



SUFFOLK DOG WALKS

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



Caption

Sandy toes and salty kisses

Farley gets his feet wet among the waves on a seaside stroll to Felixstowe Ferry

Is that a Clumber spaniel?" With just 265 Clumber puppies registered with the Kennel Club in 2017, compared to 35,068 Labradors, and 23,317 Cocker spaniels, no wonder people are not sure what Farley is, as we walk along Felixstowe's promenade.

We have come to Suffolk's garden resort to walk north to Felixstowe Ferry. This saunter, from the war memorial to the mouth of the River Deben, takes in historic seafront gardens, sand and shingle beaches, a classic golf links, a timeless boat-building hamlet and, for some, arguably the best view in Suffolk. Inevitably, for part of our walk, there are some restrictions.

"Felixstowe is a great place to come for all the family, including with our four-

legged friends," says Steve Gallant, Suffolk Coastal District Council's cabinet member responsible for community health. "It's important however that we balance the needs of all. In the centre of the resort of Felixstowe, there's an area of beach that is designated as dog-free between May and September." Steve, a Felixstowe resident and dog walker himself, says that at Landguard Point dogs are welcome but must be kept on a short, fixed lead to protect the valuable wildlife and habitats in this area. There are no restrictions on the rest of the beach, other than for owners to clean up after their dogs.

In the year that we've been walking Farley around Suffolk his manners have improved. At three years old, he walks beautifully for the short distance where



HOW FAR?

- Felixstowe War Memorial to Cobbold Point - 1 mile
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- Cobbold Point to golf club Martello Tower - 1.2 miles
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- Martello Tower to Ferry Boat Inn - 0.65 mile
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- Ferry Boat Inn to Kingsfleet - 1.15 miles
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- Kingsfleet to Ferry Rd - 2 miles
-
- Ferry Road to Old Felixstowe church - 1 mile
-
- Old Felixstowe church to War Memorial - 1.4 miles
-
- Total - 8.4 miles**

VETS

- Ryder Davies & Partners
83 Queens Road
Felixstowe
IP11 7PE
T: 01394 284554
-
- Whitworth Vet Practice
Station Yard
Station Road
Trimley St Mary
IP11 0UB
Tel: 01394 271112

Seasonal dog restrictions apply to signposted areas of beach at Felixstowe between May 1 and September 30 each year. Dogs are not allowed on the beach in these areas at these times. For details visit eastssuffolk.gov.uk

dogs are to be kept on a lead on the promenade, and are not allowed on the beach. Once we leave the restricted zone he's off into the sand heading straight for the sea. It is mid-summer, and although there is a gentle southwesterly breeze, the sunshine between fair weather clouds makes for a pleasantly warm morning. Holidaymakers, day visitors and residents are making the most of the ice cream kiosks, chalets, beach huts and windbreaks.

But among this delightful essence of English seaside there is, at least for me, an aberration. As an islander and keen sailor

I love all things boating, and believe there is dignity in a vessel coming to the end of its life as scrap or a wreck. But to end up as a flower bed? I loathe rowing boats and sailing dinghies filled with soil and plants. I call them 'Dead Boats', and there's one here on the seafront at Felixstowe. It will be the first thing to go, if in my remaining years, I ever become Prime Minister.

There is no denying, Felixstowe waterfront looks rejuvenated and feels alive. Behind us, the redeveloped pier is a vast improvement, and the Fludyers Arms Hotel ahead looks every inch a fashionable and popular boutique hotel and restaurant. Steve agrees.

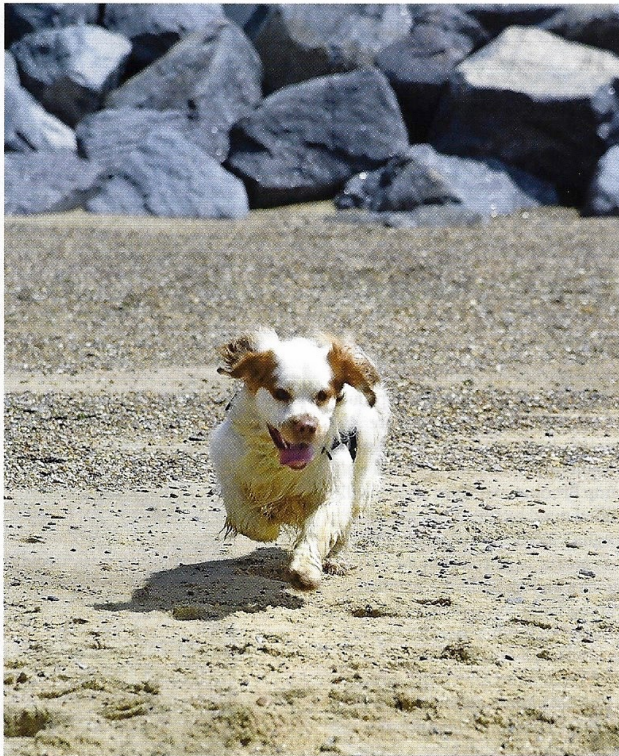
"There is a real buzz about Felixstowe at the moment. The town is really on the up and attracting more and more visitors. In recent years it has benefited from significant investment from both public and private purses. The Seafront Gardens are a real magnet for visitors and residents. The new pier head building and boardwalk is an impressive sight and the Spa Pavilion provides a diverse range of entertainment from pantomime, summer specials and tribute bands."

High above us on the cliff line, the former Felix Hotel, now luxury retirement apartments, looks out majestically over the approaches to Harwich and the River Deben. Below, a Thames barge under full sail, silhouetted against a bright horizon, pushes gently against a rising tide. We pass



Caption





Caption

beach huts and ponder their names. 'Gulls and Buoys'. 'Casita de la Playa'. 'Kingsfield'. Is there is a difference between a beach hut and a shed, I wonder. £15,000 perhaps?. I notice some huts have vertical slats and some horizontal ones. The subject of beach huts clearly needs more study.

Within moments this thriving seaside vanishes around the corner of Cobbold Point. We drop down from the concrete access around the headland onto the shingle beach. Here, we are almost alone on 140 metres of sheltered shingle beach. Four groynes segment the shore into smaller, virtually private suntraps, although from the sharp intakes of breath of a young couple stepping into the surf, we guess the sea remains decidedly chilly.

Further along the shoreline, towards the Deben mouth, a seawall denotes the coastal path alongside Felixstowe Ferry Golf Club to the hamlet. The course is one of only 26 true links courses in the UK and is one of the oldest. Its 18 putting surfaces stand out, oases of green among parched fairways, sea grasses and sand traps. In the freshening breeze, two golfers tee-off from the 14th tee adjacent to a Martello Tower just metres from the beach.

The view from here along the golf course, to Felixstowe Ferry, across the River Deben to Bawdsey Manor and beyond is arguably

'The view along the golf course, to Felixstowe Ferry, across the River Deben to Bawdsey Manor and beyond is arguably as pleasing as any in Suffolk.'

as pleasing as any in Suffolk. 'The Ferry' (as locals call it) has changed little over the last 50 years. Twenty-nine houses nestle around a green, a boatyard, sailing club, slipway, two cafes and The Ferry Boat Inn (FBI), which hosts us for lunch. It has a dog-friendly bar and beer garden. The food is great. It was a difficult choice though. Just 100 metres nearer the harbour, The Ferry Café has ample outside seating for dogs and their owners. It has been serving honest English food and drinks to visitors and locals since 1946, and its 1950s theme keeps the past alive in this timeless idyll.

As we walk along the flood bank in front of the sailing club, where the red buoys marking the navigation channel, the flood tide is at its strongest. The sea rushes in, burbling and swirling. I'm not sure I would want to swim, or let Farley into the water, in such a racing tide. "Tides run really strongly here," says veteran harbour master, John White, who has spent all his working life at The Ferry. He says, there are safe places to swim, but some are risky and he has pulled people out of the water. But, he says, he has never had to pull a dog out. "They've mostly got more sense than their owners," he jokes. "Owners jump in after their dogs and most of the time dogs can get themselves out. They're not daft."

We stroll across Millennium Green, around the boatyard and moorings for another three-quarters of a mile to Kingsfleet creek, then we return the way we have come, until we cross behind the golf course into Ferry Road and through 'old Felixstowe' back to the seafront. Although this walk is mainly linear, not circular, it matters not. There is so much to see and savour in this unspoilt part of the county that we leave not with a sense of having done the same walk twice, but with a desire to come back to do it all over again. ♦



Caption