



Viewpoint

The best view in Norfolk?



Time: 15 mins

Region: East of England

Landscape: coastal



Location: Gazebo, Sheringham Park, Upper Sheringham, NR26 8TL

Grid reference: TG 13278 42415

Getting there: Access by foot from the Norfolk Coast Path. Or park at Sheringham Park Visitor Centre (NT members free / £5 other) and follow signs to the gazebo.

Be prepared: There are 40 hillside steps and 60 wooden steps to reach the top of the tower

From up here high among the birds and the treetops you get a wonderful view of the Norfolk landscape. In many ways it's typical of the county – the zig-zag coastline that looks like its been munched by a hungry caterpillar, arable fields of sugar beet and turnips, a picturesque windmill and (if you're lucky) a steam train snaking through the landscape. But there's much more to this view if you know what to look for.

In *Private Lives*, playwright Noel Coward famously mocked Norfolk as "very flat", but if you look towards the coast and to the right (north east) you can see a hill topped with a white building (a coastguards hut).

This is Skelding Hill, and standing an impressive 170 metres above sea level it's something of an anomaly.

Why do we find a hill on the flat Norfolk coast?



Hopefully you're here on a nice warm day. But 500,000 years ago the view and the temperature would have been very different.

At that time Britain was in the middle of an Ice Age. Temperatures were about 12 degrees Fahrenheit lower than today. A large ice sheet up to three miles thick covered most of Britain. This severe cold period was known as the Anglian Glaciation.

This ice sheet didn't quite cover all of Britain in ice, but almost. It reached as far as the Thames and diverted the river from its original position in North Essex several miles further south.

When temperatures warmed up, the ice retreated, leaving behind the materials that it had carried on its journey.

These clays, sands and rocks were dumped by the melting glacier and formed the hills and bumps that we can see along this stretch of coast including Skelding Hill. Today, the golf course takes advantage of this hummocky landscape and the vantage point of Skelding Hill provides the coastguard with an ideal lookout point.

But it wasn't only ice that created this view...

If you turn to look in the other direction and gaze over the gentle wooded hills and valleys you are enjoying parklands that were sculpted by a different force - human design.

Sheringham Park might look entirely natural but it was designed in 1811 by landscape architect Humphrey Repton. Unlike other garden designers he chose to work with the natural features carved out by the ice not against them.

Repton planted woodlands on the hilltops and left the flat land for farming. He designed paths to skirt around the hills rather than cut across them, revealing his natural understanding of the area's fascinating geographical past.

Together man and ice have created a splendid view that might just win the award for the best view in Norfolk.



Skelding Hill steam train © Gerry Balding (CCL)



Humphrey Repton Business Card © Wikimedia (CCL)