



Weymouth to Bridport walking guide

Travel to Weymouth to follow the South West Coast Path along Dorset's idyllic coastline

A delightful two-day, 24½-mile walk from Weymouth to Bridport that takes in the bleak beauty of Chesil Beach and one of Dorset's most charming villages, with an overnight stop in an 18th-century inn. An easy stroll, which allows plenty of time to soak up the area's natural and cultural heritage.

Getting your bearings for this walk is simple: just head south along Weymouth's seafront, pick up the signs for the South West Coast Path and follow it all the way to Bridport. The first steps hint at few of the rural delights that await on this two-day walk along part of Dorset's Jurassic Coast. But it's a nice enough way to start—a stroll among elegant Georgian and Victorian seaside buildings, along the promenade and past the statue of George III.

The open waters of Weymouth Bay give way to the vast lagoon of Portland Harbour, cradled in the arms of its breakwaters. Beyond looms the humpy back of the Isle of Portland, which is joined to the mainland at the eastern end of the great 11-mile pebble bank that is Chesil Beach. This shingle bar is a strange, bleak and beautiful place, seeded with the white bells of sea campion and yellow-horned poppies; a barrier between land and sea, where once countless ships were lost in storms.

A crunchy excursion on to the dry wastes of Chesil Beach is not to be missed, but the South West Coast Path itself runs westwards along the inner bank of The Fleet, an eight-mile brackish lagoon that lies between the land and the shingle bank. Here, you'll find ducks, swans and other waterfowl, and the banks dotted with beautiful wildflowers, such as hawkweed and sea mayweed. After a couple of miles, a detour into the hamlet of Fleet brings you to a pretty little chapel. It is the setting for one of the creepiest episodes in John Meade Faulkner's famous and much-filmed thriller *Moonfleet*, where the young hero is trapped by a smuggling gang in the vault beneath the chancel floor. In the 18th century, smuggling was no romantic fiction, but a steady means of income for the local men who brought ashore the untaxed "brandy for the parson, baccy for the clerk".

Soon the Path heads inland across pasture and cornfields, up over the back of Linton Hill into Abbotsbury, the setting for your overnight stop. Abbotsbury is one of Dorset's most charming villages, with thatched cottages, an immense medieval tithe barn and the massive St Catherine's Chapel on the top of Chapel Hill. Nearby are the Sub Tropical Gardens full of trees, shrubs and birdsong, and the medieval Abbotsbury Swannery that looks after the thousand swans of The Fleet.

Next day is a straightforward walk beside the sea, at first with the Chesil pebbles underfoot. At West Bexington, the scrubby shingle has been designated a nature reserve—it is an excellent place for spotting songbirds. This is a truly beautiful section of the walk, with the sea to your left all the way.

Around Burton Bradstock you come to colourful cliffs of pale clay, dark oolitic limestone, yellow sandstone and white limestone, where the frequent rock falls bring fossils to light on the beach. A quick fossick in search of a fossil, and you walk on the last couple of miles to reach West Bay's harbour, the setting for many episodes of BBC TV's *Harbour Lights* soap. And then it's inland to Bridport—the journey's end.