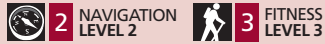


# 04 Northern England Seaham, County Durham

• Distance 17km/10 miles • Time 5hrs • Type Coast



## Plan your walk



PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY



**WHERE:** Linear coastal walk from Seaham to Crimdon.

**START:** Seaham harbour (NZ432495).

**END:** Crimdon caravan site car park (NZ483373).

**TERRAIN:** Coastal footpaths – mainly tracks, some paved. Some stiles, steep valley descents and beach walking.

**MAPS:** OS Explorer 308 & 306; Landranger 88 & 93.

**GETTING THERE:** Seaham rail station is on the Durham coast line, with services from Newcastle and Sunderland. From Crimdon caravan site car park you can take the no25 bus to Hartlepool or Durham/Seaham via Peterlee (© 0871 2002233, www.traveline.info).

**EATING & DRINKING:** Lickety Split, 13 North Terrace, Seaham (© 0800 917 5531, www.lickety-split.co.uk) – arguably the best milkbar this side of the 1950s.

Turn east off the A1 in County Durham and you stumble upon one of England's forgotten corners. This is a stark post-industrial landscape, yet infinitely varied and drably beautiful. Coal was once king here, but no more. The Durham coalfields under the North Sea have closed but they left a legacy: for 150 years, coal waste was simply dumped on the beaches, smothering the sand to a depth of 30ft in places. The brutalised shoreline was subsequently employed by sci-fi film directors in search of alien landscapes, such as in *Alien 3*. The sea has slowly washed away that mining waste and a huge regeneration project, Turning the Tide, has transformed the area's superb coastline into a virtue – revealing the charms that made Lord Byron and Lewis Carroll linger here – and establishing a breathtaking coastal route from Seaham to the edge of Hartlepool.

**1. START** Seaham has some fine

Georgian buildings and heading south you'll pass Seaham harbour (NZ432495), the focus of an ambitious regeneration project. Initially you're surrounded by Sunderland to the north, Hartlepool to the south and ASDA to the east. But spectacular coastal views are just a few paces away. At the A19 roundabout, bear L by the wind stockings, signposted for Nose's Point (NZ436478). Useful interpretation boards reveal that the handsome cliffs are formed from rare magnesian limestone, which is incredibly good for wildlife. But what magnetises you is the burnished brown spectacle below of Blast Beach, named after local pig iron blast furnaces and once totally blackened by spoil from the mines. Coal is known as black gold, and there is an irony in that these two colours dominate the beaches.

**2.** Cross over Ginny's Dene and follow the coast path by the railway until you cross it via a

## Continued...

**SLEEPING:** The Seaton Lane Inn, Seaham (© 0191 581 2038, www.seatonlaneinn.com).

**VISITOR INFORMATION:** Durham Tourist Board (© 0191 383 7426, www.visitcountydurham.org).

**GUIDEBOOKS:** *Walking in County Durham – the Land of the Prince Bishops* by Paddy Dillon (£12, Cicerone Press, ISBN 9781852845377).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP:** Sunderland Ramblers (© 0191 526 0434, www.ramblers.co.uk/groups).

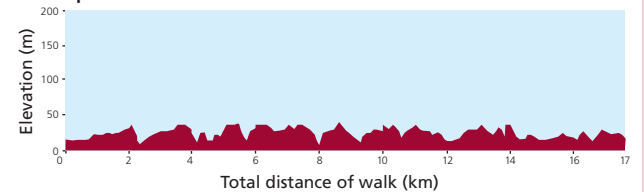
bridge (NZ441462). Turn L and keep ahead, entering wooded Hawthorn Dene, one of several glacial valleys cut into this coastline. At a T-junction, ignore the stile to the train tracks and turn R. After 50 yards, turn L down into secluded woodland and begin climbing again in front of the magnificent railway viaduct. Go up steps, bear L, and then R to walk under the viaduct and pick up the coast path, now with the railway on your R.

**3.** Walk above Shippersea Bay and, at a gate and stile, bear L (NZ441448), with rolling hills, bucolic farmland and a mournful, solitary pit cage from Easington Colliery for company. Follow the path around Busiers Holes and turn inland along Fox Holes Dene, towards rows of classic terraced mining houses ahead. Turn back to the coast at the road and railway bridge (NZ440435), enjoying the superb bay views north and south. Follow the path down Warren House Gill to the beach and up grassy steps to the clifftop. Skirt around Whitesides Gill, and down and up steep Blackhills Gill.

**4.** Drop down Limekiln Gill along a paved road, past a small car park, and follow the path R across a footbridge at Denemouth



### Steepness of walk



(NZ456405), the head of Castle Eden Dene, where the valley marshland is framed by another spectacular viaduct. Head L up the path and steps to pick up the coast path above Blackhall Rocks, used as the bleak setting for the final chase in *Get Carter* with Michael Caine.

**5.** Turn inland to walk around Blue House Gill, over the filled-in shallow topsoil of Blackhall Colliery. Continue to hug the coastline, passing a 'V' stile (NZ474384) and looking out for the flourishing colony of rare little

terns – perhaps the surest sign that nature is finally winning the battle against the industrial legacy of pollution. Follow the cliff contours and walk through successive 'V' stiles, then turn L down and up steps to pass a substation (NZ475382) and pass the caravan site on its coastal side to the car park (NZ483373). The view ahead is of Hartlepool and Middlesbrough, but lift your eyes and above the flare stacks you can drink in the vista of the North York Moors. *Route devised by Mark Rowe.*