



## Devon's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

This leaflet is part of a series of themed trails in Devon's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); helping you get out there, enjoy, and learn more about the landscape around you.

Trail themes include

- Coast in Conflict,
- Man and the Landscape,
- Trade and Settlement and
- A Colourful Landscape.

Have a look at these websites for further leaflets in the series, and ideas for other ways of enjoying yourself out and about!

See [www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk](http://www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk),  
[www.southdevonaonb.org.uk](http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk) and  
[www.discoverdevon.com](http://www.discoverdevon.com)

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is the Government's designation for Britain's finest landscapes; there are 40 in England and Wales. Together with Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks, Devon's 5 AONBs cover 35% of the county. AONBs share a common commitment to secure sustainable living landscapes. Each AONB has been designated for special attention because of the quality of their flora, fauna, cultural and historical heritage, as well as beautiful scenery. Their care has been entrusted to local authorities, organisations, community groups, individuals who live and work in them and those who value them.

The National Trust own and manage extensive tracts of coastline along the North Devon coast including Peppercombe Valley, Worthygate and Sloo Woods, which it manages for wildlife and access for people to enjoy.

## Bucks Mill

- **Start/Finish:** Bucks Mills car park (7 miles west of Bideford off the A39)
- **Distance:** 5.5 miles (9.0 km)
- **Circular walk:** Yes      ■ **Grade:** Moderate
- **Terrain:** Coast path, public rights of way, surfaced road. Mostly reasonable underfoot. Some slippery stretches on coast path in wet weather
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 3 flights of steps; 1 stile; 1 steep climb
- **Accessibility:** This route is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** Bus service 319 from Barnstaple and Bideford to Bucks Cross. From Bucks Cross turn down past post office signed 'Bucks Mills ¾'. Walk start point ¾ mile on right. Public Transport Information Call Traveline on 0871 200 22 33 or [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)
- **Toilets:** No public toilets on walk route
- **Parking:** Bucks Mills car park. Free
- **Other Facilities:** Public payphone in Bucks Mills, to right where walk route turns onto coast path from village street
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Bideford Tourist Information Centre 01237 477676 or [bidefordtic@torridge.gov.uk](mailto:bidefordtic@torridge.gov.uk) or [www.discoverdevon.com](http://www.discoverdevon.com).
- **OS map:** Explorer 126      ■ **Grid ref:** SS 358232
- **Countryside Code:** When walking in the AONB always follow the Countryside Code, which is dedicated to helping members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside. Follow the link for more information [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)





## Trade and Settlement

In the Early Stone Age Devon was sparsely populated by nomadic hunter-gatherers. Much has changed since then. The land has been permanently lived in through the later Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age; seen Roman invasion, Anglo-Saxon settlement, Viking raiders and Norman Conquest. These have all left their mark on the landscape, from Prehistoric barrows and Iron Age hillforts to Norman castles but the land has remained settled and farmed to the present day.

Through this succession of influence, and beyond, the Devon we see today has taken shape. Villages, hamlets and farms have evolved. Towns have grown up, and centres of trade and power have developed, faded, and shifted.

This rural county has always had agriculture at its heart. But other industries have made their mark.

Men have long burrowed deep into the Devon earth to extract valuable tin, copper, silver, lead, and arsenic. Boat building, lime burning, cloth making, and the woollen trade all helped bring affluence. And Devon's stream sides are dotted with the old mills that once ground grain, or made paper and textiles. Lastly, we cannot forget the contribution made by Devon's 'free traders', the smugglers of old.

Meanwhile, Devon's coast has always provided the county with a portal to the wide world. For centuries, galleons, schooners, clippers and cutters have plied their trades in and out of the county's ports. There is even persuasive evidence that tin was being traded with visiting Phoenician and Greek galleys in the Bronze Age.

Today's Devon, home to three quarters of a million people, has roots sunk deep into a long and fascinating history.



## Directions

1. Take short path, from bottom corner of car park by village information panel, down to road. Turn right down road through village **(1,2)**
2. Continue straight on down Tarmac pathway **(3,4)** to old quay and beach **(5)**. Afterwards, retrace your steps to here up to and through village.

3. Just before Old Coastguard Cottage turn left by red telephone box, signed 'Coast Path Peppercombe 2 miles'. Bear right up steps after 20 metres.
4. At junction near top of climb, bear left signed 'Peppercombe 2 miles' **(6)**
5. Follow the path through the woods and after 2 miles, **(7)** descend into Peppercombe Valley at the main track turn left and follow the path across the field and down through some woods to the beach **(8)**. Afterwards retrace your steps.
6. Continue over the bridge and up the main track of Peppercombe Valley **(9)**, after 250 metres the track divides bear right here and continue up the lane passed the Old Coastguard Cottages.



7. After another 250 metres look for a footpath on your right signed to Northway turn right and proceed up a steep footpath to the road.
8. On reaching a surfaced road, turn left, then at the next road junction turn right by Northway Holiday Cottages
9. After about ½ mile look for a public footpath on your left, just passed an old concrete structure and before Sloo Farm. **(10)**

To visit Hoops Inn (500m detour each way) cross road to right. Follow public footpath around field edge, signed 'Holwell ½m'. Beyond next stile bear right down to car park and pub. Afterwards, retrace your steps back up through car



park. Follow path to stile, and then left around field edge. Turn left along road.

10. After ½ mile, just beyond the second of two sharp left hand bends, turn right past 'Lower Worthygate' sign on wall. Follow public footpath fingerpost down drive.
11. Turn right in front of the houses and walk through farm. Bear right up ramp and follow public footpath fingerpost down left side of barn. Path follows field edge and drops down through woods to follow stream.
12. Where path emerges at road, turn immediately left up footpath back to car park **(11)**

## Points of Interest

1. At one time more or less every resident in Bucks Mills held the surname Braund, or was related to the family. A ferocious attitude to newcomers ensured the valley remained a Braund stronghold for many centuries. King's Cottage on the right at the bottom of the village was once the home of Captain James Braund, known as the 'King' of Bucks Mills.

A distinctive clan, known for their dark hair and eyes,

the Braunds were said to be descended from survivors of a wrecked ship of the Spanish Armada. In fact, it is now thought that prehistoric Iberian immigrants who settled in these parts are the most likely source of the family's famously Mediterranean looks.

2. Part of the name Bucks Mills stems from the village mill. Corn was ground here, and the mill was powered by the lively stream which tumbles down the valley. The origin of 'Bucks' lies in the Saxon term for a homestead, 'Buccas Htwise'.
3. The tiny cabin to the right of the path down to the beach was for 50 years the summer residence of the artists Judith Ackland and Mary Stella Edwards. Their nationally acclaimed work included many beautiful evocations of the North Devon landscape, which were known for their distinctively gentle and timeless quality.



4. Bucks Mills is home to two former lime kilns. One is the fortress like complex to your right as you descend to the beach; the other stands to the left at the bottom of the path. Limestone quarried in South

Wales was brought here by ship and burnt in the kilns. Lime was used as a fertiliser to "sweeten the soil" as well as being used for mortars and whitewash for buildings. Lime production was important to North Devon's economy and agriculture, but it had its dangers. The heat of the kilns and the caustic nature of the lime made for some gruesome accidents.



5. For many centuries the small boats of Bucks Mills landed plump catches of herring, mackerel, lobsters, and prawns, and the community relied heavily on fishing. A curved quay built in 1598 once provided protection and embarkation for the fishing fleet and other vessels. That quay is now long gone, its demise hastened by the erosion of the cliff behind it. A pile of boulders visible to the left at low tide is all that remains.

Beyond the remains of the quay, a narrow spit of rocks known as the Gore extends out into the sea. According to local legend it is the Devil's work, the first part of a planned causeway over to Lundy Island. Apparently, Lucifer lacked staying power and gave up on the project once his shovel broke.

The Gut is a slender 'corridor' of sand visible at all but high tide. Explosives and hard labour cleared this channel through the coastal rock. The result allowed coastal trading vessels to beach themselves here, unload their cargoes, and refloat again on the next tide.

6. The magical oak woods along the coast path here may be very old. Too steep and inaccessible to be cleared and worked, coastal woodland such as this has escaped the plough for centuries or even longer.

Human influence has often been limited to small scale coppicing, and the age of the woods makes for tremendous natural diversity. During the spring these woodlands are a riot of colour, no wonder they are considered to be one of the best habitats in Britain.



7. Peppercombe Castle was an Iron Age promontory fort and was one of several such defensive structures to be found along the North Devon coast. Today only the earthen banks remain. Look for a small viewpoint on your left which gives commanding views of the Bideford Bay coast.



- 8. Peppercombe was once a small fishing hamlet, complete with its own Lime Kiln which stood at the top of the beach. In the 19th Century there stood an old summerhouse belonging to the Portledge Estate, it looked like a medieval castle but it was replaced by the existing holiday bungalow, which was an early example of a prefabricated "flatpack" building brought down on the train from London in 1923.
- 9. Peppercombe Valley is a true Devon 'combe', the local term for a wooded valley. A mixture of rare grasslands, woodland and marshy habitats this area is biologically very diverse. It plays host to a range of wildlife such as rare lichens, orchids and fritillary butterflies.



- 11. The view along the coast to the west takes in the small fishing village of Clovelly clinging to the cliff, with Blackchurch Rock beyond. Looking east, the majestic sweep of Bideford Bay follows the cliffs to Westward Ho!, and then the expanse of Saunton Sands. Saunton Down rises beyond, and in the distance, the promontory of Baggly Point noses out into the ocean.
- 12. This woodland footpath used to be known as the 'Coffin Path'. Before the establishment of a church in Bucks Mills, the dead from the east side of the valley were carried along here on their way to be buried at the parish church in Parkham.

**Refreshments**

**Hoops Inn, Horns Cross**

01237 451222  
[www.hoopsinn.co.uk](http://www.hoopsinn.co.uk)  
 Hot and cold drinks. Beers from nearby Abbotsham. Local food emphasis, including meats from farmer Steve Harding; handmade breads from Welcombe; and seafood including fish and shellfish from Clovelly and Appledore.

- 10. Look inland to the left from here, and you can see the church tower at nearby Parkham. This building dates mainly from the 15th Century, but retains a Norman doorway and font.  
 Beyond Parkham the view extends for 30 miles to the heights of Dartmoor rising in the distance. The skyline includes Dartmoor's highest point at Yes Tor and High Willhays.

