

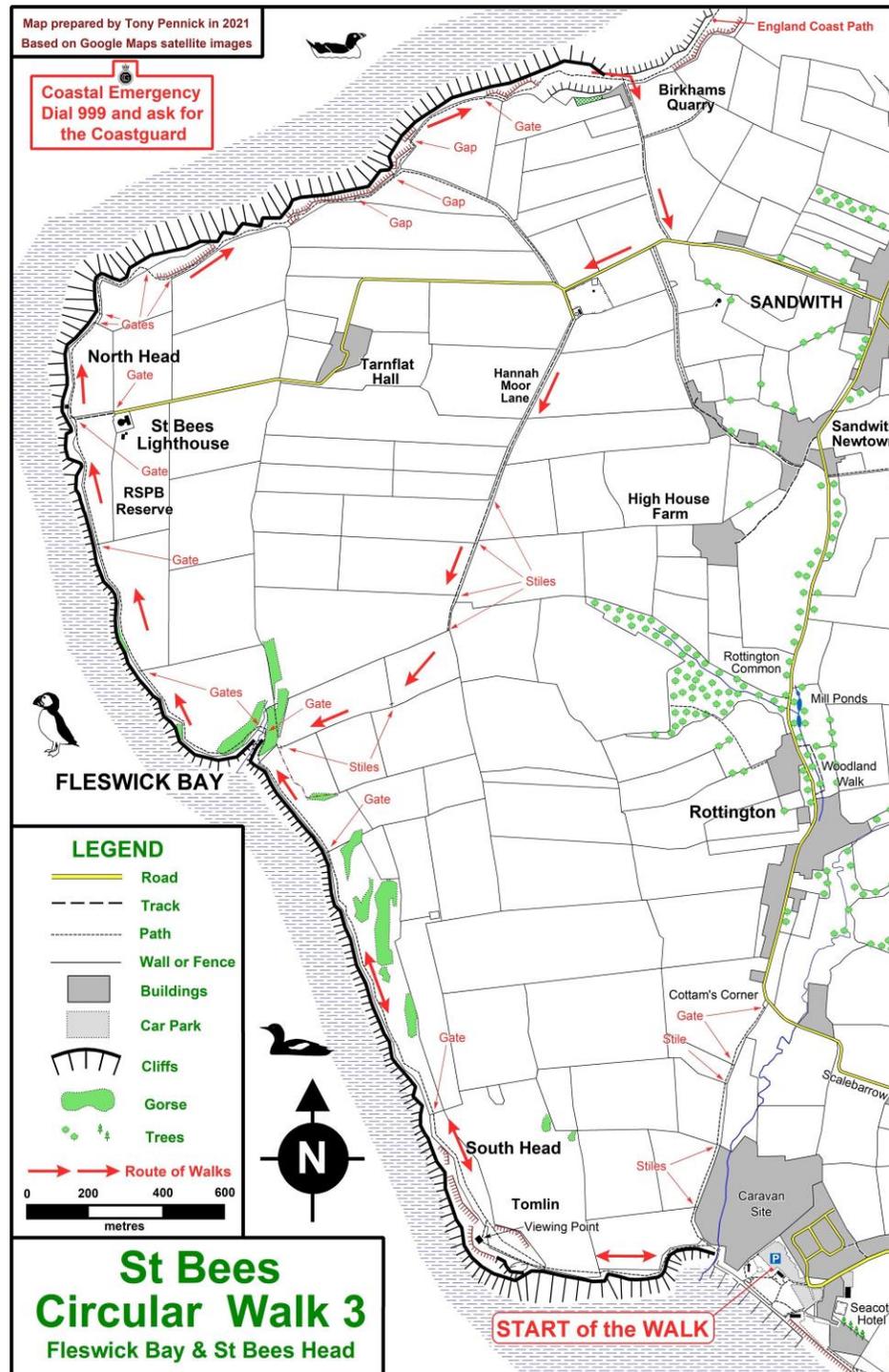
CIRCULAR St. Bees 3 WALK

A Choice of 2 Walks on St. Bees Head
 Fleswick Bay 2.0 Hours : 3 Miles
 Around the Head 4.5 Hours : 7 Miles
 plus three other options



Published by

St Bees Parish Council



St. Bees Circular Walk 3 : St. Bees Head

(A choice of 2 walks and 3 other options)

The walks described below pass close to the unfenced cliff edge in a number of places. Parts can be muddy and steep, so appropriate footwear should be worn. Exuberant children and dogs may need to be curbed at times. However, since the path from St. Bees to Birkhams Quarry has become part of the England Coastal Path, stiles have been replaced by kissing gates and other improvements have been made.

Please Respect the Countryside Code and keep Dogs on leads at all times when crossing stock fields.

(1) Return Walk to Fleswick Bay (Time : approx. 2 hours ; Distance 5 km : 3 miles)

Starting at the beach car park, go past the Lifeboat Station (and the display for the Start of the Coast to Coast Walk) and turn right along the promenade. Cross Rottington Beck by the footbridge and walk up the South Head, known locally as Tomlin. A Plan Table was installed at this view point in 2006. It will help you to identify what you are viewing.

The climb is steep, but on a clear day there are fine views across to Snaefell on the Isle of Man.

Below the cliffs, carved out of the rocks, there is a swimming pool, built by the unemployed in the 1930's - an early example of a job creation programme. Unfortunately the pool has now been filled in because of concerns about safety.

Just off the rocks at low spring tides, you may be able to see the boilers of the steam ship "Izaro", which ran aground in thick fog in 1907. No lives were lost and most of the ship was eventually cut up for scrap.

The route to Fleswick Bay is clear and follows the old turf and stone boundaries along the cliff top.

At the top of Tomlin the lighthouse becomes visible together with the spectacular sandstone cliffs of the North Head.

On the descent to the bay a waymarker post is passed. This is the junction with the footpath from Hannah Moor Lane - the return route for those completing the walk completely around the head. The beach at Fleswick is reached via a kissing gate.

The pebble beach contains semi-precious stones such as agate, carnelian and jasper. It is a delightful place to spend a sunny afternoon.

Return to St. Bees by the same path. On the descent from Tomlin, enjoy the views of the Cumbrian coast line south of St Bees. Do **NOT** attempt to follow the rocks back to the village. The tide can come in very quickly and there is no escape.

(2) A Circular Walk around St. Bees Head (Time : approx. 4½ hours ; Distance 12 km : 7 miles)

The coastal path from Fleswick Bay climbs the North Head following the cliff edge towards the lighthouse.

The cliffs are up to 300ft high and the first lighthouse was built in 1718 as an aid to navigation in the Irish Sea. It remained a coal burning lighthouse until 1822 when the tower was destroyed by fire and the present 17m high tower constructed. The cliffs just before the lighthouse are an internationally important breeding site for sea birds.

Cliff overhang at Fleswick Bay



This RSPB reserve holds one of the largest colonies on the west coast of England with over 5000 breeding sea birds, mainly guillemot, razorbill and puffin and the reserve's speciality, the black guillemot, for which St. Bees is the only English colony. Other breeding sea birds are kittiwakes, herring gulls, shags and fulmars. The best time for a visit is the spring and early summer when the birds are at their most active. A section of the cliff has also become popular with sports climbers looking for a pleasant alternative to busy Lakeland crags. A guide is available at climbing shops. To the north there are fine views across the Solway Firth to Scotland.

Continuing North from the Lighthouse, the path is sometimes inside and sometimes outside the field boundary. At the northern end of the RSPB reserve the path cuts through the sandstone. This used to be the access track to one of the numerous sandstone quarries on the North Head.

When the cottages at Birkhams Quarry are reached, the route turns inland following the quarry access track until it reaches the tarmac road.

At this point the Coast to Coast walk goes left to Sandwith village (the nearest pub !).

Our route turns right and after a short distance a cross-roads is reached by a radio mast. At the signpost to Fleswick Bay, turn left along Hannah Moor Lane.

The field boundaries on either side of the track date from the 18th century enclosures.

At the end of the track, four ladder stiles are crossed before the footpath goes diagonally right across the field to the far corner. Follow the field boundary downhill, cross a stile and join the coastal path at the waymarker post. Turn left and follow the coastal path back over Tomlin to the beach car park at St. Bees.

Other Options

(a) The Coastal Path to Whitehaven

(Time : approx. 4½ hours ; Distance 12 km : 7 miles)

From the Parish boundary at Birkhams quarry the Coastal path continues to Whitehaven, passing the site of the former Marchon chemical factory.

The area is rich in old industrial remains including the Haig pit which was closed in 1986 and, below the cliff, Saltom pit which was the first undersea coal mine in the world.

From Whitehaven the train, bus or a taxi can be taken back to St. Bees.

(b : c) The Road via Sandwith & Rottington (Time : approx. 4½ hours ; Distance 12 km : 7 miles)

Instead of turning right on reaching the tarmac road, turn left towards Sandwith and follow the road south through Rottington, passing Rottington Common on the right and the former Mill Pond. Alternatively, turn right and immediately left and follow the track down to Sandwith Newtown (The distance is slightly shorter, but the track can be muddy). At Cottam's corner, go through the kissing gate and follow the path back to the car park.

To find out more about St Bees, you may like to visit the Village Web Site on www.stbees.org.uk

Bob Mayow and Tony Pennick

February 1998 (Updated April 2021)

Illustrations courtesy of "The Cumbrian Coastal Way - A Guide to the Whitehaven to St. Bees Section".

Photograph of St Bees Lighthouse from a 1905 postcard, courtesy of Donald Brownrigg.
First Published in 1998 by St. Bees Parish Council (Updated 2006 & 2021)

