

Bleak, beautiful, evocative & poignant... 5½ miles


Orford Ness, Suffolk




A fascinating walk across one of Suffolk's most unusual coastal landscapes. Orford Ness was a top secret military test site for most of the 20th century, but now everyone can discover its unique variety of wildlife and intriguing historic landmarks.

Start: Orford Quay – grid ref: TM 429494 – maps: OS Landranger 169, Explorer 212

Getting here & local facilities...

By foot/bike: Suffolk Coast Path passes Orford Quay and National Cycle Network bike routes connect with Orford as they meander through the Suffolk countryside

By bus: regular bus service, Orford-Ipswich, passing through Woodbridge and Melton 

By car: on the Suffolk coast, 12 miles E of Woodbridge , 10 miles E of Melton  and 9 miles SE of Wickham Market . It is the final destination of the B1084, 12 miles E of the A12

Please note: Access to Orford Ness is only via a National Trust ferry from Orford Quay in Orford village, therefore this walk is only available on a normal open day. A ferry charge applies to all visitors, including NT members. Non-members pay an additional admission charge. Check our website, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/orfordness or call 01728 648024 for further details.

WC on Orford Ness, but no café or shop, so bring your own food & drink. WC, tea room & pubs at Orford Quay and village. Contact us on 01394 450900 or orfordness@nationaltrust.org.uk

Things to look out for...

Vegetated shingle

Orford Ness is a ten mile long vegetated shingle spit, divided from the mainland by the River Alde/Ore, consisting of shingle, salt marshes, mudflats and lagoons. This globally rare and fragile habitat was badly damaged when the Ness was a military testing site and later from walkers straying onto the shingle. It is now recovering and becoming increasingly rich in wildlife.

Grazing marshes

The grazing marshes were once the site of early aerial warfare and radar development. The mixture of short, long and tussocky grass creates ideal habitat for ground nesting waders such as lapwing and redshank and meadow birds such as skylark and meadow pipit.

Military history

From 1913 until the mid 1980s Orford Ness was a secret military testing site. There are several historic military buildings, some of which were used in the development of atomic weapons.



An old Ministry of Defence sign on Kings Marsh serves as a reminder of Orford Ness' history as a bombing and firing range. For much of the 20th century, pioneering military experiments were carried out here, including the first development of radar.

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First recorded in Britain in 1575 on Orford Ness, the sea pea almost disappeared completely. Now it flourishes again here. Look out for pretty bluish purple flowers in summer along much of the drift line, just behind the beach.



Stony Ditch is a wide and shallow tidal creek that flows through the centre of Orford Ness. At low tide, a large expanse of mud and salt marsh is revealed. This is a great spot to see wading birds and wildfowl like curlew and oystercatcher feeding on the nutritious mud and salt marsh.

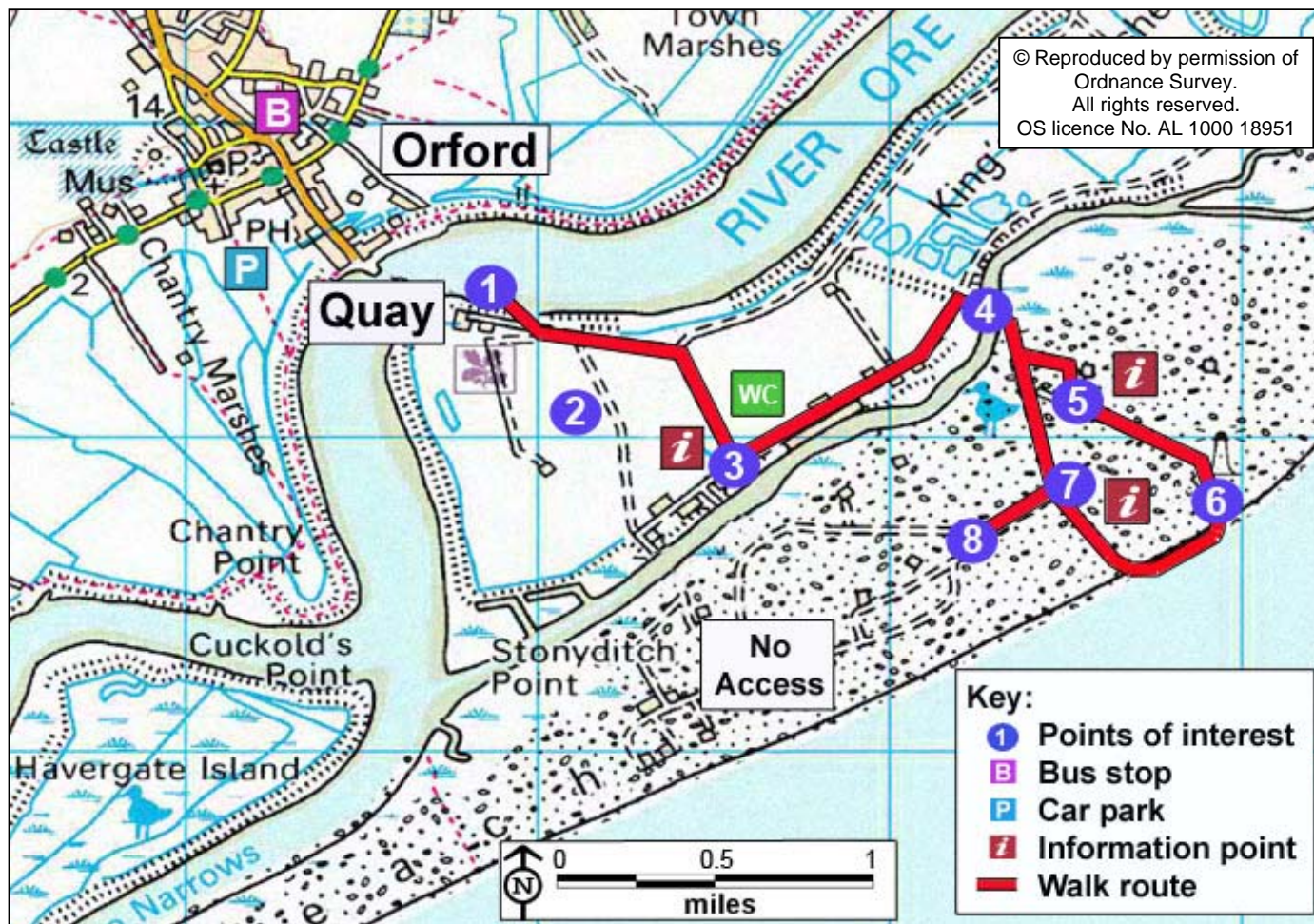
**Orford Ness was a bombing and firing range for 80 years. Unexploded ordnance is still found here.
It is very important to keep to the paths and not touch suspicious objects. Please also be prepared for unexpected changes in the weather.**

Directions...

1. Take the *Octavia* ferry to the Ness and hand your ticket to a warden on arrival.
2. Follow the red arrows. As you approach the Information Building, look around you at the First World War airfields and later firing ranges. These are now used by breeding waders and wintering wildfowl.
3. Visit the information displays in the former site HQ to find out more about the Ness' ecology and history. Exit the buildings and return to the marked red trail. Pass the WCs on your left and at the 'gate' the track climbs upwards to the right towards the bridge.
4. Cross the Bailey bridge, taking you over Stony Ditch, and follow the red arrows ahead taking the left fork.
5. On reaching the Bomb Ballistics Building, climb to the top for superb views over the shingle and marsh. It was once a control centre for the bombing ranges.
6. Continue following the red arrows to the working lighthouse, owned by Trinity House. It was built in the late 18th century. From here, drop down onto the beach and turn right along the shore to reach the Police Tower. Turn inland and follow the red arrows.
7. Take a look at the information displays at the Black Beacon and Power House. Return to the main roadway turning left to walk to the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment site
8. Laboratory No.1. The first experiment on an atomic bomb at Orford Ness took place here. Return to the Black Beacon, then turn left back to the bridge. Cross it and follow the red arrows to your start point.

Terrain & accessibility...

5½ mile (9km) trail. Easy to moderate walking conditions along mostly tarmac tracks with some uneven, broken surfaces, several gentle slopes and steps into some buildings. Short optional section (¼ mile) on a shingle beach (unsuitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs). Steep steps onto and off ferry, slippery when wet.



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