

Discover Swale

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European Union
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HM Government

A PHOTO LOCATION GUIDE



Faversham
Isle of Sheppey
Sittingbourne

Visit
Swale

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Derelict boats on Oare Creek.

Introduction



Winter sunset over the reed beds near Little Murston Nature Reserve.

Welcome to Swale! This is a significant landscape with a rich arts heritage. The great painter JMW Turner loved capturing the big skies and the quality of light here; so we're definitely in good artistic company!

This guide features a variety of evocative and unusual photo locations for you to explore as part of a day out walking or as specific spots to head to with your camera. Whether you have a smartphone or a DSLR, this guide has ideas and inspiration for you to plan your visit and discover some outstanding land and seascapes.

Excellent photography is possible at any time of day or year in Swale. From creeks, marshes, shipwrecks and ancient forests to nature reserves, wild horses and Highland Cattle, it's an incredibly varied landscape.

Each location includes hints and tips for making your photography a success. From planning your visit around tides, sunrises and sunsets or specific times of year, all the key secrets to each location are revealed.

Also included are suggested walking routes, pubs, cafes and restaurants. These are the hidden gems which I've found for myself and can highly recommend to you. They might lie off the beaten track, but they are places with unique character and charm where you will enjoy first class Kentish hospitality.

I hope this helps you to enjoy discovering Swale with your camera and I wish you good light and Turner-esque skies!

Alex Hare
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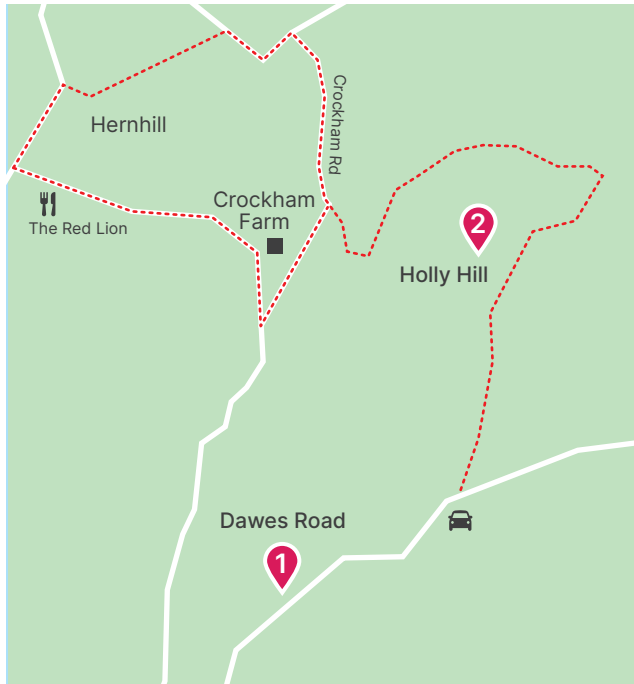
Average sunrise, sunset & daylight hours

Month	Sunrise	Sunset	Daylight	
Winter	December	08.01	16.15	8 hours
	January	08.01	16.16	8 hours
	February	07.15	17.10	10 hours
Spring	March	06.15	18.00	10 hours
	April	06.03	19.57	14 hours
	May	05.05	20.45	16 hours
Summer	June	04.35	21.20	17 hours
	July	04.56	21.14	16 hours
	August	05.42	20.25	15 hours
Autumn	September	06.30	19.15	13 hours
	October	07.23	18.05	11 hours
	November	07.19	16.08	9 hours

Map of Swale Photo Locations

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Holly Hill & Dawes Road



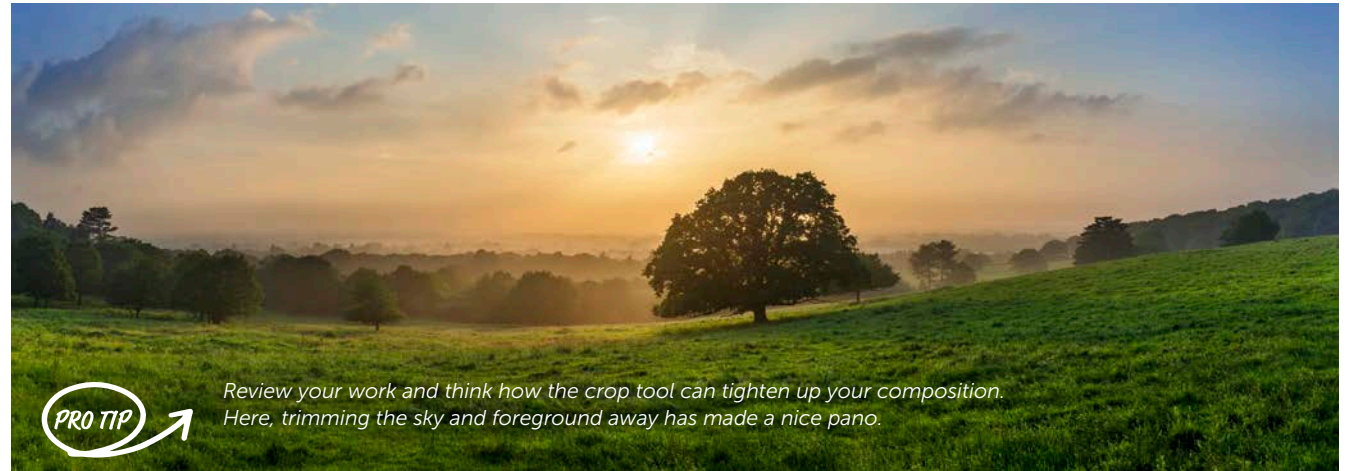
What's there?

Holly Hill lies just north of Dawes Road and together they provide one of the best vistas in north Kent. With an excellent walk through varied countryside and two quintessential English village pubs, it's an excellent place to enjoy some landscape photography as part of a day out exploring.

Where to Park

For Holly Hill and views from Dawes Road, there is plenty of free parking in the laybys where the bridleway meets the road, located at:

Parking **what3words**: retailing.bottom.trees



Review your work and think how the crop tool can tighten up your composition. Here, trimming the sky and foreground away has made a nice pano.

Viewpoint 1: Dawes Road

From the parking, the view will be immediately apparent as the landscape disappears into the distance towards The Swale and the Isle of Sheppey.

The best places to enjoy the view with your camera are just down Dawes Road. After a few yards heading downhill, an area suitable for enjoying the views away from the road offers plenty of room to set up and watch the light and skies unfold. Moving further down the hill, other views present themselves over the small fence line with some trees available for framing alternative compositions.

This viewpoint suits a variety of lenses. A wide angle will be ideal for taking in the 'big views' of the sky and landscape, whereas a telephoto is useful when the afternoon or setting sun backlights the scene, especially with any lingering haze or mist present in the valley below.



The sky forms a large part of the composition and thought must go towards how to fill this with interest. Any broken clouds or changeable weather will serve the photographer well.

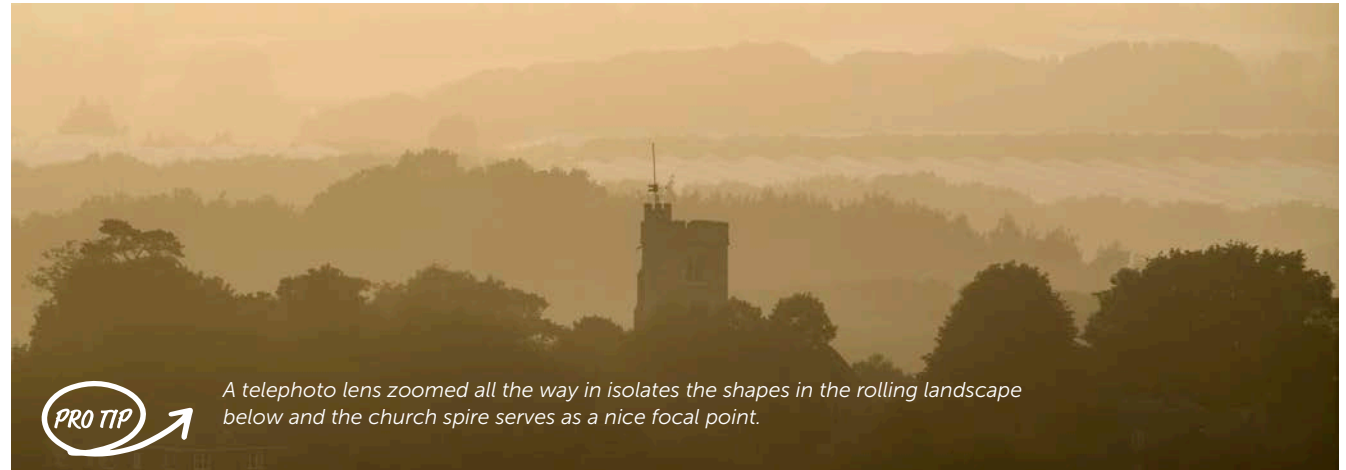
Holly Hill & Dawes Road

Viewpoint 2: Holly Hill

From the parking spot on Dawes Road, a short walk northwards via the bridleway heading into Holly Hill reveals a beautiful patch of woodland. It's deciduous so it also comes alive in autumn when the leaves turn golden shades of brown and ochre. As the path travels downhill towards the village of Hernhill, there are some lovely views over the north Kent marshes and the Thames Estuary.

Where the bridleway meets Crockham Road, turn left and then sharp right and follow the road up into Hernhill. If you take the footpath on the left, near the top of the road, it takes you through the churchyard and makes for a lovely way to arrive at the idyllic village green where the Tudor pub (The Red Lion) awaits. From here, a circular route back to Dawes Road can be found by taking the footpath heading north east out of Hernhill towards Crockham Road and back up Holly Hill.

The Red Lion, a pub dating back to Medieval times, awaits the traveller on arrival at the village green in Hernhill.



A telephoto lens zoomed all the way in isolates the shapes in the rolling landscape below and the church spire serves as a nice focal point.

📍 Best Time of Year/Day

The view from Dawes Road is suitable at any time of day or year as much depends on the quality of the clouds in the expansive sky above this landscape.

Consider autumn for the colours in the forest, and any day forecasting some wind and showers for big skies and fast changing cloudscapes.

Sunset is a good option in summer as the sun is so far north in this season it will be in view and potentially offer some spectacular colours. Sunset will also provide a nice backlight to any gathering mist in the valley as the cool air moves in over the warm landscape.

🍴 Where to Eat & Drink

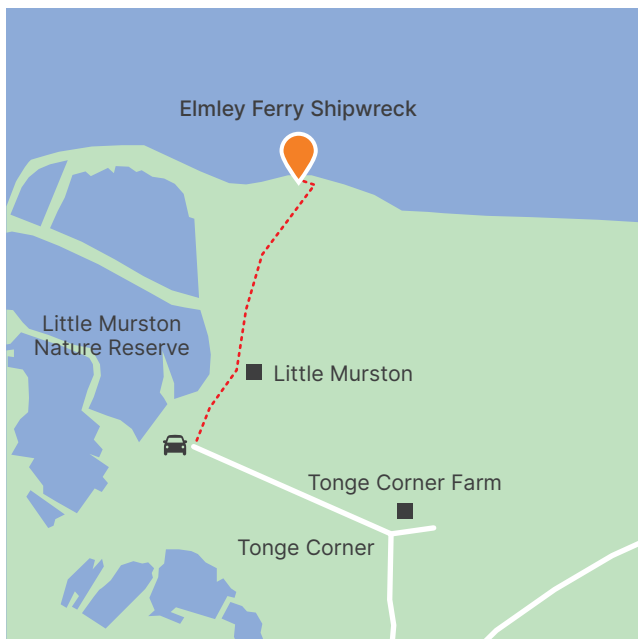
The Red Lion at Hernhill is a wonderful old pub with a car park and large extension to cater for eaters and drinkers. At the bottom of Dawes Road, on

Staplestreet Road, there is an excellent old pub called the Three Horseshoes. It's family friendly and with outdoor space for food and drinks, ideal in summer. Finally, at Dargate (just north of Holly Hill) on Plumpudding Lane, is another hidden gem; The Dove. Please see their websites for photos and further info.



The large deciduous woodland on Holly Hill is a wonderful place to enjoy a walk and some photography from late spring into autumn.

Elmley Ferry & Wild Horses



What's there?

Swale thrived during the great age of sail as boat building and maritime trade boomed here. Today, the relics of this era can be found in the form of shipwrecks and there are few better than Elmley Ferry, just off the banks of The Swale.

Wellies are highly recommended for walking down to the shipwreck as the path has large puddles too deep for walking boots after rainfall.

Where to Park

There is no official parking here, but I have always found I can tuck my car off the bridleway from where it begins, or further down towards the coast in a small lay-by opposite a house. If you have a 4x4 with good clearance, you can drive all the way to the end of the track where it meets the sea wall by the coast. To reach the start of the bridleway use:

Bridleway what3words: taped.search.valve

Viewpoint: Elmley Ferry Shipwreck

To reach the ferry, head towards Tonge Corner (postcode ME9 9BB) and follow the road onwards to the very end where the bridleway begins. The path leads you to the coast and a few yards west (turning left) brings the shipwreck into view.

Also here is Little Murston Nature Reserve and, on occasion, a semi-wild herd of Konik horses that can be seen between here and eastwards towards Oare Marshes.

These horses are closely related to the extinct Tarpan which was a forest horse from Neolithic times. Today, the Koniks perform a vital role in maintaining the natural environment through grazing the land and supporting biodiversity, similar to how the Tarpan once did.

The marshland behind the sea wall on the eastern side of the path is also full of photogenic potential and worth exploring after a visit to the ferry. The reeds offer plenty of abstract and close up photos away from the 'big views' over The Swale.



Check your tide app for high tide an hour or more before sunset to time a visit for when the water is around the boat and the sky may also come alive with colour!

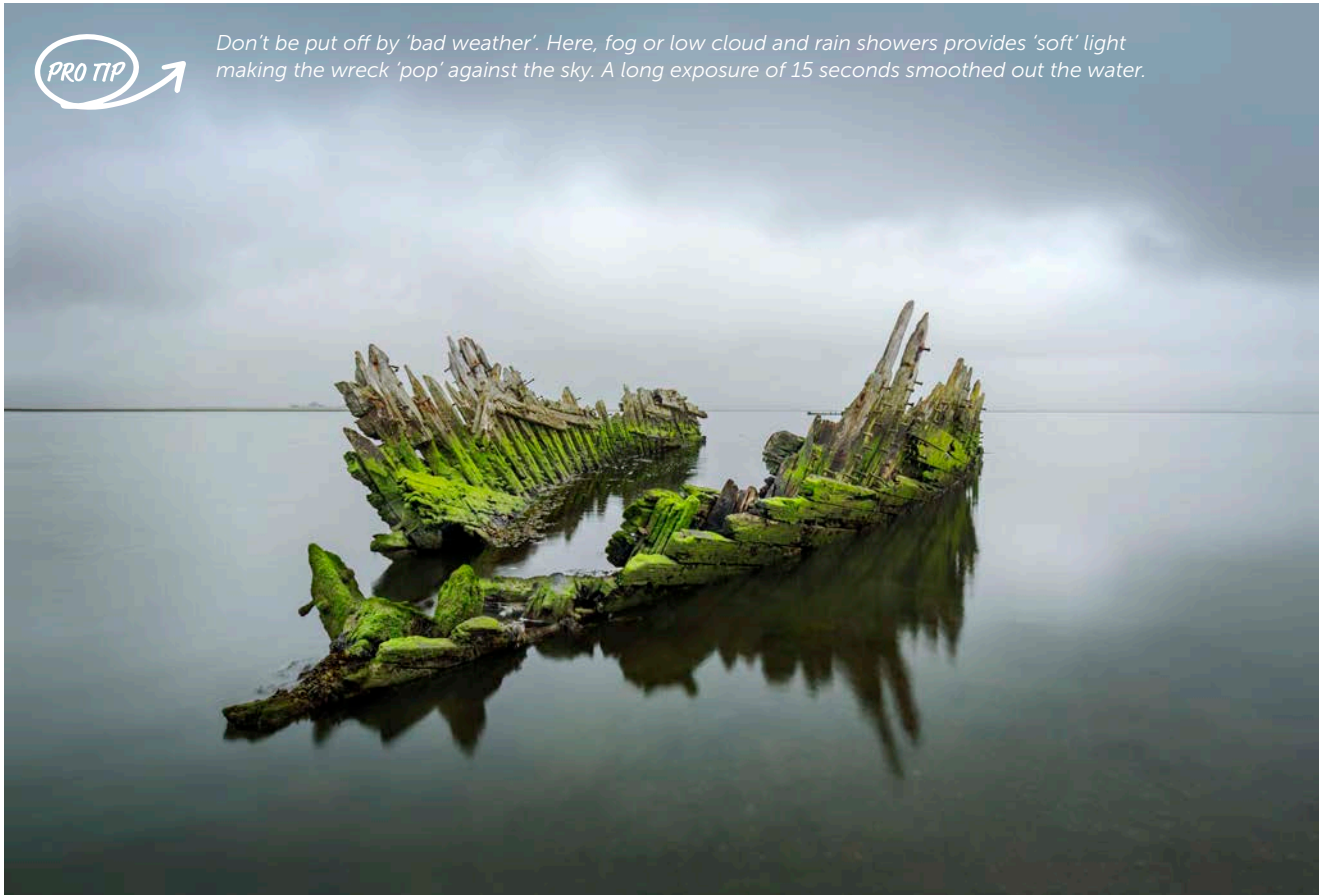


You can't plan everything. Serendipity plays a big, but fun, part of outdoor photography. If you're lucky to see wild horses, capture what you can while you can!

Elmley Ferry & Wild Horses



Don't be put off by 'bad weather'. Here, fog or low cloud and rain showers provides 'soft' light making the wreck 'pop' against the sky. A long exposure of 15 seconds smoothed out the water.



Best Time of Year/Day

The wreck can be shot any time of day or year, but what's more important is to time a visit from around an hour after high tide when the water is still around it hiding the less photogenic mud beneath.

At low tide, one can walk out on the firm mud and get closer to the second wreck further out into The Swale.

Where to Eat & Drink

Nearby, at Conyer, there is the 18th Century Ship Inn serving food and local ales. A short drive east is Faversham and Oare where some outstanding old pubs and excellent cafes can be found, please see the location entry for these places for specific recommendations!



Golden afternoon light in winter has come in from the right hand side (side lighting) which has made the grasses come alive with colour.



When wind makes the clouds move, neutral density filters provide a longer exposure which captures their movement as they move across the sky. See the Photography Kit section for more info.

Oare Creek, Hollowshore, Oare Marshes & Harty Ferry



What's there?

This trio of locations offers lovely walks and photography by the coast, creeks and marshes. It also features a choice of three excellent pubs and a café.

From the parking at Oare village to the mouth at Hollowshore, it is a pleasant 30 minute stroll beside the creek, reed beds, marshes and boats. Nearby, Oare Nature Reserve, on Oare Marshes, is nationally recognised as outstanding for sighting over-wintering birds.

Where to Park

For Oare Creek and Hollowshore:

Parking what3words: bongo.bedroom.campfires

Parking postcode: ME13 0PY

For Oare Marshes & Harty Ferry:

Parking what3words: retiring.vows.thickens

Parking postcode: ME13 0QD

Viewpoint 1: Oare Creek & Hollowshore

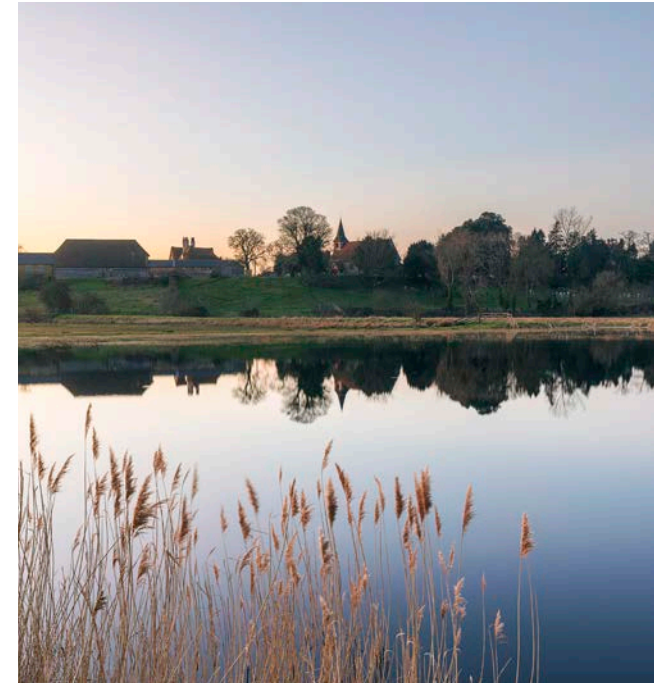
From the parking, follow the Saxon Shore Way over the road, across the small field and onwards as it runs alongside the creek towards Hollowshore.

The creek has an area of marshland on the western side and a church as a point of interest. The creek is packed with boats in varying states of repair.

Hollowshore lies at the mouth of Oare Creek; an unusual but serene landscape best captured at high tide and late in the afternoon or evening when the water offers calm reflections on a still day.



Beautiful light can happen early and late in the day. Here, twilight was around 30 mins after sunset for this calm and evocative scene.



Still, calm weather allows reflections and timed for sunset the light is warm and inviting.



The soft light at dusk combines well with splashes of colour from these colourful boats.

Oare Creek, Hollowshore, Oare Marshes & Harty Ferry

Viewpoint 2: Oare Marshes & Harty Ferry

You can drive and park at Oare Marshes but, if you continue along the footpath from Hollowshore, it leads to Oare Marshes and makes for a nice longish route there and back.

The light, tides and weather can change quickly around here so a 'there and back' walk from mid afternoon into sunset can be very productive.

The nature reserve at Oare Marshes provides anyone with a long lens and an interest in bird photography with a wealth of opportunity. The marshes to the east and west of Harty ferry offer plenty of lovely abstracts and vistas depending on the weather and light you experience. Keep an eye out for the wild herds of Konik horses and the lovely Highland Cattle that often graze in the area between Hollowshore and Oare Marshes.

🕒 Best Time of Year/Day

Oare Marshes comes alive in winter with the birds that visit it. It's also a good time for frosty conditions. Spring is wonderful for the rich colours in the reed beds.

Hollowshore and Oare Creek are worth considering all year round when high tide and calm weather combine well. Check your tide app to time your visit carefully as the water drains away very quickly after high tide! My preference is to visit Hollowshore for high tide at sunset and walk back to Oare and capture the boats into the twilight as I go.

🍴 Where to Eat & Drink

Oare and Hollowshore are blessed with excellent, family friendly, pubs. The Shipwright's Arms, a lovely and truly remote pub on the marshes, lies behind the boat yard at Hollowshore. To get there, drive up Ham Road on the eastern side of Oare Creek. A pleasant, child friendly, beer garden awaits. Also serves pub grub.

In Oare, The Café by the Creek serves the local fraternity of yachtsman but passing travellers are very welcome too. It's just opposite the parking spot and serves excellent teas and cakes.

The Castle Inn and Three Mariners are only a few paces away from the parking spot. The Three Mariners offers perhaps the warmest welcome of any pub I've ever visited and serves excellent food.

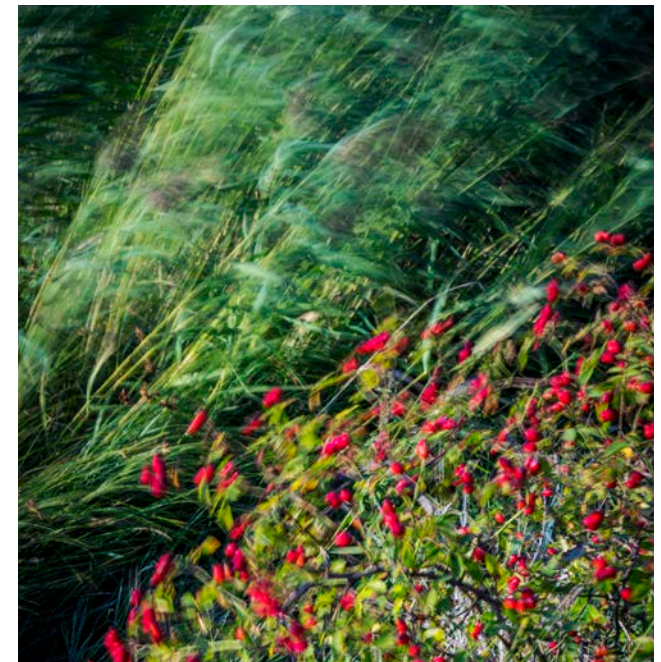
Looking north towards Isle of Sheppey from Harty Ferry at Oare Nature Reserve and Marshes.



Keep an eye out to sea for the cloudscapes can ebb and flow throughout the day.

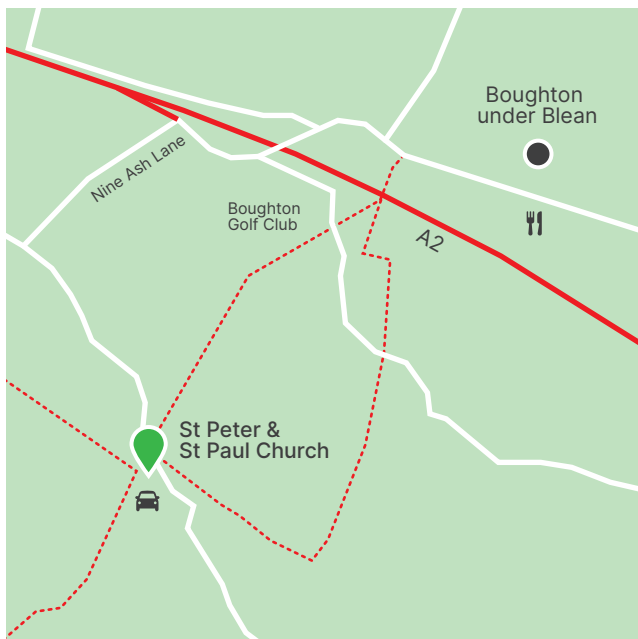


Use the zoom on your lens to isolate small details in the landscape for abstract images capturing the 'small landscape'.



With a shutter speed of 1 sec I captured the movement in the reeds as the wind blew. Try the Slow Shutter app on your Smartphone for the same effect.

St Peter & St Paul Church, Boughton under Blean



Where to Park

An excellent circuit walk can easily be plotted from Boughton under Blean (where there is plenty of parking) and south past the golf club, around the church and back via Bushey Close. These paths are some of Kent's oldest and include the 'coffin track' which links the church to Boughton under Blean. An OS map will indicate these paths and the routes available to you.

Parking is also available at the church (best avoid a service) from where various walking routes/options can be undertaken:

Parking what3words: dislikes.revival.exist

From here, it's a short walk up to the church. If it's open, enjoy exploring inside and finding out more about its history.

Viewpoint: St Peter & St Paul Church

There are two excellent places to enjoy views of the church from each of the footpaths that lead away from it, heading either west or south.

There's no particular favourite to recommend as much depends on the time of day you visit and the weather, light and crops you find in the field.

From the path heading south, towards the railway line, a classic view of this quintessential English countryside landscape can certainly be made.

What's there?

Perched on the brow of a hill, this 13th Century church is just south of Boughton under Blean and it must be one of the most picturesque churches in the UK.

Everything is stepped in history here; the Domesday book records the village and the church was owned by the first Archbishops of Canterbury. It also lies on a pilgrims route to Canterbury Cathedral; the Mother Church for the worldwide Anglican Communion. Even the trees around it are ancient; the large yew tree on the south side dates back to 1695.



Where a scene has much interest left to right, but perhaps more repetitive sky and foreground, a panoramic crop can 'tighten' the composition up well.

St Peter & St Paul Church, Boughton under Blean



Try to explore as many angles or views as you can find at any location to consider all the possibilities for capturing it.

Best Time of Year/Day

As the best views are found from the two footpaths and looking back, over the fields towards the church, the crop and time of year are important factors.

In spring, it's possible that Oilseed Rape - which peaks in colour in late April - might be planted. After that, Wheat, which is emerald green as it grows and golden yellow prior to harvesting, might be present.

In terms of timing your visit during the day, consider morning or late afternoon as these periods offer the chance of some low light flooding in from the east or west, side lighting the church.

Turner also painted churches and he often depicted them with big skies, such as towering summer clouds or storms, which added drama to the scene and emphasised the power of nature. Therefore, if some April showers or summer storms sent some shafts of light down onto the landscape this location could certainly suit a photographer very well too!

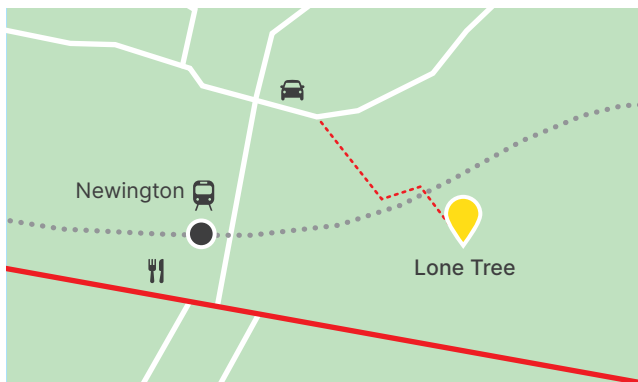


Where to Eat & Drink

The best and nearest places to eat and drink are in Boughton under Blean. The village has the excellent Dairy Restaurant & Bar, Queens Head and White Horse pubs. Also nearby is the luxury Cave Hotel (at the golf course, postcode ME13 9AJ) which has high-end food, drink and seating inside and out.

Just north of Boughton under Blean, on Staplestreet Road is the Three Horseshoes; a traditional wooden weather boarded pub deep in some of Swale's prettiest countryside.

Lone Tree at Newington



What's there?

This gently ascending landscape with a perfect oak tree perched upon the brow of a hill lies tucked away in the heart of Swale's agricultural countryside. It offers a chance to use various lenses to create wide vistas or smaller, more abstract compositions of the tree. It's a place to return to time and again as various weather, seasons and times of day provide very different outcomes.



A weather forecast can only tell you so much. If you see any dramatic, 'Turner-esque' skies developing, head somewhere you can take advantage of them at any time of year.

Where to Park

Free parking is on Church Lane and adjacent to the entrance to St Mary the Virgin Church.

Parking what3words: isolated.nicknames.snares



In late April Oilseed Rape is in full bloom. Keeping an eye on crops season to season can pay dividends and repeat visits make the chances of fine conditions more likely.

Viewpoint: Lone Tree

From the parking, follow the road downhill before taking a right onto the public footpath. The footpath passes through a residential gate, past a large pond and beside a house before entering some woodland. At the railway line, use the crossing to enter the field and take the public footpath as it ascends gently uphill through the field to where views of the oak tree can be found.

Best Time of Year/Day

The tree is potentially a good location all year round. From snow in winter and colourful crops in Spring, to warm golden wheat into July and August, it's generally best to visit in the mid to late afternoon and towards sunset. However, it's not ideally positioned for a dawn shoot (except perhaps in mid winter).

Where to Eat & Drink

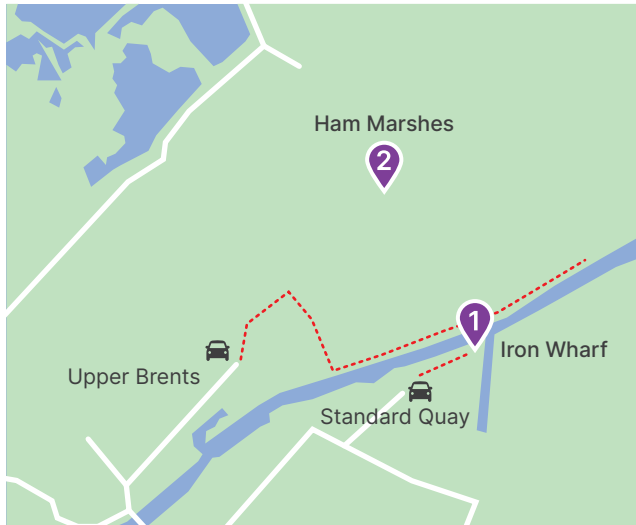
As it's a remote location, I suggest heading to nearby Conyer where there is the 18th Century Ship Inn serving food and local ales.

A short drive east to Faversham and Oare offers some outstanding old pubs and excellent cafes. Please see the location entries for these places for specific recommendations!



Always consider how a view might look in different seasons and plan a visit accordingly to capture it's variety.

Faversham, Faversham Creek & Ospringe

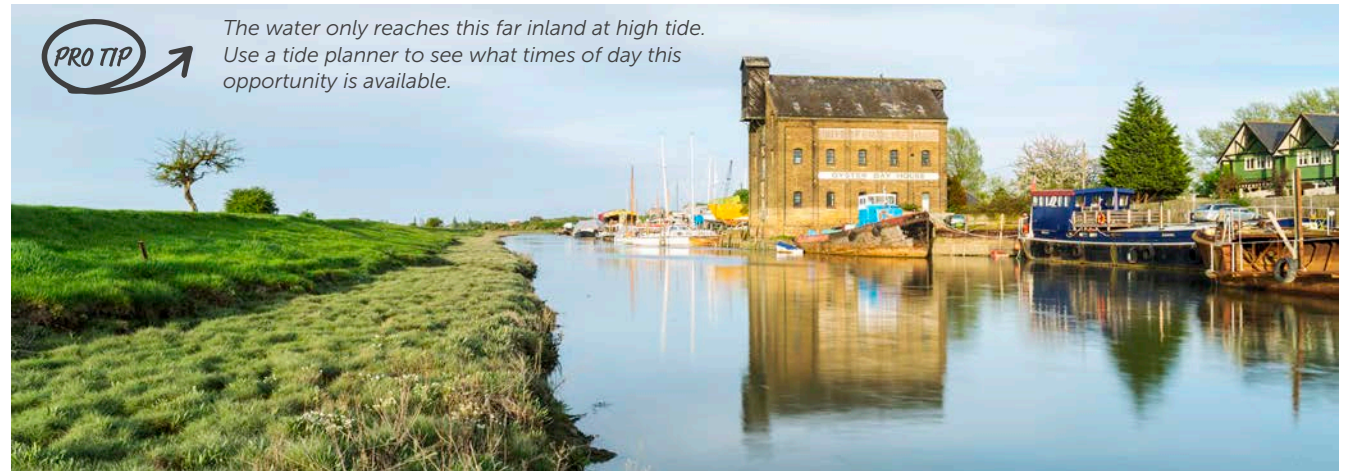


What's there?

Faversham lies at the top of the creek bearing its name. It is Kent's oldest market town and home to Shepherd Neame, Britain's oldest brewer.

The town centre has some beautiful Tudor buildings which come alive at dusk when the ambient light is low and the sky fades to twilight. Just outside Faversham, at Ospringe, there's a beautiful church that's worth visiting to capture it and the crops in the field around it.

Down by the creek, Ham Marshes and Iron Wharf fall either side of this narrow waterway. On the eastern side, Iron Wharf and the distinct Oyster Bay House (best captured from the opposite bank), leads onto a photogenic old boat yard via the Saxon Shore Way Footpath and onwards towards Graveney Marshes.



The water only reaches this far inland at high tide. Use a tide planner to see what times of day this opportunity is available.

Where to Park

For Standard Quay & Iron Wharf:

Parking what3words: loss.admire.octagon

Parking postcode: ME13 7BS

For Ham Marshes:

Parking what3words: rating.downfield.hogs

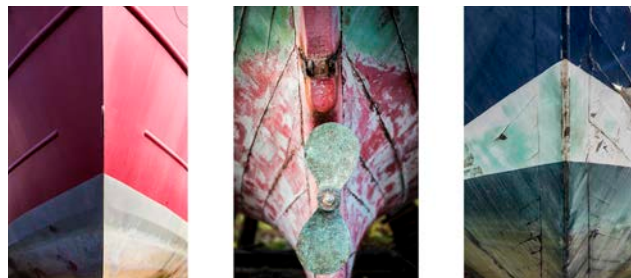
For St Peter & St Paul's Church, Ospringe:

Parking what3words: cherish.pavilions.ushering

Viewpoint 1: Iron Wharf Boat Yard & Graveney Marshes

Park at Standard Quay (free for 2 hours) and pick up the Saxon Shore Way heading north. After around 150 yards you reach a boat yard where various boats can be used for abstract photographs of the colours and patterns in their exposed hulls. Access further into the boat yard is via private land, not available without permission from the land owner.

Further on, past Quints Retreat café caravan, views across to the attractive little trees on Ham Marshes can be seen from where the old wooden wharfs lie abandoned on the marshes. Beyond this, a twisted metal shipwreck can be found before the path leads you onto the expansive Graveney Marshes.



Finding a sequence of images connected by an idea or theme can make a nice triptych and these boat abstracts worked well in this sense.

Faversham, Faversham Creek & Ospringe

Viewpoint 2: Ham Marshes

Although, quite literally, a stone's throw away from Standard Quay, reaching Ham Marshes requires a circuitous drive into town, over the bridge and along Upper Brents to where the road terminates at a small industrial estate.

From here, pick up the public footpath heading around the buildings and beside a field, and head towards the creek for some splendid views across to Oyster Bay House.

Further on, an enjoyable marshland walk brings various small trees that are fun to set against the skyline into view. Depending on the time of year and rainfall, various large puddles form here providing calm reflections for some abstract photography.

From the mouth of the creek, a classic view back towards Faversham on a misty dawn with the masts of the Thames Barges silhouetted is an alluring idea if such conditions are forecast.



The old architecture in Faversham is most evocative at night when the street lights bathe it in a warm glow.



Trees isolated against a sky are always a compelling combination. Use a compass to see where the sun rises and sets to plan for colours behind the tree on a return visit at dawn or dusk.

Viewpoint 3: Faversham Town Centre & Ospringe

The old buildings and cobbled town centre in Faversham make for a photogenic combination, especially at twilight when the inky blue colours at dusk combine well with the warm glow of the street lights. It can be an ideal way to spend some time before enjoying the excellent pubs and restaurants in the town.

Ospringe is a short drive from Faversham and lies on its southern edge. Here, the beautiful church is adjacent to the road where there is plenty of room to park. A public footpath runs from the church over the fields behind it, whilst views from the verge on the road side can provide an excellent angle with any colourful crops in the field.



Timing is crucial for 'night' shots in towns and cities with an inky blue sky. It's actually a period at twilight after sunset and before night fall.



The church at Ospringe amidst some strong colours from the field and blue sky above.

Faversham, Faversham Creek & Ospringe

🕒 Best Time of Year/Day

There's plenty of opportunity to photograph here throughout the year, but mornings and afternoons on the marshes, and during twilight for Faversham town centre, are especially good.

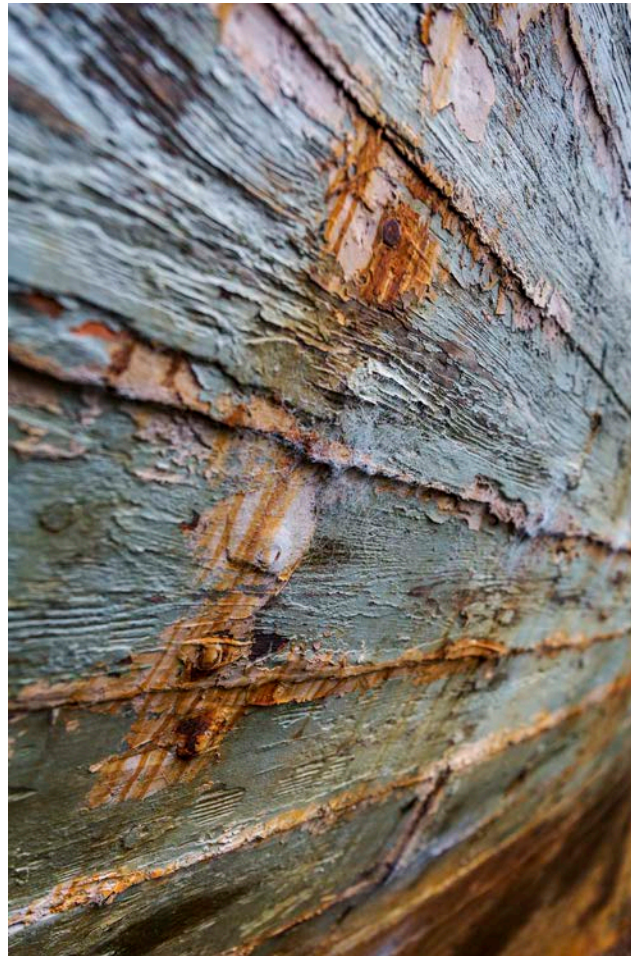
Any morning with light winds that coincides with a high tide is likely to offer great conditions for photographing the creek.

The boat yard offers somewhere for photography even on a sunny day as the exposed hulls provide interesting colour abstracts.

The church at Ospringe is captured well in the context of the crop around it, which varies from season to season. Only winter (except in snow!) would be the least likely time for a productive shoot here.



Old wooden wharfs lie abandoned along the Saxon Shore Way as it heads north towards Graveney Marshes from the boat yard.



Not all outdoor photography is vistas and scenery; the small details we notice are all part of the landscape and tell their own story.



The Bear Inn at the town square in Faversham.

🍴 Where to Eat & Drink

Standard Quay offers an excellent café within the lovely little garden centre adjacent to the car park. There are also some very good independents offering a variety of daytime and evening meals here. In the boat yard, there's an excellent caravan café (Quints Retreat) serving yachtsman and walkers on the Saxon Shore Way with delicious snacks, drinks and pleasant seating by the creek.

In Faversham, The Bear Inn on the town square, must rank as one of the finest traditional pubs in the UK with its stunning interior.

If you walk onto Ham Marshes, the Saxon Shore Way footpath will take you round to Hollowshore and the remote Shipwright's Arms. This pub is a true hidden gem serving food and local beer.

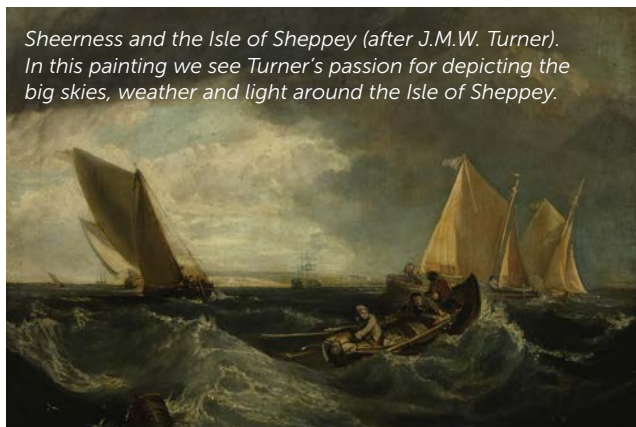
Isle of Sheppey: Sheppey Crossing, Warden Point, Leysdown Beach & Shellness



What's there?

The Isle of Sheppey has some of the most peaceful landscapes in Kent as they abound with stillness, calm and abundant bird life beneath some incredible skiescapes.

The locations here are all very different, emphasising the impressive variety of subject matter available to the photographer throughout the year.



Sheerness and the Isle of Sheppey (after J.M.W. Turner). In this painting we see Turner's passion for depicting the big skies, weather and light around the Isle of Sheppey.

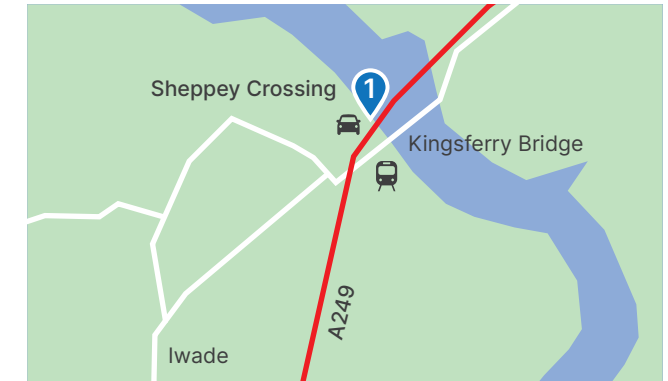


A forecast for wind speeds under 5mph is enough to provide the potential for mirror like reflections in water. Without them, the shot relies more on dramatic light and skies.



Beautiful light at Leysdown at dusk where simple compositions of the sky, reflections and sand are effective.

Viewpoint 1: Sheppey Crossing



Where to Park

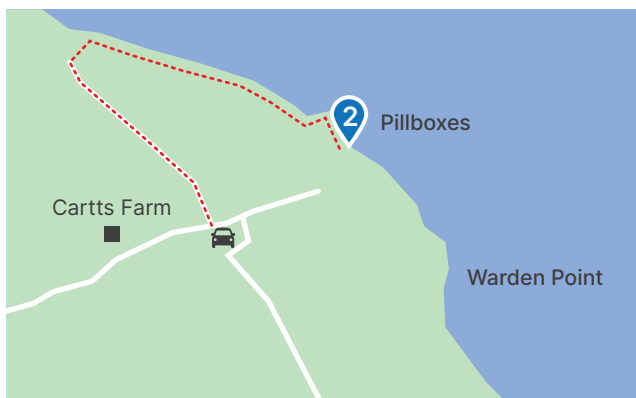
Parking what3words: fingertip.casually.tolls
Parking postcode: ME9 8SS (Swale railway station)

The impressive and graphic shape of the bridge that connects the Isle of Sheppey to the mainland via road is an excellent photographic opportunity. It's easily reached en route to Sheppey by exiting the A249 via the slip road on the approach to the bridge. Bear left at the roundabout, then first right heading towards a car parking area where the coastal path along the sea defences can be picked up, and where views over the water and towards the bridge become apparent.

The bridge is also easy to reach via the Swale branch line railway station. From the exit, access to the coastal path is via the equally interesting views of Kings Ferry Bridge.

Isle of Sheppey: Sheppey Crossing, Warden Point, Leysdown Beach & Shellness

Viewpoint 2: Warden Point



Where to Park

Parking what3words: shears.peroxide.distilled

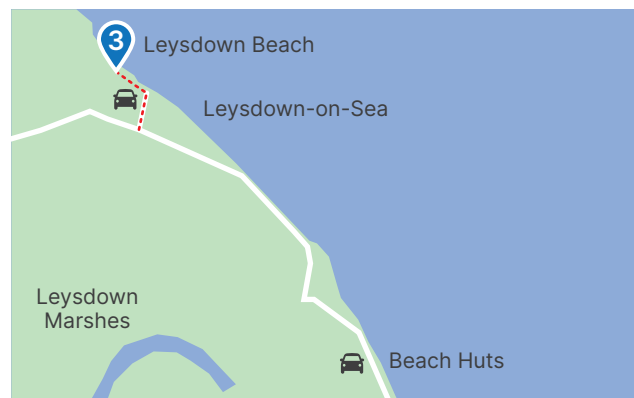
At Warden Point a series of WW2 pillboxes rest on the firm mud. Tilted at slight angles and washed daily by the tides that flow around them, they make for a fascinating and unusual subject.

Please note the land above the pillboxes is liable to slip and caution must be taken if venturing there.

To reach the pillboxes from the parking area, follow the road heading north west from the parking spot (which becomes a public footpath) heading down to the beach $\frac{3}{4}$ mile west of the pillboxes. On reaching the shoreline, head east along the beach until they come into view.

Time your visit for around an hour after high tide and the beach is accessible with the water still washing around the pillboxes. Wellies are essential!

Viewpoint 3: Leysdown Beach



Where to Park

For Leysdown-on-Sea Promenade:

Parking what3words: concerned.lion.piles

Parking postcode: ME12 4QA (Promenade Car Park)

For Leysdown Beach Huts:

Parking what3words: hoping.monorail.fillers

Leysdown Beach has golden sand that gives way to wide mudflats at low tide which are firm enough to walk on. Where the water lies on the mud, it reflects the light and sky above, especially at dawn and dusk. A sky and seascape combination can be beautiful in its simplicity and emphasises these large, natural elements.

From the parking at Leysdown-on-Sea, the beach is nearby and offers a lovely place to spend a warm summer's day followed by some photography at dusk.

Please note that a section of the beach, just south of Leysdown on Sea is a naturist beach. Signage indicates the area in question.

Heading south from Leysdown-on-Sea, the Shellness Road passes a neat row of colourful beach huts on your left with ample parking through the gate, or in a layby in the road. Facing east, they overlook the full spectacular beauty of Turner's 'big skies' as they form over the sea when unsettled weather is on the cards.



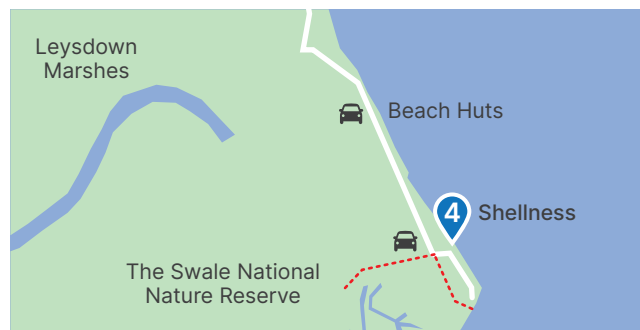
Timing is essential! This photo was taken around an hour after high tide before the water drained away. In the morning or afternoon the sky is likely to have pleasing light as a backdrop too.



A beach facing out to sea will offer a good chance of catching any moody conditions that the weather brings in.

Isle of Sheppey: Sheppey Crossing, Warden Point, Leysdown Beach & Shellness

Viewpoint 4: Shellness



Where to Park

Parking what3words: monorail.balance.survived
Parking postcode: ME12 4RP

Further down Shellness Road lies the (private) hamlet of Shellness where free parking in the RSPB car park gives access onto the marshes and beach. Here we find sand, shingle, weathered groynes and a marsh full of attractive colours. A walk around the periphery of it offers plenty of photo opportunity including a decaying WW2 era pillbox.



Keep an eye out for the 'small landscapes' at your feet where patterns, textures and colours can make excellent photos.

Additional Locations & Viewpoints

Sheppey has much to enjoy exploring and the following are also highly recommended for outdoor photography opportunities:

Minster Abbey Gatehouse Museum (ME12 2HW): the attractive 12th Century gatehouse offers excellent panoramic views across the land and seascape.

Elmley Nature Reserve (ME12 3RW): This large and very special nature reserve is a wilderness full of marshland, birds, peace and tranquillity. It can be explored via pre booked tours, see the Elmley Nature Reserve website.

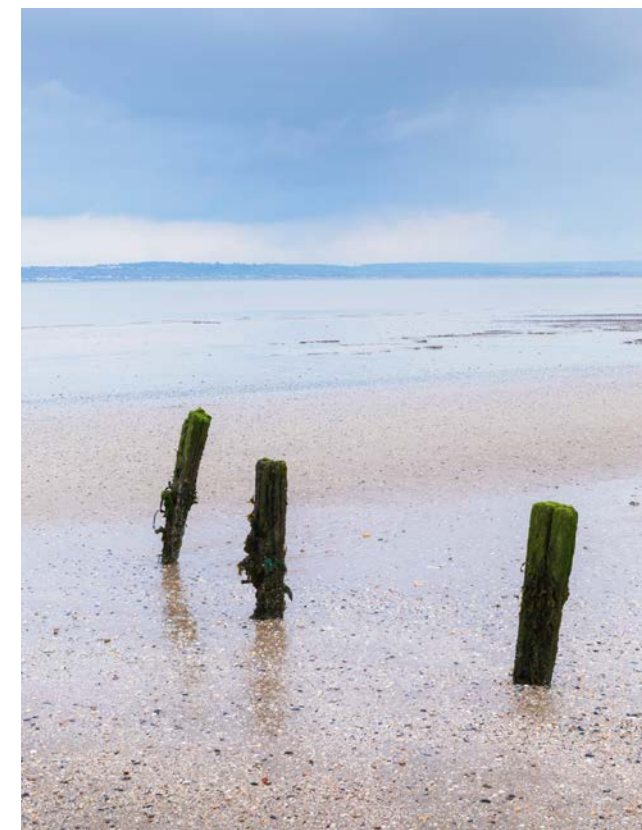
Isle of Harty Trail (see Explore Kent website for route map): This circular route is ideal for cyclists, including families, and tours through the heart of Sheppey's quiet and beautiful landscape.

Best Time of Year/Day

Viewpoint 1 is best when the sun is low on the horizon, be it early morning or late afternoon, as the bridge is bathed in warm and attractive side light. Viewpoint 2 can suit any time of day. The essential factor is timing; the pillboxes look best with some water around them which is around an hour after high tide. Viewpoint 3 and 4 are good options throughout the year although early morning and late afternoon light are likely to offer the best chance of some interesting skies. Low tide is also worth factoring in for reflections on the beach at Leysdown-On-Sea, especially at dawn and dusk.

Where to Eat & Drink

All the towns and villages on Sheppey have a variety of pubs and cafes. The Ferry House Inn at Harty Ferry is a very enjoyable place for an evening meal, especially in summer, when tables on the patio provide elevated views across The Swale only a few yards from the shoreline.



Add a sense of depth to your photo by placing something in the bottom third as foreground to draw the eye into and through the scene.

Blean Woods



Where to Park

The best place to park is in the free RSPB car park down New Road, off Rough Common Road near Canterbury:

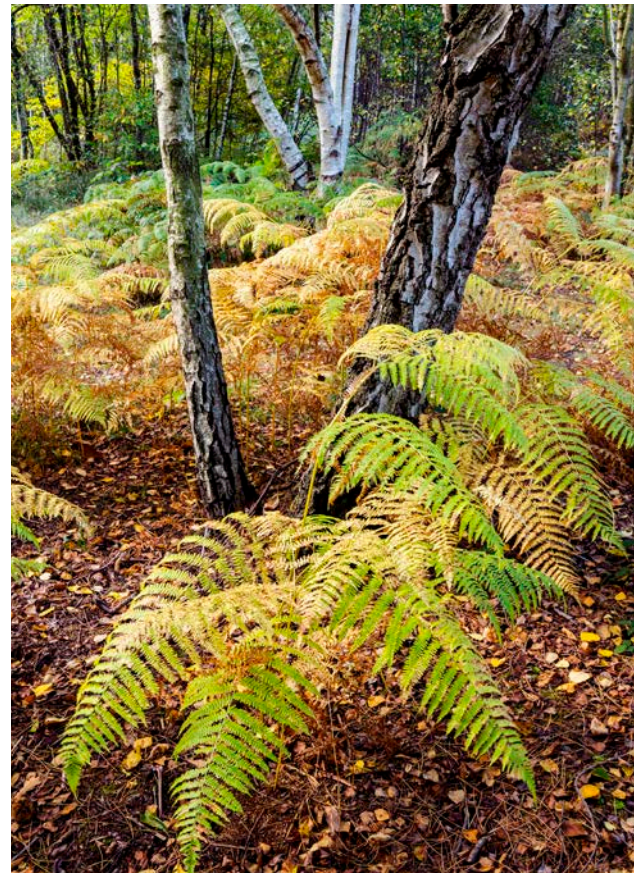
Parking what3words: [tapes.removing.commuted](https://www.what3words.com/tapes.removing.commuted)

What's there?

Blean Woods is an ancient forest where woodpeckers and nightingales nest amongst beautiful old oaks, and where colourful fungi grow on the autumnal woodland floor.

There's a myriad of footpaths to explore it from which take you deep into a varied woodland including an area alive with purple heather in mid-summer.

Photographing woodland is one of the harder subjects to tackle. The chaos of the forest makes finding a composition tricky. If you are struggling to 'see' a composition, try what I call 'abstracting' to find simple details or arrangements of trees, trunks, or individual leaves, rather than a big 'view'.



Less is so often more and especially in the complicated landscape of a woodland. Here, one frond of bracken and three trunks provide the structure to this effective composition.



if you find the wider view appeals, use the 'rule of thirds' to compose something in your foreground, middle and background.

Blean Woods

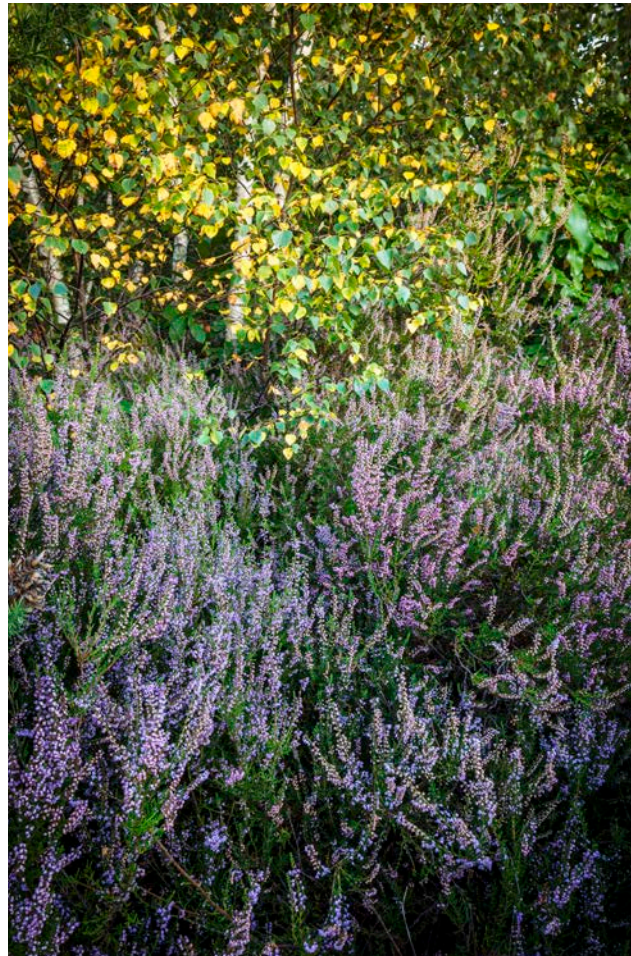
Viewpoint : Blean Woods

The car park lies deep in the forest and some lovely silver birches, to the right of the information sign, signal what is to come. Throughout the wood, there is easy access away from the footpaths into the woodland to explore anything that catches your eye. I recommend taking an OS map and GPS device with you, but otherwise, just follow the marked trails and enjoy the experience!

In summer, a large clearing has a carpet of colourful heather, visible if you head for grid reference TR 099 594, also marked on the location map provided here.



This Fly Agaric was shot as I lay flat on the ground, level with it, and zoomed in as much as possible to isolate it from the background.



Don't be afraid to 'abstract' what you see down to it's simplest forms. This arrangement of colours and textures has led to a balanced composition of the intense colours on display.



Best Time of Year/Day

Morning and evening are often good for the chance of low light piercing through the trees, and any forecast for fog or misty days is ideal for the unusual look and feel this provides.

In autumn, the various deciduous trees turn orange and the fungi emerge, with some excellent specimens to be found here.



Where to Eat & Drink

Blean Woods is close to the beautiful, almost timeless, village of Boughton under Blean. Head north on the A2 and come off on the Boughton exit, turn left onto Canterbury Road and head into the village. Here you will find the excellent Dairy Restaurant & Bar, Queens Head and White Horse pubs.

Nearby, the Three Horseshoes is just to the north up Staplestreet Rd (see also Holly Hill location). Each are unique places, family friendly and with wonderful character and history connected to the landscape.



Think how the landscape might look in different conditions or times of year. Here, after rainfall, I returned as the streams were full.

Planning Your Trip

Like any activity, landscape photography involves some degree of planning. From checking the weather before embarking on a walk, to thinking in more detail about timing your visit for specific tides or times of day, here are some resources to help you.

Useful Apps

Navigating

Aside from an OS map, I recommend the free app What3Words. This provides a quick and easy way to identify places and navigate to them. It's no replacement for a proper map but it's great for navigating to specific parking spots at each location as it's more accurate than postcodes.

Weather & Tide

Land and seascape photography is very dependent on the weather and the tides, so two useful resources are the BBC Weather app and a tide app, e.g. Tide Pro or Imray Tides Planner.

If you follow the tips provided for each location, you can use these apps to plan for when the conditions are in your favour for photography. This can certainly save heading out for a dawn shoot only to find the tide is out when you wanted it to be high, or that there's clear skies when you hoped for some dramatic clouds!



Frosty conditions in winter on the marshes of north Swale.

When To Shoot - Time of Day & Year

Swale benefits from varied conditions throughout the year and from dawn to dusk. From summer storms out to sea, to frosty marshes in winter, to moody seascapes in mist or fog, there is always something available throughout the year.

Keep an eye out for any forecast for cloudy or partly cloudy weather as it can often provide excellent conditions for photography. At dawn and dusk, patchy cloud can have the essential gaps required for the sun to bathe the sky in stunning colours.

Under clear blue skies, the light can be harsh during the day but towards the evening (or first thing in the morning) it can produce beautiful, calm conditions.

During winter, the light is low in the sky throughout the shorter days and this provides extended periods in the morning and afternoon for some beautiful light, be it sunset skies bursting with colour, or still calm reflections at twilight. The sunrise times in winter are also much kinder for the early riser!

From Spring into mid Summer, the Hawthorn trees are full of white blossom and other seasonal colours appear in the marshes and the fields.

From September and into Autumn, the lovely golden colours appear in the trees and the light out to sea is often at its best as warm and cold air mix, producing some classic 'Turner-esque' skies.



Oare Marshes in winter has an abundance of over wintering birds that visit it each year.

Photography Kit

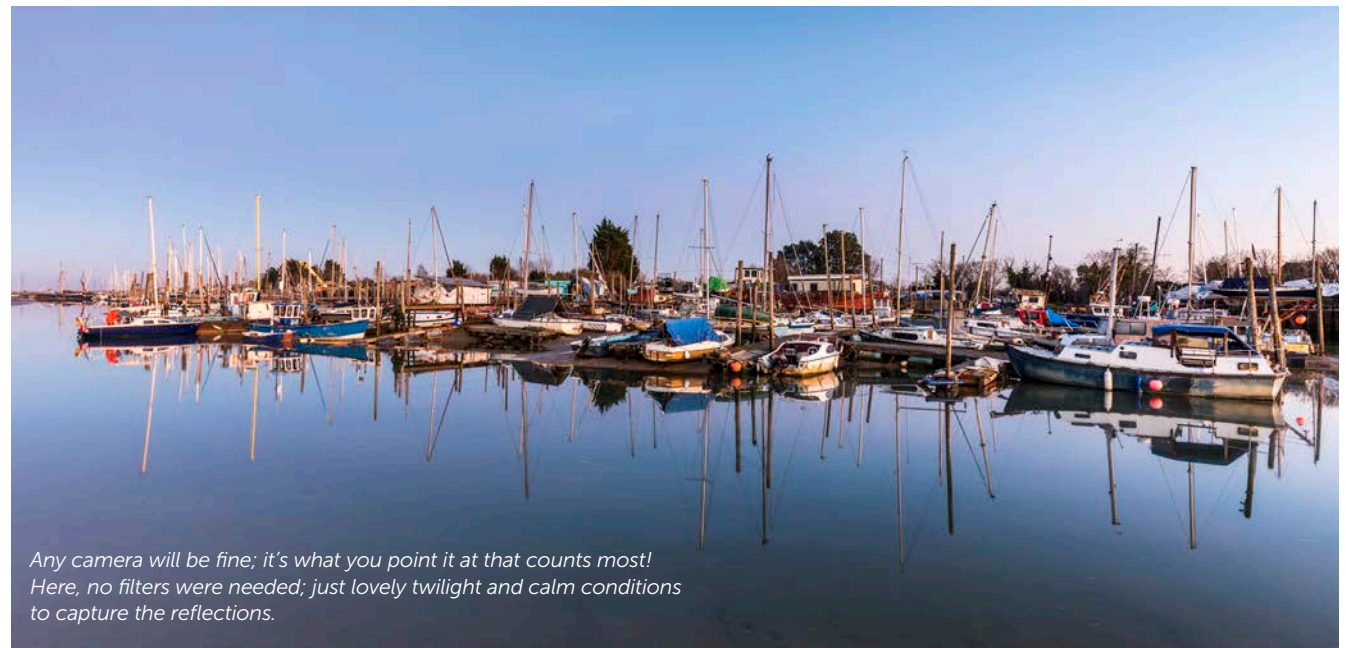
You can use any camera for creating good landscape photos. The secret lies less in the kit and more in the effort invested into visiting interesting places.

That said, there's definitely some kit I can recommend to help you make the most of what you wish to photograph.

If you have a DSLR or mirrorless camera, then a tripod and some filters (e.g. Kase filters – use my code AH10Kase for 10% off) are a good combination as you can use a polariser or neutral density filters to cut out distracting reflections and capture long exposures.

If you have a Smartphone, I recommend that you download a free app called Spectre and/or Slow Shutter. If your phone doesn't have image stabilising functionality, I'd suggest a small tripod for this too.

My camera set up on a tripod to use a long exposure for smoothing out the water at Elmley Ferry shipwreck.



*Any camera will be fine; it's what you point it at that counts most!
Here, no filters were needed; just lovely twilight and calm conditions
to capture the reflections.*

Spectre and Slow Shutter allow you to control your phone's shutter speed so you can use long exposures to blur water or grasses rustling in the wind instead of using filters.

Adding a little 'motion blur' as reeds sway in the breeze, for example, can make your photos less 'static' and help capture the 'feel' of the wind and weather you experienced at the time.

One final app I recommend is 'Snapseed'. It provides a powerful set of editing features on your phone. From colour grading, exposure adjustments, contrast and saturation etc to cropping, it goes far beyond the basic tools available in the standard camera app. You can post your finished photo to social media from Snapseed too so it's a quick process to follow.



Useful Visitor Information

Getting to Swale is easy. The area lies off the M2 motorway and has High Speed rail links from London St Pancras to Sittingbourne and Faversham (1hr 6mins). Branch lines also connect the Isle of Sheppey.

A car will always be the easiest and most flexible way to explore the towns, villages and landscapes, and with plenty of parking (often free) it's an ideal way to travel here.

For planning outdoor activities, the Explore Kent website provides many options for enjoying Kent & Swale, with fully mapped out walking, cycling, canoeing and horse riding routes. Many of these are near to the photo locations detailed here.

Visit Swale are always available to help you plan your trip, from finding somewhere to stay, to recommending itineraries, visitor attractions and things to do. They will offer you well informed and helpful advice on anything related to your visit.

The Swale Tourism Team

Email: tourismsupport@swale.gov.uk or call: 01795 417399 (office hours)

Health Care

In case of any medical emergencies, your nearest hospital with an A&E department is Medway Maritime or Ashford Hospital.

Faversham has GP surgeries and pharmacies with the one inside the Tesco store (ME13 7AS) being open until 22.30 every day except Sunday.

Where to Stay

A selection of accommodation options to help you find somewhere that suits your needs is available from the Visit Swale website, including hotels, accessible accommodation, B&B's and self catered options. For tailored advice, please contact the Visit Swale team.

About the Author

Alex is a landscape photographer who lives in Whitstable. He has photographed Kent and Swale for many years and teaches landscape photography on his tours and workshops here and abroad.

Alex was inspired to explore Swale after seeing so many of Turner's paintings and he's since found the variety and uniqueness of the nature, land and seascapes perfect for his own creative work.

www.alexharephotography.com
[@alexharephotography](https://www.instagram.com/alexharephotography)

