

# HERITAGE TRAILS GUIDE

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## Hartlepool

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Explore the natural  
and built heritage  
of the Tees Valley

River Tees  
**Rediscovered** 

# THE TRAILS



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*#heritagetrails*

# WELCOME

Explore this extraordinary coastal area north to Teesmouth and discover how humans, industry and nature exist in harmony.

Seaton Carew is a small seaside resort situated on the North Sea coast at the mouth of the River Tees. The area is named after a Norman French family called 'Carou' who owned lands in the area and settled there while 'Seaton' means farmstead or settlement by the sea.

Seal Sands is an area of international importance as it's the only inter-tidal mudflat between Lindisfarne to its north and the Humber to the south.

On land recovered from the sea, the area around Seal Sands is home to leading names within the chemical industry such as Ineos, Fine Organics, Central Area Transmission System (BP Group), SABIC, Vertellus and ConocoPhillips.

Within this industrial landscape can be found Greatham, a picturesque rural village home to around a thousand people.

The area has a long history of salt works, but this declined in the 18th and 19th Centuries. In the middle of the 20th Century, Cerebos salt works were taken over by Sharwood's. Although the factory has closed, it has now been repurposed as office units.

# THE NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE TEES VALLEY

The River Tees is barely wider than a jump from one bank to the other at its source. Yet in less than 30 miles it widens, maturing and meandering, through the lowlands between Darlington and the North Sea. The river and its surrounding landscape provide a varied natural habitat for a wide variety of animals and plant life.

## Rural farmland and woodland

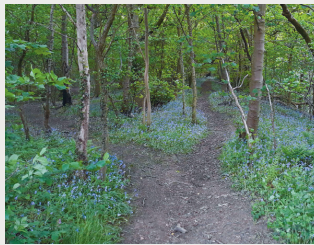
The open countryside around Darlington and to the west of Stockton-on-Tees has rich alluvial soils and so is largely farmed, mainly for crops, but some pastures too. Wildlife benefits from a good network of hedgerows between fields and alongside country lanes. Broad and mixed leaf woodland is found in places on the steep-sided banks of the River Tees.

Hedges, small woodlands and rough pastures are important for a number of bird species which are declining across the UK. These include yellow-hammer, cuckoo, green woodpecker and bullfinch.

Ancient and semi-natural woodland survives along the banks of the River Tees and its tributaries, especially the steep Leven valley. Woodland is generally restricted to the steeper slopes which have no value for agriculture. Ancient woodland is a precious habitat. It is scarce, irreplaceable and supports

a vast diversity of wildlife including many rare and declining species.

To be classified as ancient, woodland must have been present since 1600. Before that, planting was uncommon so these woodlands can be assumed to date back to the ice age.



## Urban wildlife

The major towns of the Tees Valley are inevitably the sites where most changes have taken place that affect the natural landscape.

Remnant habitats, such as small meadows and woodlands, survived agricultural improvement only to be surrounded by the spread of housing. There are ponds which were created as

a result of human activity; old brick pits, gravel quarries and even fire-ponds for a small airfield support toads, frogs and sometimes the nationally protected great crested newt.

Other abandoned industrial sites support an open mosaic of grassland where wildflowers persist. Elsewhere, dense scrub proliferates with deep thickets of hawthorn, blackthorn and dog rose.

## The river

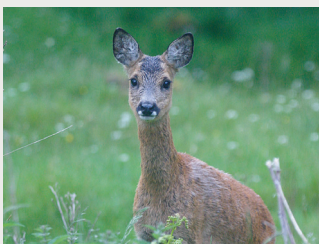
The waters of the Tees are rich in wildlife. Salmon is distributed throughout the river, while the numbers of brown trout have declined, as a result of the degraded and fragmented habitat. Brook lamprey can be found in the Rivers Leven and Tees.





Otters are spotted with remarkable regularity along the Tees throughout Stockton and around the North Tees marshes.

Roe deer are not often thought of as a urban mammals yet are regular visitors to woodlands and pastures on the edge of towns in the Tees Valley.



### **Bowesfield and Preston Farm**

Three large reed-filled pools create a sizeable undisturbed wetland that supports a number of ducks and wading birds such as teal, curlew, gadwall, ruff and golden plover. This is also an excellent place to spot dragonflies and damselflies.

### **Coatham Marsh**

A series of pools and reed swamps, this is the last remaining wildlife habitat to have survived the almost entire urban reclamation of the south Tees. Bordered by Redcar's blast furnace, the site is sanctuary for more than 200 species of wild birds and

wildflowers as well as mammals such as fox and stoats. Smaller mammals must also be present as the site is regularly visited by birds of prey including barn owls.

### **Maze Park**

Visitors can climb one of its landscaped mounds to enjoy panoramic views of the conurbation. Glades and open grassland attract scarce butterfly species such as grayling and speckled wood. The steep banks provide nesting for sand martins and give excellent views of common and grey seals preying on salmon negotiating the Tees Barrage.

### **Portrack Marsh**

This wetland nature reserve attracts hundreds of birds each year and is home to a wide variety of mammals, amphibians and insects.

Winter sees redshank and lapwing, shoveler, pochard, tufted duck and teal frequenting the pools. While kingfisher and grey wagtail are easy to spot.

Spring is the time for wheatear, whinchat and warblers. And Summer little grebe, moorhen, swans and Canada goose. By late summer, the exposed mud flats are home to waders such as dunlin, black tailed godwit, greenshank and ruff.



### **Saltholme**

A flagship site for the RSPB, Saltholme's wetlands are home to large numbers of wildfowl and wading birds. In the spring and summer many birds breed here including shoveler and gadwall and common terns. The reed beds are home to water rails, reed bunting and reed warblers.



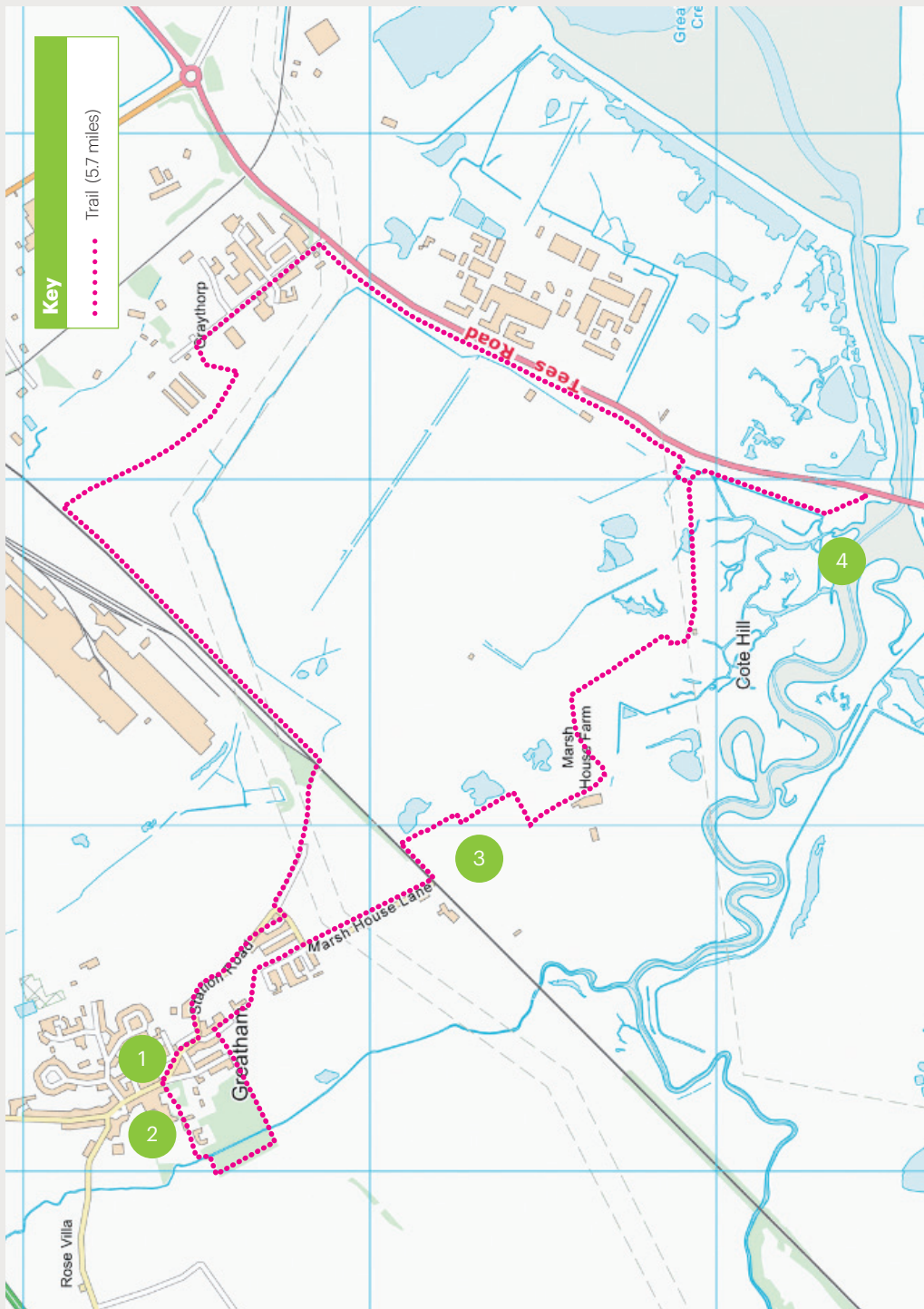
### **Seaton Common, Seaton Sands and North Gare**

Among the relics of a once thriving salt industry lies a network of ditches and wet grassland that attracts vast numbers of over-wintering migrating birds.



### **South Gare and Coatham Sands**

Fresh water marshes, lagoons, dunes and golden sandy beaches are designated as internationally important for wild birds. Species such as bar-tailed godwit, curlew, redshank and grey plover make their winter homes here. While the dune slacks support large stands of northern marsh and fragrant orchids.



# GREATHAM CIRCULAR

1

Greatham Village first appears in written sources as Greatham in 1196. Today it is home to 1,000 people and a surprising number of points of interest all of which can be seen on this circular walk.



▲ Sheaf Thrower sculpture



▲ Seals at Greatham Creek

## Highlights

### 1. The Sheaf Thrower

sculpture was erected in 1995 and commemorates the sheaf-throwing contest that has taken place annually at Greatham Feast for over 500 years. The birds perched in his hair represent a local rookery.

2. Founded in 1273 by the then Bishop of Durham, Robert de Stichell, **The Hospital of God** was originally a foundation to aid poor people. However, by the 16th Century, it had become a "house of entertainment for gentlemen"! Reforms in 1610 led to its original mission being resumed.

3. During excavation for water to supply a Vulcan rubber works in 1894, a 100m thick salt seam was discovered. Starting

as the Greatham Salt and Brine Company, the site was acquired by **Cerebos** in 1903 and **salt production** (consumer and industrial) on this site was to last for over 75 years. The site was damaged by German air raids in 1942. During its peak, the site employed 1,000 workers until Sharwood's closed the plant in 2002 due to dwindling demand.

4. **Greatham Creek** and surrounding land is part of Cowpen Marsh Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This designation identifies the site as nationally important and gives it special legal protection. You may see wading birds such as curlew and redshank feeding and common seals hauled out along the Creek when the tide is low.

## Distance

5.7 miles

## Estimated walk time

2 hours 20 minutes

## Suggested start/finish

Greatham Village

## Getting there

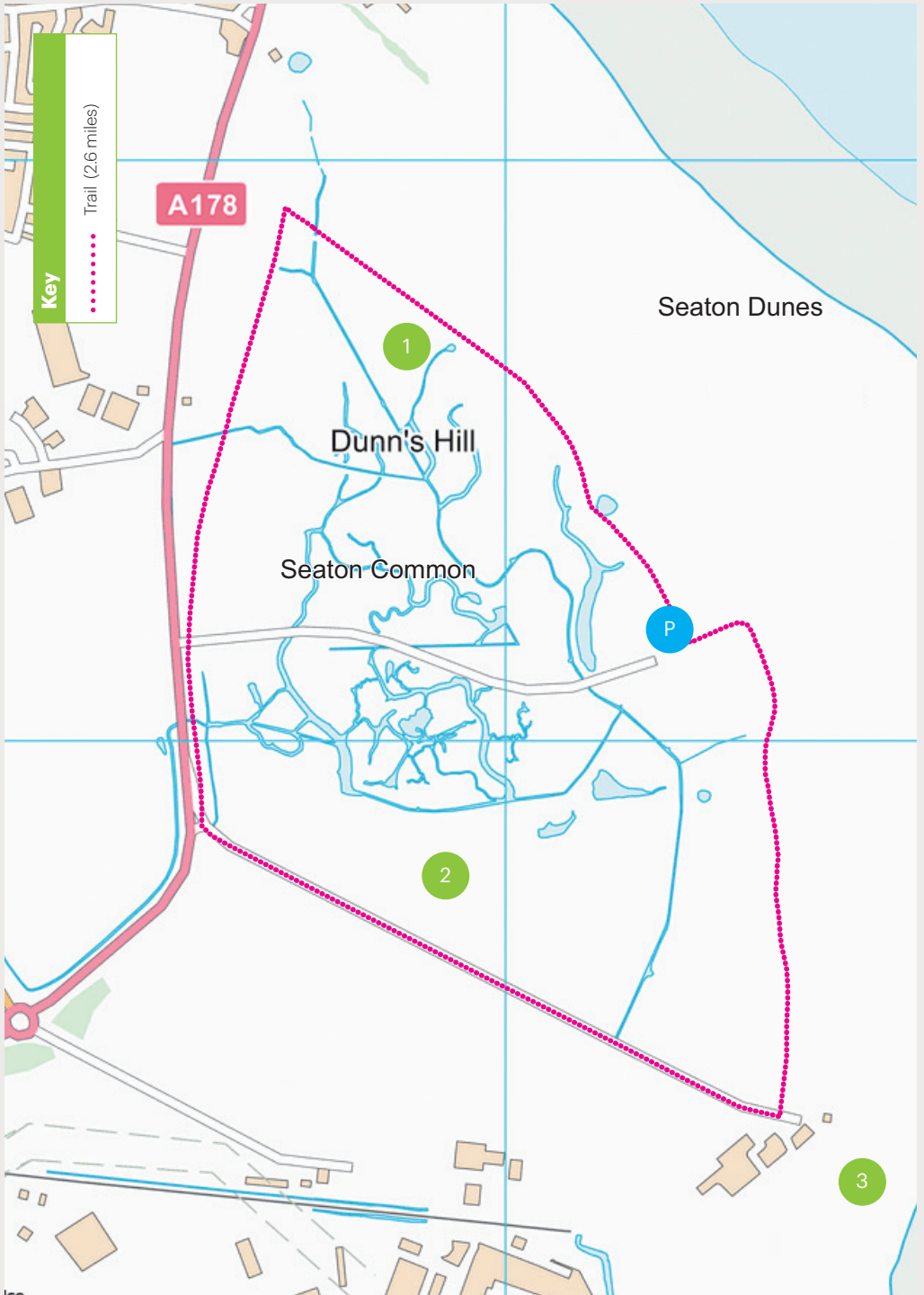
Greatham is situated approximately 2 miles to the south of Hartlepool.

**Parking** – From Hartlepool centre take the A689 south for 2 miles, turn left at Sapper's Corner, signposted Greatham. Car parking is available street-side in Greatham village and at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park situated off the Seal Sands Link Road (A1185).

**Buses** – Bus times can be obtained by calling Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visiting [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)

## WILDLIFE WATCH CURLEW







# SEATON SNOOKS CIRCULAR

2

Originally a small fishing community, Seaton Carew became a thriving seaside resort in the 18th and 19th Centuries, particularly popular with the Quakers of Darlington during Victorian times.



▲ Damselfly



▲ Northern Marsh Orchids

Seaton Carew later became a fashionable seaside destination as visits to 'health' resorts gained popularity. This lovely circular walk is a great way to take in the wider area around the town.

## Highlights

1. The grassy ash mounds that we see today at **Seaton Common** date back to medieval times and were created as salt was extracted by large fires, which evaporated the sea water to crystallise the salt. These features demonstrate the close relationship mankind has with the natural environment in this area that continues to this day.
2. **Seaton Common and Dunes Local Nature Reserve** is home to a vast number of resident and migratory wading birds, as

well as invertebrates and mammals. Across the golf course, you will find Seaton Dunes, one of the largest dune systems between Lindisfarne and the Humber, providing a rich and varied habitat for many plants and animals including purple milk vetch and curlew.

3. **Teessmouth National Nature Reserve (NNR)** is a protected area where wildlife comes first, although public access is allowed it is strictly controlled. Teessmouth NNR is especially important for its birdlife. The 355-acre site stretches from North Gare Sands down to Greatham Creek and plays host to over 20,000 waterfowl each year.

## Distance

2.6 miles

## Estimated walk time

1 hour

## Suggested start/finish

Car Park

## Route information

This walk is on tarmac and track through Seaton Snooks Common, which has gated and stiled access. There's an alternative to crossing the Common on the way back with no stiles or difficult ground.

## Parking – To Seaton Carew:

Take the A178 south for 3 miles from Hartlepool centre. Car parking is available at the Seaton Carew and the North Gare car park on Seaton Snooks Common.

## Buses – Bus times can be

obtained by calling Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visiting [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)

## WILDLIFE WATCH YELLOW WORT





# NORTH TEES TRAIL PART 1

3

Seal Sands is of international importance due to it being the only significant area of inter-tidal mud flats between Holy Island to the north and the Humber to the south.



▲ Knot Feeding



▲ North Gare Sands

## Highlights

1. Gaining its name from the large number of seals that populate its banks, **Teessmouth National Nature Reserve** is tucked neatly next to North Tees and is home to large multi-national companies, central to the region's prosperity. More than 1,700 people are employed on Seal Sands by companies with an aggregate turnover of more than £900m each year. Today, oil importing and exporting remains one of Teesside's most important industries utilising six jetties at Seal Sands.

The mud flats at Seal Sands are areas where sedimentation has occurred due to the decreasing energy of the River Tees as it reaches its mouth, thus making it rich in organic content. Despite the presence of

industry and heavy traffic, the location provides a sense of isolation, with the security fences surrounding the works creating a place with little human disturbance, allowing birds and mammals to flourish.

Today the area is home to in excess of 30,000 ducks and waders during the colder months, with industry lighting allowing wading birds to feed around the clock. Sadly, due to the results of heavy pollution and dredging, by the 1930s the sight of a seal was very rare. By 1960 the grey seal had returned, followed by the rarer common seal in the 1980s, and today around 100 seals can be found lounging on the sandbanks. The viewing hide overlooking Greatham Creek provides an opportunity to observe the seals.

## Distance

3.5 miles

## Estimated walk time

1 hour 20 minutes

## Suggested start/finish

North Gare car park/  
Teessmouth (National Nature Reserve) car park

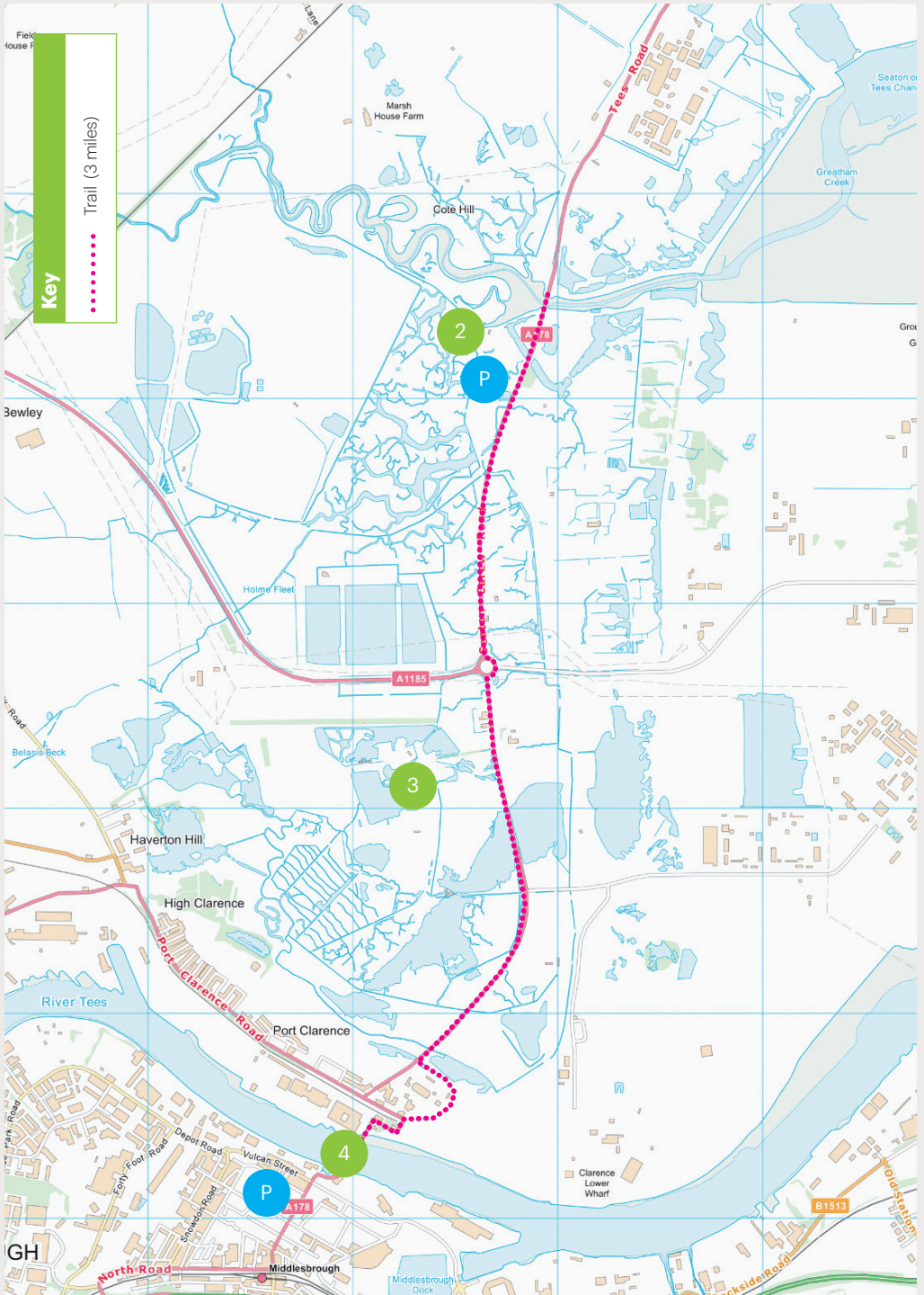
## Route information

**Parking** – The North Gare car park (accessed via a minor road) is well signposted from the main road to the north of the Hartlepool Power Station. Seal Sands can be accessed from the car park at Cowpen Marsh just south of the bridge over Greatham Creek.

**Buses** – Bus times can be obtained by calling Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visiting [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)

## WILDLIFE WATCH COMMON SEAL





# NORTH TEES TRAIL PART 2

4

A popular walk through the spectacular, open wetlands and saltmarshes of Hartlepool and the industrial landscapes of Port Clarence and Middlesbrough.



▲ RSPB Saltholme



▲ Seal Viewing Hide

## Highlights

2. To the south of **Greatham Creek** a large area of inter-tidal habitat has been created. A cut made in the old embankment alongside Greatham Creek, allows this area to flood at high tide. You may see wading birds such as curlew and redshank feeding and grey and common seals hauled out along the Creek when the tide is low.

3. **RSPB Saltholme** is a 660 hectare wetland nature reserve, often described as an oasis in the heart of industrial Teesside. The reserve provides a mixture of lowland wet grassland, reed bed, open pools and meadow habitats. Seasonal wildlife include great crested grebe, gadwall and tufted duck. The visitor centre has a café serving hot food, a shop and toilet facilities. See [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

4. Opened on the 17 October 1911, the **Transporter Bridge** was designed by GC Imbault of Cleveland Bridge Engineering Co., Darlington and was built by Sir William Arrol and Co. Vehicles and foot passengers are carried by means of a suspended gondola. It remains the largest of the transporter bridges operating worldwide.

This route forms part of England Coast Path, a 2,700 mile continuous footpath around the entirety of England – the longest footpath in the world.

## Distance

3 miles

## Estimated walk time

1 hour 45 minutes

## Suggested start/finish

Greatham Creek/  
Transporter Bridge

## Route information

This walk is on tarmac.

Start the walk at Teesmouth National Nature Reserve car park south of Greatham Creek and head south along A178.

**Parking** – There is a car park located at Cowpen Marsh just south of the bridge over Greatham Creek.

**Buses** – Bus times can be obtained by calling Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visiting [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)

## WILDLIFE WATCH SHELL DUCK



# SPOTTERS NOTES

Use these pages to note anything of interest on your walks.

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# River Tees Rediscovered

Bus times can be obtained by calling  
Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visiting  
[www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)

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This guide has been supported by the River Tees Rediscovered Landscape Partnership, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players and awarded through The National Lottery Heritage Fund.



TEES VALLEY MAYOR

For more inspiration on great things to do in the Tees Valley visit:  
[www.enjoyteesvalley.com](http://www.enjoyteesvalley.com)



The European Agricultural Fund  
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