



Title: Essex Way: Wrabness to Manningtree

Distance: about 8 miles

Time taken: 3 hours

Start Point: Wrabness Station, about 5 miles west of Harwich

OS Explorer Map: 184

Grid Ref.: TM 180 315

Transport: Wrabness and Manningtree Railway Stations

Refreshment: Strangers Home, Bradfield, The Crown, Manningtree, and Manningtree Station Buffet.

### **Walk description**

This walk takes you along an 8 mile stretch of the Essex Way; with the additional walk to and from the train station the total distance is 9 miles.

The first stretch takes you alongside secluded sections of the Stour Estuary, and through the Wrabness nature reserve, before heading across fields inland to Bradfield. Then you walk along quiet green lanes and through the beautiful and peaceful woods of Furze Hill. After this there is a short walk through a water meadow and through the Maltings factory in Mistley – the smell of Ovaltine is very evocative!

The next section of the walk takes you through the more vibrant riverside areas of Mistley, with its magnificent, healthy community of swans, and Manningtree itself with small boats bobbing on the water and riverside pubs. Finally, you walk through old Manningtree before heading back into the countryside to Lawford Church.

At Lawford Church this walk leaves the Essex Way via a footpath which takes you straight to Manningtree Station – where there is a station buffet providing beers, soft drinks and snacks to restore flagging energies.

### **Directions**

- A. From Wrabness station, turn left and left again to head north over the railway line on Black Boy Lane and down towards the coastal path. At the coast, turn left. You are now heading north west along the Essex Way (1).
- B. After passing Shore Farm, you come to another building on the shoreline. There is an attached caravan site. You will see a gravel track leading south inland on your left (2), follow this to the road. At the road, turn right. This takes you through Wrabness village where you will pass All Saints Church with its famous bell cage (3).
- C. Just before you leave the village (before the road curves to the left) there is a stile on

your right, cross over this and head back north for a few yards then take the wide grassy track on your left, with its lovely views across the estuary (4).

D. The wide track narrows into a green lane with trees and hedges either side. Keep going for about 750 yards, crossing over a farm track, until you reach the coast. Go up onto the sea wall (5), and follow this for about 250 yards, then turn left on the landward side to cross a small boggy area alongside a drainage pipe, then turn left again. This takes you to the start of a tarmac path through the Wrabness nature reserve (6).

E. Turn right into the reserve and follow the path as it twists and turns through the reserve until you come back out onto the coast again. Turn left here, heading west. The path along the coast is not always very clear, some coastal erosion has taken place, but it is easily passable (7). Continue on, passing Ragmarsh Farm, using either the coastal path or the field edge as you prefer.

F. 250 yards after Ragmarsh Farm the footpath heads diagonally south west across a field towards a bridge under the railway line (8). The path goes through this bridge then continues in the same south westerly direction across another field then up a slope towards the village of Bradfield (9). Once you reach the roadside, turn right and head towards the village.

G. Once you pass the church, turn left down The Street, opposite the Strangers Home pub. Look for Mill Lane on your right and follow this quiet tree lined lane (10) west for a quarter of a mile until you reach the corner where Mill Lane turns left: at this point leave the lane and head straight on into the field. The 'Essex Way' signs are missing at this point but the footpath itself is clearly marked (11). After another quarter of a mile, just after you have crossed a field boundary, the footpath bears slightly to the right and heads northwest across the middle of a field towards a line of trees. The footpath is not clearly marked at this point but it is well used and the route should be clear (12).

H. On the far side of the field go through a gate and onto Heath Road. This road runs mainly north/south but takes a dog-leg round to the west at this point. Follow the dog-leg and, where the road turns back to a north/south heading, turn left onto a gravel farm track (13), heading south towards a farm-house. Turn right at the farm-house and continue in a westerly direction along the farm track towards the Furze Hills woodlands (14).

I. Once in the woods the footpath is not signed. Keep straight on, heading west as best you can (15). At one point a more significant path appears on the right, crossing through an old fence; ignore this and keep to the left of the old fence. As the path begins to go down a hill look out for a kissing gate on your left, which leads into the water meadows (16). Once in the meadow keep going, still heading west, walking with some trees on your left, for about 100 yards until you come to a north/south hedge running alongside a small stream. Cross over the stream and 50 yards afterwards turn right heading north towards to factory chimney (17).

J. The path crosses an east-west track, and continues north towards the railway line. There is a pedestrian tunnel under the railway, up some steps (18). Go through this and down the steps on the other side, bear right, then at the security fence surrounding the Maltings, turn

right. This takes you through a gate into the grounds of the factory itself (19).

K. In the factory follow the well marked pedestrian route straight ahead (roughly north east) making your way past various warehouses through to the main Harwich road. Turn left on the road, heading down the hill past Mistley Towers (20) to the coast . The biggest herd (or drift, lamentation, whiting or sownder) of swans I have ever seen lives here.

L. Continue west along the coast road for about half a mile, into Manningtree. As the main road turns to the left, continue straight on into Quay Street. This road turns sharp left just by a DIY store, heading south away from the river towards the town centre.

M. Cross over the High Street and continue south up South Street, directly opposite. After a couple of hundred yards the road veers to the left (21), then to the right to continue heading uphill, before emerging onto Brook Street. Turn left, still heading uphill and south, towards the railway bridge (22).

N. After crossing over the railway turn right into Mill Hill and follow this road parallel to the railway, to the junction with Colchester Road. Opposite you will see a concrete footpath heading straight ahead, roughly west (23). Follow this, with some trees on your right, then carry on walking along the path between a housing estate and a sports field.

O. After about a quarter of a mile you will come to a field; the path cuts across this field diagonally to the right heading north west, cutting off the north east corner of the field. At the far corner of the field are garden fences. Turn left at these to walk west across rough grass towards some trees (24), where you go down into the Owl's Flight Dell conservation area.

P. The path through the conservation area weaves around but eventually, takes you on to roadside of the A137. Turn left on this and walk along for 100 yards until you come to a track opposite, heading west (25). This track heads downhill, past a couple of houses, before turning left. Just at the turning there is a gate on the right side of the track heading into a field. Go through this gate.

Q. There is a stream in front of you, but turn left to walk southwest alongside some trees, parallel with the stream. After a while you will see a farm bridge across the stream with a path heading west up into the field of the far side of the stream. This is the route to follow (26).

R. This path takes you right up to St Mary's Church, Lawford. Pass the church on its south side, and once in front of the church you will see another footpath to the north of the building heading northeast back past the church (27): this path (about half a mile long) takes you down to Manningtree Station.

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