

Summer

awareness trails

AIM

This document describes Awareness Trails as an opportunity for prayer and reflection in your local context and gives an example from one in Suffolk.

INTRODUCTION

An awareness Trail is a means of offering a purposeful walk by setting out a route to follow whilst also suggesting things to notice, consider and be moved by along the way. As an opportunity for prayer an awareness trail differs from, say, a walk you might take round local streets in order to pray purposefully for your community. Similarly it differs from a travelling act of worship such as a Good Friday procession where prayers are said at particular locations. The purpose of an awareness trail is help a person to engage with the landscape or townscape in which they are whilst at the same time being attentive to the many ways in which God might be heard in sights, sounds and other sensations. Essentially, an awareness trail is an exercise in noticing and listening.

This example is based on the town of Southwold on the Suffolk coast, though the awareness trail idea can apply to any location. You may use it to plan your own awareness trail.

SOUTHWOLD AWARENESS TRAIL

The walk suggested in this leaflet differs from the various excellent guided walks already available for this area. As well as helping you to look more closely at and enjoy your surroundings, it encourages you, the traveller, to be more aware of the 'landscape of your life'. No special degree of fitness is required for this awareness trail, just a readiness to wander at a gentle pace and to notice, listen, and maybe learn a little on the way.

The trail begins outside the **United Reformed Church** on the High Street. Sit or loiter for a while - watch the passing people - shopping, hurrying, talking, weaving myriad strands of relationships. Savour and be thankful for the order and patterns and purpose displayed in the scene before you.

Now leave the High Street and choose deliberately a narrower, less obvious path to travel - cross over the street and walk down **Bank Alley**. Cross over the street at the end and bear a little to your left until you come to the **Parish Church**. What does the size and shape, the craftsmanship and beliefs tied up in this building say to you about the past; about the present; about where you stand looking up at it? If you have the time go inside, sit and be still.

Follow the path beside the church seawards keeping the graves and the church on your left. Continue in this direction passing the **Adnam's Brewery** on your right and the **Brewery offices** and the **Methodist church** on your left. Passing the **Sole Bay Inn** look immediately to your left and observe the **lighthouse**. This major landmark in the town is awesome close up and seems to embody security, strength, and a clear sense of purpose. To those at sea, lost, confused, fog bound, the lighthouse warns and guides:

Are there landmarks and beacons which help 'fix' your life?

Are they trustworthy?

Are they durable?

Summer

awareness trails

Now make your way down to the front and pause (conveniently) by the **toilets**. The **pier** with its amusements is to your left. **Beach huts**, the **harbour**, **Walberswick**, **Dunwich** and, in the far distance, **Sizewell** are to your right. The North Sea and eventually Holland are before you. Faced with this panorama, consider these ancient words:

When I stand beneath the heaven and wonder at the moon and stars which are stationed by your hand, what is humanity that you even bother with us? ... Yet you place us just beneath the angels in usefulness and give us responsibility for the whole of creation ... O Lord, our Lord, your splendour is seen in all the earth. (Psalm 8)

With your back to the pier walk along the cliff path until you reach **Gun Hill** with its imposing line of cannon - finance, technology, chemistry, craftsmanship and art combined into a weapon of war. Human ingenuity is often faced with the choice of improving life or destroying it - how do you use your gifts?

The trail can conclude at this point as you return to the town passing the **Red Lion** on your right. Alternatively you may choose to use the extensions set out in this leaflet. Whether you end the trail now or continue, take a few moments now to reflect upon what you have seen, heard and thought and, if you wish, make use of this prayer:

Prayer

Father God,

I pause for a while on this trail,

a fragment of the longer journey

which is my life.

Help me to know that I do not travel alone.

Guide me through uncertain times;

strengthen me in weary times,

and share my joy in easy times.

May I always be good company

for fellow travellers,

and may I always find in You

my journey's end.

Amen

To extend the trail ...

... head southwards along the beach or through the grass and dunes until you reach the harbour. Turn right and follow the river upstream for 100m and then turn right

Summer

awareness trails

again towards the town on the signposted footpath – enjoy both the woodland intimacy and the marshland openness, and celebrate the variety to be found in creation.

To extend the trail still further ...

... follow the river upstream noticing all the activity, both work and leisure based. Pass the **Harbour Inn** on your right and continue on the path until you reach the **bridge**. Enjoy the views that open up at every point of the compass. Retrace your steps and take the footpath across fields which starts behind the pub. The outline of the town is striking and welcoming – use this last part of your journey to consider what you have discovered by leaving the busy-ness of the town. Fix firmly in your mind any thoughts or resolutions which have arisen.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more summer materials please revisit the website. If you have an awareness trail for your local area why not let us know (contact below).

Acknowledgements

This material has been prepared by Ian Fosten, to whom copyright belongs, who has given permission for it to be used in the Vision4life process.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk