



# "All at SEA" Castle

Once a part of the sea, the Pevensey Levels are now a wetland of international importance with outstanding and rare wetland plants, invertebrates and birdlife. This walk provides an excellent opportunity to view the area's wildlife, England's first brick castle and the landing place of William the Conqueror in 1066.

Length 11½ Miles = 18½ Kilometres

Approximately 7 hours – Grade 4

(This walk forms a 'figure 8' crossing at Rickney and can be shortened to two walks – 4½ Miles = 7½ Kilometres (south of Rickney), Approximately 3 hours – Grade 2 and 7 Miles = 11 Kilometres (north of Rickney), Approximately 4 hours – Grade 3)

**START** – Westham car park, Peelings Lane, Westham. (O.S. Explorer 124 ft NGR 640047).

**ACCESS** – Car – Car park in Peelings Lane, Westham  
 Bus – 6, 8, and 19  
 Train – Pevensey and Westham Station

**PUBLIC TOILETS** – Pevensey Castle car park

**REFRESHMENTS** – Pubs at Pevensey and Westham  
 – Cafes and Tea Room at Pevensey  
 – Village shops at Pevensey and Westham

**CAUTION** – The walk is almost wholly on a wetland area and may be flooded following wet weather. There are two crossings of the A27.



11½  
Miles



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- Up until about 1100 this area was part of the sea. The ridge on which Pevensey and Westham stand today formed a peninsula accessed only from the west. Since then, man's activities have drained the area and forced the sea back to its present line, leaving an area of summer pasture and a wetland of international importance for its flora and fauna. The route descends here to the old shoreline.
- Today, the marshes are drained by a series of manmade channels and sluices across the Levels. Modern management ensures that the drainage is "just good enough" to leave the area sufficiently wet to preserve the wildlife. The Pevensey Haven was the original channel forming the port of Pevensey, its age emphasised by the parish boundary following its route.
- Rickney was once an island as suggested by the "ey" ending of its name. To the north a second, former island, Horseye, can be seen. Just north of the hamlet the path passes a series of modern water management sluices situated in a channel with the Saxon name of Yotham.
- Today, Herstmonceux church stands in isolation on a hill which once overlooked the beach. As this means of communication vanished, the village migrated to the main road on its own. The main point of interest is the carved stone monument to Thomas Fiennes (d1533) the owner of Herstmonceux Castle and his son and would-be heir who had died five years before him.
- Herstmonceux Castle was the first brick castle to be built in Britain. In 1440, Sir Roger Fiennes commissioned Flanders workmen to make bricks to

11½  
Miles



- construct the 200ft square castle with its towers, gatehouse and moat. The castle remained with this family until sold in 1708, by which time it was a ruin. Most of the interior was further demolished and it was resold in 1777. However, in the present century it was rebuilt to its former glory and from 1946 to 1988 it housed the Royal Greenwich Observatory. It was at this time that the nearby telescopes were constructed. Today the castle is owned by the University of Kingston, Ontario.
- As you cross Horseye Level, your route makes use of three former droveways. These wide tracks leading from Hailsham into the wetlands were, and still are, used to drive cattle and other animals to and from their summer pastures on the marshes.
- Pevensey was once a thriving port. Named Anderida by the Romans, it was constructed to house sailors operating a fleet against Saxon invaders in the 3rd century. The safe anchorage was the reason for William the Conqueror landing here in 1066 on his historic journey to Battle and the throne of England. The town flourished again under the Normans, being important enough to have its own mint (now open to the public).
- Overlooking their port the Romans built a commanding fort. With its tall walls, ten bastions and enclosing an area of nine acres, it is still impressive 1700 years later. The Normans added an inner keep, curtain wall and moat. Often besieged, the castle has never fallen to an attacking force. In World War II gun emplacements were added, carefully camouflaged to blend with the older masonry. Thus defences of three periods blend together, whilst a fourth – the Martello Towers built to guard against Napoleon – can be seen on the present coastline at Pevensey Bay.