

Walk - Seaton to Lyme Regis through the Undercliffs - Part 1

Difficulty ◆ Challenging - A challenging walk over uneven terrain, and due to the clay soils sections of the path can be muddy and slippery after wet weather. Note, once you have entered the Undercliff there are no paths leading inland (or seaward) and it generally takes about 3½-4 hours to reach Lyme Regis.

Start Seaton Seafront - EX12 2LX

Finish Undercliff National Nature Reserve - EX12 4AS

Length 3.5 miles (5.7 km)

Summary A challenging walk (7.0 miles / 11.2km in total), passing through the Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs National Nature Reserve, one the highlights of the Jurassic Coast. The landscape is a unique, wild area of landslides, tumbled coastline and luxuriant vegetation. It is a delightful route in spring, when the fresh-leaved woodland is carpeted with bluebells and wild garlic, with 'hosts of golden daffodils', and the bright air is full of birdsong.

This is a dog friendly walk. Have a look at our [Top Dog Walks on the South West Coast Path \(/top-dog/\)](/top-dog/) for more dog friendly beaches and pubs.

This walk from Seaton to Lyme Regis has been split in half so that users of the printed map can see all parts of the walk. Part 2 can be seen [here \(/walksdb/634/\)](/walksdb/634/).

You can also download a [BBC podcast about the Undercliffs here \(http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/country/country_20130418-1530a.mp3\)](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/country/country_20130418-1530a.mp3) (link to 13mb mp3 file - click to play, right click to save)

Public Transport

The Jurassic CoastLine x53 bus runs regularly between Seaton and Lyme Regis and stops at the seafront, Castle Hill, Seaton and outside the Co-op, Broad Street, Lyme Regis. For timetable information, zoom in on the interactive map and click on the bus stops, visit [Traveline](http://www.travelinesw.com/) (<http://www.travelinesw.com/>) or phone 0871 200 22 33.

Nearest car park

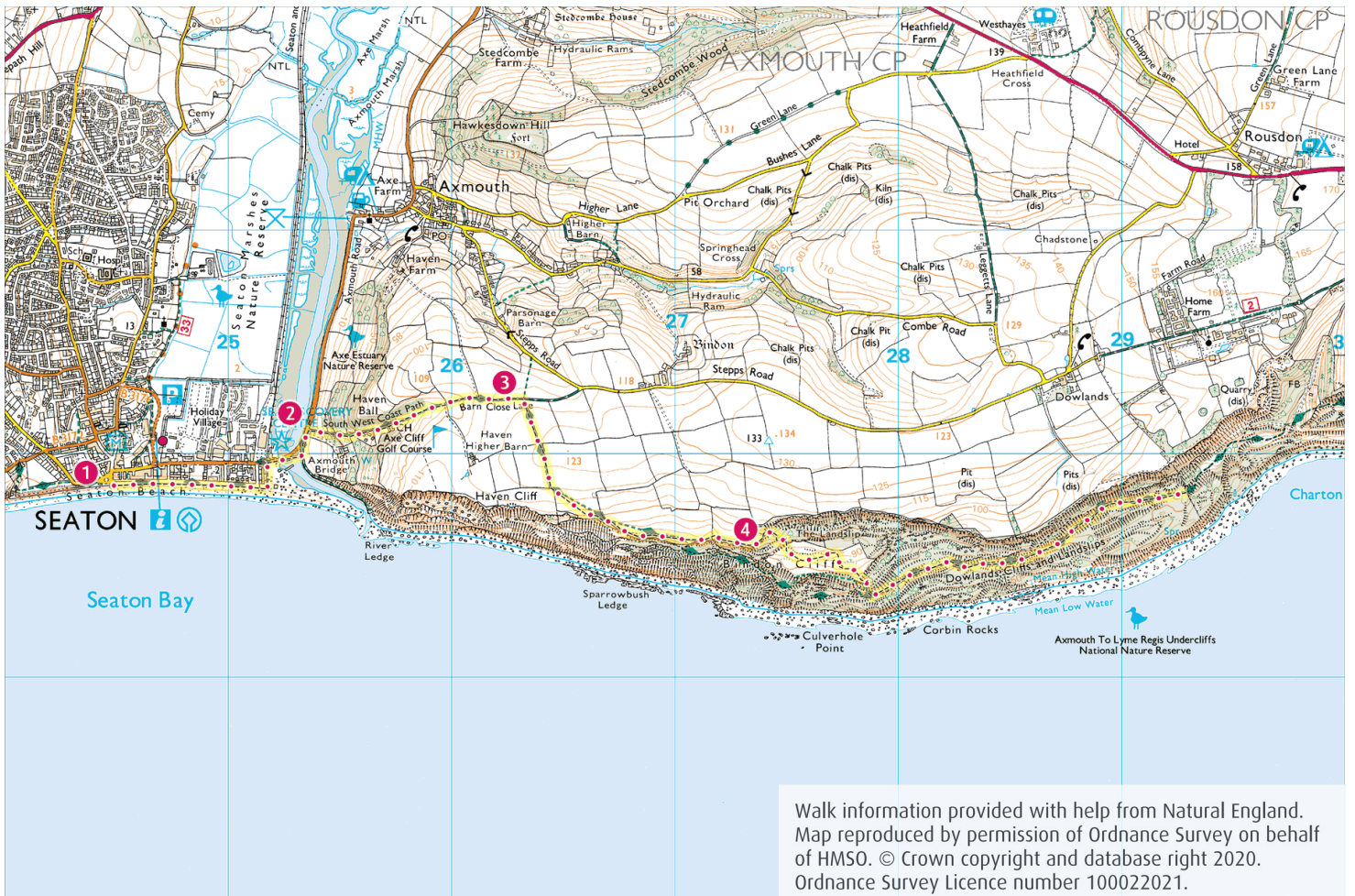
Seaton (Postcode for Sat Nav: EX12 2LX), Lyme Regis (Postcode for Sat Nav: DT7 3BS).

Nearest toilets

Seaton and Lyme Regis.

Nearest refreshments

Seaton and Lyme Regis.



Route Description

You can also download a BBC podcast about the walk here -

A leaflet about the Undercliffs can be downloaded from here (http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/axmouthnrrleaflet_tcm6-18631.pdf)

BBC Open Country Undercliffs podcast (http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/country/country_20130418-1530a.mp3) (link to 13mb mp3 file - click to play, right click to save)

- 1** *From Seaton, walk along to the eastern end of the seafront, and cross over the River Axe using Britain's oldest concrete bridge which was opened in 1877. Walk upstream alongside the river for about 100 yards, and then take the track on the right signed Coast Path and Axe Cliff golf course.*
- 2** *The path climbs steadily passing the club house and crossing the course (watching out for golf balls) to then enter a sunken Devon lane, which in spring is full of flowers.*
- 3** *At the first junction take the right turn which takes you out to the top of Haven Cliff, from where you get great views along the coast in both directions. From here you also get your first impression of how unstable this section of coast is.*

The geology of this section comprises of seaward sloping beds of greensand and chalk overlying clay. Rain can seep straight through the greensand and chalk, but has to flow across the surface of the impervious clay. Heavy rain can lubricate the join between the clay and greensand sufficiently enough to allow the top layers of rock to slide.

This constant movement (a bit like a glacier) of the Undercliff means that between the back cliff and the sea, deep fissures open up. As a result you are advised not to wander off the path.

The most famous example of this happening was on Christmas Day in 1839, when 15 acres (6 hectares) weighing an estimated 8 million tons, slipped from the cliff to form a chasm 180 feet (60 metres) deep and ½ mile (800 metres) long. On the seaward side of the chasm a field stayed intact enough for the crop to be harvested later that year, and the outcrop is now known as Goat Island. At the time, the spectacle drew thousands of tourists, including Queen Victoria, and pictures of it are on display at Lyme Regis Museum.

- 4** *After following the cliff top for a few hundred yards the Coast Path descends down into the Undercliff National Nature Reserve, and across Goat Island.*

The reserve, which is managed by Natural England, is one of the largest active coastal landslide systems in Western Europe. The National Nature Reserve forms part of the 95 mile long Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and contains rocks from the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods of geological time. The rocks get younger as you walk from Axmouth in the west to Lyme Regis in the east.

In addition to the geological interest, the reserve is important for wildlife. It forms part of the Sidmouth to West Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is also part of the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Woodland covers the majority of the reserve and the unstable terrain is dominated mainly by ash and field maple woodland. The reserve is sheltered, south facing and often relatively hot and humid providing ideal growing conditions for ferns including the characteristic Hart's tongue fern. Away from the path the cliffs and unstable terrain also provide a haven for a variety of specialist insects and other plants. In some parts of the reserve non-native species including holm oak, rhododendron and laurel can be seen and the spread of these is being controlled.

Goat Island is a particularly special part of the reserve. Although once part of the old fields on the cliff tops, it has been unfarmed for over 150 years. Today it is managed for the species rich chalk grassland that has developed on its well drained chalky soils. With the help of volunteers, the grassland is cut and raked each year to provide the right conditions for a wide range of rare plants and insects to thrive, including a number of orchids and butterflies such as the common blue. Without active management the chalk grassland, which is a rare habitat, would quickly become overgrown and invaded by scrub.

To avoid trampling damage to the grassland on Goat Island, please keep to the waymarked path across it.

Nearby refreshments

Seaton and Lyme Regis.

If you spot any problems or changes to this walk please email the details to hello@southwestcoastpath.org.uk so we can get it fixed for those that follow in your footsteps.



If you enjoyed this walk, please help us keep it fantastic. Text **SWCP88 £2 / £5 / £10 to 70070** to donate now. Eg: SWCP88 £5



It costs at least £1,000 per year to keep a mile of the Coast Path maintained, accessible, improved and promoted for everyone to enjoy. If you would like to support us please become a member, it's less than the price of a pasty or a pint per month.

www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk

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