



Title: Essex Way: Manningtree to Great Horkesley

Distance: 12.5 miles

Time taken: 5 hours

Start Point: Manningtree Station

OS Explorer Map: 184 & 196

Grid Ref.: TM 088 315

Transport: Manningtree Station on Great Eastern Main Line, London Liverpool St. to Ipswich.

From Great Horkesley - Bus 84 (hourly) opp. Half Butt Inn to Colchester Station.

Refreshment: Dedham: The Sun Inn, & The Marlborough Head

Great Horkesley: The Half Butt Inn.

## Walk Description

This section of the Essex Way is lovely. There are magical woodlands, wide open skies, wonderful views over the hills around Dedham, quiet, sleepy villages, ancient churches - it's all just there, waiting to be explored.

The first section of the walk takes you over hills and through farmland in the hills east of Dedham. This is all Constable country, and it is beautiful. There are a few surprises along the route as well, including a short walk through a private garden and woodland. The village of Dedham is itself very picturesque, and the Church of St Mary is just magnificent, and visible for miles around.

After Dedham, the walk takes you along the valley of the River Stour before rising into the hills again near Langham. Langham church, also dedicated to St Mary, is on a much more cosy scale but clearly has a proud history of its own, with a plaque pleading for good treatment of dumb animals in the porch (believed to have come from the nearby Gun Hill, which was a major trade route before the A12 was built) and the school for poor girls in the corner of the churchyard.

Boxted itself is pretty, with many old, listed buildings in the village. The countryside around is beautiful and there are some lovely views across the hills and valleys, and pleasant walking through the nearby farms. The walk also takes in one of Essex's vineyards.

The final part of the route suffers from too much road walking and some poorly maintained

footpaths, but overall this section of the Essex Way is a real pleasure.

### **Directions**

A. There are 2 car parks to the south of Manningtree Station. Make for the space between them, find the footpath heading south towards a track, and turn right along this track. After about 50 yards, take the footpath on the left heading south. The footpath sign points to Lawford Church. After about half a mile on this path you will come to the church, and can re-join the Essex Way in the church car park to the west of the churchyard.

B. The Essex Way leaves Lawford church car park via the north west corner, and crosses diagonally north west across the corner of a field to a wooden gate (1). Cross through this gate onto a gravel path and turn left. Follow this path all the way to a lane called Dedham Road.

C. Turn right and walk along Dedham Road, following the lane around a corner to the left, until you come to a bridleway on the left heading west (2). Stay on this stony track for about half a mile as it turns left in front of a farm heading south, then turns right at a footpath crossroads near the crest of the hill (3), heading west again. Just past the crossroads there is a similar stony track off to the left, but ignore this and carry straight on heading roughly west.

D. About 250 yards after the crossroads, the track goes downhill into some trees leading to a private house. This is the Essex Way, and although it feels a bit intrusive, it is OK to be here. But because it feels so private, finding your way can be a little confusing despite being well signed. As you pass a 17th century black barn, there is a driveway to the right. Between this, and the stony track ahead, there is an area of mowed grass under trees, with some shrubs on the right. The path goes diagonally north west across this area, under the trees, and in front of a wooden shack containing logs (4).

E. Once past the shack the path becomes clear again. Follow it as it meanders through the woods to a stream; cross the stream using the bridge and walk up to, and cross, the railway line. On the far side of the railway walk straight across the field still heading north west, towards a metal gate at the far end, and then between paddocks towards some trees (5). The path continues along the north-west edge of the trees to the road (Long Road East).

F. Cross this road and go into the field opposite by way of the kissing gate. From here you get the first glimpses of Dedham Church, and the beautiful Dedham Vale. Walk north west across the field towards the far corner; just to the left of this you will find a gate opening onto East Lane. Turn right on the lane, go around the corner to the left, and continue walking downhill through the trees until the lane turns to the right. Just at this corner there is a footpath on the left heading west: climb over the stile and walk along this path.

G. This path, fenced on either side, takes you through several fields until you emerge about half a mile later onto Castle Hill, a fairly busy north/south road. Turn right and walk north up this road for about 100 yards until you see a footpath on the left into a field, then walk along the well-worn path roughly westwards through the field towards some trees. Once past the first few trees the path bears to the right, passing to the right of a building. Immediately in front of the building, turn left onto a brick paved driveway for about 20 yards, then right to walk along a gravel path to Coopers Lane.

H. Once on the lane turn right and walk up hill for about 250 yards until you come to a turning on the left between two houses. After 100 yards the track diverges, with the left track being the Park Farm access road, and the right hand track heading towards a large house. Take the right hand track. The Essex Way goes to the right behind a small outhouse at the north west corner of the garden of this large house, with a hedge on the left side. After a few yards you will emerge into a field; bear left to walk north west, parallel to the back wall of a stables block belonging to the farm. Look out for the commemorative plaque in memory of Fred and Shem! Continue in this direction to the gate at the end of the field (6), which takes you to a bridge over a stream.

I. Across the stream there is a choice of footpaths. Turn right to head north through a series of meadows until you come to the recreation grounds, where you turn right skirting the cricket pitch then left to walk along the tree-lined path towards St Mary's Church.

J. As the path emerges onto Dedham High Street, turn left walking along the High Street. As the houses on the right side of the High Street seem to come to an end, look for a turning on the right just by a white post marking Westgate Cottage. The footpath leads off to the left on a gravel track (7).

K. The route goes past Bridges Farm then becomes a grassy farm track leading roughly north west across fields and water meadows before running alongside the beautiful, tranquil River Stour (8). As you enter a small copse the path bears slightly to the left away from the river, towards a large Victorian house which is now Milsoms Restaurant. In front of this building, turn left (south east) along the access road then turn right up the Stratford Road heading west, (9) to cross over the A12 via the road bridge.

L. Once over the road bridge turn left to head up Gun Hill and turn right through the very imposing gates into what appears to be a private park (10). Keeping to the tree-lined road, carry on north west for about half a mile. At the end of the park you will come to a T-junction, turn right (north) towards Langham church. In the church porch you can read a touching cast iron sign, taken from Gun Hill, once a major trade route between Ipswich and Colchester. It says: " DUMB ANIMALS HUMBLE PETITION. Rest, drivers rest, on this steep hill. Dumb beasts pray use, with all good will. Goad not, scourge not with thonged whips. Let not

one curse escape your lips, 'God sees and hears'. T.T.H. posuit." The small building in the corner of the churchyard was once a school for poor girls.

M. From outside the churchyard, continue northwards. After a few yards the route bears to the right to head downhill between woods on the left and a field on the right. (11) A few yards later, the trees stop and the path heads north-east across a field towards a gap in the hedge. When you approach the hedge, stay in the same field, turning left to head west, with the hedgerow on your right. At the corner of the field, where the hedge meets the trees, go through the small gap into another field and continue walking west, now with a hedge on your left. Follow the hedge line until you pass another small wooded area, after which the path bears left to cross a small field towards a footbridge and onto a lane.

N. At the lane turn left to head south west and keep walking until you come to a T-junction. There is a footpath on the opposite side of the road which crosses the field heading south west and passing to the left of a telegraph pole. At the far side of this field is a footbridge, cross over this and continue south west with a hedge on your left. When the hedge turns south, carry on along a narrow track across the field, now heading more to the west. As you reach the roadside go down the steps and turn left for a few yards then turn right up the track to Plumbs Farm (12). The Essex Way goes up this track then heads west alongside the farmhouse boundary hedge, then continues westwards across the field ahead to Sky Hall Hill – follow the waymarkers.

O. Turn left on this lane and walk for about a third of a mile until you come to a grass triangle in the road, with a tree in the middle of it (13). Cross through the gate behind the tree and you will see a farm to the right, which you have to walk around. To do this, turn right to follow the hedgerow towards a metal barn, then turn left to walk alongside a large brick building towards a footpath sign. Turn right at the sign, walking through the farmyard with a wooden farm office building on your left, go behind another large barn, then turn right again when you reach a gravel track.

P. On the gravel track turn left walking north east, downhill past a pretty cottage (14), and then just after the track curves left, past a beautiful lake on your left. Carry straight on up the other side of the valley heading north west to the road, then turn left going west up Lower Farm Road towards the quiet village of Boxted. There are some lovely views across the Essex countryside along this road. Continue along this road for a little over half a mile as it turns left then right and becomes Church Street, until just before another left turn you can see the church tower through the trees.

Q. Turn right to go along a narrow alley to the north of the churchyard, heading west, starting by a telegraph pole just in front of a large building. The alley opens out onto a tiny lane. Turn left to walk between the churchyard and a graveyard, then turn right to walk west

along a grass track, to the south side of the graveyard. This takes you to Boxted Hall.

R. The grass track comes out onto a gravelled area near several houses (15). Turn right on the gravel to head north west through the white gate and on to a metalled driveway. Continue along this as it turns left taking you west, past some more houses and a paddock to Burnt Dick Hill. Turn left here and walk south to a T- junction. At the junction turn right heading west on Church Road.

S. After a few yards you will come to a left turn, ignore this and carry straight on. About 150 yards after this junction, there is a footpath on the left heading south, opposite Kerseys on the right. Turn left along this footpath with a ditch on your right. After 100 yards cross to the other side of the hedge via a footbridge, and continue south on a straight tree-lined grassy path (16). After a further 250 yards you will pass Carter's Farm, then a lake, then the path continues south along a wide grassy track by some trees, to Green Lane.

T. At the road turn right for 150 yards then left onto a footpath heading south, alongside a hedgerow on your left. After another 150 yards, turn right to cross the field westwards along a wide dirt track. This takes you towards Holly Lodge Farm; go straight on through the farmyard (17) to Holly Lane. Turn left on Holly Lane and continue walking south along it for about half a mile to a T-junction where, surprisingly, you turn left to head south east along Boxted Road.

U. Walk for about 200 yards, passing a house on the right, until you come to a small industrial unit. Turn right into here, walk south past some buildings, and a few yards later bear right along a track south west into some woods. The route is not well marked here, and when we were there we had to negotiate past some parked lorries partially blocking the track. The route through the woods is not terribly clear either, but as best you can head roughly south west to the exit. You should emerge from the trees onto a well defined farm track, heading south west towards a distant farm.

V. As you near the farm you will see another track off to the left, following a well maintained hedge (18). Turn left here, walking south with the hedge on your right, then past a lake on the right, then over a stile and along a narrow, poorly maintained footpath to Ivy Lodge Road.

W. When you reach the roadside turn right to head west to the junction with the A134 Nayland Road. Turn left at this junction and walk south along Nayland Road for about 500 yards to the Half Butt Inn, which is on the right. The bus stop for the 84 into Colchester is just south of the pub, on the opposite side of the road.

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