

New stretch of the England Coast Path opens

- The Grain to Woolwich stretch connects the sea and the Thames Estuary to central London for the first time.
- The nearly 50-mile route forms a continuous walking trail on the south bank of the Thames to the coast at Grain in Kent.
- The route links with the existing Thames Path at Woolwich to create a continuous 'source to sea' National Trail along the length of the River Thames.

The new year brings a new trail for London and Kent residents and visitors to enjoy, to connect with nature and for health and wellbeing opportunities.

An incredibly varied 47.12-mile (75.85km) trail from the north Kent coast, along the wild reaches of the Thames Estuary which supports a wealth of wildlife, and beside the dynamic working tidal Thames in London, has been opened by Natural England today.

Marian Spain, Natural England Chief Executive said:

The 2,700-mile-long England Coast Path will be the longest coastal walking route in the world as well as England's newest National Trail. It follows the whole coast, passing through some of our finest coast and countryside as well as iconic seaside towns and places of marine industry, past and present.

At a time when the benefits of connecting with nature are clearer than ever, it's fabulous that we are opening up this 47 mile-long section of footpath from the capital to the Kent coast. Easily walkable in all weathers and readily accessible by public transport, it is a wonderful new recreational resource for the hundreds of thousands of people who live nearby, as well as a tourist attraction for those who will come from around the world to walk the whole Path.

This new trail covers a wealth of unique environments. As you set off from Grain on the Hoo Peninsula, you can enjoy views across to Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey, to Southend-on-Sea, and the confluence of the Medway and Thames.

Surprisingly so close to such an urban area are some of the remotest grazing marshes in the south east. Between Allhallows and Cliffe in Kent, you can walk more than 12 miles (nearly 20km) without passing another coastal village or car park. There are some gorgeous little pocket beaches and extensive mudflats full of wintering wading birds. Along the river, you may also see the occasional grey seal hauled up on one of the many small beaches.

In the Thames Estuary, the largest in England, the creeks, extensive mudflats, saltmarsh and grazing marshes support a wealth of wildlife of national and international importance. During the winter months, you'll see flocks of waterbirds such as avocet, knot and dunlin and the nature reserve at Cliffe Pools in Kent is a popular spot for bird watching.

The Thames Estuary also has a long and rich military and industrial history. You can see forts such as Shornemead, near Gravesend, which were installed to protect London in the 1860s. You pass under the largest pylon in the UK and can look up at the impressive Queen Elizabeth II Bridge, which is the busiest estuarial crossing in Europe.

A new section of the path will also take visitors through the recently designated Site of Special Scientific Interest at Swanscombe Peninsula, where an industrial history has resulted in habitats that provide ideal conditions for a unique variety of wildlife.

As you walk beside the Thames, the busiest working port in the UK, the boat traffic provides a fascinating view into this dynamic working river. There are many independently run wharves handling goods arriving by large maritime vessels.

As you arrive in Woolwich, with great views of London's skyline, the [England Coast](#) Path meets the existing Thames Path National Trail. You pass the impressive Thames Barrier, which protects London from flooding, and can walk along the Thames to its source in the Cotswolds. This new stretch of the England Coast Path completes a 'source to sea' walking route along the country's most famous river.

Lord Benyon, Minister for Rural Affairs and access to nature said:

The England Coast Path is greatly improving access to our cherished coastlines and connecting people across the country with nature, in line with our 25 Year Environment Plan. Home to a diverse array of bird life at this time of year, this latest stretch links the salt marshes and mudflats of the Thames Estuary with the heart of London. I encourage people of all ages and abilities to venture outdoors and explore this fantastic new path for themselves.

Mike Hill, Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services said:

The opening of this section of the England Coast Path extends opportunities for local residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors and to discover some hidden gems along the lower Thames and North Kent coast. This really is an extremely varied stretch of coastline rich in wildlife and with a long history of industry, trade and transport. The result is a walk full of contrast and interest that will help support the health and wellbeing of visitors and the local economy.

Cllr Phil Filmer, Medway Council's Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services, said:

Medway is proud to have two National Trails in our area including the England Coast Path, which is the longest, continuous, coastal trail in the world. Medway is also home to the Thames Path extension from Greenwich to Grain, making this trail a 'Source to Sea' walking route. We are delighted to have been part of this historic project that gives people even more opportunities to connect with nature and explore new pathways and views. As well as giving Medway residents access to new trails, we look forward to welcoming new visitors to Medway where they can enjoy 1,900 hectares of rich and varied greenspaces.

Natural England has worked with a number of partners to develop this trail, especially the four Access Authorities – Kent County Council, Medway Council, London Borough of Bexley and Royal Borough of Greenwich, who have worked on this project from the start and will be taking on management of the path now that it is open.

Find out more about the England Coast Path [here](#).

For more information about the walking route, visit: www.nationaltrail.co.uk

For more information about the Thames Path visit: [Thames Path – National Trails](#) where you can also find more information about the Source to sea.