PUBS WORTH THE WALK

The Tower Inn, Slapton

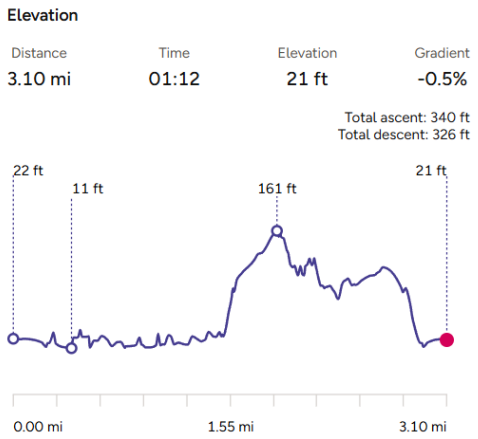
Slapton Ley Nature Reserve & the Slapton Sands D-Day Preparation Memorial, 3 miles

OVERVIEW

Start at the war memorial on Slapton Sands, standing above the beach. If you've read Michael Morpurgo's 'The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips' to your children, you'll likely know why it's here.

The memorial was presented by the United States Army to the people of Slapton, Stokenham, Strete, East Allington and Blackawton — five parishes evacuated in the winter of 1943 to make way for invasion rehearsals for the D-Day landings.

Around 3,000 people — roughly 750 families and farmers — were given six weeks to evacuate, taking what livestock and belongings they could. The memorial thanks them for what they gave up, so that the rehearsal for D-Day could happen on ground that genuinely resembled Utah Beach and hasten the end of WWII.



From the memorial, the walk turns inland toward Slapton Ley — the largest natural freshwater lake in the South West, sealed off from the sea only by the shingle bar you've just walked.

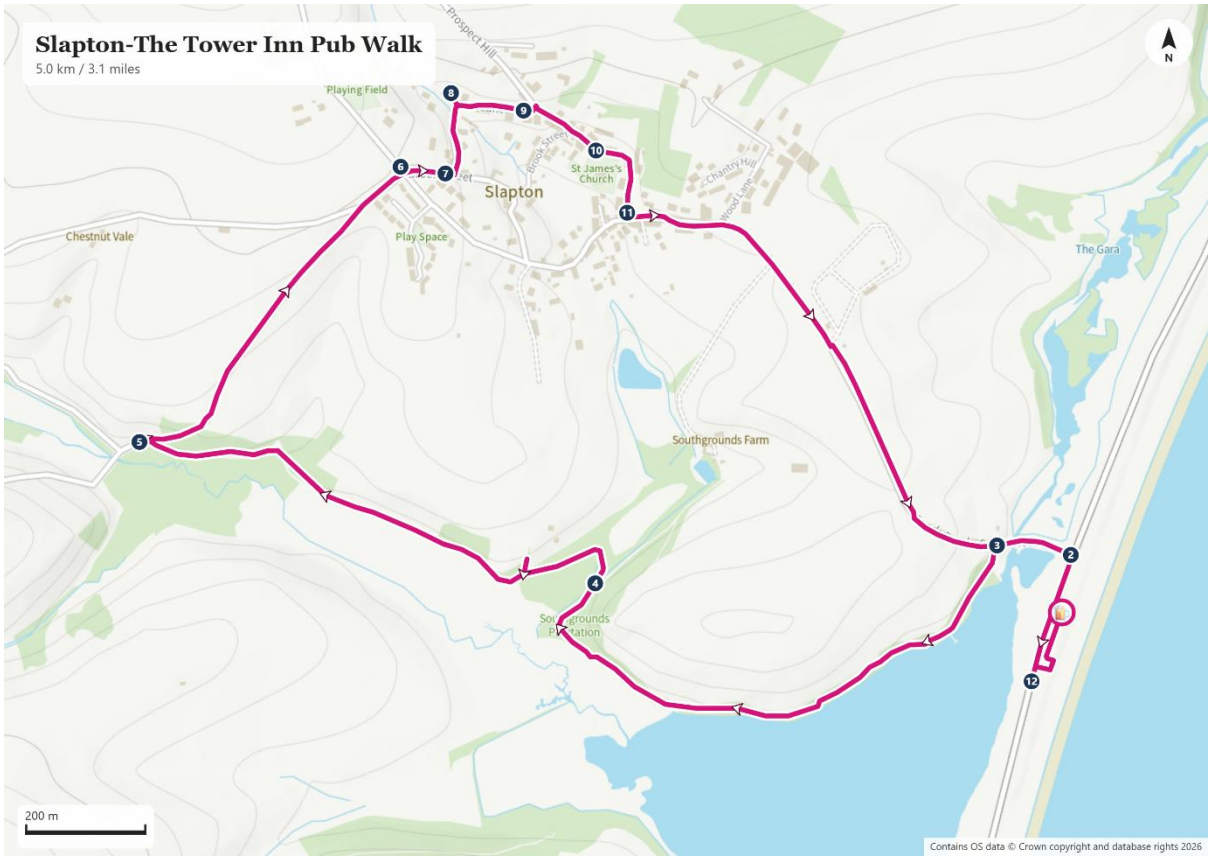
It doesn't look particularly dramatic from the path — a long, reed-fringed lake — but it's genuinely irreplaceable. It has been a National Nature Reserve since 1993 and a Site of Special Scientific Interest since 1952 — a wetland that has been important for seventy years, while the road beside it keeps falling into the sea.

The path threads on into the village itself and you arrive, eventually, at a squat, ivy-softened tower rising incongruously behind a beer garden — and at the pub that has sat beside it for nearly seven hundred years.

Start/Finish	The walk starts from the car park of the WWII War Memorial on Slapton Sands, outside the village. The route visits the Slapton Ley nature reserve then routes through Slapton village for a visit to The Tower Inn, before the c. 3/4 mile return to the car park.				
Parking	Parking is available at The Slapton Sands War Memorial. It's a distinctive feature as you approach the junction for Slapton Village along the A379 from Dartmouth direction. See the Notes section below for guidance.				
Grid Reference	SX 829 443 for the War Memorial and parking at Slapton Sands				
What3Words	///dodging.readjust.perch (the War Memorial parking at Slapton Sands)				
Distance	3.1 miles / 5 km	**Time**	1.5 hrs	**Ascent**	340 ft / 105 m
Paths/Terrain	Easy walking on pavements, tracks and boardwalks. Some steps. A section of the walk is along a narrow lane entering the village, usually quiet but busier now that the main road is closed. Take time at Slapton Sands to views the beach and walk 'the Line' towards Torcross.				

Difficulty	Easy. Uphill section along lane into the village after the nature reserve.
Public Transport	Bus services have been disrupted by the A379 closure. Devon Council has introduced services to help local communities and visitors with a new service connecting Dartmouth and Slapton.
Toilets	At The Tower Inn
Other Pubs Nearby	All businesses between Dartmouth and Kingsbridge have been impacted by the closure of the A379. Please make the effort to support them. This walk passes the other pub in Slapton, **The Queens Arms**. **The Start Bay Inn** at Torcross was battered by the 2026 storms but it's open and ready to welcome you. They have an incredible photographic collection on their website that shows the exposure to the elements and the evolution of the coast here at Start Bay and Slapton Sands. **The Tradesman's Arms** in Stokenham is a postcard thatched inn.

DIRECTIONS



1. There's limited parking in the village. Some parking across the road from Camping site, and near to the entrance of Slapton Ley. Otherwise, the parking at the War Memorial on Slapton Sands is the easiest, and logical for this route – the directions start and end there. Take time while visiting to reflect on the commemoration on the monument.

2. The Memorial was presented by the US Army to the people of the South Hams – three thousand of them - who left their villages and farms in December 1943 as the beach of Slapton, the bay in front of you, and the land behind you became a live battle practice area for the D-Day landings over the months that followed. Their sacrifice helped to save thousands of lives and contributed to the end of the Second World War. On a personal note, my father was a despatch rider at this time, carrying orders from US Command at the Salcombe Hotel to the Generals overseeing preparations on the beach here.
3. From the memorial, cross the Slapton Link road in the direction of the village, signposted from the junction in front of you. Just after the bridge, look for the entrance to the Slapton Ley Nature Reserve on your left. The well-marked route offers wonderful views over the nature reserve, with plenty of opportunities to stop and study activity on the freshwater lake, and reedbeds.
4. The path forks in two after the first jetty, but they combine again later. If conditions allow, follow the left-hand path along the shoreline, and use the other path if the water level is raised.
5. After the Ireland Bay hide, round the corner and, at a gate, drop down to your left onto a boardwalk.
6. At the end of the boardwalk, bear left. A viewing point provides views over Southgrounds Marsh reedbed and explains the view in front of you.
7. At the end of the Slapton Ley trail emerge onto a lane, and turn right to follow the road uphill back to the village. Note, this lane and those surrounding Slapton and Stokenham, are usually very quiet. The storm damage on the A379 that has led to the closure of the Slapton Line has forced local traffic, and some not-so-local traffic onto these lanes. Please take care as you head back into the village.
8. You enter the village at a T junction. Go straight across. Follow the narrow road downhill, then round to the left as it starts to meander through this fabulous, ancient Devon village. You'll soon arrive upon a sign for The Tower Inn, but you'll need to explore up a lane on your left to actually find it. If you're passing the Church, you've just missed it – retrace your steps a little!
9. Continue through the village, passing the village's 2nd pub – the Queen's Arms. The road bears left to start to head out of the village in the direction of the beach. You'll soon pass the Camp site (very good!), and the gravel, then tarmac footpaths that lead back down to Slapton Sands.

NOTES - With the A379 closed along the Slapton Line 'Directions' are now even more important!

The A379 Dartmouth to Kingsbridge road is the long, straight road that runs along Slapton Sands, known locally as the Slapton Line. It's vulnerable to winter storms and was catastrophically affected in the early months of 2026 when successive storms wiped a section of it away completely, near Torcross. Through-traffic has ceased, and neighbouring villages either side of the closure have practical, everyday logistics challenges to overcome. Local public transport services are in place to help, but most people will arrive in the area by car. I hope the following information helps.

From Dartmouth, it's straightforward: the A379 runs directly to Slapton Sands and you can access the village without any problems. And — small silver lining — it's now dramatically quieter than it's been since Covid, since it's no longer a through route to anywhere. A pleasant, uncrowded drive along a road that used to carry through-traffic to Kingsbridge and beyond. If you're heading to Torcross, however, and were planning on heading along the coast via Slapton, you'll need to read on and reverse the described route.

From the Kingsbridge side — which matters, because Kingsbridge, Salcombe, Hope Cove and Bigbury are among the busiest holiday spots in the South Hams, and plenty of people staying there will be tempted to just follow the coast road — it's more complicated. The A379 from Kingsbridge still reaches as far as Torcross perfectly normally. However, it does not reach Slapton; that's the closed section.

The alternative is the A381 Kingsbridge-to-Totnes road, which is signposted in and around Kingsbridge. Follow it nearly to the little hamlet of Halwell — and turn onto the A3122 — there's a petrol station at the junction - signposted for Dartmouth. Once you pass the Woodlands Leisure Park entrance, watch for signs to Strete on your right, and follow that lane through. At Strete, you rejoin the A379 and turn right for Slapton.

It's a proper diversion, and it will add real time to your journey. Resist the temptation to shortcut it via the web of minor lanes on the map which your Satnav might encourage you to consider.

Devon's country lanes look inviting on a screen and are, in practice, single-track, high-hedged, and built for a horse and cart rather than diverted holiday traffic — passing places are scarce, and reversing blind around a bend is a routine part of driving them. Best left to the locals and the farmers who actually know them. Take the long way round on the proper roads; it's genuinely the quicker option, when you account for the alternative.

But the key point is: don't be put off, make the journey. The businesses need your custom.