

# ‘Why I walk the coast’

Whether for inspiration, companionship, memories or necessity, Trust members, volunteers, supporters and staff share their stories with **Clare Gogerty**





## Irene Wilcox, member Walks for confidence

Last September, my husband and I were staying in our caravan on the Isle of Wight and one day we decided to visit the Needles Battery. The weather was lovely as we walked along the cliffs, the sun was sparkling on the Solent and behind us we could see the cliffs of Alum Bay. My husband is a keen walker but I have fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue and hadn't long been out of my wheelchair, so the steep walk ahead was daunting.

When we arrived at the Battery, I felt as though I had run a marathon and staggered upstairs to the café to reward myself with a cream tea. It was the closest I have ever been to the Needles so we had a good look at them and around the Battery. They walked slowly back to catch a bus to return us to Alum Bay. As we waited for the bus, we watched yachts below us racing along in the water, and saw rabbits sand a stoat.

When the bus arrived, I gratefully sank into a seat and felt a proud glow that I had completed such an uplifting walk with the most stunning views.

## Lizzy Tibble and Ken Tansley, volunteers Walk to be sociable

We are both members of Royston Ramblers in Hertfordshire and met on one of our weekday walks. We were both at a loss after losing our partners and it was through walking that we found each other and ourselves again. We have been together now for over 18 months and are still walking, either just the two of us or with groups. By walking with others we can always be sure of nice company and like-minded companions.

We love to head out on a coastal path because walking is the only way to access certain parts of the coast. We are often rewarded with exhilarating views of cliffs and rocky outcrops that we couldn't see otherwise. Some of our favourite walks are the South West Coast Path and Cleveland Way in Yorkshire. Last December we went on a walking holiday based in Whitby. Although it was cold we enjoyed the amazing view of Robin Hood's Bays as we approached it from the south.



## Sasha Harding, member Walks for inspiration

Two and a half years ago I needed fresh inspiration for my art exhibition and thought that walking the entire South West Coast Path would be a great way to get new ideas. I had read book about a man and his dog doing the walk in one go, and decided to do the same with mine, a Rhodesian Ridgeback called Jess.

During the walk, I was saturated with ideas and inspiration. Every time I rounded a headland, I was confronted with a different view. I didn't have to worry about bills, shopping or any of the usual everyday distractions. All I had to do was put one foot in front of the other. This freed me to really see what was around me and to jot down ideas for paintings.

One of my favourite days was day 42, from Exmouth to Sidmouth. I was fit after weeks of walking and as Jess and I set off along the seafloor, a low mist hung over the sea and there was not a breath of wind. I knew it was going to be a cracking day and it was. From the red cliffs of the Jurassic Coast, to the fishing fleet at Budleigh Salterton, it was a painter's dream.

## Ceri Victory-Rowe, member Walks to remember

The West Wales coastline is the landscape of my childhood and reminds me so much of my mother, who we lost to cancer in 2002.

Walking by the sea gives me feelings of freedom, space and energy. It is partly the sounds of a coastline empty of people – the birdsong, the constant tug of waves, the crunching of the path underfoot – and partly the almost metallic taste in the air. Then there are the views: slices of great, open sky and the sea every hue of blue and grey imaginable.

On wet, stormy days, I come home filled with excitement and energy. In sunshine, I let go of daily demands and see the bigger picture. By the end, I'll usually have clarity about what matters most to me. Sometimes I have a chat with my mother: as I walk – the coast provides space to remember her – probably prompting quizzical looks from passing walkers!

Earlier this year, I walked from the beautiful Bosherston Lily Ponds to Stackpole Quay and over to Barafundle and Broadhaven South. Walking there in the year I turned 40, and stealing some moments away from my young family, I felt exhilarated.

## Bob Smith, volunteer Walks to fundraise

From 8 June to 5 August this year, I carried a rfidnet along the Wales Coast Path as part of a trek to raise money for the Neptune Coastline Campaign. I took the rfidnet to all 333 places the Trust looks after around the Welsh coast, handing it over to anyone who wanted to join us for a day.

I volunteer at Glan Farnon on the Menai Strait and protecting our coastal heritage is very important to me. Every year the National Trust spends over £3,000 a mile to look after the Welsh coast, and the money raised by the trek will be used to create new footpaths and restore and improve habitats.

I've been lucky to have trekked in some beautiful places around the world, but I still find the coast of Wales the most inspirational. It's easy to forget how amazing our own coast is with its long, sandy beaches, towering cliffs, coves and rocks. Not only is it beautiful but the physical and mental health benefits of walking are proven. In Wales you are never far from the sea so I would urge anyone to get out there and enjoy it.

## Chris and Rachel Jones, members Walk long distances by accident

We've walked the entire South West Coast Path almost by accident. We started by walking a section in Dorset near Lymeham/Kimmeridge in 2007 and then, on a camping holiday a few years later, we decided to start at Poole and see how far we would get in a couple of weeks. We gradually increased the distance over the next four summer camping holidays – it got addictive.

We finished the final 80 miles of the path over the course of four days in October 2013, just a couple of days after we were approved to become adopters. We needed to dedicate our time to our new child and it seemed right for just the two of us to finish off the path. ➔

**Previous page** Bob Smith by the Menai Strait during his Wales Coast Path walk to raise money for the Neptune campaign.

**Above left** Irene Wilcox pauses for breath on her way to the Needles Battery.

**Below left** It was through walking that Lizzy Tibble and Ken Tansley found each other and rebuilt their lives after both losing their partners.

**Above** Sasha Harding and Jess at the top of Great Hangman, Exmouth, on day four of their walk around the South West Coast Path.

**Below** Welsh coastal walking backs strong memories of Ceri Victory-Rowe's mother. **Below right** South West Coast Path completers Chris and Rachel Jones, here walking in Cornwall.

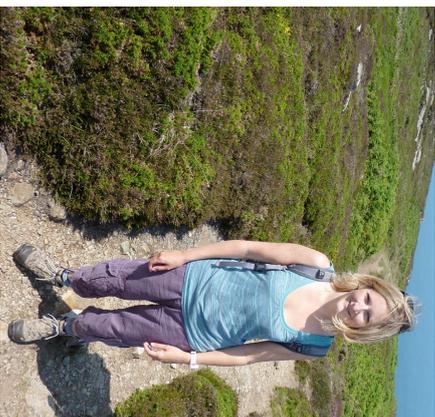
The way to really get to know a landscape is to walk through it. Once you get close to the earth, smell the air and see the wildlife, you begin to understand it. Nowhere is this more true than by the sea, where a walk along a coastal path is enticed by the calls of seabirds and the rustle of marram grass, and where a limitless horizon offers space for the eyes to wander and the mind to dream.

We are lucky in the UK that the coastline is so beautiful, dramatic and diverse, and that the National Trust looks after 773 miles of it, the most recent acquisition being the headland of Great Orme in North Wales. Soon everyone will get the chance to explore more of the English coastline as, thanks to anew right of access bill, more sections of the England Coast Path will open. The Trust is working with Natural England, local authorities and other partners, including the Ramblers, to help make this happen. When it is completed in 2020, the 2,796-mile (4,500km) route will be one of the longest coastal walking paths in the world, and a companion to the Wales Coast Path which opened in 2012.

So there really is no excuse not to put on a pair of boots, pack a waterproof and head to the coast. To encourage you, eight National Trust members, supporters, staff and volunteers here share their own personal reasons for walking the British coast. To help you get your own journey started, the National Trust's Great British Walk (see p38) has routes and ideas for everyone, both coastal and inland.

You might also consider joining in the South West Coast Path Challenge from 1 to 31 October, a fundraising event that aims to set the record for the number of times people can walk or run part of the 630-mile (1,014km) path in one month. Choose from a range of options from a one-mile stamper to tackling the entire route. Visit [southwestcoastpath.org.uk/events/challenge](http://southwestcoastpath.org.uk/events/challenge) for more information and to register.

Did you know it costs £3,000 a year to care for a mile of coast? If you'd like to donate to a stretch of coastline near you, please visit [nationaltrust.org.uk/mg/coastcampaign](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/mg/coastcampaign)





### Kevin Cosgrave, supporter Walks to spend time with his autistic son

I have a ten-year-old son, Ged, who is almost non-verbal autistic. He can wake up very early, so to give the rest of the family a chance to sleep, I take him to the coast.

One morning we were playing on our local beach in Hartlepool when he started walking north. Even though the sky was black, I followed his lead, and we walked more than seven miles all the way to Horden. Although Ged likes to walk he is reluctant to turn around, so we travelled back by bus.

My favourite walk is north of Easington, towards Seaham. It is so quiet and the only way to access the coast is on foot: there are no roads. This part of the country is often associated with coal mining but it is really beautiful, with cliffs dropping to the sea cut through with wooded denes. The coast around Souter, south of South Shields, is also superb. It is so varied with an old windmill, bays, caves, rock stacks and huge beaches.

Ged and I have now walked the whole North East coast from the Tees to the River Wansbeck, each time returning on the bus. We've had some great times and also some very difficult days, but the memories of the good ones get us through. I don't think Ged knows what we are doing but he does enjoy it. He is uncomfortable in many places and finds a lot of life hard, so this is a big positive for us. At the best times, he starts running, and on rare occasions to show he is happy, he will kiss me and just can't stop smiling.



### Paul Sayers, ranger Walks to work

I work at Downhill Demesne as a Visitor Experience Ranger, sharing my knowledge of the history of the estate with visitors. My commute to work starts with a 35-minute train journey travelling through the Lough Foyle wildlife sanctuary and then the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. From there I walk for 45 minutes through Downhill Demesne over the clifftops, passing the Mussenden Temple, from where I watch kittiwakes, skuas and gannets fishing. Passing Downhill Forest in the early morning is a great opportunity to watch the buzzards and peregrine falcons. The Demesne is quiet in the early morning and no two mornings are the same – a different sky and sea every day is an absolute joy.

The cliffs around the estate have suffered from erosion lately, and much work has been done to protect them and prevent falls on the railway track. A huge rockfall at the Demesne in April, which I pass every morning, really brings home the fragility of the coastline. ○



**Above left** Kevin Cosgrave and his autistic son Ged have shared happy times walking the North East coast.

**Above** Visitor Experience Ranger Paul Sayers passes the Mussenden Temple (middle) on his daily walk to work at Downhill Demesne, County Londonderry.



**Clare Gogerty** is the author of *The National Trust Book of the Coast*, and former editor of *Coast* magazine. Her favourite coastal walk is Tennyson Down on the Isle of Wight, although St Anthony Head on the Roseland Peninsula, Cornwall, comes a close second.



National Trust Images x 1

## Find your perfect walk

This autumn marks the fifth year of the Trust's Great British Walk, and this year we want you to find and share your favourite walk. Do you like to feel tired but exhilarated after a long walk, or relaxed and happy from spending time on an outdoor ramble with friends and family? Search through hundreds of downloadable trails at [nationaltrust.org.uk/mag/walking](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/mag/walking) and, once you've found your favourite, share what you love about it on Twitter @nationaltrust using #GBwalk.

People like walking for different reasons – to spot wildlife, to photograph beautiful views, to go at a gentler pace surrounded by nature, to meet like-minded people, or to explore new locations. Whether you take part in a walk that you know will interest you or try something completely new, there will be a variety of walking events taking place across the country for you to enjoy. Try a fungi foray at Brighstone Forest on the Isle of Wight or a historical walk through the city of Bath – or even an archaeological exploration at Leigh Woods in Bristol.

Sponsor of this year's Great British Walk, Cotswold Outdoor is dedicated to getting more people out and about in the countryside. From hikes up hills and woodland walks to strolls along secluded beaches, Cotswold Outdoor can kit you out with all the clothing and equipment you need to make the most of the National Trust's diverse locations.

For more information visit [cotswoldoutdoor.com/about-us](http://cotswoldoutdoor.com/about-us)

