

Benfleet circular via Leigh on Sea

Length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main circular walk 15.2km (9.8m) (or a bit longer if you explore Leigh on Sea) • Short walk to Leigh 8.9km (5.6m) • Main circular walk with optional circuit of Two Tree Island 18.6km (11.6m)..
OS Map	<p>OS Landranger 1:50,000 – Map 178, Thames Estuary</p> <p>OS Explorer 1:25,000 - Map 175, Southend on Sea and Basildon</p>
Toughness	<p>Main circular walk 4/10; 244m ascent and descent. All the hills are before lunch; it is flat on the return leg to Benfleet.</p> <p>Short walk ending in Leigh 2/10</p> <p>Main circular walk with circuit of Two Tree island – 4/10</p>
Walk Notes	<p>This Essex excursion is a companion walk to the short 5.6km (3.5m) Benfleet to Leigh on Sea amble along the Benfleet Creek shoreline which was devised to coincide with the Leigh on Sea folk festival and which usually takes place at the end of June. You can find more information about this walk here.</p> <p>Another related walk is SWC Walk 258; a Canvey Island circular starting and finishing at Benfleet Station. This is a flat walk of 23.2km (14.5m) essentially following the sea –wall around the island in an environment of tidal flats, marshes and sandbanks.</p> <p>This day walk covers completely different territory: the higher ground north of the estuary and Canvey Island, and is a walk of contrasts. In the morning you go along narrow, grassy paths through the dense, hilly woodland of Benfleet Downs and Hadleigh Country Park. You visit the ruined Hadleigh Castle which is an excellent picnic spot and has superb views; on a clear day you can see all the way across Canvey Island to the Hoo Peninsula and the North Downs in Kent. You have lunch at Leigh on Sea; a town rapidly gentrifying with boutiques and up-market restaurants.</p> <p>After lunch in Leigh on Sea you walk back to Benfleet along a wide track adjacent to Benfleet Creek with fine views of the flat open estuary waterscape and the hilly woods away to your right which you walked in the morning. You can also incorporate a circular walk of Two tree island which has fine bird-watching opportunities.</p> <p>The undulating hills of Hadleigh Country Park were the venue for the mountain bike events in the 2012 London Olympics and there are a large network of bike trails of varying severity criss-crossing the area. This walk however uses “walkers only” paths and routes with just short and unavoidable stretches on bike trails.</p> <p>This walk is best done from May to October. In winter, stretches of the</p>

	<p>narrow woodland paths are likely to be very muddy with some short sections quite tricky to navigate.</p>
<p>Transport</p>	<p>Benfleet and the stations beyond it are served by the c2c service from London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness. Fenchurch Street station is not connected to the underground network but Tower Hill tube station on the Circle and District lines and is just 100m away. The nearby Tower Gateway station is served by the Docklands Light Railway.</p> <p>Journey times can vary from 38mins to almost an hour depending on the route to Shoeburyness. Intermediate underground stations from which you can catch the train are West Ham (Jubilee and District lines) and Barking (the District and the Hammersmith and City Lines and the London Overground – Barking to Gospel Oak line.)</p> <p>There are trains about every 10 mins on weekdays and a Saturday and about every 15 mins on a Sunday with about the same frequency for return trains to London Fenchurch Street</p> <p>If you are ending the walk in Leigh on Sea you will need to buy a day return to that station.</p> <p>Suggested trains. Depending on the time of year you can pick a train that suits you best from say 9.30 am to 11.00 am</p>
<p>Lunch and Tea</p>	<p><u>Lunch</u> If you are bringing sandwiches or a picnic then Hadleigh Castle is an ideal spot with fine views over the estuary and Canvey Island.</p> <p>Leigh on Sea It s difficult to know where to begin as you are really spoilt for choice on the High Street which is just a few metres from the sea front..</p> <p>Simply Seafood (01702 716645) is the first place you come across as you arrive in Leigh. Its quite upmarket and a little pricey and has had mixed reviews.</p> <p>Your recommended pub (if you can get in; it's very popular) is the Crooked Billet (01702 480289) described as the best pub in Leigh. It is a traditional pub/restaurant with wooden floors providing real ales and “hearty pies”.</p> <p>Opposite the Crooked Billet is Osbourne Bros café which specialises in traditional sea foods like cockles and smoked eels</p> <p><u>Afternoon and end of walk refreshments</u> About 400m before you reach Benfleet Station you will see on your left a quirky establishment called the Barge Gladys. This is a converted barge, with a pub garden, moored on the north side of Benfleet Yacht Club. Up until 2003 it was a private members club but is now open to all.</p>

It serves simple meals and has two craft beers as well as other bottled beers..it It serves tea and coffee on request. It is popular with walkers, cyclists and boating people.

For other refreshment opportunities you will need to continue past Benfleet station and check out the pubs and restaurants in the High Street about 200m away. **The Hoy and Helmet** (01268 792307) has received good reviews.

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Features	<p>Benfleet The name of the town originates from the time of the Saxon settlers in the 5th Century, when the area was largely marshland. They named the area <i>Beamfleote</i>, meaning "tree stream", being the area where the creeks from the River Thames adjoined the wooded area to the north. In 894 a major battle took place in the area between Saxons and Vikings.</p> <p>Benfleet Downs This escarpment overlooking Benfleet Creek and Hadleigh Marshes has now been incorporated into Hadleigh Country Park.</p> <p>Canvey Island This is a large reclaimed island in the Thames Estuary. It has a fascinating history dating back to the Neolithic era but the first settlements probably occurred between 50 and 250 AD. It has an informative and extensive Wikipedia entry</p> <p>Hadleigh Country Park This is one of the largest parks in Essex and has a wide range of wildlife including many rare species of plants and invertebrates. It is a particularly good spot for butterflies with 27 species recorded. In spring there are fine displays of bluebells, archangel and celadine while summer sees the meadows in bloom. In autumn there are blackberries and sloes and winter brings large flocks of birds to the estuary and mud flats.</p> <p>You may like to visit the rare breed centre at Hadleigh Farm which is close to the walk route and well signposted. See here for April to October opening times and full details about the centre and its activities.</p> <p>Hadleigh Castle This 13th century castle is now owned by English Heritage and is classed as a scheduled monument and a Grade 1 listed building. Unfortunately the site chosen for the castle is on a geologically unstable outcrop of London clay and has been subject to landslips and subsidence throughout</p>

its history. Much has been lost but it is a superb spot for a picnic or rest with panoramic views over Canvey Island, the Thames Estuary and beyond to Kent. See its Wikipedia entry [here](#) for more information on its history.

Leigh on Sea

This civil parish has been occupied since early Saxon times and is now a growing town which has successfully reinvented itself as an “artistic quarter” of boutiques, bars, restaurants and gift shops replacing the traditional high street outlets. It has two well-established and very popular annual events: the Leigh Folk Festival in June or July and the Leigh Regatta in September. On fine summer weekends the sea front area and its pubs and restaurants can become very crowded.

Two Tree Island

This 640 acre island was formally a landfill site but is now a nature reserve of grass land, scrub, reedbed and lagoons and supports a wide variety of birds, particularly migrants. It got its name from two elm trees that blew down in the 1960s.. At the western end of the island there are two bird hides. Avocets breed on the island each year and the mudflats have beds of eel grass which feed thousands of Brent geese in winter. Curlew, dunlin, redshank and grey plover, short-eared owl, skylark, meadow pipit are present all year. Other creatures on the island are carder bees, butterflies (marbled white, Small skipper and Essex skipper), slow worms, adders and common lizards.

Walk options

Shortening the walk

You can just walk the morning section of the walk to Leigh on Sea (8.9km, 5.6m) and have lunch there and then spend the afternoon ambling around the interesting sea front area, shopping or relaxing on the small beach. You return to London from Leigh on Sea station.

If you do not want to walk the hilly morning section you can take the clearly signed estuary path from Benfleet Station to Leigh on Sea. This is the afternoon section of the main walk but **in reverse** and is completely flat. You essentially leave the station by its main exit/ entrance/ticket office and keep straight ahead in the same direction. This route is 6.3km (4m).

Lengthening the walk

The circuit of Two Tree island is recommended for bird-watching enthusiasts and adds 3km (1.9m) to the main walk. Information about walking a circular route on the island are in the main walk instructions.

Once you reach Leigh on Sea you may care to continue on the flat tarmac/hard surface seaside path/ promenade all the way to **Southend** or even beyond. There are intermediate stations on the way at **Chalkwell** and **Westcliffe on Sea**. Southend has numerous attractions including a mile long pier which has its own railway (or you can walk it.) These options could add 1 to 5+ miles to your morning route depending on how much walking and exploring you want to do.

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Walk Directions

A. Benfleet Station to Leigh (Crooked Billet pub) 8.9km, 5.6m

1. Leave Platform 2 – the one you arrived on – by descending the steps to go through the ticket barrier. You go into a small car-park where there is also a bus stop and a 3 armed footpath sign. You follow the direction sign for Benfleet Downs, heading for Station Road 40m ahead of you.
2. Turn left up Station Road, climbing quite steeply. In 80m where the road turns sharply left you turn right along a concrete driveway to go through a wooden gate. There is a signpost and a map of Hadleigh Park on your left. You continue down the car-wide dirt track. In 70m you ignore a narrow grassy track to your right and continue on the car-wide dirt track going gently uphill for 30m before the path levels out and you continue ahead.
3. You pass a wooden bench on your right with some fine views over the estuary . After passing more benches and information boards on your left the dirt track splits in two. **!! Here you leave the dirt track to take a clear grassy path away to your far left** heading through bushes. You continue on through an area of fairly dense bushes. In 80m you go through some wooden barriers, cross a dirt track and continue on through the dense bushes.
4. In 50m ignore a track to your right and continue ahead on your narrow path. In 40m you cross over a stepped path and pass a wooden barrier to your left and continue ahead on your narrow path. You soon pass an information board about the redpoll cattle which graze in the area. **(Parts of this path may be quite muddy after rain).**
5. After around 200m you reach a small open triangular grassy area and here at a T junction you turn left to go steeply uphill heading for a wooden kissing gate clearly visible ahead of you. You go through the gate and continue uphill heading for an information board 30m ahead of you. Here you reach a car-wide dirt track and turn right. In 50m the dirt track bears gently right but you leave the track to turn left and cross a stile with a nearby wooden bench to continue along a narrow grassy path.
6. The path soon begins to gently descend. The path opens out into an open field and away to your left just ahead of you there is a metal field gate and footpath sign.!! Here you can **either** turn right to follow the potentially muddy farm track a few metres ahead of you **or** follow the right hand field edge until you meet the footpath posts and field gate. ! if following the farm track, where it bears left near the field

edge ahead of you leave the track to turn right and head towards two footpath posts and an ancient metal field gate 30m away.

7. At the footpath posts cross over a stile (or go through the gate which is usually open) and up a slight rise and then turn left on a narrow path, the field edge to your left and heading towards woodland. In 80m at the field edge turn sharp right with the path, going gently uphill with the wood on your left. (Just before you do so note away to your left the top of a water tower visible above the tops of trees.)
8. At the top of the rise there are fine estuary views ahead of you. ! **10m after the path starts to descend you reach a two armed footpath sign and here you turn left on a path going into dense woodland.** There are a few barely visible steps here so take care and you continue on a narrow enclosed path. In 80m the enclosed path bears sharply right and you continue ahead soon going gently downhill. In 70m there is a footpath post on your right and a tall finger post on your left and you bear left with the path a 2m tall, wire fence now on your left. In 10m you ignore a path to your right going downhill to continue on your narrow grassy track.
9. In 180m you reach a wooden bench and you continue ahead on your path. In 70m your path is enclosed by wooden fences. You next cross an earth track with gates to your left and right and go through a potentially muddy area to continue on through the woodland. You go through a wooden kissing gate to turn left and go steeply uphill on a grassy track. In 60m ignore a grassy track to your left to continue ahead to a footpath post on your right. Here you turn right on a wide grassy track going gently downhill in open countryside passing a wooden bench on your right in 40m.
10. Go through a wide gap between hedges into a field. On your left is an information board about Hadleigh Castle and the Visitor Centre. ! Ignore the path ahead of you but take a wide grassy track to your left going gently uphill. In 100m the path veers away from the woodland edge on your left and you head towards a wooden kissing gate ahead of you. (There is a bench 30m to the left of the gate,)
11. Go through the wooden kissing gate and continue uphill through woodland on a wide earth track soon passing a picnic table on your right. The track forks but you can take either fork. The track levels out and you continue ahead. In 80m you turn right, in 10m going through a wooden kissing gate passing an information board on your right and in 10m you are on a tarmac road.
12. You are now in Hadleigh Parks newly developed visitor centre and you continue ahead on the wide tarmac road soon passing on your left an "Iron Age" Round House and on your right a large car-park. You then pass some modern buildings on your left and with a car barrier 30m ahead of you turn sharp right along a tarmac road heading for a two armed footpath sign and information boards.
13. At the signs and information boards turn left to go through a gap and go along a dirt track. There is a raised bank on your right and beyond that a reservoir. Soon there are open fields to your left and beyond these a line of houses.
14. In 100m you reach an information board and a pole on your right and here you turn right on a narrow earth path. In a few metres you reach open rough land and you

continue on your track, a line of telegraph wires to your right. In 50m you go through a wooden kissing gate and go towards an information board 30m ahead of you. (Here there are the mountain bike trails and some fine views of the estuary.)

15. At the information board turn right on a track and in 10m turn left to go downhill on a clear dirt track. In 130m go over a cross-roads and continue ahead on a dirt track following a public footpath sign to your left. You pass a car-parking area and continue ahead on a wide grassy track to bear left in 30m to cross a bike trail and head for a wooden kissing gate.
16. Go through the kissing gate to continue on a narrow path with a barbed wire fence to your right. You reach an information board about the bike trails and you go through a wooden kissing gate to continue on an enclosed car-wide earth track initially gently uphill but soon descending.
17. In 100m you go through a gap in the hedge line to turn left on a car-wide dirt track; the ruins of Hadleigh Castle ahead of you and the railway line away to your right beyond a grassy field. In 200m you reach a 3 armed footpath sign where you bear left to go through a metal gate where you continue ahead for 20m and then bear left to start going steadily uphill on a wide gravel track.
18. At the top of your climb you pass a double metal field gate to immediately take a metal pedestrian gate on your right to enter the grounds of the ruined Hadleigh Castle. Take the wide grassy path to reach the ruins of the castle walls in 80m. (If you do not want to picnic in Hadleigh Castle then you can ignore the metal pedestrian gate and continue ahead for 30m on the wide track towards a multiple sign footpath post where you turn right on a track which runs along the back of the castle grounds and which merges with the recommended route at the two metal gates in para 19).
19. **Leaving Hadleigh Castle ruins:** cross the grassy area and head just to the left of the high ruined castle tower. Cross over a very low ruined wall and continue down a wide grassy track which soon narrows and descends towards two metal gates. Go through the two metal gates and continue on a broad raised grassy path towards Leigh on Sea, visible in the distance.
20. The grassy path descends towards a metal kissing gate. You go through this and in a further few metres go through a wooden kissing gate with a four armed footpath sign to your right and here you turn left on a dirt track which soon swings round to the right. In 120m go through a wooden kissing gate to continue on the wide dirt track.
21. After 900m on this wide track you reach a two-armed footpath sign and in a further 10m you go through a broken kissing gate passing a further footpath sign to continue ahead along a rough tarmac lane. In 80m you reach a car-blocking barrier with a main road just ahead. Turn right here and continue along the pavement, a grassy area to your right.
22. In 80m bear right down an approach road to Leigh Station. You pass a car-parking area on your left to reach Leigh station in 70m where you can end your walk if you

wish. A few metres beyond the entrance to Leigh Station turn right at a busy road to cross a bridge over the railway lines.

23. Just beyond the bridge cross the road with care to go down steps with metal hand rails to reach a concrete lane. Turn left on the lane passing the Marina café on your right and continue ahead towards Leigh on Sea with the railway line to your left and buildings and fish and cockle merchants on your right.
24. Just before the road bridge crossing the railway lines turn right passing Simply Seafood restaurant on your right (a possible lunch stop) and continue ahead on the estuary tarmac path. In 50m you reach Osborne Brothers, a sea food merchants, and just ahead to your left is the **Crooked Billet Pub** your recommended lunch stop. (There are many other lunch alternatives if you continue past the Crooked Billet along the attractive harbour-side cobbled street.

B. Leigh (Crooked Billet pub) to Benfleet Station, 6.3km, 4m.

25. After lunch retrace your steps from the Crooked Billet to return to the Marina café and the steps you descended in para 23 above. Upon reaching the cafe and steps you turn sharp left with the concrete road which then swings sharply right in 50m. to reach a tarmac road. Here you turn left along a raised concrete path following a footpath sign and passing a 2 armed footpath post saying Benfleet 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles.
26. The raised concrete path soon becomes an earth path and you pass an information board on your left and a 2 armed footpath post on your right. You continue on the raised earth path going over a cross-paths. You pass a boat yard away to your left. You reach a footpath sign to Two Tree Island on your left. (If you wish to visit Two Tree Island see **Section C** below.)
27. **Continuing to Benfleet:** At the footpath sign cross the road to another two-armed footpath sign and pass a car barrier to continue along a tarmac track. In 150m the tarmac track swings to the left and becomes a wide earth track. **You now stay on this wide earth track (ignoring any ways off) for the next 4.5 km all the way to Benfleet with the creek on your left and attractive open countryside away to you right, and beyond that the railway line, and the hills you walked before lunch.**
28. After about 2km you go past a redundant kissing gate with two metal field gates on your left. Eventually the track begins to narrow and you go towards the bushes ahead of you with the railway line now just 70m away to your right. You pass a ruined concrete construction on your right.
29. The track bears left and in 30m you reach a 2 armed footpath sign, an information board and just beyond these a wooden gate. Go through the gate onto a tarmac road and continue ahead through a boating marina (Benfleet Moorings) Bear right with the tarmac road passing a little island and continue ahead. In 70m pass to the right of a car-blocking barrier ignoring a tarmac track to your right. In 80m you reach the quirky **Barge Gladys** on your left, a possible tea stop.

30. Continue on past the Barge Gladys with the railway line now just behind a fence to your right. You leave Benfleet Moorings and continue up a road soon meeting the busy road bridge to Canvey Island on your left. Continue on along a pavement with the busy main road on your left.. In 80m at bus stops ignore the tarmac approach going up to your right .

31. You pass another bus stop and traffic lights to reach Benfleet Station. Trains to London are from Platform 1.

C. Optional circuit of Two Tree island, 2.9km, 1.8m

32. Turn left at the footpath sign and go along a tarmac road soon crossing a bridge over Benfleet Creek. 20m beyond the bridge there is a display board on your right welcoming you to Two Tree island. There is a car park on your left. At the end of the car park you head towards a wooden gate to your right and a further welcome sign. On going through the gate you will see a number of path options.

33. There are no written instructions for walking on the island. Once through the wooden gate you could take the hard-surface path on your left and continue on this clockwise all the way around the island returning to the gate to pick up your onward route to Benfleet. This makes a walk of almost 2 miles. At the western tip of the island there is a bird hide and information board. Alternatively you could explore the narrower grassy paths criss-crossing the island.

34. You can download a map for the island off the web ([options here](#)) or alternatively you could take a photo of a map on the information board just by the gate.

35. However much exploring or bird-watching you do you on the island you will need to return to the wooden gate and information board to retrace your steps and continue your onward route to Benfleet..