



SUFFOLK DOG WALKS

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



Southwold Harbour - a working harbour full of interest

"THERE'S no such thing as bad weather – only bad clothing." I leave Southwold for a day's walk with wife Clare and our Clumber spaniel, Farley, and wonder whether my shorts and a t-shirt will indeed be 'bad clothing' during the coming hours of intense, midsummer sunshine.

This Suffolk seaside town offers such a choice of places to walk that we can go where the day takes us. First, we must decide whether to head for the beach or the harbour. Although dogs are welcome on the beach there are some restrictions. Councillor Graham Catchpole, of Waveney District Council, says the council recognises that part of the pleasure of owning a dog comes from going for walks on the beach:

"We want to address the wishes of all beach users and feel that the restrictions balance the needs of both dog and non-dog owners, and will allow our beaches to remain accessible and enjoyable for everyone."

From April 1 to September 30 no dogs are allowed on the beach for half a mile from the northern-most end of the promenade along to the southern-most end of the promenade. There are no restrictions outside this area.

LEAD ON . . . BUT MOSTLY OFF

From the free parking on York Road adjacent to the cricket club we head off towards the

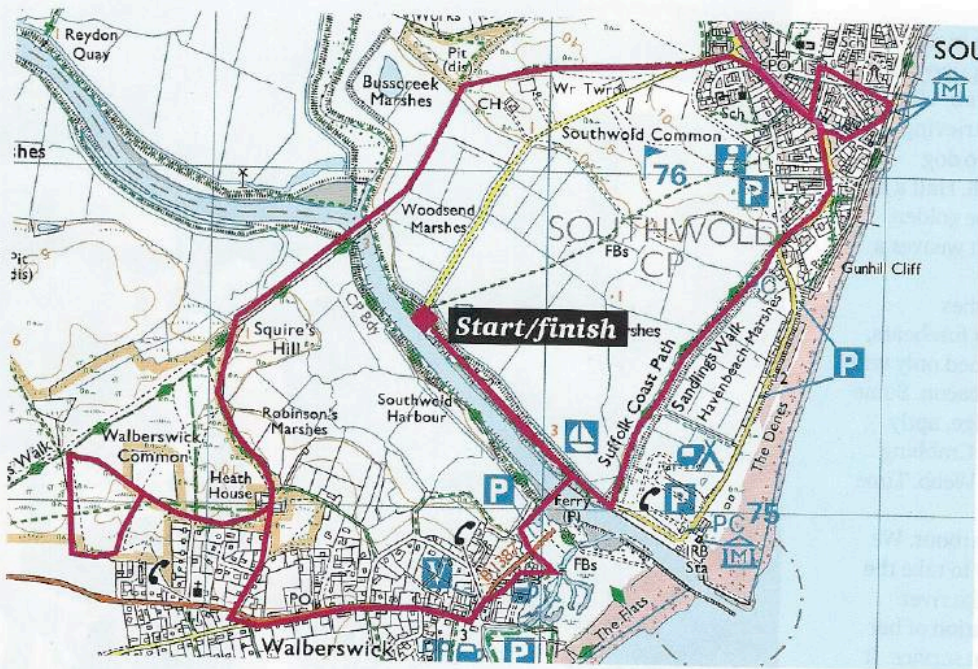
Heath to harbour

*... with some dunes and sea swimming too.
Clumber spaniel Farley enjoys a circular stroll
from Southwold to Walberswick and back with
owners Mike and Clare Trippitt*



Crabbing on Wally's Bridge

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HOW FAR?

Distances from the car park (the start of the walk)

1. Bailey Bridge (far side) **0.75 miles**
-
2. Heath House Walberswick **1.4 miles**
-
3. Heath House after walk round common **2.4 miles**
-
4. Village green/village sign **3.1 miles**
-
5. The Bell public house **3.2 miles**
-
6. The ferry **3.4 miles**
-
7. The Harbour Inn **3.9 miles**
-
8. Top of Harbour Road **4.9 miles**
-
9. St James Green **5.3 miles**
-
10. Back to the car park **6 miles**
-

The nearest vet is Wangford Veterinary Clinic Pound Corner, Wangford, Beccles. Tel: 01502 578999



harbour. Farley can cool off in the sea later in the day. Southwold's 'old' and 'new' water towers stand conspicuously next to its golf club. We walk behind them, our heads up admiring the views. Farley walks in front of us, nose down enjoying the smells. For a short distance, the path dissects this famous heathland golf course, so dogs should be kept on leads and care taken when crossing the fairways.

A track to Palmers Lane passes through a copse of gorse. Twice in May this year, 60,000 sq metres of heath were damaged by fire. The smell of charred wood lingers, while blackened trunks and branches create an eerie air.

After three-quarters of a mile, a Bailey bridge spans the River Blyth. St Andrew's Church, Walberswick nestles in trees on the horizon beyond. Reydon Marshes stretch for miles. Birds chatter, a breeze flutters, and cumulus clouds hang lazily in a rich blue canopy. The hot summer morning tingles every sense.

Just before the bridge a bridleway to the harbour and a path back up to the common would give us a gentle stroll of two-and-a-half miles. But instead, we cross the bridge heading southwest. Curiosity draws us onto Walberswick common. It is our first visit to this patchwork of fern, gorse and grasses, sewn together with pathways and bridleways. It will add a mile to our walk. Dogs can remain off the lead at all times on the public rights of way but, to protect ground-nesting birds, they must be on the lead on other paths from March 1 to July 31. The Sandlings Walk – 55 miles of path through Suffolk's sandlings from Ipswich to Southwold – passes through the common, as did the old narrow-gauge Southwold Railway. Part of the Walberswick station platform remains, though trains last ran in 1929. While here, we see no one. The views to Southwold, the river and the harbour disappear. We are

gloriously isolated, and could be anywhere or nowhere. We will certainly be back.

Walberswick, a thriving town in the 15th and 16th century due to shipbuilding and fishing, has relaxed to the idyll it is today. It boasts famous writers, broadcasters, and film producers as its residents. Its undeniable charm makes it a popular choice for second-home owners.

The Bell Inn, close to sand dunes and the picture-postcard village green, is busy in the early afternoon. We have lunch here, although The Anchor Inn would also have served us well. Both are dog friendly, and have extensive, reasonably priced menus. Families, walkers and dog owners all find shelter from the sun under parasols in The Bell's large garden. Dogs hide beneath tables. Those shorts and t-shirts that leave arms, legs and necks exposed look a poor choice now.



Farley follows his nose on Walberswick Common

After lunch, Farley gets his time in the sea. He took to the 'wiggly water' as a puppy and seems to sense when salt is in the air. His enthusiasm for swimming and retrieving always raises a smile. There are no dog restrictions on Walberswick beach. Half a mile of dunes and marshes separate the golden sand from the Dunwich River as it weaves a path to the sea.

Here, among saltings and marshes youngsters and parents, like their forebears, spend summer days crabbing armed only with a line, a bucket and a handful of bacon. Some have a prime spot on Wally's Bridge, aptly named after village stalwart and Crabbing Championship co-founder Wally Webb. Time can almost stand still here.

So too, it would seem, at the harbour. We stroll the short distance to a jetty to take the ferry the 60 metres back across the river.

Dani Church is the fifth generation of her family to operate the rowing boat service. It has been her life since her father, David, died in 2001. She says she has the most beautiful setting in which to do her job:

"The people are lovely, I am surrounded by wildlife and the river. It's a beautiful area." Importantly, Farley can travel on the boat.

"Dogs are very welcome," she says. "We love having dogs on our ferry. Passengers can bring them free of charge. In most boatloads I have a dog on board, and had four on a river trip I have just done. I have a dog and she's on the boat with me as well."

BEAUTIFUL BLACKSHORE

Across the water Southwold's Blackshore is unique. Change here is slow, subtle and sympathetic. Dark fishermen's huts stand almost randomly along the dusty, bumpy track. Wooden jetties, some new, some weary with age, stretch into the water as if stapling the riverbank down.

A Southwold trip is not complete without a half-mile stroll along the Blackshore. As it is



Time for a rest - Clare and Farley

"There is something of interest at every turn, restaurants, galleries, boutiques and tearooms"

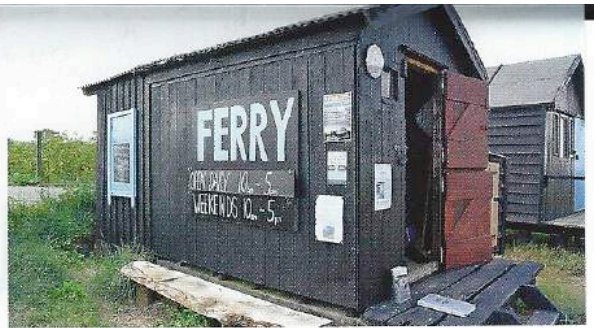
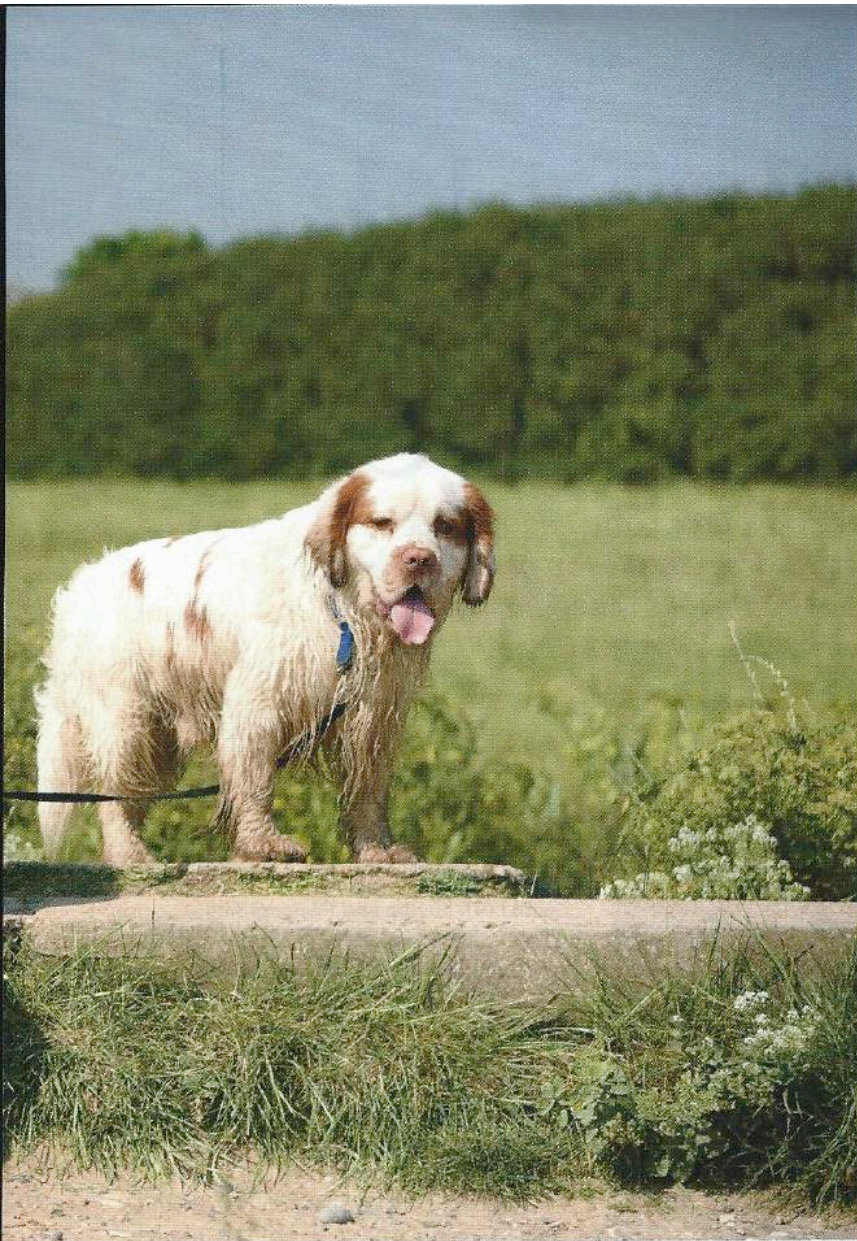


Walberswick village

a working harbour Farley is back on his lead. We quench our thirst at the Harbour Inn, though outside there is nowhere to escape the sun and heat.

Our walk back to where we began takes us on the latter part of Sandlings Walk and part of the Suffolk Coast Path, behind the campsite, across the marshes and up Constitution Hill. On this summer's afternoon the town is awash with visitors, many sauntering with a Labrador, spaniel or French bulldog for company.

There is something of interest at every turn, restaurants, galleries, boutiques and tearooms. Along the High Street and nearing our journey's end we pause a while at The Southwold Gallery. Its owner, local artist Karen Keable, has a piece of Southwold in her heart.



The Walberswick ferry - dogs are welcome aboard

"I love how traditional Southwold is," she says. "There is still a town crier to deliver the news, and the processions and marching band are a joy to behold. People are friendly, everyone says good morning, and the town and surrounds are stunning." She also draws her inspiration from here.

"From an artist's point of view I love the big skies and the drama that the terrific light casts on simple coastal life. The working harbour is ever changing. Boats are left to weather on the shore, fishing paraphernalia, folk and the shifting tides make for daily, refreshing painting material."

By 5pm we are back. The sun remains high and the afternoon still warm. Our shoulders and necks feel sore – T-shirts without collars were a bad idea! We have walked six miles, Farley many more. The town, the village, the heathland, the beach, the dunes and marshes provide such a variety that there is something for everyone. There are walks of a mile or less, to ten miles or more.

Southwold and Walberswick, their people and places, were a delight today. It is easy to enjoy walking in this beautiful part of Suffolk again and again . . . whether you have four legs or two. ♦



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