



DISCOVER THE SECRET  
**SOMERSET COAST**

# WALK 1: MINEHEAD TO BREAN

**Length:** 58 miles

**Difficulty:** Easy, moderate and hard sections

**Theme:** Nature, History and Geology

**Notes:** Some sections of the walk are tidal - please check tide times before setting off. Dogs are welcome but need to be kept under close control on working farmland.

**Good For:**



## 1. Minehead

West Somerset's premier seaside town Minehead grew from a small fishing village and port into a popular and genteel Victorian resort. In 1962 one of the first Butlin's Holiday Camps was opened and the town's tradition of welcoming people from all over the country continues to this day. With its heritage trail around the thriving harbour to its long flat sandy beach and bustling promenade Minehead has something for everyone.

Park in the car park beyond the Quay and start at the Map sculpture which marks the beginning of the walk. Minehead has many cafes, restaurants and shops and three public toilets. There is a Tourist Information Point in the

Beach Hotel which also houses a small local museum. Leave the town to the east passing an elegant block of neo-Art Deco flats and at the end of the promenade follow a discreet path in front the golf course which takes you onto the Coast Path.

## **2. Dunster:**

Visiting this beautiful medieval village is like taking a step back in time with its ancient castle, yarn market and mill. And with more than 200 listed buildings it has been preserved for us all to enjoy. It is also one of the most stunning sections of the walk with beautiful wildflowers, exciting birdlife including Dunlin, Oystercatchers and Curlew, plus the chance to forage in a rock pool.

As you exit the path beyond the golf course, passing two Second World War pill-boxes, walk on the grass but keep to the seaward side along the frontages of the beach huts. At this point there are public toilets and a snack bar. Imposing Dunster Castle can be glimpsed inland on the headland.

## **3. Blue Anchor:**

As you walk this stretch of coast you can wave at the evocative steam trains chugging past on a former Great Western Railway branch line, now run by volunteers of the West Somerset Railway. The resort is a favourite with families and has an excellent café, pub and public toilets. The beach is also popular with fishermen and you can see the skeletal remains of wooden groynes and sea defences reaching out of the sand. It is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest running as far as Lilstock.

#### **4. Watchet:**

*The breathtakingly pretty town of Watchet really does have something for everyone with its two beaches, historic harbour, unique shops, museums, great restaurants and cafes and even a picturesque steam railway station. Steeped in history the town has seen them all from murderous knights to pirates, Kings to saints.*

*As you approach Watchet to descend the hill into the town you pass several earth mounds that are all that remain of the ancient Burgh of Watchet, one of King Alfred's defences against the Vikings. Watchet is also said to be where Samuel Taylor Coleridge was inspired to begin working on his famous poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. There are several cafes and public toilets.*

#### **5. St. Audries Bay:**

*With its beautiful waterfall plunging off the cliffs straight on to the beach below the bay is a firm family favourite. With steps down to the beach, fascinating red rock formations, amazing geology and fossils to be found amongst the pebbles, this walk will keep the little ones enthralled all day long. There's even the chance to spot herds of deer and buzzards. There are also toilets available and a little shop.*

#### **6. East Quantoxhead:**

*This is a quintessentially English village with its medieval church, glorious Grade I listed manor house, mill and duck pond. The walk includes everything from beautiful forest to farmland, stunning views over the Quantock Hills -*

England's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - and some of the Somerset Coast Path's most beautiful flora and fauna. The geology is also mesmerising, with limestone pavements and red rock formations, carved by the elements over millions of years.

### **7. Kilve:**

This is a part of Somerset's Jurassic Coast and attracts geologists from all over the world. Ammonites and reptile remains can be found in the rock formations and in the cliffs themselves you can see grey, honey, blue and red bands of rock formed at the time of the dinosaurs. There are public toilets and slightly inland there are tea-rooms open all year around.

### **8. Lilstock:**

This beautiful village with its small and historic harbour and two churches is also a must for history and geology lovers. You can still see the ruins of the old quay and the remains of ancient lime kilns. The parish was recorded in the Domesday book and is also known for its fascinating rock formations and amazing views. The walk from Kilve to Lilstock is an easy stretch and nature lovers will get the chance to spot larks soaring and singing, buzzards and a rich array of wild flowers including Pyramid Orchids and the rarer Bee Orchid.

### **9. Shurton:**

The coastline around the village of Shurton has its own rugged and beautiful features and a small, sandy beach. The geological formations make attractive geometric patterns with natural pavements of Blue Lias punctuated with rock

pools.

## **10. Hinkley:**

*The Somerset Coast Path takes a slight detour inland to circumvent the building of the new Hinkley C Nuclear Power Station. Work is expected to take more than 10 years and it will be the biggest construction project in Europe. The area itself is a treasure trove for archaeologists with recent digging work for the site revealing a prehistoric circular henge monument, Roman remains and isolated medieval farmsteads and longhouses. The surrounding mud flats are great for spotting wading birds.*

## **11. Stolford:**

*Regaining the Coast Path at Stolford you will follow pebble seawalls that protect farms and fishermen's cottages from the sea. You could also see Britain's last remaining mud-horse fisherman still at work using traditional wooden sledges to cross the mudflats and catch shrimp at the tide's edge. A small fish shop near the beach sells the delicious locally caught shrimp and at low tide the blackened stumps of a long gone prehistoric forest emerge. And you can find fossils amongst the bands of shale and limestone exposed at lower tides.*

## **12. Steart Marshes:**

*Along the coast to Steart, part of Bridgwater Bay, where an internationally important Nature Reserve is managed by Natural England. The Environment Agency recently joined forces with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust to create a traditional salt marsh - one of the UK's largest new wetland reserves. The Steart Marshes buffer homes and*

businesses from rising sea levels and provide habitat for a rich mix of wetland wildlife including otters, egrets, owls, waders and wildfowl. This part of the walk includes footpaths, bird-hides and toilet facilities. The walker must now head inland following the River Parrett Trail to Bridgwater.

### **13. Combwich:**

The next settlement is Combwich which was once a Roman Port exporting grain and salt to the entire Roman Empire. It became a fishing village and small port for its main industries, farming, brick, tile and brush making. The village lies on Combwich Reach and was the site of an ancient ferry crossing where the River Parrett flows to the sea. In the Domesday book its name meant 'the settlement at the short, broad, open valley.' There are no public toilets but there is a pub and general store.

### **14. Bridgwater:**

Bridgwater's history is fascinating, from medieval port and trading centre once protected by its imposing castle to successful industrial town. It's well worth a visit as you continue along the coast path, with its docks, stunning Georgian architecture, the oldest Arts Council funded Arts Centre in England, two fascinating museums featuring its illustrious history including the quirky Brick and Tile museum, as well as great shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants. A great place to stay along the walk.

### **15. Dunball to Highbridge:**

From Bridgwater follow the River Parrett northward where you can see Second World War fortifications. These were

part of the Taunton 'Stop Line' where the South West would have been defended if Germany invaded. A small commercial quay at Dunball is still trading in sand and aggregates. The Pawlett Hams provide rich pasture for sheep and dairy cattle and at Black Rock salmon returning to spawn used to be caught in withy traps laid along the riverbank.

## **16. Burnham-On-Sea:**

This small Victorian Seaside town has the shortest pier in the world, even though it is at the southern end of what is the second longest strip of sand in Europe. With a promenade and great seaside resort cafes, pubs and restaurants walkers can take a welcome break and soak up the views over the coastline and the mouth of the tidal River Parrett. The local voluntary rescue craft is a Hovercraft - essential to navigate the mud flats - and Burnham once boasted three lighthouses. Now only the famous wooden nine-legged stilt lighthouse remains. There are a number of shipwrecks off the coast, one of which is visible at low tide.

## **17. Berrow and Brean:**

This coastal belt is hugely popular with holidaymakers with acres of camping sites and holiday villages making up one of the largest concentrations of caravans on the continent. And there are reasons why people return again and again, from the area's small nature reserve where the Southern Marsh Orchid is protected amongst the sand dunes to its stunning views across the Bristol Channel to the islands of Steep Holm and Flat Holm - stunning at sun set. The area is popular with walkers, horse riders, wind surfers and sand artists thanks to the flat, open beaches with one of the world's highest tidal ranges.



## 18. Brean Down:

Described as Somerset's greatest natural pier the views from the top of the down will take your breath away as you look over the Bristol Channel to South Wales and the Somerset Levels. The area is of national importance and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument with 32 individual entries, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Grade 1 site for Nature Conservation. You can also travel through time as you pass through the prehistoric iron-age and Roman landscape, medieval field systems and Second World War fortifications. This limestone headland is a northern spur of the Mendip Hills and marks the end of this beautiful and fascinating walk.

## Interactive Map:

To view a map of the whole 58-mile route please visit our interactive map via the link: <https://goo.gl/nqRcZW>

