

SUFFOLK DOG WALKS

Mike Trippitt is a journalist who enjoys exploring the county, especially with his clumber spaniel, Farley



"WALLABIES in Suffolk?" I exclaimed, unable to mask my amusement. Admittedly, the two hares sitting brazenly on open farmland were huge, but my wife suggesting that they were marsupial made me laugh. The idea would have been even more bizarre, had we not encountered Highland cattle grazing in sand dunes earlier in the day.

Clare and I had come to Dunwich Heath with Farley, our Clumber spaniel, and four hours earlier, the day had started well. "We are incredibly dog-friendly here," Alison Joseph, visitor experience manager at The National Trust estate had told me. "We welcome many dogs each year in the tea room and lookout. We try to make sure that dogs have a really good day. We have water bowls around, hook-ups to secure dogs whilst owners use the facilities, and we have free Bonios, which are a huge hit with dogs and their owners."

We were impressed by how much thought goes into accommodating dogs here. There is a dedicated two-mile 'Woof walk' where dogs can stay off lead all year round, and even though no owners have reported that their dogs have suffered snakebites on the heath, the Dunwich team takes precautions to help them.

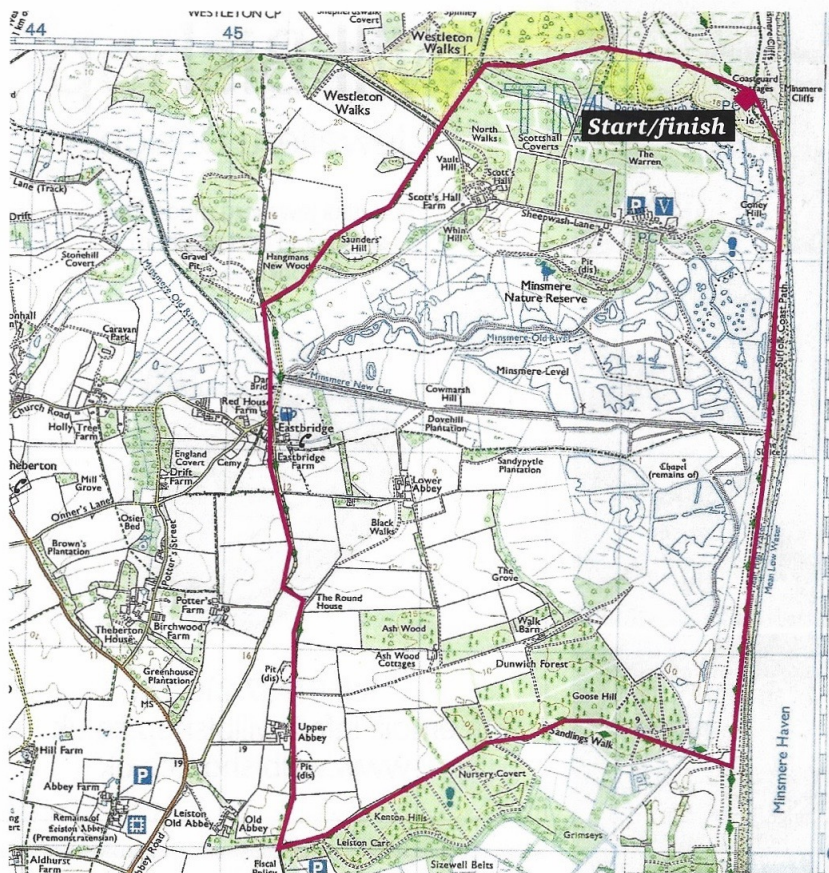
"We contact the local vets at the start of each summer to find out who has anti-venom, so if a dog does get bitten we can help," said Alison Joseph. "It's important to get the dog straight to the vet. Come and see any member of our team if you're not local, or don't know where the nearest vet is. We'll get on the phone and ask the vet to get ready for a dog coming in, and we'll give the dog owner directions."

Watch out for 'wallabies'

Mike Trippitt sets off with Farley for a seven-mile circular stroll starting and ending at Dunwich Heath.



Minsmere New Cut, just north of Eastbridge



HOW FAR?

National Trust Coastguard Cottages to Minsmere Sluice 1 mile

Minsmere Sluice to Sandlings Walk 1 mile

Sandlings Walk to Eastbridge Road 2.4 miles

Eastbridge Road to The Eel's Foot Inn 0.6 mile

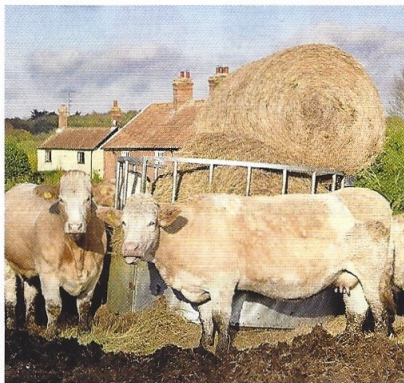
The Eel's Foot Inn to Dunwich Heath 1.2 miles

Across Dunwich Heath 1 mile

Total 7.2 miles

The walk can be reduced to five miles by leaving the coastal dunes at Minsmere Sluice and walking to Eastbridge on the footpath south of Minsmere New cut.

Extend it to 10 miles by continuing down the coast to Sizewell, then following public footpaths, bridleways and roads to Eastbridge.



Curious cattle at Eastbridge



Farley on Dunwich Heath

Dunwich Heath is home to a variety of wildlife. Other than on the Woof walk, dogs must remain on leads from March 1 to August 31 to prevent disturbance to protected ground-nesting birds. Outside that period and on the beach there are no restrictions. A patchwork of purple, mauve, gold, yellow, and green heath was standing out bright and crisp behind the former coastguard cottages, and the shimmering sea was reflecting the golden autumn sunlight, when we checked our watches, locked the campervan and set off towards the beach, with the dog eagerly searching out the source of the salty air.

Farley, Clare and I first discovered this part of the Suffolk coast earlier in 2017. The heathlands of heather and gorse, woodlands of pine and oak, sea grasses and dunes, former World War II coastal defences, shingle, and sandy beaches at low tide make for the most varied coastal environment. Today we had decided to walk south, first on the dunes and then on the bridleway as we had previously walked along the beach. Farley ran freely through the dunes, but responded admirably to the whistle. We exchanged greetings with walkers, mountain bikers, dogs and their owners. A group of Nordic walkers, sticks in

Local vets
Leiston Veterinary Clinic
1d Eastlands Road
Leiston IP16 4LL
T: 01728 833566

Fromus Veterinary Group
Street Farm Road
Saxmundham IP17 1DU
T: 01728 602599

Wangford Veterinary
Clinic
Pound Corner
Wangford NR34 8RS
T: 01502 578999

Eagle Veterinary Group
Norwich Road
Halesworth IP19 8HY
T: 01986 873139



hands, marched purposefully passed us. Such a diverse range of users is testament to the perennial appeal of this spot.

After two miles, a row of dishevelled tank traps veers sharply west. There, we turned inland following the Sandlings Walk. We skirted down the edge of the RSPB reserve at Minsmere, where dogs other than assistance dogs are not permitted unless on the public footpaths.

Where the reserve meets the beach, we saw Highland cattle. Prominent signage gave us plenty of time to get Farley on his lead, while a temporary electric fence kept the cattle away from harm. RSPB graze sheep and cattle at Minsmere to manage the habitat and improve conditions for various species of visiting birds. While Farley detected the presence of the cattle, his eyes showing searching alertness, and his noise homing in on their smell, he never saw them, as they lay among the grasses. It was best that way.

Through Goose Hill woods and Kenton Hills all sight and sound of the sea disappear. From the bracing east coast, our walk became a sheltered forest stroll within the blink of an eye. Tall pine trees, their trunks stripped of branches and leaves for two-thirds of their height, swayed gently in the autumn breeze. At ground level, soft grassy paths made easy walking.

Farley expressed great interest in cattle again near Eastbridge. A curly haired, muscular old bull grazed nonchalantly with his harem in an emerald green pasture, while young calves watched us cautiously in the adjoining field.

Cattle have always amused me, and I have often pondered what angst they must endure having been blessed with both curiosity and timidity. Perhaps it is that combination that endears them to us.

Our lunch and a drink at the village pub in Eastbridge were a welcome break after five miles. The Eel's Foot Inn delivered good

Clare and Farley on the tank traps



'Cattle have always amused me, and I have often pondered what angst they must endure having been blessed with both curiosity and timidity.'

food, fine ale and prompt service, all in a dog-friendly atmosphere. Just what a country pub should be. But where does that name come from? Landlord Julian Wallis said no-one is sure how the pub got its name. "It may have come from Heel's Foot, a cobblers' implement, or more likely named after the Eel's Boot, a type of woven reed basket used in Eel Fishing. Some believe it is derived from 'Neale's Boot', after a medieval priest who trapped the Devil in his boot and tossed him into the river. Legend says the Devil escaped disguised as an eel." Whatever the explanation, the team had served us well and with two miles to go we had set off again northward continuing around the edge of Minsmere reserve.

"They're so big I thought they were wallabies," said Clare looking across a field at the two hares. I couldn't help but laugh. We had seen most things today, but I was certain we hadn't seen any wallabies.

A track across an elevated plain of grass, trimmed to bowling green height by rabbits and littered with dead, twisted branches, led us to one last copse. We kicked and crunched our feet through a carpet of golden leaves. The final mile across the heather and gorse of Dunwich Heath rounded off a varied and rewarding day.

The autumn light was fading when the coastguard cottages came back into view. Farley looked exhausted, ready for his dinner, and showed every sign of wanting an early night. With over seven miles, and five hours of fresh Suffolk air under our belt, we felt much the same. It had been an excellent day in a place of remarkable variety. ♦



The National Trust Coastguard Cottages, Dunwich Heath

suffolk
hideaways

Bringing you Suffolk's finest holiday cottages
Find your perfect place to stay or the right agency to market your home. Please get in touch today
Call us on 01728 666 300 or visit suffolkhideaways.co.uk