THE VANGUARD WAY

(SOUTH TO NORTH)

A different experience in the other direction!

SECTION A
Newhaven to Exceat Bridge

Third edition 2025

VANGUARD WAY ROUTE GUIDE

SECTION A

Newhaven to Exceat Bridge

COLIN SAUNDERS

Third Edition (South-North) 2025
Version 3.1

This 3rd edition of the south-north route description was first published in 2025 and replaces the 1st edition published in 2011 and the 2nd edition published in 2017. It is only available as an online resource.

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To find out about changes to the route, please visit www.vanguardway.org.uk and click the 'latest news' button. Or visit our Facebook page (Vanguard Way Association).

Colin Saunders asserts his right to be identified as the author of this work. Whilst the information contained in this guide was believed to be correct at the time of writing, the author and publishers accept no responsibility for the consequences of any inaccuracies. However, we shall be pleased to receive your comments and information of alterations for consideration. Please email colin@vanguardway.org.uk or write to Colin Saunders, 35 Gerrards Close, Oakwood, London, N14 4RH, England.

Cover photo: Vanguard Way Footpath from Tide Mills towards Newhaven. The path runs through the ruins of Tide Mills Village – cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Kevin Gordon

SECTION A: NEWHAVEN TO EXCEAT BRIDGE
10.3 km(6.4 miles)

Distances from Newhaven Town Station to:

Tidemills	1.9 km	(1.2 miles)
>Bishopstone Station	3.1 km	(1.9 miles)
>Seaford Station	5.2 km	(3.3 miles)
Splash Point	6.0 km	(3.8 miles)
Cuckmere Haven	9.0 km	(5.7 miles)
Exceat Bridge	10.3 km	(6.4 miles)

Public transport

On route: Trains at Newhaven Town. Buses at Newhaven and Exceat Bridge.
Links with Bishopstone and Seaford stations, and with bus stops at Bishopstone and Seaford.

Abbreviations and symbols

Bw	=	bridleway	KA	=	keep ahead	N	=	north
CB	=	compass bearing	TL	=	turn left	S	=	south
FB	=	footbridge	TR	=	turn right	E	=	east
Fp	=	footpath	L	=	left	W	=	west
KG	=	kissing gate	R	=	right			
NP	=	no pavement (see below)						
Rd	=	road	m	=	metres			
Tk	=	track	km	=	kilometres			
VGW	=	Vanguard Way	>	=	off route			

= Bus = Cafés etc = Toilets

= Train = Pubs = Phone box

Ž = Taxi ã = Accommodation = Ferry

⊗ Take extra care – see below.

Route overview

<u>Going from south to north, the Vanguard Way now starts at Newhaven Town Station,</u> instead of the Harbour Station as in previous editions – this is because the latter now has a much reduced train service, also there are better facilities in the town centre, and the Harbour station area is uninspiring! Town Station is also just 200 metres from the ferry terminal. The route follows footpaths beside Mill Creek, passing the historic abandoned village of Tidemills, then there's a long stretch beside the sea through Seaford, passing a fascinating Martello tower. A steady climb up to Seaford Head brings the reward of the famous and spectacular view of the Seven Sisters in line ahead, but don't forget to look back as you climb for the equally fine view back across Seaford towards Brighton. There's an easy descent to Cuckmere Haven, where you can dip your toes in the English Channel – but take care as the current can be very strong. Finally you follow a level track to Exceat Bridge, where you cross the River Cuckmere (pronounced Cookmere). The section is level except for the ascent and descent over Seaford Head.

Lowest point:. Tidemills (1m). Highest point: Seaford Head (86m).

How to use this guide

Paragraphs are numbered for ease of reference. However, please note that this South-North version uses the same numbering system for locations along the route as the original North-South version, so they appear to run in reverse order, i.e. in this section from A(10.11) to A(10.1). (The individual route description

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paragraphs in this South-North section are preceded by the letter A to distinguish them from the North-South versions.)

The route is marked on Ordnance Survey Explorer and Landranger maps, though you should note that in some places it is incorrectly marked on some older maps - we draw your attention to specific instances where relevant. Maps showing the correct route are appended to this route guide. Grid references are given at each numbered point to help identify the route. The country is divided into 100 km squares identified by a two letter code, and following standard OS practice we include these letters in our grid references. In this section they are mostly in square TQ, but the stretch between Bishopstone and Westdean is in square TV.

In this route guide:

The actual route description is shown in black Roman (upright) text.

Links with stations and other key places off route are shown in boxes with a blue background.

Italic text is used for items that are not part of the main route description, including:
*- Key information about facilities (**see Vanguard Way Companion for more details**)*
*- Road and street names **
- Advice and asides.
* The mention of a road or street name does not necessarily mean that you will see this name on the spot, but it may be helpful if you need to be picked up or set down, or to find your position on a street map.

Underlined bold italic text indicates that more details can be found in the Commentary, which follows the route description.

Distances and altitudes are given in kilometres (km) and metres (m); but if you are more familiar with miles and yards, remember that 1km is about five eighths of a mile and that 100m is about the same as 110 yards. To roughly convert metres to feet, multiply by three and add 10 per cent.

⊗ **- Walking on roads and other hazards**
When walking, one should of course take care in all sorts of potentially hazardous situations, but especially when crossing or walking along roads. **Please read the 'Safety' chapter in our Introduction to the Route, which can be downloaded from our website vanguardway.org.uk.** We use this symbol ⊗ to draw your attention to situations that require extra care.

'**NP**' in the route description indicates that the road has no pavement or other provision for pedestrians. You should take great care when walking along them, as traffic may approach at speed. Generally, you should walk in single file along the right-hand side, but this may be dangerous at a right-hand bend, where you cannot see approaching traffic, and the driver, not seeing you, may keep too close to the bend. You should therefore follow the advice given in the Highway Code for such situations, which is: 'It may be safer to cross the road well before a right-hand bend so that oncoming traffic has a better chance of seeing you. Cross back after the bend.'

If walking in poor light conditions or in the dark, always wear something light, luminous or reflective on top, and carry a torch.

BEFORE SETTING OUT ALONG THE VANGUARD WAY

Please read the Introduction to the route, available from the 'Directions and maps' pages of our website www.vanguardway.org.uk. It contains important information that will be helpful when reading this route description.

ALL INFORMATION SHOWN IS SUBJECT TO ALTERATION WITHOUT NOTICE

This third edition of the South-North version of the Route Description is based on a completely new survey undertaken by members of the Vanguard Way Association in 2023.

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Inevitably changes to the route and facilities will occur, and we try to keep abreast of them. It is our intention to bring out an updated version of the Route Descriptions and Companion as necessary, **but please refer to the Latest News page on our website vanguardway.org.uk for any changes that may have taken place meanwhile. You might also like to join our Facebook page, where news of developments affecting the Vanguard Way will be posted – just search Vanguard Way Association. Another way would be to join the Association, as members are kept up to date through the bi-monthly VGW News – details on our website.**

We will always be pleased to hear about any changes you may find, in which case please email route@vanguardway.org.uk.

If your trip relies on the provision of public transport, catering etc, you are strongly advised to check in advance that they will be available on the day of your visit. Further information about these facilities is provided in the Vanguard Way Companion available at www.vanguardway.org.uk (click the 'Directions and Maps' button). If you carry a smartphone, there are apps that give up-to-date information on public transport. Search engines will provide information on refreshments, taxis and other services nearby. This can also be done on Google or Bing maps by typing e.g. 'Pubs Forest Row' in the search box, then the map will highlight locations together with website links if available.

PROBLEMS WHILE WALKING THE ROUTE

If you encounter an obstruction, closure or diversion on a public right of way, please tell us about it by emailing route@vanguardway.org.uk.

Section A(10) of the VGW (South-North) starts at Newhaven Town Station *[TQ 449 014]* in Lewes District in East Sussex.

Newhaven Town Station: direct trains from Brighton and Lewes. From Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London change at Brighton or Lewes.

*The **ferry terminal** is located 200 metres west of Newhaven Town Station (TQ 448 014). From its exit, KA along pavement on left-hand side of approach road/car park. Just past mini-roundabout TR across Rd and past bus stop to **Newhaven Town station** (if arriving by train TR out of station).*

The Engineer pub is 300m from Newhaven Town Station along the VGW, but does not open until 15:00 Mondays-Thursdays and noon Fridays to Sundays. There are more pubs in the town centre.

The ferry terminal has a café and toilets, and there are more cafés in the town centre (TL outside station).

ã *In the town centre.*

A(10.11) *[TQ 449 014]*
*For the whole of this section, you will see the signs of several other trails that coincide with the VGW: the **King Charles III England Coast Path** (ECP), the **European Coastal Path**, the **Seahaven Coastal Trail**, the **Sussex Ouse Valley Way** (all as far as Seaford), and the **Seaford Heritage Trail**. The VGW also coincides at several places in this section with **Avenue Verte**, a route for cyclists from London to Paris or vice versa via the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry.*

a) Arriving from Brighton and Lewes, from the exit of Newhaven Town Station TR. (Arriving from Seaford, you also have to cross the railway level crossing.)
b) Immediately TR again along Railway Road (changes to Clifton Road then Beach Road along the way), soon passing the Engineer pub .
c) Pass an entrance to Newhaven Harbour Station (Transit Road) to reach the South Gate into the East Quay of the Port of Newhaven.

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If starting from Newhaven Harbour Station, from the exit TL along Rd, then TR along link Rd and TR again to join the VGW along Beach Road.

A(10.10) *[TQ 449 009]*

a) Continue along Beach Road for 85m then follow earth Fp (with VGW sign) parallel to Rd and with railway on R.
b) Cross FB (39 steps up and down) over railway then continue along Fp between railway and Mill Creek. *Mill Creek is the former channel of the River Ouse. Here it disappears over a weir into the 'new' channel.*
c) In 55m at a path junction, the VGW continues ahead beside the creek. *It's very attractive scenically, but the path soon becomes narrow and uneven, and may be slippery in wet weather. A more comfortable but slightly longer alternative route is described below, but does not go through Tidemills village.*
d) Pass under McKinley Way (Newhaven Port Access Road). As Fp diverges from railway line continue 770m beside creek to cross Tk (Mill Drove) amidst the ruins of ***Tidemills village*** with its multitude of information panels. *Here, for just 800m, you pass through part of the* ***South Downs National Park***.

Alternative route following England Coast Path. At junction (c) above, TR along FB over creek, then TL to pass under McKinley Way bridge and bend R beside port buildings. At another junction TL to follow Tk near beach, passing Tidemills Village, then continue between creek and beach to rejoin VGW at sailing club.

A(10.9) *[TQ 459 002]*

a) KA on embankment beside dried out remains of creek (now shingle).
b) In 675m reach shingle beach beside caravan park and KA to ECP fingerpost.
c) Bear L along concrete Tk parallel to beach (former railway from Seaford to Tidemills, may be covered by shingle).
d) Pass Newhaven & Seaford Sailing Club at ***Bishopstone***, joining Seaford's Promenade and Marine Parade. *Note VGW metal signpost, where Sussex Ouse Valley Way starts/finishes. Also large house with turrets, called* ***The Buckle***. ***Bishopstone Station*** *is of interest in its own right (see link below).*

Galley café at Newhaven & Seaford Sailing Club, also two refreshment kiosks nearby.

In Buckle Car Park.

Link with Bishopstone Station *[330m, TV 469 998]*

a) Leave Promenade at VGW metal signpost opposite The Buckle, cross Marine Parade with care and TL along right-hand pavement.
b) Just before bridge TR up steps and ramp to station platform.

To Seaford, Newhaven, Lewes, Brighton. Change at Lewes or Brighton for Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and London.

If starting from Bishopstone Station:

a) Exit via ramp at west (Newhaven) end of platform.
b) At Rd, TL towards sea-front, ignoring rising Tk on L.
c) In 200m cross Rd and through gate to Promenade, and TL along it to join VGW.

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Link with Bishopstone bus stops *(for Seaford, Newhaven, Eastbourne and Brighton) [520m, TQ 470 002]*
a) Leave Promenade at VGW signpost and immediately TL along left-hand pavement.
b) Go under bridge and KA to main Rd.
c) TR for bus stops (this side for Newhaven and Brighton; far side for Seaford, Exceat and Eastbourne).

To Seaford, Exceat, Newhaven, Brighton and Eastbourne.

250m to L along main Rd.

If starting from Bishopstone bus stops:
a) TL along nearby Marine Parade towards railway embankment.
b) Using right-hand pavement, KA under bridge and continue for 200m.
c) Shortly after sailing club, TR through gate and TL along Promenade to join VGW.

A(10.8) *[TV 468 996]*

a) KA (passing open marshy area to your L, once an inlet of the sea) to follow sea side of wall along concrete-surfaced ***Bönningstedt Promenade***. *This may be covered in shingle after stormy weather and uncomfortable to walk on, in which case you may prefer to use the parallel pavement. Growing on the beach here is the rare sea kale plant, with its large green leaves and white flowers – please note that it is legally protected so must not be picked.*

**Dog owners should note that, from May 1st to September 30th, their pets are banned from a 700-metre section of the beach, from here to just past Dane Road, where the link with Seaford Station starts. Notices posted along the seafront show where the ban operates.*

b) In 800 metres rejoin Marine Parade* and KA along promenade beside it for 1 km to junction with Dane Road beside Eversley Court in ***Seaford***.

Café in Salts Recreation Ground just before Dane Road.

In Salts Recreation Ground, just before Dane Road.

Link with Seaford station *[400m, TQ 482 991]*
NB: If you wish to visit pubs and cafés in the town centre, it's better to divert at point A10.7a (see below).
a) TL along Dane Road, passing Morrisons supermarket.
b) At junction of five Rds (Clinton Place, town centre) bear L round corner along Station Approach to Seaford Station.

To Newhaven, Lewes, Brighton. Change at Lewes or Brighton for Gatwick Airport, East Croydon and central London.

Daily to Eastbourne, Newhaven and Brighton. Also 'Ramblerbus' on Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays during British Summer Time to Berwick Station.

Steamworks (at Seaford Station).

Several cafés and tearooms, also Trawlers fish-and-chips, near Seaford Station.

Good choice in town centre – see VGW Companion.

If starting from Seaford Station:
a) From station exit TR then immediately TR again along Dane Rd for 400 m to the Esplanade, where cross Rd with care ⊗ to go behind sea wall, then TL beside the beach to rejoin VGW.

A(10.7) *[TV 478 989]*

a) KA along concrete or paved Esplanade between beach and road for 750m to ***Martello Tower Number 74***.

Note the Martello Rotary Club's toposcope, which points out distances to well-known overseas locations. Opposite is the site of the former Esplanade Hotel.

Beach kiosk and café just before the Martello Tower. Also Frankie's Beach Café further along.

For the Wellington and Old Boot pubs, and High Street shops, (100-200 metres off route) TL along The Causeway, 150m beyond Frankie's Beach Café, or follow the blue and white seagull signs on the pavement.

In café building beside the Martello Tower.

A(10.6) *[TV 485 985]*

a) KA beside beach for 500m, passing two lots of colourful beach huts and the Holy Cow kiosk, to ***Splash Point***, where the Esplanade ends.

*Note the cream coloured building behind fields to your L – this is **Corsica Hall**. Also note the beacon ahead, erected and lit in 2022 especially for the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.*

NB: The distance to Cuckmere Haven on the signpost here is incorrectly shown as 4½ miles – it's actually 2½!

A(10.5) *[TV 487 982]*

a) After last beach hut bear L to VGW/ECP fingerposts (note the distance to Cuckmere Haven is 2½ not 4½ miles as shown) and ascend L hand winding Fp *(R hand one leads to a viewpoint with seats below the cliff. Here you re-enter the South Downs National Park and stay within it until reaching A27 road at Berwick. To see kittiwake nesting area, KA past jetty to end of promenade.)*

b) Just before concrete viewing area with seats TR up steps then follow coastal path – the line of which may change as erosion wears the cliffs away. *Away to your left rises the main ridge of the South Downs. Near the top take advantage of seats to sit and admire the view back over Seaford towards Brighton. On a very clear day you may be able to see more of the Sussex coast further west.*

c) Continue climbing up Hawks Brow to reach top of ***Seaford Head***.

A track to your left leads in 200m to the club house of Seaford Head Golf Club, which is open to the public for refreshments

***Keep well away from the cliff edge** – this applies all the way to Cuckmere Haven. These cliffs are eroded by a combination of natural forces (waves, storms, ice) and fall into the sea at an average half a metre each year. Sometimes large chunks fall away without warning. Some sections of the coastal path may be roped off, then you must follow the alternative path further inland.*

*Looking ahead from the top of Seaford Head you have possibly the most outstanding view on the whole of the VGW – and even in the whole of Southern England – of the **Seven Sisters**.*

*Dominating the view 13 km out to sea now is a vast array of turbines forming the **Rampion Offshore Wind Farm**, and you may see one of the yellow-hulled Newhaven-Dieppe ferries arriving at or departing from Newhaven Harbour.*

A(10.4) *[TV 494 978]*

a) KA with Seaford Golf Course on your L. *You shortly pass a sign indicating that you are entering **Seaford Head Nature Reserve**, which extends nearly all the way to Exceat Bridge. Almost hidden among shrubbery on your left is a 'space-age installation', which is actually a '**DVOR**'. Away to your L on the way down is **South Hill Barn** and the Chyngton Lane car park – if you need to reach it, a stile gives access to a direct Fp.*

Cotton's Coffee Bar at South Hill Barn (550m off route).

b) Descend dry valley ahead for 1.5 km. *On the way down you pass a steep and narrow cleft leading down to the sea – this is known as **Buckle Church**.*

c) At the foot KA across Hope Bottom, the southernmost point of the VGW. *This is a dry valley which provides an alternative route from **Hope Gap** up to Chyngton Lane car park. The surface here has recently been improved as part of a circular 'Miles Without Stiles' route from South Barn, which is intended to be accessible for those with limited mobility. Note that the steps down to the beach at Hope Gap have been closed for the foreseeable future as they are unsafe.*

d) Climb again for a short time over Short Cliff then descend to reach an ECP fingerpost beside cattle grid at start of a row of cottages.

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A(10.3) *[TV 514 976]*

Note that the route has been diverted here due to a cliff fall beside the beach. You can still access the beach as described in (b) below.

a) Ignore cattle grid and go half L down a small grassy field. *The conical cairn up to your L is the **Canadian War Memorial**.*

b) Reach another ECP fingerpost, where a FP leads R to beach at ***Cuckmere Haven***. *Here you will find the former **Cable Hut**, and a **pillbox** partially covered by vegetation. This footpath crosses anti-tank traps from the Second World War then continues as an alternative route beside the cut, which leads to the Cuckmere Inn, but it can be slippery and difficult to follow in places.*

It is expected that the rising sea level will affect the Cuckmere Estuary in due course, and the Environment Agency has proposed making changes to the current sea defences that may result in flooding of the reclaimed pastures adjacent to the Vanguard Way along the following stretch.

A(10.2) *[TV 515 977]*

a) Still in the same field, TL at fingerpost to go through KG and follow fenced Tk at foot of slope (Outbrook Bank) for 1.5 km, passing several gates and side Tks. *The hillside on your L is part of **Chyngton Farm**.*

c) KA through car park beside River Cuckmere to end of Section A of VGW (south-north) at:

A(10.1) *[TV 513 992]*

The ***Cuckmere Inn*** at ***Exceat Bridge***. *Note the information board beside the car park for the **Slater Trail**.*

🚌 *Daily to Seaford, Newhaven, Brighton and Eastbourne.*

🍺 *Cuckmere Inn.*

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COMMENTARY
on places shown in bold italics and underlined in the route description

A(10.10)

The small port of **Newhaven** developed at the expense of Seaford after the 16th century when the River Ouse was diverted directly into the sea here. The town is nowadays best known for its ferry to Dieppe, which started in 1847 when the railway was extended from Lewes by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. The LBSCR also provided the three original paddle steamers, called *Newhaven, Brighton* and *Dieppe.* The service became very popular as it was the most direct and cheapest train/sea route between London and Paris, but fell into the doldrums after the inexorable rise of Dover as the main Cross-Channel car ferry port and the opening of the Channel Tunnel. After a period during the 1990s when the future of the service was in doubt, it has been reinvigorated by the provision of modern vessels, largely through the intercession of the local authorities in Dieppe, whose economy relies heavily on the continuance of this service, and the support of Danish ferry company DFDS.

The present ferry terminal serving vehicles and foot passengers replaced one for foot passengers only near the Harbour Station. There was also a quayside Newhaven Marine Station to which 'boat trains' ran direct from London. That stood on the site of the London & Paris Hotel, the venue for some riotous parties thrown during the 1890s by a Mr Charles Wells, 'The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo', as described in the famous song. In 1913, the 23-year-old Vietnamese revolutionary and later prime minister Ho Chi Minh served as a pastry chef on the ferry. As a result, Newhaven is developing links with Vietnam, and a controversial monument to Ho Chi Minh has been erected in the town centre.

A substantial harbourside development around Newhaven Harbour Station is proposed by Newhaven Port & Properties, which if it comes about should brighten up the area as it includes waterfront renovation and retail activities in an attractive environment. As far as we are aware, this proposal should not significantly affect the VGW route, though may include a new ferry terminal further to seaward. The harbour was the base for construction of the Rampion Offshore Wind Farm (see below) and continues to be used as its operational and maintenance base.

The original settlement, called Meeching, was founded by Saxons in the 5th century. It lay on the far side of the harbour in the area around the present marina, below an Iron Age hill fort dating from around 400 BCE, now called Castle Hill. The Lords of the Manor of Meeching were the Gibbon family, one of whose members was Edward Gibbon, who is believed to have written some of his 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' here between 1776 and 1788.

Part of Castle Hill is now occupied by **Newhaven Fort** (also called Fort Newhaven) which was completed in 1871 close to the site of an earlier Napoleonic one. Now a military museum, its massive walls, ramparts, tunnels and gun emplacements help you experience what life was like in a 19th century Victorian Fortress. There are also displays about the First and Second World Wars. To reach the fort you have to continue into Newhaven town, cross the river, then turn left to follow the riverside walk, passing The Ark pub, then Fort Road for 1.5 km.

The bridge over the River Ouse features constantly in the day-to-day life of Newhaven, as it is frequently opened to allow vessels through. The present electrically operated swing bridge was built in 1974, replacing an earlier manually operated one of 1866. That had replaced a wooden drawbridge, which in 1784 replaced a ferry.

The Bridge Inn was built in the 17th century and is now a listed building. It featured in the first 'south-north crossing' of the Vanguard Way, as it were, in February 1848, when King Louis Philippe and Queen Marie Amélie, in flight from the French Second Republic (and amongst the earliest passengers of the Dieppe ferry), stayed overnight there and left for Croydon the following day.

The town centre, up the hill on the far side of the river, is a pleasant place to explore, with its intricate street pattern. St. Michael's Church dates from Norman times. Its graveyard contains a monument to the crew of HMS Brazen and its captain, James Hanson, all of whom (except one single survivor) lost their lives when

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the ship was wrecked off Newhaven in a terrible storm in 1800, at the end of a four-year voyage of exploration. As a result of this tragedy, Newhaven's lifeboat began service in 1803, well before the establishment of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution in 1824.

Also in the churchyard is the grave, dated 1785, of Thomas Tipper, a brewer, who was renowned for his Tipper Ale - some modern ales are still called Tipper in his memory. An inscription on the headstone provides a suitable epitaph for him and an epilogue for your completion of the Vanguard Way:

Reader, with kind regard this grave survey,
Nor heedless pass where Tipper's ashes lay,
Honest he was, ingenious blunt and kind,
And dared do, what few dare do, speak his mind.
Philosophy and history well he knew,
Was versed in physick and in surgery too;
The best old stingo he both brewed and sold,
Nor did one knavish act to get his gold.
He played through life a varied part,
And knew immortal Hudibras by heart.
Reader, in real truth such was the Man,
Be better, wiser, laugh more if you can.

The VGW coincides here with six other trails:

The **King Charles III England Coast Path** (ECP) is currently under development to follow as closely as possible the whole coast of the country, a distance of 4,500 km (2,795 miles). All of the ECP is now open where it coincides with the VGW, between Newhaven and Exceat, but the two routes follow slightly different routes in the Tidemills area, as explained the route description. In 2023, to mark his coronation, the trail was formally designated the King Charles III England Coast Path.

The **European Coastal Path** is the popular name for **European Long Distance Path E9**, which starts at Cape St Vincent (the south-western tip of Portugal), then follows for nearly 10,000 km (6,250 miles) the coasts of Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to finish at Narva-Jöesuu (the north-eastern tip of Estonia). It has an alternative route which crosses the Channel from Roscoff in Brittany to Plymouth, then follows the ECP to Dover, where it crosses back to France at Calais.

The 42-mile **Sussex Ouse Valley Way** joins the VGW as far as Seaford. Opened in 2005, it follows the River Ouse in Sussex from its source near Lower Beeding in the High Weald to the sea at Seaford Bay. This was the idea of Terry Owen and Peter Anderson, of the publishers Per-Rambulations, who also devised the Tandridge Border Path encountered later. It was established with the collaboration of East and West Sussex County Councils and the then Sussex Downs Conservation Board. The route runs for 67 km (42 miles) from Lower Beeding near Horsham to Seaford, passing close to Haywards Heath and through Lewes and Newhaven.

The **Seahaven Coastal Trail** is a 20 km (12½ miles) route for walkers from Saltdean to Exceat, promoted by a partnership of local authorities co-ordinated by the Sussex Community Development Association.

The **Seaford Heritage Trail** has been devised by the Seaford Community Partnership and follows an interesting two-hour route around the town, starting from the railway station. The same organisation is responsible for the 5-mile **Seaford Bay Exercise Path**, which starts at Splash Point, goes along the sea front then back along an inland route.

Avenue Verte is a route for cyclists from the London Eye in London to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris or vice versa, using the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry and encountering the VGW four times. It is 387 km (242 miles) long, excluding the ferry, thus providing a shorter route between the two capital cities than the alternative 'Classic route' via Dover-Calais (490 km/306 miles). From the ferry terminal at Newhaven, it takes a different route from the VGW to reach Marine Parade at Seaford, which they share almost to Splash

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Point. They rejoin between Exceat Bridge and the Visitor Centre, and at Alfriston, then follow almost completely different routes, only coming into contact again as they cross each other at Forest Row.

The 'forgotten village' of **Tidemills** (sometimes shown as two words) is well worth exploring, with interpretation panels scattered around to tell you the full, fascinating story. It contains the ruins of a former tide-powered corn-mill and the thriving village that once surrounded it. The flint-built mill opened in 1761, with flour being taken by barge up Mill Creek and the River Ouse to Lewes or by sea elsewhere. It was operated by the flow of water pushed into the surrounding ponds by tidal action, and for a while the building was surmounted by a windmill for extra power. In 1795 this was the scene of a mutiny by locally based troops in protest at prices and living conditions.

The arrival of the railway to Seaford in 1864 heralded the end for the mill. Although a branch came into Tidemills from Bishopstone, the development of the east quay at Newhaven for the railway closed Mill Creek. It then became cheaper to send corn away for milling, and the mill closed in 1883. Another branch of the railway came here from Newhaven, to carry ballast. Traces of the track beds can still be seen. The mill continued in use as a warehouse until 1900 and was demolished in 1901. The village housed about a hundred mill workers and remained occupied until 1940.

During the First World War a seaplane station operated from the beach to the west. In the 1920s and '30s a Chailey Heritage hospital was actually built on the beach for boys with physical disabilities, and a horse hospital occupied part of the village. During the Second World War, the buildings were demolished to prevent their use as cover for invading troops, and the remains were used for hand-to-hand fighting practice. In 2004 a number of organisations worked together to reveal more of the remains, and it is hoped that the village will in due course become a scheduled monument.

The **South Downs National Park** formally came into being on 1st April 2011, though it had been functioning in 'shadow mode' since 1st April 2010. This followed a protracted campaign by many organisations for national park status over a period of some 60 years. It had been proposed as one of the national parks under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, but this was rejected as the South Downs had suffered so much deprivation during World War 2. Instead, two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (recently renamed as National Landscapes) were created for the South Downs, one each in Hampshire and Sussex. National parks in Britain are not publicly owned, but the status confers substantial protection (even more than that of an AONB) from unsuitable development.

A(10.9)
The Buckle, now a private residence but until fairly recently a pub, is named after the buckle that forms part of the coat of arms of the Pelham family. The circular addition to the building reflects the Martello Tower at Seaford. In 1545 this was the site of a great battle between French invaders and English troops led by Sir Nicholas Pelham, who were victorious - this led to the motto, "Pelham did repel 'em".

In the early 20th century, **Bishopstone** was the target for development as a commuter town but fortunately this never came about, otherwise the beautiful valley and downs to the north would have been covered in houses. Even so, there are two substantial residential developments either side of the main road. By rights, this location should be known as 'Bishopstone-on-Sea', as the original (and very secluded) village lies in a fold of the South Downs 1.5 km north of here.

Grade II listed **Bishopstone Station** was featured in an edition of *The Architecture the Railways Built* on the Yesterday channel on 18th October 2021. Replacing an earlier building, the present station was built in 1938 and has an unusual octagonal central booking hall, which extends above the surrounding roof. During the Second World War, two pillboxes were added to the roof to boost defences along the coast. The station building fell into disuse after the war, but has been restored for use as a community centre.

A(10.8)
Bönningstedt Promenade is named after one of Seaford's twin towns, Bönningstedt, which is near Hamburg in Germany. Seaford also has friendship links with Crivitz in the former East Germany and Crivitz in Wisconsin, USA.

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Seaford (seaford.co.uk) has a long history. It was once a port, whose harbour lay in what is now a flat plain behind the Esplanade. It came into use as a result of the development of a shingle bar at the mouth of the River Ouse (called Medewynd or Midwyn in earlier times), which over centuries forced it eastwards to enter the sea here. Consequently it became a major port from pre-Roman times, and the Romans made good use of it. A Saxon prince called Ella landed here in 477 and established the kingdom of the South Saxons - Sussex. Previously known as Mecredesburn, the first record as 'Sæforda' was in 788.

The town prospered, but was regularly raided by French pirates. In the early 13th century it became a member of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports, not in its own right but as a 'limb' of Hastings. Although the origins of this distinguished ancient body are not clear, it is believed that it was established as an informal association of fishermen during the time of Edward the Confessor (1042 - 1066). Although the name comes from the French for five, it is pronounced 'sink', not 'sank'. The original five ports were Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich, but they were soon joined by Rye and Winchelsea, and at one time the confederation stretched from Seaford in Sussex to Brightlingsea in Essex. Today, the confederation consists of seven 'head ports' (those mentioned above, with New Romney replacing Romney) plus seven corporate members (Folkestone, Deal, Ramsgate, Margate, Faversham, Lydd and Tenterden).

There used to be a theory that Seaford's demise as a port was due to a terrible storm in 1579, which resulted in the River Ouse breaking through the shingle bank at what is now Newhaven. However, it is now clear that human intervention some 40 years earlier was the cause. For many decades before that, the river upstream of Seaford had been silting up, making navigation increasingly difficult for vessels bringing goods from Lewes and beyond. So commercial and political interests insisted that a cut be made at the small fishing village of Meeching, further west, so that the river could flow directly into the sea there and avoid Seaford. This resulted in the 'New Haven'.

Seaford fell into decline, eventually losing its membership of the Cinque Ports. But during the 19th century the rise of sea-bathing as a healthy pastime, and especially the arrival of the railway in 1864, led to a revival in the town's fortunes. However, Nikolaus Pevsner (unaware of future linguistic trends) wrote, 'Seaford is the least gay of the chain of south coast seaside places. It has no pavilion, no amusement arcade, a short esplanade which, at the time of writing, appears far from thriving.'

Seaford no longer has its own Member of Parliament, but over the years has had connections with no fewer than six Prime Ministers. During the 18th century its MPs included William Pitt 'the Elder' and George Canning; and the Pelham family from nearby Bishopstone provided Henry Pelham and the Duke of Newcastle. More recently, the descendants of Thomas Harben of Corsica Hall included Joseph and Neville Chamberlain.

During the Second World War, Seaford became a restricted zone, with no access for people from outside the area. The town was occupied by troops, especially Canadians, and played a major part in the D-Day invasion of 1944.

The town centre is a pleasant and interesting place to explore: St. Leonard's Church, a Grade I listed building, has a Norman wall and massive 15th century tower, and many of the cottages are Grade II listed. The Barn Theatre in Saxon Lane houses the award-winning Seaford Musical Theatre and Seaford Community Cinema, while Seaford Little Theatre in Steyne Road is the home of a repertory company.

A(10.7)

This **Martello Tower**, built in 1810 and a Grade II listed building, was the westernmost of a chain of 74 such defensive forts built during the Napoleonic Wars in the first decade of the 19th century by the Royal Engineers along the Kent and Sussex coasts between Folkestone and Seaford. A further 29 were built later along the Essex and Suffolk coasts. They were named after the Torre della Martella in Corsica, on which the design was based; it had walls nearly six feet thick and a swivel cannon on the roof. For added security, entrance to a Martello tower was at first floor level, reachable only with a ladder. This fort, completed in 1806, had a complement of one officer and 24 men, and a moat for further protection. Two more towers were planned for Seaford but never built, due to the cost and the peace treaty in 1815, and in the end not one

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shot was fired in anger. However, many of the Martello towers, including this one, were reoccupied during the Second World War as anti-aircraft batteries. Various uses have been made of it subsequently, even as a skating rink or hot baths for a while. The tower was substantially rebuilt in 1978 and is now the home of Seaford's Museum of Local History. For such a small building, there is a great deal of interest inside, and local people call it 'The Tardis'. The former toilet block beyond the tower has been restored to include a small café.

There is a notable absence of hotels along Seaford's sea-front - there seems to be no demand. The row of modern houses behind a wall near the Martello Tower is the site of the Esplanade Hotel, opened in 1891 in anticipation of a boom in visitors, but soon closed when this did not materialise on the hoped-for scale. It did, however, provide accommodation for a short stay by King Edward VII in 1905. The abandoned hotel was used as a set for the film *A Fragment of Fear* in 1970.

Grade II listed **Corsica Hall** was formerly a nursing home, then Seaford College of Education, and has now been converted into luxury apartments. It stands on the site of the original Corsica Hall, home of the Harben family whose descendants include the prime ministers Joseph and Neville Chamberlain. Its name is said to derive from the profits made on wine smuggled from Corsica, but this may be apocryphal.

A(10.6)

At **Splash Point** are the remains of the Splash Point Hotel, built on the site of a fort that protected the entrance to Seaford Harbour. It was occupied by troops during the Second World War but demolished soon afterwards when the sea wall failed to prevent erosion. The cliffs here are a favourite nesting place for kittiwakes, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has set up a viewpoint with seats.

The **South Downs** is a range of hills extending for 120 km (75 miles) between Winchester in Hampshire and Eastbourne in East Sussex. The highest points are Butser Hill near Petersfield, Hampshire (270 m / 886 feet) and Ditchling Beacon (248 m / 814 ft) near Brighton.

A(10.5)

Seaford Head, 86m above the sea, is the site of a formidable Iron Age hill-fort and gathering place, whose ramparts were much higher and more extensive than the scant remains you see today, as most of it has fallen into the sea. It was constructed by the Celts about 2,500 years ago then used by the Romans as a burial ground from the 2nd century CE (AD). The hill-fort was preceded by a Bronze Age 'bowl barrow' grave, probably of a local chieftain, which during 19th century excavations yielded a hoard of flint axes and other tools. In 1850, the army blew up part of the cliff to form some kind of protective defence in the sea, but this was in vain as the fallen chalk was quickly eroded by sea action. The event was accompanied by much publicity and witnessed by hordes of trippers from boats offshore and other vantage points. In spring and early summer, this area is the first landfall in Britain for many migratory species of birds and butterflies.

On a fine day, as well as the view eastward of the Seven Sisters, you can look back along the Sussex coast towards the chalk cliffs on the east side of Brighton and even, so they say, if clear enough, Selsey Bill and the Isle of Wight, though you may need binoculars to see them.

You now have possibly the most outstanding view on the whole VGW, and even in the whole of Southern England: the **Seven Sisters**. Together with Seaford Head, they form the Sussex Heritage Coast.

From left to right the 'sisters' are Haven Brow, Short Brow, Rough Brow, Bran Point, Flagstaff Point, Baily's Brow and Went Hill Brow - perhaps the Brow Brothers would have been equally appropriate. There is in fact an eighth sister, sometimes called Shy Sister as 'she' is so difficult to distinguish, being invisible from this end and only just discernible from the far end. However, continual erosion means that she is becoming ever bolder! Just out of sight beyond the furthest sister lie Beachy Head and Eastbourne. The tall building on Baily's Brow is Belle Tout Lighthouse, now a unique guest house (belletout.co.uk) with a refreshment kiosk. It is in constant danger of falling into the sea, and in 1999 was moved in one piece 17 metres inland on rails; it may have to be moved again some time if it is to survive. In front of that is Birling Gap, a favourite refreshment stop for walkers.

The chalk that makes up the cliffs of the Seven Sisters and Seaford Head was formed under the sea some 85

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million years ago from the skeletons of minute sea creatures that floated down as they died and became compressed. The stratum that you see here continued south to join what is now mainland Europe, until Britain was severed after the last great Ice Age 10,000 years ago. The brown coloured material that appears amongst the chalk is loess (pronounced 'lerce'), rock from Arctic regions that during the Ice Age was ground down to a fine powder and blown here, filling gaps in the chalk. The short, springy grassland behind the cliffs is typical of chalk landscapes.

The **Rampion Offshore Wind Farm** was the first to be built off the south coast of England, and is named after the county flower of Sussex. Now fully operational, it produces enough electricity to power 350,000 homes, and consists of 116 turbines occupying an area of 72 square kilometres (about the size of Guernsey) between 13 and 20 km away from the coast. The wind farm is operated and maintained from a base in Newhaven, but the undersea cable linking with the mainland actually comes onshore at Brooklands, between Shoreham and Worthing.

A(10.4)
Seaford Head Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, consists of 123 hectares of chalk down and river valley, most of which is owned by Seaford Town Council. It lies between Cuckmere River and Seaford Head Golf Course, and extends inland to Exceat Bridge. There are many species of plant and animal life, including some uncommon ones, that thrive on chalk grassland. Look out for skylarks, Adonis and chalkhill blue butterflies and the bloody-nosed beetle. A feature of the flora is its unusually small growth due to the exposed conditions. The slope to your left is known as Badgers Bank, due to the high incidence hereabouts of these shy and nocturnal creatures, as well as rabbits. It was the site of Poynings Town, a village established in the 14th century to house refugees from Seaford during the Black Death and the worst raids by French pirates; but it too became the target of pirates and was eventually abandoned. The reserve was established in 1969 by Lewes District Council and local farmers D.L. Paul & Sons Ltd. It shares offices with the Seven Sisters Country Park at Exceat.

DVOR = Doppler VHF Omni-Directional Range Beacon, used in Air Traffic Control. See trevord.com/navaids/sfd.htm for further information.

The flint barn away to your left is **South Hill Barn**, which is used for events and exhibitions and has a refreshment kiosk. There is a car park behind it.

A little way out to sea, there may be small fishing boats - they will probably be after mackerel.

There has never been a church at **Buckle Church** but, according to the information board here, it may have been called thus after a hermitage that existed here in 1372 and was thought by later visitors to have been a church. Buckle probably derives from the Pelham family coat of arms, which includes a buckle (see above). An alternative theory is that the name derives from an old landslip to the west known as Puck Church Parlour. The turf around here is grazed by rabbits: this creates a habitat for plants such as thrift, ground ivy and kidney vetch, which are the food source for the mining bee.

Hope Gap is the southernmost point of the VGW, and an example of the geological formation known as a hanging valley. There is an interpretation panel at the top of the (closed) steps but unfortunately it is very worn and barely legible in places. Briefly, it explains the origin of this landscape, resulting from the ice-cap that covered Britain during an earlier Ice Age 14,000 years ago. As the ice melted, rivers flowing to the sea cut valleys in the chalk, such as the one (now dry) that rises from Hope Gap, which probably flowed into the Cuckmere further south when Britain was joined to Europe. Then the rising sea cut back into the land, forming the cliffs, and this valley was left hanging, high above sea level. This probably also applied to the valleys that separate the Seven Sisters. The cliffs are gradually being eroded, and the rocky platform just above sea level shows their former extent. The opening scenes of the original *Dad's Army* film of 1971 were shot in this valley, in which a German general on the French side of the Channel watches, through very high-powered binoculars, Private Godfrey emerge from a toilet, then the platoon defiantly brandishing the Union Jack.

The steps down to the beach were closed at time of writing as they were unsafe, but anyway bathing is not

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recommended due to submerged rocks and strong currents.

A(10.3)
A plaque on the **Canadian War Memorial** reads:

> 'This plaque commemorates the soldiers who died in this area, and specifically in this field, during the Second World War. Their numbers are unknown but their memory lives on. The following is a personal testimony from Corporal Leslie Edwards (1920-2004), a local man who served in the area and laid poppies on this spot every Remembrance Day until his death:
>
> "I will never forget the day in 1940 when a Canadian company came to Cuckmere and pitched their tents in this field. I was stationed here and knew that bombers regularly used this valley for navigation purposes. I tried to tell the commanding officer but he was not interested in what I had to say. Two mornings later the Messerschmidts arrived. Just as the sun was rising they came skimming over the water and up the valley. Around Alfriston they banked hard and came back. Bearing down on the tents they opened fire. Steam, soil and grass rose in front of them as bullets and bombs covered the ground. All the young men in the marquees and bell tents were killed. The commanding officer, who was shaving at the time in the middle coastguard cottage, died instantly when a shell came through the wall that held his mirror."

'Remember me when I am gone away, Come far away into the silent land.' Christina Rossetti.

Number 5 Coastguard Cottages is occupied by **The Pilgrim Potter**, who runs courses, and is usually open to visitors.

The former **Cable Hut** was built in 1911 as a telegraph relay station between London and France. During the Second World War, the cables were cut, the hut was turned into a gun emplacement and damaged as a result of target practice by the Canadian troops. It was restored in 1947 and is now privately owned for use as a fishing hut, but is opened to the public on certain dates, when visitors will be able to see old photographs of its history and evidence of the cable that ran to France.

During the Second World War, **Cuckmere Haven** (pronounced Cookmere) was heavily defended as it was expected to be a major landing point for the German invasion - which never came. Many years ago, when there was not so much shingle, the river was deeper and a summer ferry operated across the mouth. Now it can be waded with care at low tide.

King Alfred the Great is said to have established here a shipyard, where part of the fleet was built that helped to defeat the Danes in 878. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries this was the scene of many a run-in between coastguards and smugglers as the latter attempted to land. Its importance as a safe anchorage is demonstrated by an offer in 1787 of £1 million by the Dutch government to build a harbour here, but the threat of war with the French put paid to that.

Small cargo vessels and barges were able to reach Alfriston until the mid 20th century, but the shingle bank that has built up across the mouth contributed to the demise of navigation. This is the result of erosion of the chalk cliffs, which also brings down the embedded flint. The soft chalk is then eroded by the sea to leave vast quantities of hard flint pebbles that form the shingle, which often builds up to cause flooding in places up the valley. The lake on the far side of the river was artificially created in 1975 for the benefit of seabirds.

The Cuckmere River flows for about 30 km from sources in the Greensand Ridge near Heathfield, through the South Downs past Alfriston. The most plausible explanation of the name is from the Saxon 'cuwcmere', meaning lively pool, but it has never been recorded as such. As far back as 450 it was plain Coc, or Cocu, which may have been a Celtic name that was taken up by the Saxons. It passed through later centuries variously as Cokemaresho, Cookmere, Coukemere, Cokemere, Coukmere, Cuckmer and Cockmare before taking on its present name. Bizarrely, in 1275 it was called (probably by very few people) Aqua de Longebar, after the local hundred (administrative district) of Longbridge, and at one time Wandelmestrouw, though why is not clear.

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The river was formerly much wider, possibly even covering most of the flat valley floor near the haven. It frequently flooded, but the banks were raised in the 1930s to prevent this. It now follows a straight cut from Exceat Bridge to the sea, built in 1846. This has cut off the meanders that the river used to follow on the far side – you will get a better view of these in the next section. The river is currently kept in its artificial channel by embankments, though there is a proposal to allow these to decay. As sea level rises, the embankments would be breached, the sea would return to the surrounding reclaimed pastures, which would in due course revert to the original salt marsh.

However, a fund-raising organisation called Cuckmere Haven SOS has been established to repair and improve the sea defences, in order to protect the famous view.

A(10.2)

Some 18,000 **pillboxes** were constructed throughout the UK (but mainly in south-east England) during the World Wars as guard posts against invading troops. The name comes from their similarity in shape to boxes that used to be provided by pharmacists for medicinal pills. Though there were some variations, they were mostly of hexagonal shape, about 10 feet across, with thick walls made of concrete and/or brick and a flat roof. They were originally camouflaged by grass or shrubbery, though most of those that remain have lost this cover. One side had a door, the remaining five sides had a narrow slit for lookout and rifle firing. They were mostly manned by local volunteers of the Home Guard. This one at Cuckmere Haven was hidden for many years but local enthusiasts have removed the brambles that covered it. You will pass several more along the Vanguard Way. For further information contact the Pillbox Study Group (pillbox-study-group.org.uk).

The fields of **Chyngton Farm** were ploughed up for food production during Second World War. The farm was acquired by the National Trust in 1993 and has been returned to grass to recreate typical downland scenery.

A(10.1)

Exceat (pronounced ‘Eckset’ or sometimes ‘Ackset’ in Sussex dialect) was until the 15th century a flourishing settlement on Cuckmere Haven, but was wiped out by the Black Death, raids by French pirates and poor harvests. There are almost as many theories for the origin of its unusual name as there are letters in it. Recorded in Domesday Book (1086) as Essete, this may refer to ‘settlers by the Exe’ (possibly an early name for the Cuckmere River); or to ‘Ecci’s settlement’; or to the land of the Aese (the first kings of Kent); or to ‘aecsceat’, the Saxon for oak grove (or oak corner, depending on source of information).

The current bridge was built in 1876 to replace an earlier one, which itself replaced a ferry.

The **Cuckmere Inn** (formerly Golden Galleon) was previously a tea-room, established in 1930 by Captain Douglas Ann of Drusilla’s fame (see Section B).

A panel on the wall of an outhouse, visible in the lower car park, provides information about the **Slater Trail**. It is named after Eric Slater (1896-1963), who according to the panel ‘lived in Seaford and used Japanese techniques to make colour woodcuts of the landscape around his home. He had international success in the 1930s but died in obscurity’. The panel states that it is a two-hour walk along a figure-of-eight route to the west of Cuckmere Haven featuring five Eric Slater views. More information at ericslater.co.uk.

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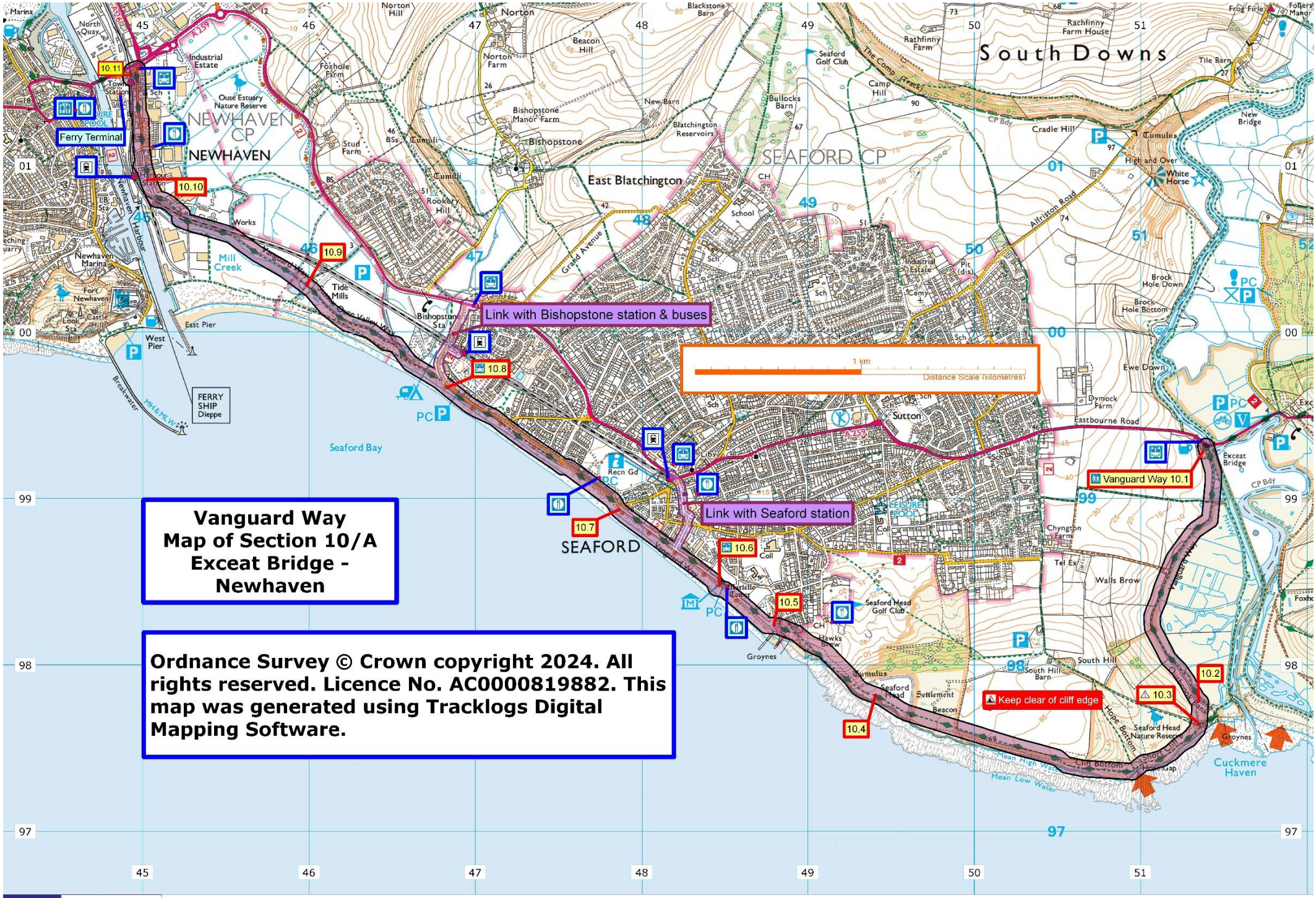

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