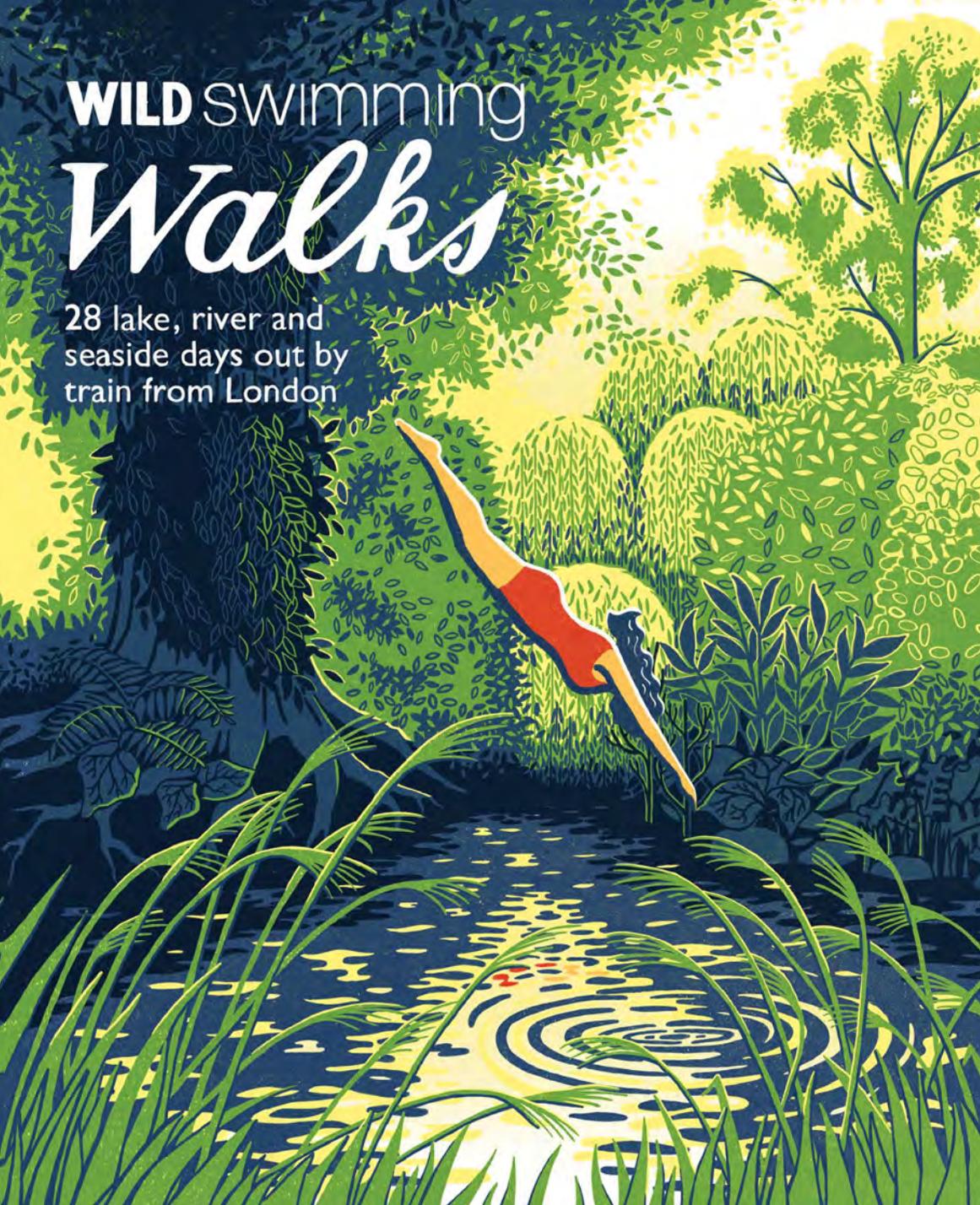


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## Walk 21

# CANTERBURY TO SWALECLIFFE, KENT

A walk from the medieval city of Canterbury, through gentle countryside along part of the Crab and Winkle Way, and to the coast for a sea swim.

The walk starts from Canterbury, a historic city with city walls and many medieval houses, but above all famous for its cathedral, the mother church of the Anglican Communion, called in full the Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of Christ at Canterbury. In the Middle Ages, Canterbury was one of Europe's important pilgrimage destinations and from the 12th century, centre of the cult of St Thomas Becket, the archbishop who quarrelled with King Henry II, was murdered in 1170 and canonised in 1173. Now the cathedral and other ecclesiastical buildings nearby are a World Heritage Site and major tourist destination. The walk is too long to combine with serious sightseeing, but those arriving at Canterbury East will walk through the old town, passing near the cathedral, while the route from Canterbury West heads up a hillside from where there are impressive views of the cathedral below. The building as it appears now is mainly 12th century, although the foundation dates back to 597.

The walk climbs up through the grounds of the University of Kent, Canterbury and joins the Crab and Winkle Way ②, a cycle route named after the disused railway, and a much older salt route along which salt was transported from Seasalter to Canterbury. The railway, opened in 1830 and soon nicknamed the Crab and Winkle Line, was the first anywhere to carry passengers on a regular basis. On the hilly parts of the line trains were hauled by cables powered by fixed steam engines, while steam locomotives hauled the rolling stock on flat stretches. There is an information board close to the entrance to Tyler Hill Tunnel, the first steam passenger railway tunnel, now home to bats.

### INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 8.5 miles (9.5 miles starting from Canterbury East Station).

**TIME:** 3.5 to 4 hours.

**MAP:** OS Explorer 150 (Canterbury & the Isle of Thanet); Landranger 179 (Canterbury & East Kent).

**START POINT:** Canterbury West Station or Canterbury East Station.

**END POINT:** Chestfield & Swalecliffe Station.

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Southeastern Railways from Charing Cross or Southeastern Highspeed from St Pancras International (there is a surcharge) to Canterbury West; Southeastern from London Victoria to Canterbury East. Return from Chestfield & Swalecliffe station to London Victoria, or to St Pancras International by changing onto the Highspeed (with surcharge) at Faversham. It may be best to buy a return to Canterbury and a single from Chestfield & Swalecliffe to Faversham, where the routes join.

**SWIMMING:** In the North Sea at Swalecliffe or Tankerton.

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** Canterbury historic city; Blean church; Long Rock, Swalecliffe.

**REFRESHMENTS:** Plenty of pubs and restaurants in Canterbury; The Wheatsheaf Hungry Horse (CT5 2LU, tel 01227 792310), Plough Inn (CT5 2RN tel 01227 792428) and Mr Beano's Café Restaurant (CT5 2QT, tel 01227 374343) in Swalecliffe.

The route passes the ancient village of Blean **3** and a 13th century church, dedicated to Saints Cosmos and Damian, with a magnificent crown-post roof. The church's origins are older than the building, as it stands on the site of a Roman villa and a chapel here was mentioned in the Domesday Book. Listen and look out for skylarks on the field to the right and for other birds in the churchyard, and note the interesting information board here. After Blean the route goes past some of the orchards Kent is famous for, before plunging into Clowes Wood and on to Shrub Hill in Chestfield. It then descends into the village of Chestfield, crossing the major A299, and on to Swalecliffe for a well deserved swim in the sea.

This route was first walked on a gloomy day in November, when flocks of winter thrushes and herring gulls heralded the approach to the sea. There are good views on a clear day, and on a fine spring day in late April there were bluebells

and stitchwort in the woods and plenty of warbler birdsong.

The North Kent seaside is quite built-up and our route from Canterbury reaches it in the middle of ribbon development stretching from Seasalter to Herne Bay. None of the possible ways through entirely avoids dull streets, but our route keeps them to a minimum. The seafront itself is very pleasant, with a wide promenade backed in some places by a grassy slope and in others by brightly painted beach huts. The swimming is good from the shingle beach between mid and high tide, but towards low tide the retreating sea exposes some estuarine mud.

Our walk directions end at Swalecliffe station, but an option is to walk on along the front to the old fishing village of Whitstable, which is famous for oysters and by far the prettiest of the adjacent seaside towns. Whitstable station is one stop on along the line from Swalecliffe.

## DIRECTIONS

*The route is written from Canterbury West station; alighting instead at Canterbury East enables you to walk through the city but will add a mile to the distances. From Canterbury East, cross the footbridge straight ahead on leaving the station. Turn right onto the city wall with Dane John Gardens to the left. At the end of the gardens, descend and turn left into Watling Street. At the second crossroads*

*turn right into St Margaret Street. On reaching High Street, if you want to visit the cathedral go straight on along Mercury Lane, but otherwise turn left into High Street. Cross a river into St Peter's Street. Cross another river by West Gate, continue and turn right into Kirby's Lane. As it bends left (to Canterbury West station) continue straight on a footpath, joining our route from Canterbury West.*

### **1** CANTERBURY

From the main entrance of Canterbury West station, turn left into Station Road West, right into Kirby's Lane, and immediately left into a passageway between new houses, then left on a small road keeping parallel to the railway. There are brief views of the cathedral to your right. Cross two roads and pass under the railway. Follow signs for the cycle route to



the university. On reaching St Stephen's open area, turn left along its southern side, signposted for the university. Just after the green area, fork right (signed National Cycle Route 1) with houses on the left and a wooded bank on the right. Turn left at Beaconsfield Road and cross it on the pedestrian crossing. Take the



first right into St Michael's Road, signed for the cycle route to the university. Quite soon you can avoid the drab housing in this road by taking a path behind the houses on your right, on a wooded bank with playing fields to the right. This is actually the old Crab and Winkle railway line. After Tyler Hill Tunnel, turn left following a blue arrow for about 50 metres, then right (signed for the University and the Crab and Winkle Way link). Continue uphill through the university grounds with views of the cathedral below. Pass through the central university buildings, with the Students' Union building on your right.

**1.25 miles**

## 2 THE CRAB AND WINKLE WAY

Bear right at the road, then left at the T-junction with a busier road, Giles Lane. Note Tanglewood, a weatherboarded house, on your left. Take a footpath to the right, signed for Park Wood. You pass the University Sports Centre on your right. At the next path junction turn right, leaving the Sports Centre on your right. There is a pond on your left. Pass between large buildings (the one on the left is called Jennison). At the end, cross the perimeter road and take a footpath opposite into Brotherhood Wood. Follow the yellow waymarks on posts and trees downhill, later crossing a stream. At the bottom, cross two footbridges and turn left, signed Blean Walk. Follow the field edge with the Sarre Penn stream on

your left, known locally as the Fishbourne. Cross another footbridge into a second field. At the far end of this, turn right onto a metalled track, marked by blue arrows. This is the Crab and Winkle Way (CWW).

**2 miles**

## 3 BLEAN

Walk uphill to Blean church. After visiting the church, cross Tyler Hill Road (named after a medieval pottery and tiles industry). Keep left on the CWW and pass Arbele Farm on the left and Amery Court, a beautiful Georgian house, on the right.

**3 miles**

## 4 TO CLOWES WOOD

Pass some farm sheds and after the track bears right, leave the CWW at a junction of fields, taking a right fork on an enclosed footpath between fields. Enter woodland (soon chestnuts on the left and conifers on the right) and continue straight on to a path crossing in a clearing (the CWW is visible to your left). Very soon after this take a left fork footpath off the main track. After crossing under the pylons, take an indistinct but signed right fork. Follow this path on through Clowes Wood, continuing straight on at a cross-path and later over a gravel track. Soon after this, on reaching a broad grassy path, turn right onto it. On reaching Radfall Road, by the Dog's House Rehoming Centre and opposite Mill Farm, turn left.

**5 miles**

## 5 TO CHESTFIELD

This half-mile stretch of busy road is unavoidable but it is tree-lined and there is a verge to walk on. At the 30mph sign where the road bends left, continue straight on along Broomfield Gate, marked with a FP sign. At the end of the houses, pass through a kissing gate and continue on between bushes to the open grass of Chestfield Golf Course, with good views to the right. Soon you can hear the noise of the A299 and see the coast and outskirts of Chestfield. Follow the waymarks. At the cross-roads on Shrub Hill follow the sign for Molehill Road, taking a path downhill with a wood on your right, approaching the main road obliquely. (Do not bear left and head directly for the main road.) You pass two seats and cross the fairway to enter a small wood. Climb a short hill to cross the A299 by a most cleverly landscaped bridge. The road enters a tunnel just here and, but for the noise, you would not know it was there. Once over the other side, the noise soon subsides and you find yourself at the edge of Chestfield.

**6.5 miles**

## 6 TO SWALECLIFFE.

Continue past houses on your left, crossing The Drove into a private road opposite with a right of way on foot. The golf course is on your left (on the far side you can see oast houses and the timber-framed clubhouse, claimed to be the oldest in the world) and houses are on your right. At the



crossroads in Chestfield village, turn left (signed for Swalecliffe) and follow the road round, passing a bizarre house (The Paddock) on your right. In a few yards, take a signed footpath on the right into Meadow Drive. Keep straight on through housing to a footpath between houses. There were sparrows chattering in the hedge here. Cross several more residential roads, finally turning left to emerge on the main road near a petrol station and a roundabout, where you turn left. Chestfield & Swalecliffe railway station is the far side of the roundabout.

**7.5 miles**

## 7 TO THE SEA

To reach the coast, cross under the railway bridge. If you want the shops or a pub, turn left after the bridge and then right into Swalecliffe Court Drive. Otherwise, you can turn right after the bridge, take a FP on the

left just before the community centre, then right into Swalecliffe Court Drive. Follow it down, past the Victorian parish church of St John the Baptist with a steeple. At the end, turn left along the Oyster Bay Trail to reach the Saxon Shore Way. There is an information board here about Long Rock, the shingle spit straight ahead, which is a protected site noted for birds. However, a short distance to the left there is an area suitable for swimming with a row of beach huts and groynes. You may wish to continue west for just under a mile to the popular Tankerton beach. Alternatively, you can walk along to the right beyond Long Rock to a promenade and further swimming area, towards Herne Bay. Whichever you choose, retrace your route to return to the station.

**8.5 miles**

*Liz Valentine, Cath Cinnamon.*