a series of headlands to Porthcothan and then makes a short, steep crossing of Porth Mear valley before rising to the cliff top again to reach **Park Head**. About 800m further on you reach the cliff top above the spectacular **Bedruthan Steps**, a series of rock stacks on the beach, a popular tourist attraction since Victorian times. On the flat cliff top there is a car park, toilets and a National Trust shop and **café**. There are good viewpoints from where you can see the rock formations. These include Queen Bess Rock, which, before its royal head

### WARNINGS

Never assume at an unsigned junction that the path closest to the sea is the one to follow. Old mining tracks, livestock trails and paths used by sea anglers and others often lead seaward and into sometimes-dangerous ground.

There are three river crossings encountered on this section of the South West Coast Path (SWCP). Some can be crossed by stepping stones or by wading. Others are crossed by ferries, which may only run at high tide. Local shops stock current tide tables. Wading across rivers at low tide can save a lot of mileage but do so only when conditions are right; in the wrong conditions it can be fatal. Tides do not just rise and fall; they flood, and can be very fast and dangerous. They also vary substantially from day to day throughout the cycle of neap (low) tides and spring (high) tides. Check locally.

Many beaches shelve suddenly and have strong currents. Flags mark safe places to swim and lifeguards are sometimes on duty. If in doubt, stay out.

There is little shade on the SWCP, so in hot weather make sure you carry enough drinking water. Keep well in from cliff edges in high winds.



wore away, was said to resemble the Tudor Elizabeth I – who otherwise kept her head, in every way.

The SWCP continues along the cliff top to Mawgan Porth, where the **Merrymoor Inn** (☎ 01637-860258; www.merrymoorinn.com; d £50) has decent accommodation and also does filling bar meals.

From here the trail heads south for 2 miles along the cliff top above the famous surfing beach of Watergate Bay. At the end of the beach the path makes a small sidestep across the neck of Trevelgue Head, where there are the extensive remains of a prehistoric cliff **castle**. The SWCP continues round St Columb Porth Beach and along the cliff

edge until it joins Lusty Glaze Rd and then enters brash, breezy, lusty and often glazed, but always bountiful, Newquay.

### NEWQUAY pop 19,570

Newquay, major holiday resort and Surf Centre UK, is a colourful culture shock

after miles of fairly remote coast walking. Its pedigree is pure Old Cornwall, however. Once known as Porth Lystry, the 'boat beach', it acquired a 'new quay' or harbour in the 15th century to cope with pilchard fishing and the export of copper and china clay. The biggest and most accessible beaches in Cornwall made it inevitable that Newquay would become the major resort that it is today. Embrace it for what it is.

There is a huge choice of B&Bs, although you'll still need to book ahead in summer – the **tourist office** (☎ 01637-854020; www.newquay.co.uk; Marcus Hill), in the council offices, can advise.

There's camping at well-equipped **Trenance Caravan & Chalet Park** (☎ 01637-873447; www.trenanceholidaypark.co.uk; Edgcombe Ave; sites for 2 £14), and budget walkers can head for **Newquay International Backpackers** (☎ 01637-879366; www.backpackers.co.uk/newquay; 73 Tower Rd; dm £17) or **Fistral Backpackers** (☎ 01637-873146; www.fis-tralbackpackers.co.uk; 18 Headland Rd; dm/d £16/34).

Newquay is crowded with eating places, many of them fast-food and budget. For chow with the stars try **Fifteen** (☎ 01637-861100; Watergate Beach; set-menu lunch £24, dinner around £50), opened in 2006 by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver.

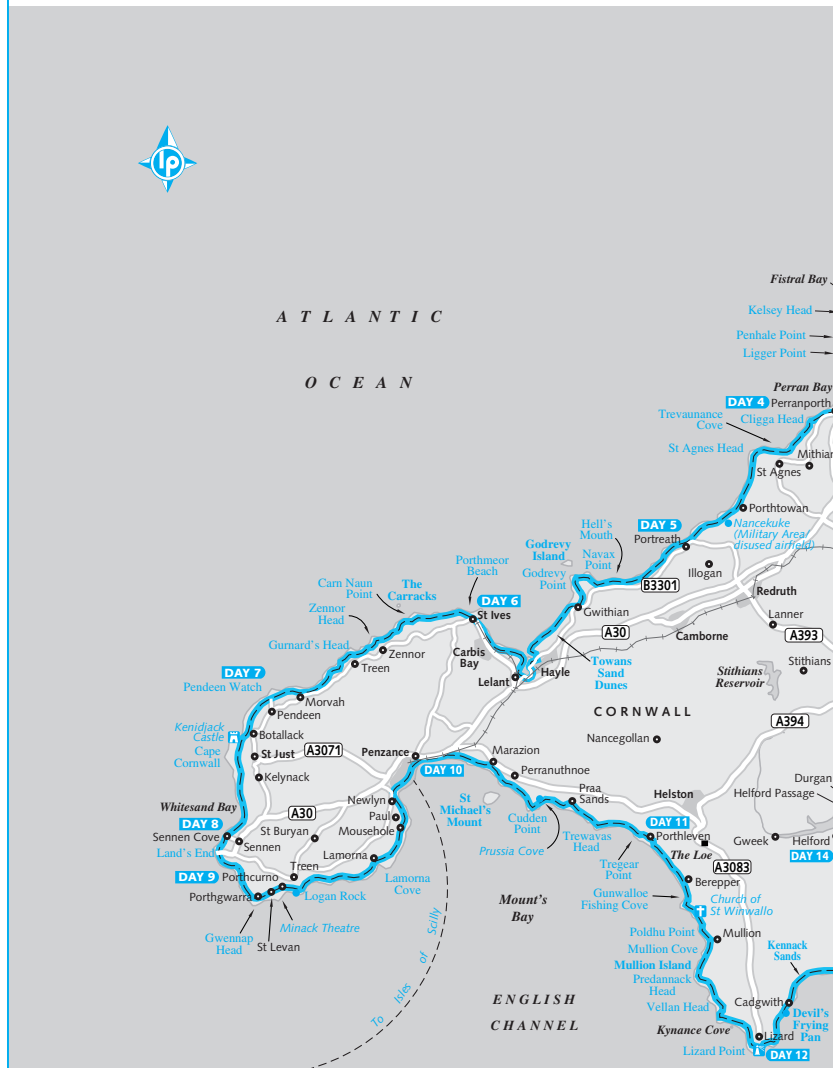
### Day 3: Newquay to Perranporth

4–6 hours, 10.9 miles (17.5km)

A tough day's walking begins with a crossing of the River Gannel, where the tide and the time of year decree how far upstream you have to go. Plan your day carefully.

Leave the bright lights of Newquay behind and follow the main road to the harbour. From here the SWCP goes up steps and on round Towan Head and above Fistral Beach, another major surfing venue, to reach the suburb of Pentire. Ahead lies the tidal estuary of the River Gannel. There are several options for crossing here. Consult tide tables carefully and seek local advice. The most seaward crossing is at Fern Pit, where there is a **café** and a footbridge that can be used at low tide only. At high tide there is a **ferry** (☎ 01637-873181), running between 10am and 6pm from late May to mid-September. When the café is closed both footbridge and ferry are not available. The 'official' public right of way crossing of the Gannel is about 800m upstream from

## The South West Coast Path (Padstow to Falmouth)



Fern Pit. Here, off Trevean Way, another footbridge, available at low tide all year, leads to Penpol on the south side of the river. At high tide there is a **ferry** (☎ 01637-873181) here; operating times are as for the Fern Pit ferry. If none of the above options is available, the alternative is a detour inland by road that adds about 4 miles to your journey and is not much fun. Think tidal.

Once across the estuary, pass by a National Trust car park, where there are toilets and a seasonal **café**, and then stroll across the grassy Rushy Green with its seaward sand dunes above the attractive Crantock Beach. The path then twirls its way round Pentire Point West and the lovely sea inlet of Porth Joke, where the slopes are swathed with vivid wildflowers in early summer.

The trail continues southwards past the little beach resort of Holywell, where there are toilets, cafés and shops. It then climbs to Penhale Point and skirts the military establishment of Penhale Camp – keep a careful check on signposting here – and then runs between the long expanse of Perran Beach and the inland Penhale Sands.

#### PERRANPORTH

A very big beach is Perranporth's very big asset. Otherwise it's a small resort, but with food stores, tourist shops, cafés and very big numbers of happy holidaymakers in summer.

At Droskyn Point, west of the village centre, the **YHA hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5994; perranporth@yha.org.uk; dm £14) is in a fabulous position, as benefits a former coastguard station.

Walker-friendly B&Bs include **Chy an Kerensa** (☎ 01872-572470; wendychy@aol.com; Cliff Rd; s/d £28/55) and **Cliffside Hotel** (☎ 01872-573297; www.cliffsideperranporth.co.uk; Cliff Rd; d £60), both by the path and with comfy rooms and great views.

For a big choice of bar food and meals the **Watering Hole** (☎ 01872-572888; meals £8-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) is right on the beach.

#### Day 4: Perranporth to Portreath 5–7 hours, 12.5 miles (19.6km)

*This stretch combines fairly easy walking along well-used cliff-top paths with stiffer sections where the trail dips into valleys. The final few miles to Portreath can be tiring.*

From the Perranporth YHA Hostel at Droskyn Point, follow the signposted cliff

path that leads through old mine workings and quarried ground at **Cligga Head**.

The SWCP switchbacks through Trevellas Coombe and then into Trevaunance Cove, where there is a good **pub** and several B&Bs. Just inland is **St Agnes**, which has some attractive old houses and miners' cottages, a free museum and B&Bs, shops, pubs and cafés.

From Trevellas Coombe it's a tough hike up to St Agnes Head, followed by easy walking through a fascinating industrial landscape of old mine workings and buildings. The path then descends to the beach of Chapel Porth, where there is a car park, toilets and seasonal **café**. From here the route diverts inland for 200m and then heads uphill and along the cliff top to **Porthtowan**, which has two pubs, a café and a shop.

Beyond Porthtowan, the path continues through old mining country and then runs between the cliff top and the fence of the military establishment at Nancekuke before descending to Portreath.

#### PORTREATH

Portreath was once a busy port through which coal was imported from South Wales to fuel the numerous mines of mid-Cornwall. Copper ore from the mines was then shipped out to the Welsh smelters. Modern Portreath has made the best of its beach and is a popular resort. There are toilets, shops, a takeaway and two decent pubs – the **Basset Arms** and the **Portreath Arms** – both of which do a good selection of bar meals.

Walker-friendly B&Bs include **Fountain Springs** (☎ 01209-842650; www.fountainsprings.co.uk; Glenfeadon House; s/d £35/56), a lovely Georgian house with balconied facades; it's about 400m from the trail. Another pleasant option is **Sandy Acres** (☎ 01209-843608; j.klineberg@virgin.net; Green Lane; d from £50).

#### Day 5: Portreath to St Ives 8–10 hours, 17.9 miles (28.7km)

*Today's walk is a long one, but after an initial climb the walking is generally flat and easy. The route passes through the town of Hayle where an overnight stop can be made. However, after some road walking, the next section to St Ives is not overly demanding and from Lelant onwards is scenic.*

Leaving Portreath, the SWCP climbs to Western Hill, from where it runs through

the flat heathland of Carvannel Downs and Reskajeage Downs, with fine views out to sea. The B3301 runs close to the cliff tops here, and at Hell's Mouth, a dramatic cleft in the vast slate cliffs, the path and road nudge each other on the edge of the gulf. There is a small road-side **café** here, mainly open in summer and at weekends. The path then heads away from the road to Navax Point and Godrevy Point, with its offshore lighthouse, inspiration for Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*.

The SWCP skirts the picturesque village of Gwithian, with its handsome old church and several thatched buildings. Waymarks lead for a tough 3-mile slog through Towns Sand Dunes, although at low tide you can walk on the beach.

At the end of the beach the route swings inland and follows roads for a couple of miles through the town of Hayle. Decent B&B options in Hayle include **Mrs Cooper** (☎ 01736-752855; 54 Penpol Tce; d from £50) and **Penpol Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 01736-754484; 34 Penpol Tce; d £50).

From Hayle's outskirts the route follows roads to Lelant village, from where a lane leads to Lelant church and then across a golf course to reach the coast. The trail runs beside the St Ives branch-line railway above Porthkidney Sands and above low, wooded cliffs to Carbis Bay and, finally, St Ives.

#### ST IVES pop 9870

St Ives is one of the West Country's most appealing resorts. The harbour area of Down'long is a warren of narrow, cobbled streets and alleyways that wriggle to and fro past flower-bedecked courtyards and always

seem to lead to the broad harbour, where small fishing boats still work from the granite arm of Smeaton's Pier. The town also boasts two major beaches of silken sand: the sheltered Porthminster and the friskier surfing beach of Porthmeor on the north side of town. As if all this was not enough, art has taken a grip of St Ives in a big way, as exemplified by the bone-white, neoclassical façade of the **Tate St Ives** (☎ 01736-796226; www.tate.org.uk/stives; adult £6; ☺ 10am-5.30pm daily Mar-Oct, to 4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) gallery above Porthmeor Beach.

During July and August the town is packed and prices can be higher here than in less-favoured resorts. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01736-796297) is in the Guildhall in the town centre.

For campers there's the excellent **Ayr Holiday Park** (☎ 01736-795855; www.ayrholidaypark.co.uk; sites for 2 £15) about 800m uphill from Porthmeor Beach and with great views.

Good sleeping options are the bright and friendly **Gowerton** (☎ 01736-796805; www.gowerton.guesthouse.co.uk; 6 Sea View Pl; d £60), in a great position overlooking the harbour near the old quay; **Carlyon Guest House** (☎ 01736-795317; www.carlyon-stives.co.uk; The Terrace; d £60); and the lovely **Tamarisk** (☎ 01736-797201; www.tamarisk-bb.co.uk; Burthallan Lane; d from £50).

For harbour-side tradition the **Sloop Inn** (☎ 01736-796584; www.sloop-inn.co.uk; s/d £64/92, mains £5-10; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) has comfy rooms and offers a range of food, from sandwiches and baguettes to meals.

Also near the harbour, in the old part of town, is the flower-heavy **Grey Mullet** (☎ 01736-796635; www.touristnetuk.com/sw/greymullet; 2 Bunkers Hill; s/d £25/56).

#### AS I WAS GOING TO THE WRONG ST IVES...

The famous song, *'As I was going to St Ives, I met a man with seven wives'*, refers to St Ives in Cambridgeshire and not the Cornish St Ives. The two towns are often confused. There are apocryphal stories of delivery drivers from London and the north arriving at St Ives, Cornwall, only to discover they had come to the wrong town. Some never left...

St Ives owes its name to the Christian Irishwoman, Ia, who is said to have sailed across the Irish Sea in the 5th or 6th century on an ivy leaf, a fanciful tale that may be based on the fact that the substantial coracle-style vessels used at the time had hulls of interleaved hides. Ia built a chapel and then converted the neighbouring Romano-British ravers to Christianity. After her death, the village that developed round her chapel became known as Porth Ia and then Sancte Ye and then St Ives.

Other Cornish saints did the trip on similar apocryphal craft: St Piran zipped across on a millstone; St Newquay (had there been one) would surely have made it on a surfboard.

St Ives harbour-side is well stocked with fast-food outlets and snack bars, while there are numerous restaurants scattered throughout the adjoining streets.

### Day 6: St Ives to Pendeen

7–9 hours, 13.9 miles (22.5km)

*This is one of the most scenic and rugged sections of the SWCP, though it has no handy refreshment points. It's worth considering splitting the route by stopping overnight at Zennor or Treen, both about 800m inland, and both with sleeping and eating options. The more leisurely pace of this option gives you extra time to enjoy the unsurpassed cliff scenery, bird-watching and wildflower spotting. Take plenty of water and some food.*

From above Porthmeor Beach, keep left of the toilet block in the small car park and continue to Man's Head, where the wilder coast begins. The trail now winds its way delightfully along the top of jet-black greenstone cliffs, with steep dips into the coves that slice into the land and with some tough uphill sections. A steep climb leads to dramatic Zennor Head, from where a path and narrow lane lead 800m inland to Zennor village.

If you want to break at this stage (6.5 miles from St Ives), the **Old Chapel Backpackers** (☎ 01736-798307; zennorbackpackers@btinternet.com; Zennor; camp sites for 2 £9, dm £15) also has a café serving breakfast, snacks and lunches. Just up the road is the friendly farmhouse B&B of **Trewey Farm** (☎ 01736-796936; d £56). The nearby **Tinners Arms** (☎ lunch & dinner) pub does excellent bar meals.

From Zennor Head the SWCP continues along the cliff top to the knuckle-like Gurnard's Head, once the site of an Iron Age promontory fort. Another potential overnight stop is the hamlet of Treen, about 800m inland from Gurnard's Head. A handy B&B is **Treen Farm** (☎ 01736-796932; d from £50). About 100m away, up on the main road, is the **Gurnard's Head Hotel** (☎ 01736-796928; www.gurnardshead.co.uk; s/d £50/83, dinner mains £9-16; ☎ lunch & dinner), which has bright, cheerful décor to go with comfy rooms and great food.

Beyond Gurnard's Head the path drops into lonely Porthmeor Cove, from where there is some steep uphill walking to the magnificent Bosigran headland with its west-facing cliffs that plunge 300ft into Porth-

moina Cove. There's a steep descent and ascent across the slopes of Porthmoina Cove, after which the trail winds along the lonely cliffs of Morvah and then passes above Portheras Beach to reach the **lighthouse** at the headland of Pendeen Watch. From here, lanes lead 1 mile inland to Pendeen village.

### PENDEEN

Decent B&B options include the **Radjel Inn** (☎ 01736-788446; d £50, meals around £12; ☎ lunch & dinner). The nearby **North Inn** (☎ 01736-788417; ernestjohncoak@aol.com; camp sites for 2 £6, d £60, bar meals £6-10; ☎ lunch & dinner), a popular real-ale bar, does B&B in an adjoining bungalow-style building.

Pendeen has a well-stocked village shop with a fish and chip shop next door.

### Day 7: Pendeen to Sennen Cove

4–5 hours, 9.3 miles (14.6km)

*Today's walk leads south towards Land's End, first through the heartland of mineral mining and along the edge of great cliffs to Cape Cornwall, and then dropping closer to sea level for the final section to Sennen's glorious golden beaches.*

From Pendeen Watch the SWCP follows the cliff top through dramatic mine ruins. Just inland is **Geevor Tin Mine** (☎ 01736-788662; www.geevor.com; adult/child £8/5; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Fri), which closed as a working mine in 1990, the last coastal tin mine to do so. It is now an excellent heritage centre and is well worth a visit. Further south is Levant Mine and **Engine House**, where a refurbished beam engine, used for pumping water from deep mines, can be seen. Next come the twin engine houses of **Crowns Mine**, perched on top of dramatic cliffs. From these buildings a wagon incline once led into a tunnel mouth that gave access to miles of undersea workings. Close to the path is an arsenic labyrinth (see the boxed text, opposite).

Inland from the trail is Botallack village, which has eating and sleeping options if required. There's an excellent camp site about 200m from Botallack at **Trevaylor Touring Park** (☎ 01736-787016; www.trevaylor.com; sites for 2 £12; ☎ Mar-Nov). On the northern edge of Botallack is the lovely old farmhouse of **Manor Farm** (☎ 01736-788525; s/d £40/56). In Botallack is the **Queen's Arms** (☎ lunch) pub.

Beyond Botallack is the headland of **Kenidjack Castle**, the site of yet another Iron

Age promontory settlement. The path descends steeply into the Kenidjack or Tregeal Valley, an area that is crammed with more mining ruins. In the valley bottom the path passes another arsenic labyrinth and then climbs steeply to cross the neck of the shapely Cape Cornwall.

From the Cape car park, the SWCP passes Carn Goose and Ballowal Barrow, a Bronze Age entrance grave that is very well preserved through having been buried beneath mine waste for many years. From here a road leads for 1 mile to the town of St Just, where there are several B&Bs, pubs and shops, including a supermarket and a post office. A number of pubs in St Just offer bar meals in the £5 to £10 range. The **Wellington Hotel** (☎ 01736-787319; Market Sq) is a good choice and there's also a popular **fish and chip shop** (Market Sq). The **Star Inn** (☎ 01736-788767; Fore St) is a great pub that often has folk music sessions and does good bar meals.

Beyond Ballowal the SWCP dips down into Cot Valley. From the valley head, the useful **Land's End YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5906; www.yha.org.uk; Letcha Vean, St Just; camp sites for 2 £7, dm £14) is only about 200m away.

The route continues easily from Cot Valley along the cliffs. It descends gradually to sea level and reaches the major surf beach of **Gwenver** and the adjoining **Whitesand Bay** beach. Both beaches have potentially dangerous currents, Gwenver especially. Always heed lifeguard advice. At the end of Whitesand Bay beach is the seafront village of Sennen Cove.

### SENNEEN COVE

This is one of the area's most popular small resorts, overwhelmed in summer but with its charm intact. It should not be confused with Sennen village, a less-cohesive settlement on the high ground above, and about 800m from the Cove by a steep road.

There's B&B at the friendly **Myrtle Cottage** (☎ 01736-871698; Old Coastguard Row; s/d £50/58). An excellent overnight choice is to continue through Sennen Cove and then take the path leading inland from just beyond the final car park to **Treewe Moor House** (☎ 01736-871284; www.firstandlastcottages.co.uk; s/d £40/60) for peaceful, charming rooms and a friendly welcome.

Uphill, about 1 mile from the Cove and on the A30, is the bright and welcoming **Whitesands Lodge** (☎ 01736-871776; www.white

### GETTING IN A DEADLY SCRAPE

There is a well-preserved arsenic calciner and labyrinth close to the SWCP as it passes Botallack, and another in the Kenidjack Valley. Mineral ore contains arsenic and these labyrinths were used in the early 19th century to extract the arsenic by roasting mineral ore at times when tin prices were too low to be profitable. The arsenic fumes released in the calciner condensed as crystals on the labyrinth walls. These crystals were then scraped off, mainly by women and children. Much of the arsenic was exported to the American cotton fields, where it was used as a pesticide against the boll weevil. The skin and lungs of those handling the arsenic were unprotected and the toll of miserable early deaths from toxicity among Cornish workers and cotton pickers in America must have been very high. It casts a grim reality over the romantic images of today.

sandshotel.co.uk; dm/d £18/50), incorporating the attractive **Whitesands Hotel** (☎ 01736-871776; s £40, d £60-95, meals £10-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner), which has a stylish restaurant.

There are several cafés and pubs in Sennen Cove, including the **Old Success Inn** (☎ 01736-871232), which does bar meals.

### Day 8: Sennen Cove to Porthcurno

3–3½ hours, 6.8 miles (10.6km)

*Today you pass a major milestone – Land's End, from where the path leads above beautiful bays and across magnificent headlands with towering granite cliffs that shine like gold in the sun. There are a couple of superb beaches as well, and in spring and early summer there's the bonus of swathes of golden daffodils and a glorious palette of wildflowers.*

From Sennen Cove it's an easy jaunt along the cliff tops to **Land's End**, where the Land's End complex engulfs the mainly car-borne crowds with all the grinding charm of 'themed' tourism. There are separate entrance fees to the various enclosed attractions at Land's End and there are several ticketing systems. There is no charge at all for simply walking about the headland, or entering the hotel bar and the various retail outlets. You do not have to pay the entrance

fee by reaching the headland via the coastal footpath. Embrace it all for what it is, but do not expect to be at one with the wilderness here.

Staying at the comfortable **Land's End Hotel** (☎ 01736-871844; www.landsendhotel.co.uk; s/d £77/134, 3-course meal £20; 🍴 dinner) gives you the chance to stroll around the headland in the evening after the crowds have gone. You can eat here, or in the nearby **Trenwith Arms** (🍴 lunch & dinner).

Beyond Land's End, where casual strollers steadily dwindle, the well-marked coast path leads along the airy cliff tops above glittering seas. After about 3 miles the path climbs steeply to Gwennap Head and then down to tiny Porthgarra Cove, where there is a small seasonal **café** and toilets. Another mile or so leads to **St Levan's holy well** above the lovely Porth Chapel beach, from where a path leads inland for about 200m to the delightful and secluded **Grey Gables** (☎ 01736-810421; d £62). Nearby is the lovely granite **church of St Levan**. From above Porth Chapel beach it's an 800m climb to the famous **Minack Theatre** (see the boxed text, below). From the theatre entrance, very steep steps and pathways descend directly to Porthcurno. The alternative is to walk by road from the theatre.

## PORThCURNO

The village of Porthcurno is a straggle of buildings running up a narrow valley from one of the finest beaches in Cornwall. Porthcurno Bay is lined with fine shell sand, golden and silky, and the waters of the bay are an Aegean blue in the summer sun. The beach shelves quickly in places so heed the lifeguard advice. The eastern side of the bay is enclosed by the stunning

granite headland of Treryn Dinas, known popularly as Logan Rock. Porthcurno's other famous feature is the **Porthcurno Telegraph Museum** (☎ 01736-810966; www.porthcurno.org.uk; adult/child £5/3), contained within underground WWII bunkers and detailing Porthcurno's remarkable history as a cable station serving the world through undersea cables that run out beneath the beach.

There's a **café** and pub close to the beach and places doing B&B include the **Wearhouse** (☎ 01736-810129; wearsue@aol.com; d £50) and the very welcoming **Seaview House** (☎ 01736-810638; www.seaviewhouseporthcurno.com; s/d £30/66, dinner £11-15; 🍴), which has excellent evening meals.

## Day 9: Porthcurno to Penzance

6–8 hours, 11.8 miles (18.6km)

*This day's walk is mixed, with some fairly easy sections to alleviate an otherwise tiring session. All along the route the views are superb.*

From Porthcurno a steep climb leads to the cliff top and in less than 1 mile passes a diversion path that leads off seaward between the overgrown banks of Iron Age defences and onto Logan Rock.

Keep to the main path, negotiating some steep ups and downs through magnificent granite cliff scenery until the trail passes above a trim, white lighthouse below the dramatic cliffs of Tater du. The jet-black cliffs here are composed of black-hued greenstone, a cool contrast to all that golden granite. At Lamorna Cove there is a **café** serving snacks. The best accommodation is about 1 mile inland at **Castallack Farm** (☎ 01736-731969; www.castallackfarm.co.uk; s/d £40/52). About 800m uphill from the cove is the **Wink Inn** (🍴 lunch & dinner), with bar meals.

## THE MINACK THEATRE

The **Minack Theatre** (☎ 01736-810181; www.minack.com; adult £6-8, child £3-4) is an open-air theatre built into the cliffs – one of the world's most spectacular settings. The audience sits on steep, curved rows of seats, while the actors' backdrop is the view across the sea. In summer, performances have often been disrupted by a fabulous 'Dance of the Dolphins' in mid-bay. Even the actors take a break to watch these beautiful creatures leap and fly across the water. The theatre was built in the 1930s by the indomitable Rowena Cade, who, assisted by dedicated locals, did much of the construction. She was still mixing concrete until the year of her death in 1983. There are shows at the theatre most evenings from late May to late September; you can contact the theatre or a local tourist office for details. If the weather is kind, it's paradise; but bring a cushion for the hard seats, wine for sunny evenings and hot chocolate for when the Cornish mist steals in.

After Penzer Point you reach the edge of Mousehole (pronounced 'mowz'l'), an archetypal Cornish fishing village with granite houses rising in tiers from the walled harbour. There are several pubs, hotels and restaurants – the **Ship Inn** (☎ 01736-731234; s/d £40/65, mains £6-12; 🍴 lunch & dinner) does good bar meals. Like St Ives, Mousehole is irresistible to visitors and artists.

The SWCP from Mousehole to Newlyn mostly follows the road. Newlyn is still a major fishing port, in spite of the decline of the industry generally, and there is a robust sense of life around the boat-crammed harbour. It's a pleasant seashore walk from here to join Penzance's splendid promenade.

## PENZANCE

pop 20,260

The large town of Penzance spreads along the western side of Mount's Bay. It's a cheerful, bustling place and worth exploring, especially the older part of town around **Chapel St**. Unmissable are the colourful facade of the **Egyptian House** and the **statue of Humphry Davy**, the Penzance-born chemist and scientist who invented the miners' safety lamp – and discovered laughing gas along the way. Other places to visit include **Penlee House Gallery & Museum** (☎ 01736-363625; www.penleehouse.org.uk; adult/child £3/free, Sat free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Oct-Easter), which has a superb collection of Newlyn School paintings as well as displays on the area's history. Penzance's **tourist office** (☎ 01736-362207; Station Rd) is right by the bus and railway stations.

The **YHA hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5992; www.yha.org.uk; camp sites for 2 £7, dm £16) is in an 18th-century mansion on the town's outskirts.

**Penzance Backpackers** (☎ 01736-363836; www.pbbackpack.com; Alexandra Rd; dm/d £13/28), also called the Blue Dolphin, is about 200m up from the promenade.

Penzance has a great many B&Bs and hotels, including the **Pendennis Hotel** (☎ 01736-363823; Alexandra Rd; s/d from £23/25), a reasonable, cheap option.

Just up from the promenade is **Kimberley House** (☎ 01736-362727; www.kimberleyhousepenzance.co.uk; 10 Morrab Rd; s £25-30, d £60), opposite the Penlee House Gallery.

Walker-friendly places include **Woodstock Guesthouse** (☎ 01736-369049; www.woodstockguesthouse.co.uk; 29 Morrab Rd; d £44-64) and **Warwick**

**House Hotel** (☎ 01736-363881; www.warwickhousepenzance.co.uk; 17 Regent Tee; s/d £45/76).

The centuries-old **Turk's Head** (☎ 01736-363093; Chapel St; 🍴 lunch & dinner) pub serves good pub meals, while nearby **Bar Coco's** (☎ 01736-350222; 13 Chapel St; tapas £2-5; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) serves tapas and cappuccinos. **Archie Brown's** (☎ 01736-362828; Bread St; breakfast from £3, mains £4-7; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a colourful vegetarian and vegan café. It's located above a health food shop off Causewayhead.

## Day 10: Penzance to Porthleven

5–7 hours, 13.9 miles (22.4km)

*Today is a fairly easy walk with a few steep sections towards the end. It skirts round Mount's Bay, with the dramatic island of St Michael's Mount nearly always in view. The cliffs here are much lower than further west.*

Leave Penzance by following the path from opposite the exit to the large harbour-side car park. The trail leads between the railway line and a long stretch of beach, where there is very safe bathing, to Marazion, the oldest chartered town in Cornwall. The name Marazion has no connection to Judaism, but derives from the Cornish name of a medieval market: Marghas Byhgan (Small Market).

Just offshore is the spectacular, tree-girt island of St Michael's Mount, with its handsome castle looking like an extension of the rock itself.

You walk along the road through Marazion before striking down to the coast once more. Easy walking then leads past Cudden Point to **Prussia Cove**, named after a notorious, but much admired, 18th-century smuggler, John Carter, who during childhood games styled himself the King of Prussia, after Frederick the Great.

The SWCP rounds Hoe Point, skirts the lovely beach of **Praa Sands** and then climbs onto rugged cliffs and past the remains of the Wheal Prosper and Wheal Trewavas mines. Beyond here, the way winds safely round the edge of impressive, but fairly unstable, cliffs to reach Porthleven.

## PORThLEVEN

The dark stonework and solid harbour walls of this old fishing and boat-building village give it a slightly stern look, but Porthleven is a charming place with several pubs and shops dotted around the harbour.

There's a walker-friendly welcome at the cosy **Seefar** (☎ 01326-573778; www.seefar.co.uk; Peverell Tce; s/d £24/54), while nearby **An Mordros** (☎ 01326-562236; www.anmordrosotel.com; Peverell Tce; d £58) has more hotel-style surroundings.

The cheerful **Nauti but Ice** (snacks £4-6) café on the eastern harbour side offers delicious snacks, including tasty crab rolls.

Two pubs that do decent bar meals are the **Ship Inn**, on the way into the village, and the **Atlantic Inn**, on the route out.

### Day 11: Porthleven to Lizard

5-7 hours, 14 miles (22.4km)

*The first part of today's walk is generally easy going along a stretch of coast that becomes increasingly scenic. The final section can be tiring.*

Leaving Porthleven, follow Loe Bar Rd and Mounts Rd from the far end of the harbour. Very soon you pass the **Loe**, Cornwall's largest natural body of freshwater, once the estuary of the River Cober and now separated from the sea by the shingle bank of Loe Bar. *Swimming anywhere along the shore between Porthleven and here should never be attempted.*

The SWCP passes Gunwalloe Fishing Cove and then continues round Halzephron Cliff to Dollar Cove, where the little **church of St Winwallo**, with a separate tower of an older church, stands in an atmospheric position. The trail then climbs up to and alongside the Towans golf course.

South of Poldhu Point the route passes the **Marconi Monument**, which commemorates the first transatlantic telegraphic communication of 1901. From here you drop to Polurrian Cove, then up and over to the atmospheric Mullion Cove, where there are toilets and a seasonal **café**. The village of Mullion, with shops and an ATM in the Spar supermarket, is 1¼ miles uphill. Places to stay include the handy **Criggan Mill** (☎ 01326-240496; www.crigganmill.co.uk; s/d £35/60, dinner £10), which has pleasant chalet accommodation and also does an evening meal by prior arrangement. The delightful **Trenance Farm Cottages** (☎ 01326-240639; www.trenancefarmholidays.co.uk; s/d £34/58; 🚽) is about 800m inland.

Exhilarating cliff-top walking leads to **Kynance Cove**, where the fascinating multi-coloured serpentine rock has been attracting tourists since the 18th century. The offshore rock stacks have names such as

Asparagus Island, Sugarloaf Rock, the Belows and the Bishop.

On the cliff top there are toilets and a **café** at the car park. From Kynance the SWCP leads along the edge of dark, convoluted cliffs to Lizard Point, Britain's most southerly headland, famous for its mild climate, complex geology and associated unusual flora. The nearby **Lizard Lighthouse** (☎ 01326-290202; adult/child £2/1; 🕒 noon-5pm Sun-Thu Apr-Oct) has a collection of interesting artefacts. There are two **cafés** where the path reaches the point.

### LIZARD

Just below the lighthouse is the handsome **Lizard YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6120; www.yha.org.uk; Lizard Point; dm from £16), a former 19th-century hotel, now owned by the National Trust and in a superb position. Rooms are family-size.

In Lizard village, 0.75 miles inland, is the homely **Bay View Cottage** (☎ 01326-290369; Cross Common; d £46) or you could pamper yourself at the **House Bay Hotel** (☎ 01326-290417; www.housebay.com; s £45, d £110-140), Britain's most southerly hotel, with beautiful gardens overlooking a stunning vista of cliffs and sea. The trail passes right by the garden entrance.

In Lizard Village there are several **cafés** and a decent pub doing bar meals.

### Day 12: Lizard to Coverack

4-6 hours, 10.4 miles (16.7km)

*This is another spectacular day along the cliffs. The trail begins quite easily for the first few miles, but after Cadgwith it gets tougher.*

Just before Cadgwith you'll pass the **Devil's Frying Pan**, a vast crater caused by the sea undermining the roof of a cave. Cadgwith's cottages, many of them thatched, are crammed into a steep-sided, narrow valley. Fishing boats still launch from the tiny beach. The **Cadgwith Cove Inn** (sandwiches around £6), or the attached tearooms in a former pilchard cellar, is usually guaranteed to have tasty crab sandwiches on offer.

Past Caerleon Cove and the substantial ruins of an old serpentine works, the path leads to **Kennack Sands**, popular with families in summer. A final set of steep ups and downs over the headlands of Beagles Point, Pedn Boar, Black Head and Chynhalls Point brings you to Coverack.

### COVERACK

The charming old fishing port of Coverack is a good place to overnight. At the **YHA hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5780; www.yha.org.uk; Parc Behan, School Hill; camp sites for 2 £14, dm/d £14/40) you can camp beneath apple trees.

On the approach to Coverack is an excellent path-side B&B, **Porthbeer** (☎ 01326-280680; www.porthbeer.fsnet.co.uk; Chynhalls Point; d £56), with lovely, spacious rooms and great views.

In Coverack itself, **Fernleigh** (☎ 01326-280626; Chymbloth Way; d £50) is a handy stopover.

The **Paris Hotel** (🍷 lunch & dinner) by the harbour has a lively bar that does decent pub grub. Just along the road is the popular **Archie's Loft** (sandwiches from £2.50), offering toasties and the famous, and delicious, Roskilly's ice cream.

### Day 13: Coverack to Helford

5-7 hours, 13.6 miles (21.4km)

*This is a moderately easy day, following the coast for much of the way and mixing scenic views with the ragged scars of quarrying.*

From Coverack take the road past the beach and keep straight on past the houses to fields, keeping to the path closest to the sea; this runs to Lowland Point. From here the route winds through the sizeable gulf of **Dean Quarries**, where some gabbro rock is still extracted and loaded on to coasting vessels at the pier. Red flags indicate times when blasting takes place. A hooter sounds when a big bang is imminent. Relax; read a book.

The clearly signed route through the quarries should be followed exactly. It's a fascinating little journey through desolation that leads to the pleasant beach of Godrevy Cove, where the trail turns inland to Rosenithon and Porthoustock.

Take to the road for the official route to Porthallow, where you meet the coast again and an excellent pub, the **Five Pilchards**, which offers tasty bar meals right on the beach.

The SWCP then continues to Nare Head and Nare Point, with fine views of the mouth of the River Helford. At Gillan Creek you can cross an hour either side of low water of spring tides, but there may still be a fair depth of water during neap tides. There is a line of partial stepping stones at a narrow, low-tide crossing place, but these

can be very slippery. The official, dry-shod route adds 2 miles and goes inland by road round the head of the creek and returns to the coast for a final wooded stretch leading to Helford.

### HELTFORD

Pretty, popular and very populated in summer, Helford and its tree-lined, boat-bobbing river is always a delight. Accommodation options are sparse along the Helford River, where exclusive second homes and holiday cottages tend to dominate the market.

The excellent **Landrivic Farm** (☎ 01326-231686; d from £64) offers very friendly and comfortable service, with evening meals by arrangement. The farm is about halfway between Helford and Manaccan, about a 0.75-mile walk from Helford; it offers a pick-up from Helford if required. Helford's thatched **Shipwright's Arms** is a busy pub serving bar meals. You could also head for Manaccan's **New Inn** for similar fare.

### Day 14: Helford to Falmouth

4-5 hours, 9.3 miles (14.8km)

*The last lap is a relaxed stroll, although still with the occasional rise and fall for the foot-weary.*

First catch your ferry. The little, businesslike ferries from Helford Point across the river to Helford Passage are operated by **Helford River Boats** (☎ 01326-250770; www.helford-river-boats.co.uk). They run on demand between 9am and 5pm April through October. There is some suspension of service at very low tides, so check first. Out of season, you're faced with a 13-mile detour inland via Gweek, at the head of the Helford River. Or you can succumb and catch a bus to Helston (four daily, two on Sunday) and then to Falmouth.

If you've caught your ferry, follow the SWCP from the north shore of the Helford River through Durgan, where an 800m inland detour leads to **Glendurgan Gardens** (☎ 01326-250906; Mawnan Smith; adult/child £5/3; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sat & bank holiday Mon), an extravaganza of exotic shrubs, flowers and plants.

You then toddle effortlessly round Rosemullion Head and on to Maenporth and Penance Point to reach journey's end at Falmouth.

## MORE LONG-DISTANCE WALKS

### SHAKESPEARE'S WAY

A relatively new arrival to Britain's collection of long-distance paths is Shakespeare's Way, named for Britain's best-known playwright. This route goes from Stratford-upon-Avon (Shakespeare's birthplace) to London, to finish at Shakespeare's Globe, the Elizabethan-style theatre on the banks of the Thames – a distance of 146 miles (235km). The route links some of Britain's other well-known tourist destinations – Blenheim Palace, the Cotswolds, Oxford and, er, Heathrow Airport. Walkers are encouraged to raise funds through sponsorship for a local charity: Stratford-upon-Avon's Shakespeare Hospice. For more details see [www.shakespearsway.org](http://www.shakespearsway.org).

### MACMILLAN WAY

Another worthy walk – connected to the charity Macmillan Cancer Relief – and a delightfully varied and nonstrenuous route, running diagonally across the country from Boston on the Lincolnshire coast to Abbotsbury on the south coast near Weymouth. The total distance is 290 miles (467km), passing through the flat Fens, the rolling Cotswolds and the tranquil farmland of Dorset. The route is waymarked and many people do week-long sections (of around 90 miles to 100 miles) over three separate trips. For more details see [www.macmillanway.org](http://www.macmillanway.org).

### ACROSS SOUTHERN ENGLAND

If you're a real mile-eater, it's possible to join up several existing long paths to trace a very long route right across southern England.

In the Wessex chapter we describe the western section of the Ridgeway (p83). This ends at Goring, where you could join the eastern section of the Thames Path (p64), leading all the way to London to make a very varied nine- or 10-day walk through southern England.

For something even longer you could start walking at Avonmouth, a port town on the Severn Estuary near Bristol, and follow a path called the Avon Walkway through Bristol to Bath, then join the Kennet & Avon Canal (p80) as far as Pewsey, where you branch north to Avebury to join the Ridgeway and then the Thames Path all the way to London.

Another really long walk across the region starts on the South Devon coast at Lyme Regis and follows the Wessex Ridgeway path (p96) north to Avebury. Here, you could join the Ridgeway across the North Wessex Downs and the Chiltern Hills to its official end at Ivinghoe Beacon. This in turn is the start of the Icknield Way, which in turn links to the Peddars Way. Although only for the serious walker, this 370-mile (595km) epic is an ideal way to follow Neolithic, Roman and medieval footprints all the way across southern England, from the Channel to the North Sea – and it could easily fill a month of your holiday.

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