

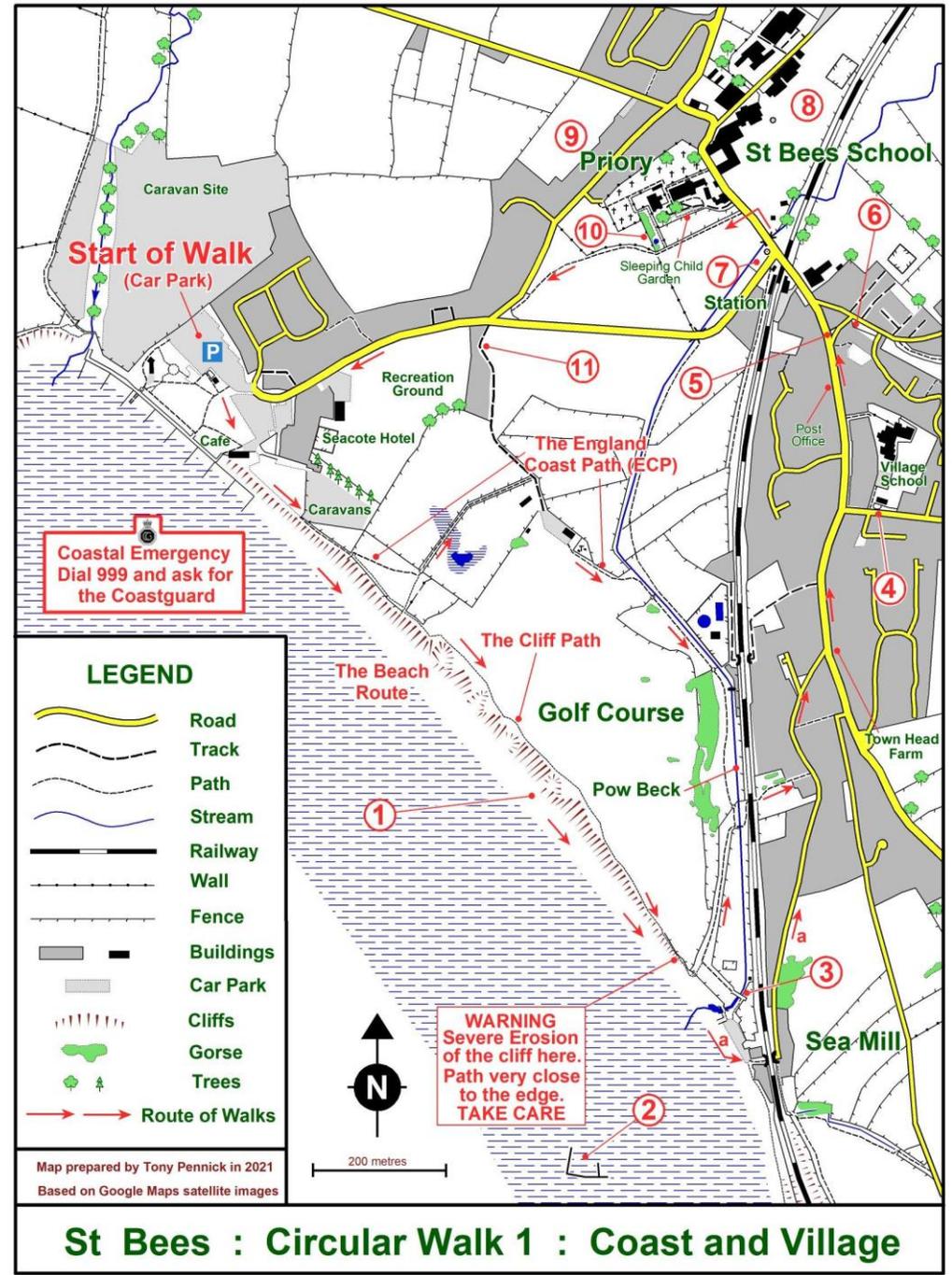
CIRCULAR St. Bees 1 WALK

A gentle stroll
2.2 miles : 3.5 km
about 90 minutes

Down the Coast
and back through
the Village



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St. Bees Circular Walk 1 : Coast and Village

(Time : approx. 1½ hours Distance : 3.5 km ; 2.2 miles)

Starting from the car park at the Beach, the route heads down the coast away from St Bees Head. There is an immediate choice. It is possible to walk along the top of the cliff. The Cliff Path is clear but exuberant children might need to be curbed at times as the path is close to the edge at places. Alternatively when there is sand to walk on, it is pleasant to stroll down the Beach Route, or there is a part of the new England Coast Path (ECP) recently installed (2021) by Natural England that skirts the golf course and follows Pow Beck to Sea Mill.

The cliff (1) that you look down at (or look up at) is the debris left behind by a retreating glacier about fifteen thousand years ago. It is therefore unconsolidated and as can be seen is being eroded quite rapidly. The huge variety of shingle on the beach is testimony to the distances this material has been carried from both Scotland and the Lakeland fells.

The beach itself is a haven for many varieties of shellfish and crabs and much of it has been declared a site of special scientific interest. Of special importance is a large colony of the tube-worms called Sabellaria which have built extensive coral-like honey comb formations out of sand and crushed shells.

At the end of the beach at particularly low tides ancient peat beds with petrified trees can be seen and also fish garths (2). They were used to catch fish by trapping them in a vee-shaped pond when the tide receded. The age of the fish garths has not been established, but they may have been built for the monks from St Bees Priory.

At the end of the cliffs there is the remains of a circular salt pan (again possibly monastic) for evaporating salt from sea water. The area over the stream was landscaped by Rail Track in 1997 and there is an information point here with details of the Sea Mill which was demolished in the early 1960's.

At the end of the Beach or Cliff Routes you can go through a kissing gate to join the ECP away from the sea past the remains of the Sea Mill to cross over the Pow Beck and then over the railway line and back towards the village. The path joins the road opposite Blythe Place. Here, turn left and follow Sea Mill Lane up to the Main Street. Alternatively, continue south over the old bridge, cross under the railway and return to the village via Sea Mill Lane.

Those using the ECP route at the start of their walk should continue to Sea Mill, cross Pow Beck using the new bridge (3) go under the railway and follow Sea Mill Lane to join up with the other routes at Blythe place.

Opposite the end of the Lane is Town Head Farm, the last working farm in the Main Street.

Turn left on to Main Street and follow the road down into the village.

The road that comes in on your right (Outrigg) was the way by which cattle were originally brought into the village from the grazing land at the top of the hill. Near the bottom of Outrigg there is a stone built semi-circular enclosure (4). This is the Pinfold, where stray cattle were kept until their owners reclaimed them and paid a fine.

Continue down the Main Street. By the Manor House and opposite the Queen's Hotel, take a right fork in order to see the Rimming Stone (5) set into the ground and used by the nearby smithy. Just around the corner on the right hand side, a plaque on the wall commemorates one of the earliest surviving houses in St Bees (6).



It was built not long after 1500 and was the birthplace around 1517 of Edmund Grindal. He was Bishop of London, Archbishop of York and then of Canterbury under Queen Elizabeth I. Disagreements resulted in his downfall but he never forgot his birthplace and in 1583 he founded St Bees School.

Turn left down the hill back to the Main Street, go across the railway line and cross the bridge. This bears Grindal's coat of arms and probably dates from the foundation of the school. If there is time, you could go into Beckside Gardens (7) to see the Millennium Statue of St. Bega.

Legend has it that St. Bega, the daughter of an Irish king, fled her homeland in 650 AD to escape marriage to a Viking chieftain, crossed the Irish sea single-handed in a small boat and landed at St. Bees where she founded the priory which bore her name.

The school buildings (8) are on your right.

The grounds are private but spectators are always welcome at any school matches.

Continue towards the school and just before the entrance to the Priory Church (9), turn left on to a footpath along the edge of a playing field.

The Church itself is worth a visit with its fine 12th century doorway and interesting interior with relics of 'St Bees Man' on show. A Viking Cross shaft in the graveyard indicates that this was an ancient religious site. When the Normans took over the lordship of the land, William le Meschin, Lord of Egremont, founded a small monastery here staffed from the great Benedictine house of St Mary at York. The monks took over an existing church and had it rebuilt from about 1160 to 1220. A recent addition on the south side of the Church is the Sleeping Child Garden and its statues by Josefina de Vasconcellos. The footpath beside the church grounds is known as the Dandy Walk because it was used by theological students when the east end of the Priory Church was brought back into use as a training college for Anglican clergy between 1817 and 1895.



The Norman Arch which forms the west doorway of the Priory

Half way along the Dandy Walk, at the end of the playing field, you can visit the Priory Paddock (10), the village's own small Nature Reserve. Continuing, you join up with the road that takes you back to the car park on the beach.

As you join the road the building on your left is Peck Mill (11), originally linked by a water supply system from Rottington dating back to about 1250.

We hope you enjoyed your walk around the village. If you would like to try another walk, or find out more about St Bees and its history, why not visit the Web Site on www.stbees.org.uk It has an extensive history section with numerous interesting articles including Douglas Sim's book '100 years of St Bees' now out of print, but reproduced in its entirety on the web. Inside the Priory Church, there is also a pamphlet 'St Bees - a thousand years of village history', written by John Todd.

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