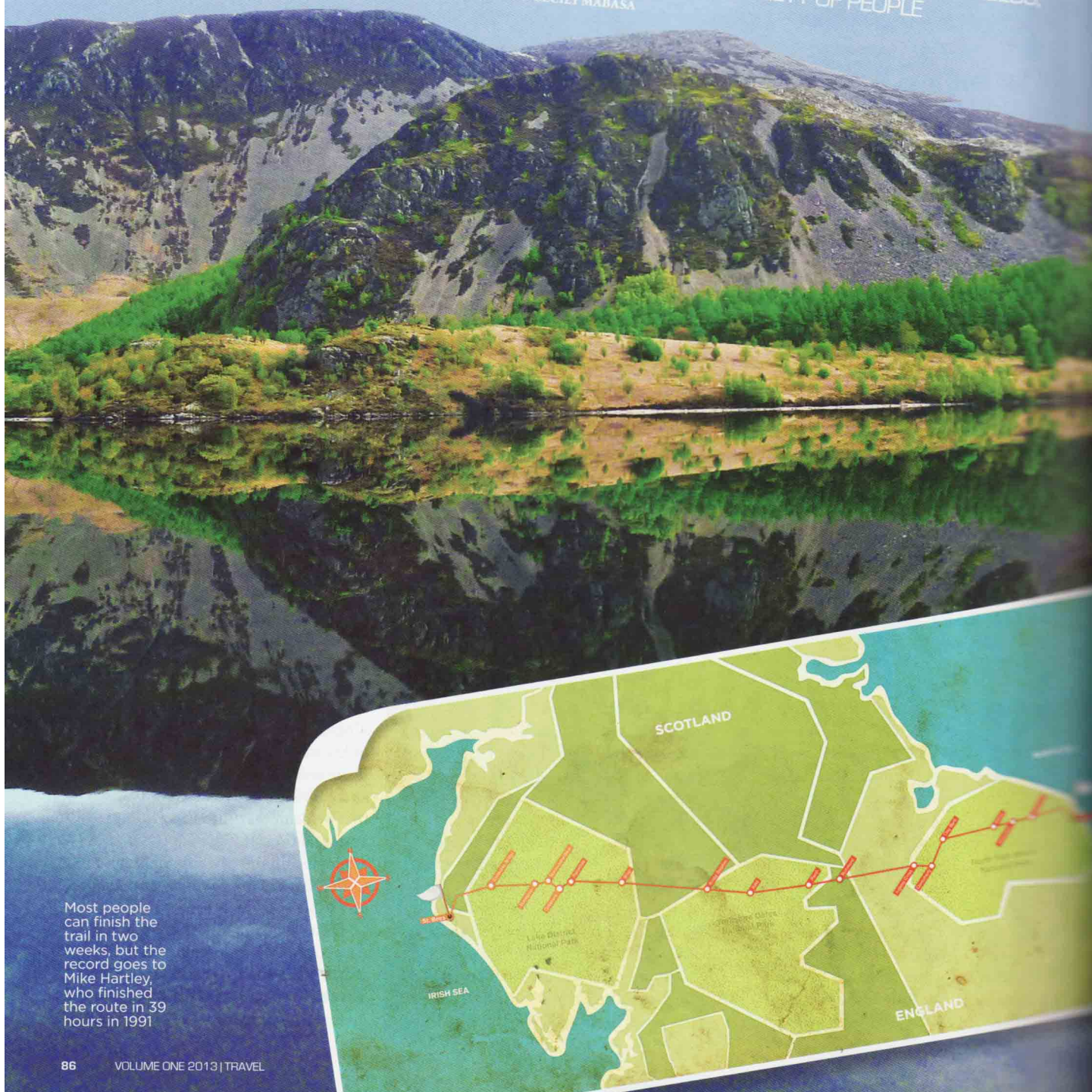


# TRAVERSING THE LEGENDARY COAST-TO-COAST TRAIL

JOIN CECILY MABASA ON THE TREK OF A LIFETIME, ACROSS BEAUTIFUL HILLS, SPRAWLING FIELDS,  
ROUGH TERRAIN AND RIVERS, QUIANT VILLAGES AND A VARIETY OF PEOPLE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CECILY MABASA



Most people can finish the trail in two weeks, but the record goes to Mike Hartley, who finished the route in 39 hours in 1991

**T**HE COAST-TO-COAST TRAIL IS A PERPETUAL ITEM ON MOST ADVENTURERS' BUCKET LISTS, AND IT DEFINITELY WAS ON MINE. This 308

kilometer hiking pleasure takes you across **England** from the Irish Sea to the North Sea, crossing through three national parks: the **Lake District National Park** (home to England's highest mountains), **Yorkshire Dales**

**National Park** (filled with rolling hills and river valleys), and the **North York Moors National Park**. This breathtaking trail—filled with storybook villages, rushing streams, meadows carpeted with flowers, and picturesque mountains—has inspired countless poets and writers, including Alfred Wainwright, famous for forging his own trail.

I have trekked harder trails in Patagonia, the Himalayas, Ireland and other parts of Europe, but most of

them were well-marked and easy to follow; otherwise I had guides to lead me through them. You can imagine the shock I felt when I realized that I had to navigate myself through the Coast-to-Coast Trail, using nothing but maps and a compass!

But there were always different people (from friendly locals inside pubs to fellow trekkers on the trail) willing to help you find your way, and really, that was part of the thrill and the charm.

Days  
1-3

St. Bees to Ennerdale Bridge  
to Roswathie to Grasmere

**St. Bees** was the gateway to my Coast-to-Coast experience. Tradition calls for you to dip your toes in the Irish Sea before you start your trip, and I did so by the St. Bees sea wall. (At the end of the trail, I would need to step into the North Sea, to commemorate my journey from one sea to another.) We set off walking to the red cliffs of St. Bees and headed over to a nature reserve for sea bird sightings—we saw puffins, guillemots, kittiwakes, among others. After a few kilometers, we turned inland and looked back longingly, our last glimpse of the coastal views.

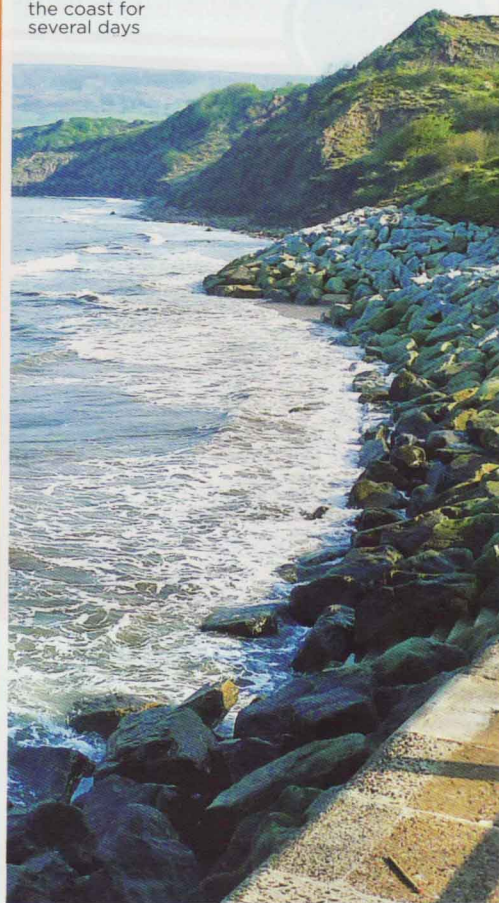
Despite the trail's fame, the routes were not well-marked, and we still managed to get lost before getting to Ennerdale Bridge. Luckily, we crossed paths with other trekkers who had the Coast-to-Coast Trailblazer guidebook (which had the best maps). We decided to trek together to the unspoilt village of **Ennerdale Bridge**, at the edge of the Lake District National Park, and ended the day in our posh and lovely hotel in **Roswathie**, where I soothed my weary legs in a great big hot tub in my hotel.

The following day was one of the most memorable days of the trail. We were headed for picturesque **Grasmere**, described by William Wordsworth as "the

loveliest spot that man hath ever found," and I was already looking forward to trying out the sumptuous restaurants. The rain was pouring as we started walking along the mountain stream **Stonewaithe Beck**, but we were in great spirits and enjoying each other's company. Half an hour later, we noticed people heading back to Roswathie. It was too dangerous to cross the streams because of the rapidly rising water levels, they said. Our group forged on though, thinking it couldn't be that bad. Little did we know that we were in the middle of the worst storm the area had experienced in 15 years.

The paths were already being washed away by the overflowing streams and river, and we had to cross streams with water as high as our mid-calves. I was shivering, gray-lipped and cold to the bone, simply running on adrenaline as I scrambled on hand and knees up the sides of a waterfall and crossed more streams. By the time we got to the top of the Vale of Grasmere (where, on a clear day, is filled with a sweeping view of the Helvellyn Range), visibility was 10 meters, trails were completely gone, and the terrain was at its boggiest. Brian, an experienced trekker who knew the Coast-to-Coast Trail well, was our only hope to get us down, and he led us all the way down to Grasmere town.

Get a good look at the Irish Sea before heading off; you won't be seeing the coast for several days



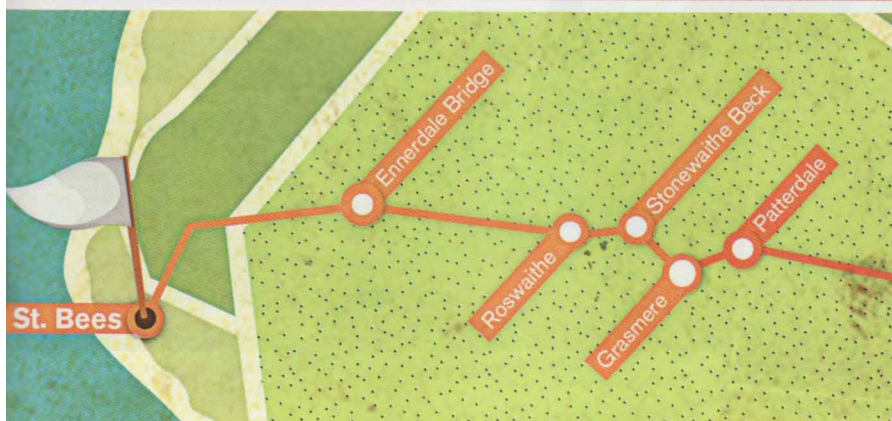
Most trekkers choose to start their journey from St. Bees

**THE END**  
**COAST TO COAST WALK**  
ALTITUDES

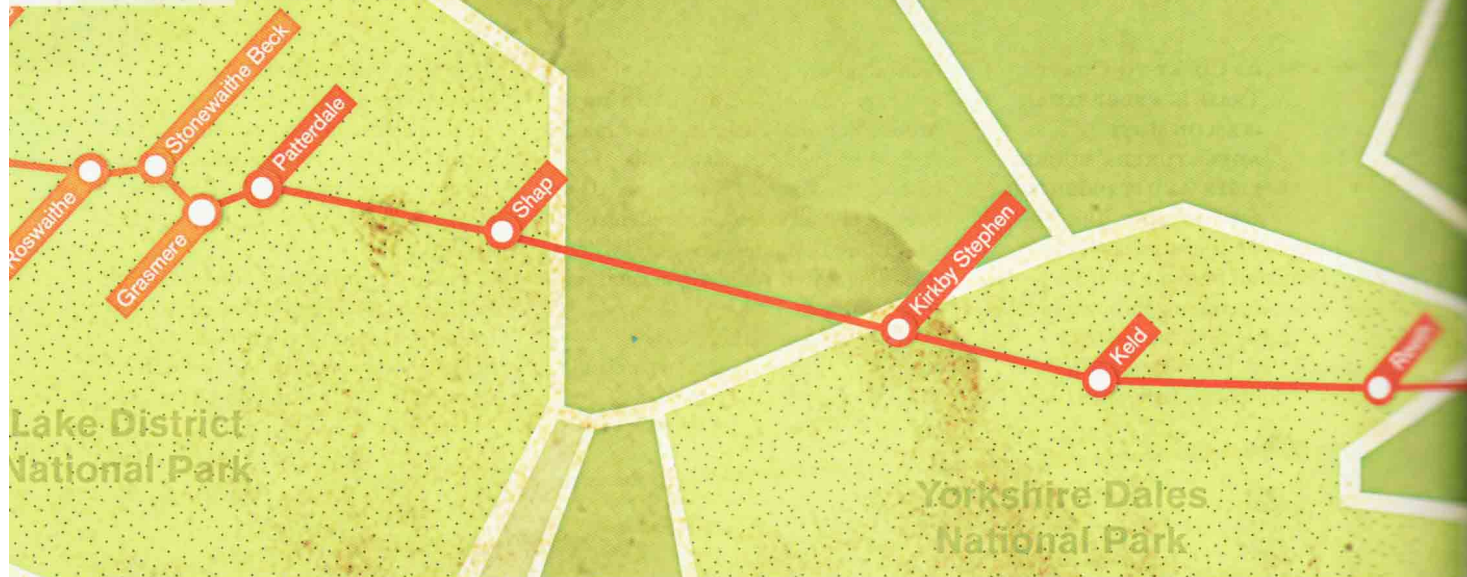
(Vertical Scale Greatly Exaggerated)  
The Highest point reached is Kidsty Pike, 2560' (between Patterdale and Shap)

**ST BEES TO ROBIN HOODS BAY**

**192 MILES**



## Feature COAST-TO-COAST TRAIL



Days  
4-6

### Grasmere to Patterdale to Shap

Waking up with trepidation for the new day, I armed myself with new high-tech rain pants and trekking poles, my own Trailblazer guide, a waterproof pouch for the book and a compass. The weather transitioned from a light drizzle as we made our way up the Helvellyn Summit, to hail when we reach the top, and to lots of sunshine at the last half of our traverse. After that, it was an easy descent to **Patterdale** Valley where we enjoyed the views of Lake Ullswater. Enjoying the great weather, we headed straight to the town's pub and we all toasted to our past four days of adventure.

The next day we left the Lake

District and headed for **Shap**. It was one of the longest and hardest parts of the whole crossing, almost 28 kilometers that included the most challenging ascent and descent of the walk, reaching 770 meters high at Kidsty Pike—the highest point of the Coast-to-Coast journey. The strong wind made the trek challenging, and if it weren't for my trekking poles firmly planted on the tracks, I probably would have been blown all the way down. We walked the final stretch to Shap, along grassy riverbanks, through parklands, and across pastures. By the time we got to our lodge, rain started to pour, but our suite already had a nice roaring fire waiting for us.

### Shap to Kirkby Stephen

Days  
7-9

We were now crossing to the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and the limestone escarpments, moorland, pastures and scattered farmsteads were quite different from the sights we saw in the picturesque Lake District.

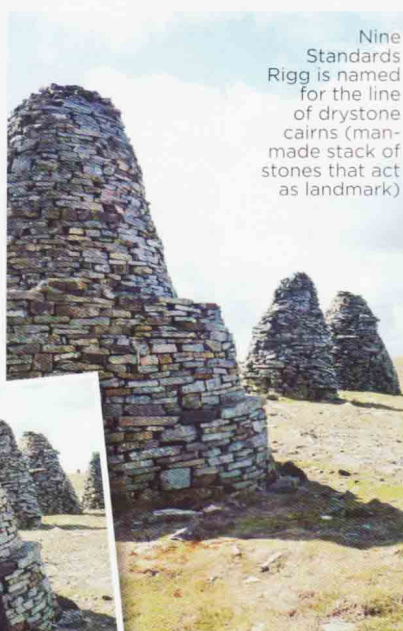
After a picnic in Sunbiggin Tarn, we headed to **Kirkby Stephen** and were picked up by our host to The Black Swan, a beautifully restored lodge located by a running stream in Ravenstonedale. As we enjoyed a scrumptious gourmet meal, our host revealed that representatives from National Geographic had stayed there as well.

The next day, we set off to one of the many highlights of our journey: the **Nine Standards Rigg**, the highest point of the Pennine crossing. After taking in the magnificent view from the top, we descended to Swaledale, a district known for its small waterfalls and old mine buildings, and slept over in Burgoyne Hotel in **Keld**, a stone English manor restored to its former luxurious glory.

Trekking poles are an important tool to keep you going, especially when winds are strong

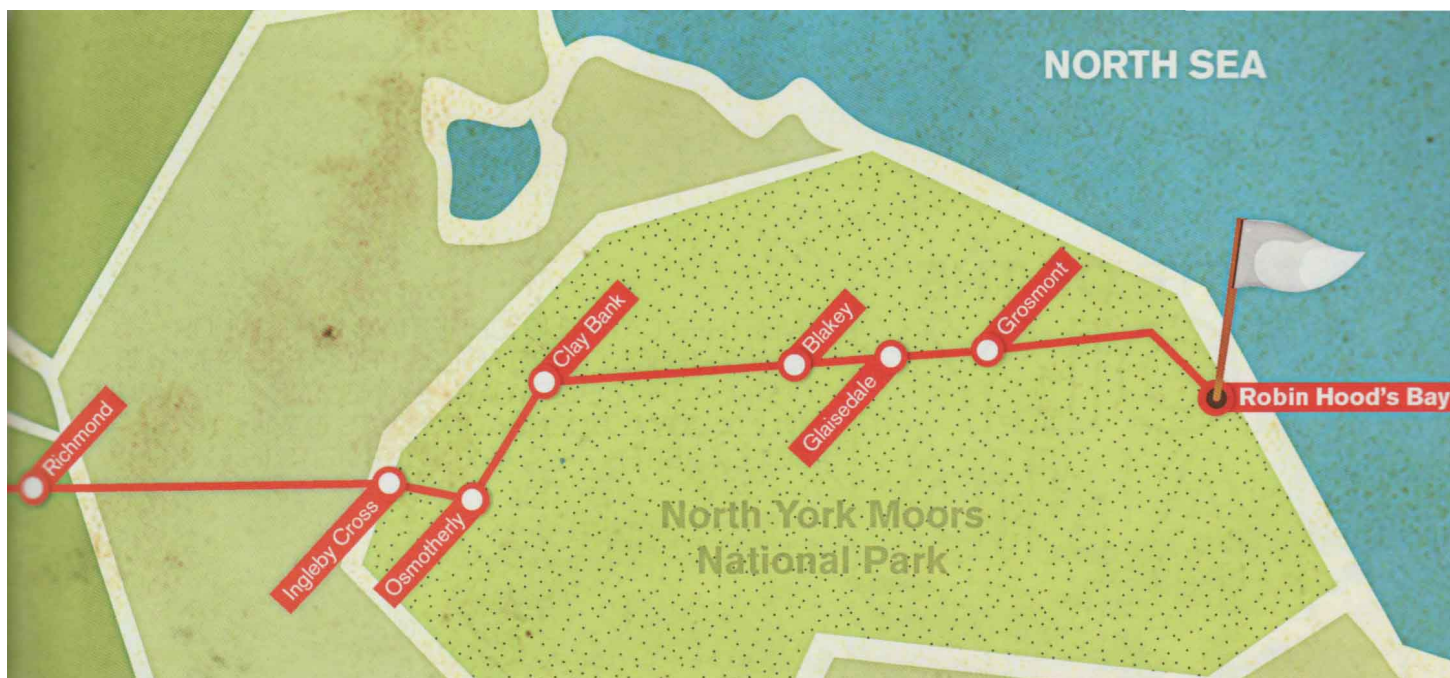


Nine Standards Rigg is named for the line of drystone cairns (man-made stack of stones that act as landmark)



Yorkshire Dales National Park is the quintessential countryside—grazing sheep, rolling green hills and quaint village nestling by streams





Days  
10-12

Reeth to Richmond to  
Osmotherley

This is a very short leg in the trail, and we had enough time to enjoy our luxurious digs, have a long breakfast and explore the village before moving on to **Richmond**. It is a medieval town with an 11th century Norman Castle and impressive 12th century keep. There was a weekend market at the center of its cobbled market square and a restored Georgian theater dating from 1788. I highly recommend staying two nights in Richmond, just to take in the culture.

The next day we headed toward a bleaker landscape: the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. We stopped for lunch at a major gas station at a main motorway, and it was a jolt to see big roads, speeding cars and crowds after spending days in vast landscapes and quiet villages! We opted to continue on the traditional Wainwright route via **Ingleby Cross**, where we spotted the remains of Mount Grace Priory, which, despite its crumbling masonry, is still the best preserved Carthusian priory in England. We then passed more farmlands (much like the Swaledale plains) until finally reaching our destination of **Osmotherley**, a typical and very charming English village.



Osmotherley to Blakey Ridge to Grosmont to Robin Hood's Bay

Days  
13-15

The flatlands from **Clay Bank** to **Blakey Ridge** featured a straightforward path, beautifully covered in a glistening mist of fog. The next day, we set off to walking downhill to **Glaisdale High Moor**, then, after following a centuries-old route, we reached **Grosmont** right after lunch. After a nice cold bath, we visited the Whitby to Pickering Railway, which was established in the 1830 and one of the earliest railways in Yorkshire.

The next day, I woke up practically smelling the salt sea air. It had been two weeks since we last saw the sea and I looked forward to celebrating our

journey's end. But we still had a long day's hike ahead of us, and the last leg finished off with five kilometers of magnificent cliff-top footpaths along the coastal cliffs overlooking the North Sea. Finally, **Robin Hood's Bay**, a scenic fishing village that has inspired poetry and novels, was in our sight. With a last surge of adrenaline, we headed for the sea, passing through narrow alleys and 400-year-old houses. I stepped into in the North Sea, honoring the Coast-to-Coast ritual, pausing as the last of my energy ebbed, and reflecting on this great journey and the wonderful people I had the chance to meet. ■

## WHEN TO GO

As the trails get very boggy the rainy season, it's best to enjoy this trek with clear blue skies which are found from the end of May until mid-September.

For more information, phone Sea to Summit Explorations at (+63) 917 868 7971 or (+63) 2 815 8233, or visit <seatosummitadv.net>, or e-mail ces@seatosummitadv.net

Discover sea, sand and secret streets in Robin Hood's Bay

