



Stonebarrow to Seatown via Golden Cap

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Trail : Stonebarrow to Seatown – 4 miles (6.4 km)

Coast Path dips and rises towards Golden Cap, the highest point on England's south coast. The views from here are breathtaking. At the end of this walk, Seatown, a tiny hamlet boasts an excellent beachside public house which is the perfect lunchtime venue.

Many fossils have been found along this stretch of coastline, and although it is not so easy to find anything of significance today, the ongoing instability of the coastline means that there is always the chance of doing so. Unfortunately a series of landslips between Lyme Regis and Charmouth has meant that the coast path is too dangerous to use, and long-term diversions inland have been put in place.

Consequently we recommend starting the walk at the National Trust Stonebarrow Hill car park in Charmouth.

▶ On entering the National Trust car park, turn right following a wooden signpost directing you towards *Golden Cap 2¼*. Pass through the small wooden gate and follow the path downhill.

▶ Soon afterwards another track comes in from the right, running parallel to the coast. Continue straight ahead here towards the sea. The path then bends round to the left, but continues downhill.

▶ At the junction with another track follow the footpath sign to *Westhay Farm*. So, turn right towards farm buildings, cross the cattle grid (or use the gate) and go past the farm to a gate and continue down towards the coast.

At this point you will have a wonderful view of Golden Cap in front of you.

• *"It is always a long-established peace to me, that Golden Cap whispers. So High, so far, so lonely, you cannot be in the world..."*

The Marches of Wessex by F.J.H Darton 1922

• Golden Cap is 626 ft (190 m) above sea level, the highest point on the south coast of England.

Its cliff face, near the summit, is composed of gold-coloured gravel, (greensand) caused by a green mineral in the rock that turns rusty gold on exposure to light - hence its name.

From the summit there is a great view back to Lyme Regis and the South Devon coast.



► Keep following the coast path sign as the path heads downhill. This will bring you down to the lower cliffs (the Undercliff) and a series of attractive grass fields leading gradually to the foot of Golden Cap. Inevitably the path begins to climb up Broom Cliff to Ridge Barn where there is a welcome bench where you may pause to take in the view. It would be difficult to go wrong now, since the route is well signposted. The coast path is the route that always keeps as close as possible to the sea.

- The tumbled land between the beach and the cliffs is called the undercliff. Created by landslides, it is an internationally important area for fossils from the Jurassic period. Its inaccessibility makes it a haven for wildlife.

Here's a piece of ghoulish local lore concerning the large stones to be found on St. Gabriel's beach:

“According to tradition, in the days when evil spirits roamed the world, the children of St. Gabriel's were lured from their beds while the village slept [...]. As they speed through the night sky, they become cold and frightened and beg to be taken home. Circling above the village, the wicked creatures swoop low over the cliff, the children are tipped into the sea and turned to stone. In another version, the circle of twelve stones on the shore marks the graves of those children who, convinced by a strange orphan called Old Barren that they could fly, had hurled themselves over the edge.”

► After crossing a few streams and on the far side of a large grassy field, you come to a footpath sign by a gate pointing inland to St Gabriel's. Here there is a choice of routes:

- I. The most direct route to Golden Cap is to remain on the Coast Path which continues to track parallel to the coast. At one point the path crosses over the stream, which flows on to the beach at St. Gabriel's Mouth, a favourite landing spot for smugglers in the old days.
 - ii. Turn left and walk through the abandoned Saxon hamlet of St Gabriel Stanton and then head up to the summit of Golden Cap
- The two paths will join up again near the summit of Golden Cap.

- There is little left of the hamlet of St Gabriel's bar a couple of holiday cottages on the approach to the village, the remains of the church and St. Gabriel's House, built on the site of the old manor house of the village. An information board describes the history of the house and village, where a small but thriving community once lived.



The old road out of Bridport used to pass through the hamlet, but succumbed to coastal erosion. The new road was built much further inland and, without any passing traffic, the village declined and fell into ruin.

In 'Highways and Byways in Dorset' (revised 2nd ed. 1935), Sir Frederick Treves wrote that the village, was

"lost and forgotten centuries ago [...] would seem to have crept as far away from the bustle of the world as it could go. All that remains here of the timid settlement is an ancient farmhouse in a state of musty decay, and a cottage."

With regards to the church,

"four grey, ivy-covered walls survive, together with a porch, two arched doorways, and certain windows. Within the enclosure is a waste of brambles and thistles. The oppressive silence of the roofless aisle is broken by the cawing of crows and by the splash of waves on the shore. The east end of the church is the least ruinous. Here is clearly shown the site of the altar, while just in front of the altar is a wild rose bush in blossom. It would seem as if the spirit of the last bride who knelt upon the chancel steps still lived in the blushing petals which the sea wind scatters over the stones."

► To walk through St Gabriel's, continue up the main track marked *Golden Cap*, which takes you past the remains of the 13th century church.

- Legend has it that newly-weds escaping a floundering ship offered prayers to St Gabriel and promised to build a chapel in return for salvation. Unfortunately, the girl did not survive, but the husband remained true to his word.

► Beyond the church, take the path to the right towards Golden Cap, making sure that you head up and across the immense grass field towards the signpost that you can see some distance away at the foot of the hill. Don't take the small path to the right that goes through a hole in the line of trees and back towards the stream.



► The two paths join at the gate at the base of Golden Cap, where is also a conveniently placed bench from where you may pause to admire the view westwards. The whole of this area is owned by the National Trust.

In early summer, the slopes of Golden Cap are covered in bluebells, and many of the fields are full of primroses, buttercups, daisies and other wild flowers.

► The final climb to the summit is in the form of a zig-zag gravel path inset with steps. Once reached the summit plateau is not as flat as it would seem, rather it is a couple of mounds, actually bronze age tumuli dating from around 1600BC.

There is also a monument to The Earl of Antrim KBE, former Chairman of the National Trust.

► From the trig. point at the top of Golden Cap, you can see the coastline stretching in front of you, Seatown beach in the foreground.



► The path heads left (north) for a few yards from the top of Golden Cap, and you follow a sign saying Seatown 1 mile. It's all downhill or level walking through a mixture of woodland and farmland until you reach the pub (the Anchor Inn). The high wooded area to the north is Langdon Hill which was planted in 1948, a mixture of beech, larch and scots pine.

- ▶ As you near the village, you are diverted to the left, since the original path has fallen away, and you cross over two stiles into a small wood, which leads to an attractive wheat field, with the path running right through the middle of it. Straight ahead in the distance, on the other side of the valley, you can see the path climbing up a grassy slope beside the sea cliffs on the next stage of your walk.



- ▶ When you reach the small road, turn right into Seatown. The Anchor Inn is about 200 yards on the right.

The Anchor Inn

Website : <http://www.theanchorinnseatown.co.uk/>

Phone No. : 01297 489215

It is open all day from 10am to 11pm (9am at the weekends)

Food is available from 12 noon to 11pm every day.

If the weather is good, the wooden tables at the front of the terrace are a great place to have lunch.

Although it is possible to have a sandwich lunch, more substantial fare is also available.

The food is good, with an emphasis on locally sourced seafood.



The Anchor Inn and Golden Cap from the east

- As a place name Seatown is a misnomer, since it is a small village, certainly not a town. The cliffs located behind the beach to the west of the village contain a wealth and variety of fossils, including ammonites, and a variety of other shells, although they are not easy to find nowadays. The clay rock dates from the Jurassic period around 150 million years ago, during which time the whole area was submerged beneath a warm tropical sea and it is within the lumps of fallen clay that ammonites may be found.

Today, the pebble beach is safe for swimming, but in November 1755 a 10 foot (3 metre) tsunami hit the English South Coast, the worst ever recorded. On a sunny afternoon it is possible to pick out a horizontal line in the shingle bank on the eastern side of the stream at Seatown, just below the car park. The narrow band of larger pebbles is believed to be the deposit left by the tsunami.

- “During the 18th and early 19th centuries many of the inhabitants of south coast towns and villages were deeply involved in the smuggling trade.

A hundred and fifty years ago there were thirty or forty fishermen living in and around Seatown who supplemented their income by smuggling at night. The local gang was led by ‘The Colonel’ and the favourite landing place for barrels of brandy was the remote beach at St Gabriel’s Mouth, whilst lookouts stationed on the summit of Golden Cap kept guard against any Customs and Excise men.

“In Dorset [...] almost every harbour, beach or gap in the cliffs was a smugglers’ haunt. Tea, tobacco, lace, silks and brandy formed the bulk of the cargoes. High import duties were imposed upon all these articles, and they were sufficiently valuable to make the risk- taking worth while. [...]

“In 1736 a Smuggling Act was passed which imposed severe penalties upon those who were engaged in this illicit trade.”

‘Riding Officers’ were placed at strategic points along the coast, and efforts

were made to prevent their becoming intimate with the local people. They were not allowed to marry girls from the neighbourhood in which they worked, and they lived in special quarters. They were paid only £20 a year, and out of this they had to keep three horses and a man to help them. As a result they were easily corruptible.

“It was not until the coastguards were organised in 1831 that the smugglers found effective opposition and, with the abolition of many of the duties during the next twenty years, the old gangs disappeared.”

(Desmond Hawkins, 'Dorset Bedside Book, 1996)