

F Tudor fortifications and a drawbridge

Henry VIII ordered a series of sea defences to be built along the south coast. After his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, he felt the country may be at risk from reprisals and an easy target for attack. A fantastic map was drawn up of his plans, with fortifications ranging from full castles to artillery towers and earthworks.



The map shows Slapton, protected by the Ley acting as a moat, with towers at each end. A drawbridge was planned to cross the water to get to the village. This work, as with a lot of other work that was planned, was never carried out.

G Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve (NNR) covers an area of 214 hectares (around 530 acres); the reserve has a diverse range of habitats including the beach, shingle ridge, woodland and freshwater and surrounding vegetation. Slapton Ley is the largest natural lake in south-west England. Although it is only separated from the sea by a narrow shingle bar, it is entirely freshwater. The lake is surrounded by reedbeds, marshes and woodland habitats.

Slapton Ley NNR is an important staging post for wintering and passage birds including swallows. If you are lucky you might catch a glimpse of badgers, otters, dormice and bats. 250 species of lichen and 2000 species of fungi have been found here, 29 of which have been described as new to science.



If you enjoyed exploring Torcross why not visit the Village Information Points.

There are four in the Torcross, each revealing a different part of the story:

Wartime Torcross **Start Bay Inn info. point**

Wild Torcross **Slapton Ley viewing point**

Life in Torcross **Village Stores info. point**

Fishing in Start Bay ... **The Boat House info. point**

Why not explore further? Pick up a **Village Explorer Trail** from one of these points.

This trail is part of a series telling the story of the Start Bay area.

Explore Start Bay panels and trails can be found along the coastal path around the Bay or by visiting www.explorestartbay.org



There is also an audio trail of Start Bay. For the price of a local call, you can hear stories about the area. Simply dial **01548 802315**, then 905 when prompted.

explore
start bay

Torcross Shore Explorer Trail

Find out more about Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve and the Shingle Ridge, on this short trail with fabulous views over the coast and the lake



This project is run by the Slapton Line Partnership www.slaptonline.org.uk, working with the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit.
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Sea-side Route

A The beach

Slapton Sands is actually made from shingle, small pieces of rock eroded by waves and currents. The shingle constantly moves around the bay. Longshore drift means the waves hit the shore at an angle and then move the stones along the beach. Watch the waves and you will see that they don't always go in and out in a straight line! Persistent strong easterly winds can move large amounts of shingle along the beach, and in extreme cases, can cause damage to the village and road.



B A sea view

From here you can really enjoy the full sweep of Start Bay, from the lighthouse at Start Point right over to the entrance of the Dart estuary, shown by the Daymark Tower on the top of the hill. At the north end of Slapton line is Strete Gate with Torcross at the southern end. The bay is wide and deep and is rich with fish and marine life. It is a popular spot for many watersports and you will often see paragliders taking off from Strete, floating out on the thermals rising as the warm air hits the cliffs.

C A defensive strategy

It is hard to imagine what this beach looked like during World War 2. Lines of barbed wire and fences ran all along the coastline, pillboxes and gun emplacements were hurriedly constructed and landmines were strategically placed to hamper any invading forces. A large area around here was evacuated and the beach was used by American troops in practice for D Day landings. The memorial in the car park was unveiled in 1954 by US Army authorities, to thank those who gave up their homes and lands to provide a battle training area. More information on the wartime story can be seen at The Start Bay Inn.



D A hardy bunch!

Slapton sands is a shingle bar dividing the freshwater Ley from the sea. The shingle is quite unstable and it is hard for plants to become established. But there are a few species which flourish in this harsh environment and they make up a rare and beautiful community. These pioneer plants have amazing adaptations which allow them to survive here, in particular to collect and hold onto any water they can find. The yellow-horned poppy and sea kale have thick, waxy leaves to prevent water loss and a bluish white tinge to reflect sunlight and help prevent sun burn! Rest harrow forms a mat to stabilize the shingle and also helps make nitrogen to enrich the small amount of soil which forms.

A bit further back on the shore, other species can be found such as sea carrot, sea campion, birds foot trefoil, sea kale and viper's bugloss. These plants are slow growing maritime specialists and most can tolerate high levels of salt.

Ley-side Route

E The Royal Sands Hotel and sport on the Ley

The hotel was built in the 19th century, at the same time as the turnpike road from Kingsbridge to Dartmouth. It stood where the car park and memorial now stand. The hotel had become renowned for fishing and shooting. It boasted a full size billiard room, coffee room, sitting room, bar and 13 bed and sitting rooms.

During the war, whilst the area was evacuated, the hotel was blown up. It is said that the culprit was a stray dog, who had walked into the area and set off one of the mines that was laid around the hotel. It is likely that it was hit many times by naval shells and bombs.

