
4 Benacre Ness

Grid reference [TM 538 877]

Benacre Ness is mostly now in Kessingland. Look seawards from the village and you will see a wide expanse of shingle ridges and sandy 'denes'. This is the body of the ness, a broad promontory or foreland made of beach sand and gravel jutting into the sea. Strange to say, it is moving.

As far as we know, Benacre Ness began life in Tudor times near Southwold. Two hundred years ago it was at Covehithe, 4 km (2.5 miles) to the south; a hundred years ago it was at Benacre. It is moving steadily northwards at a rate of about 20 m (65 ft) per year, forming a truly dynamic coastal feature. A hundred years from now, if it continues its present rate of progress, it will probably have reached Pakefield.

'Ness' or 'naze' is a Viking word for a coastal headland. Nesses are found where converging longshore water currents and tidal flows create a complex onshore build-up of shingle. Some nesses, as at Orford, have developed a long spit in the direction of the longshore drift, while others such as Dungeness in Kent, have a stable triangular shape. Scientists disagree how Benacre is being formed. The simplest explanation is that waves and tidal currents build up shingle on its northern side but scour it away from the southern end, thus causing a general northward shift. Sediment is accumulating here while it is being removed from other parts of the coast, as at Covehithe 4 km (2½ miles) to the south. An arrangement of offshore ebb and flood channels and sandbanks may be important for transporting and storing this sediment, which is almost entirely rounded flint pebbles like those found in local cliffs.

The Ness has preserved the shape of its successive phases of growth, rather like the rings in a tree. A series of undulating ridges can be seen running diagonally across the open area of the Denes, marking the positions of successive shingle bars thrown up by north-easterly storms. Tough, salt- and drought-resistant plants such as marram grass, sea kale and sea holly grow in the intervening slacks, while the ridges remain bare. This fragile habitat is one of the reasons the Ness is designated as part of the Pakefield to Easton Bavents SSSI.

The Ness is home to Suffolk's largest regular colony of breeding little terns, please do not approach any fenced areas and keep dogs well away.

Figure

(Figure 10) The shingle ridges of Kessingland Denes.

(Figure 11) Benacre Ness on a quiet day. During storm surges the beach front may temporarily retreat as much as 35 m (115 ft).



The shingle ridges of Kessingland Denes.



Benacre Ness on a quiet day. During storm surges the beach front may temporarily retreat as much as 35 m (115 ft).