

New stretch of England Coast Path joining Somerset and North Somerset complete

- 13.4-mile stretch of the England Coast Path completes the trail in Somerset
- Route highlights include Bleadon Levels Nature Reserve which is home to skylarks, waders and otters

A 13.4-mile section of the England Coast Path from Beach Road car park (Sand Bay) to Brean Down Fort opens today (16 June), creating a continuous coastal trail through Somerset to Minehead, where the South West Coast Path begins. The unveiling took place at Brean Down Sluice, the point that marks the crossing between Somerset County and North Somerset County. The path will also form part of the 'Tidal Trail', a circular route from Uphill Beach Car Park.

This is the latest section of the 2,700 mile England Coast Path (ECP) to be opened by Natural England. The new path stretches through Weston-super-Mare – one of the original British seaside resorts – and is the first section of the path to be opened in North Somerset.

Natural England has worked in collaboration with North Somerset Council, Somerset Council, Wessex Water, Environment Agency, local landowners and many other local partners to make the route available and accessible to the public.

Walkers will now be able to traverse the complete coastal route of Fiddlers Point which boasts uninterrupted views of the Severn Estuary and Birnbeck pier.

Local and visitor highlights of the stretch include:

- Bleadon Levels Nature Reserve which consists of wetlands and saltmarsh. Skylarks, waders and otters are often visible from the bird hides overlooking the lagoon
- The grand pier at Weston-super-Mare beach
- The limestone grassland of Walborough Nature Reserve which is home to nationally rare flora including the Somerset hair-grass and honewort
- Wildfowl and waders on the estuary during the autumn and winter, including redshank, dunlin and black-tailed godwit
- Wheelchair accessible paths at Weston Prom

Rachel Williams, Area Manager for Wessex at Natural England said:

We're pleased to open this new section of the England Coast Path today, over 13 miles of spectacular views boasting some of our region's most iconic wildlife.

We know that just two hours of contact with nature a week can significantly boost our health and wellbeing. This path is a welcome addition for both Somerset and North Somerset and will provide both the local community and visitors and tourists from further afield more opportunities to access the coast and connect with nature.

Councillor Mike Soloman, North Somerset Council executive member for neighbourhoods and community services, said:

I am delighted that this first section is officially recognised and that our residents and visitors will be able to enjoy our beautiful coastline more easily. It is great that this project, carried out in partnership with Natural England, is reaching completion which is incredibly exciting for future tourism and our economy.

Peter Hobley, Rights of Way Service Manager, Somerset County Council, Somerset Council said:

This latest section of the England Coast Path sees the provision of National Trail status on the whole of the Somerset coastline creating a fantastic, nationally recognised resource for Somerset residents and visitors alike. The Somerset coast is spectacular and diverse and walking the Trail is a great way to experience it and take advantage of the many positive benefits including mental and physical health and supporting the local economy.

The route along the west bank of the Axe is seasonal and will only be open 16 April – 15 July each year as waterbirds such as redshank feed and roost in this area during the overwintering period. To conserve the bird's energy and reduce disturbance to them, Natural England made the difficult decision to close the path while they are present to give them the best chance of survival. Alternative routes will be available during closed periods.

When complete, the England Coast Path will be the longest continuous coastal path in the world. This National Trail will encompass the entire English coast, passing through some of the most stunning, dynamic and internationally recognised scenery.

The England Coast Path will provide more people with the opportunity to experience the natural environment, as is part of the government's ambition to connect people with nature outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan. Coastal communities and businesses are also set to benefit from increased visitors to these areas.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 places a duty on the Secretary of State and Natural England to secure a long-distance walking trail around the open coast of England, together with public access rights to a wider area of

land along the way for people to enjoy. Natural England is working on the entire coastal route. A map showing a timetable for the work is here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-coast-path-overview-of-progress.

As well as new sections of trail, there are improvements to existing access along the coastline that:

- identify a clear and continuous way-marked walking route along this part of the coast, bringing some sections of the existing coastal footpath closer to the sea and linking some places together for the first time
- allow the route to 'roll back' if the coastline erodes, shifts or slips, solving the long-standing difficulties of maintaining a continuous route along the coast

For more information, visit

www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-improving-public-access-to-the-coast and www.nationaltrail.co.uk/.

The [Countryside Code](#), recently updated, is the official guide on how to enjoy nature and treat both it, and the people who live and work there, with respect.