



## 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.

*Please recycle this leaflet by passing it onto a friend when you have finished with it. Don't let Devon go to waste.*

## Hartland

- **Start/Finish:** Hartland Quay car park (3 miles west of Hartland)
- **Distance:** 6 miles (9.5 km); shorter route 3.5 miles (5.5 km)
- **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Short route: moderate to strenuous. Full route: strenuous
- **Terrain:** Coast path, public rights of way, surfaced road. Mostly reasonable underfoot. Some tricky footing on coast path
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 6 flights of steps; 4 stiles; 5 steep ascents; 3 steep descents
- **Accessibility:** This route is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** No bus service to Hartland Quay
- **Toilets:** Public toilets by Hartland Quay Hotel; also in Stoke, by church
- **Parking:** Hartland Quay car park
- **Other Facilities:** Hartland Quay Hotel, refreshment kiosk at Hartland Point
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Bideford Tourist Information Centre 01237 477676 or [www.bidefordtic@torridge.gov.uk](http://www.bidefordtic@torridge.gov.uk) or [www.discoverdevon.com](http://www.discoverdevon.com)
- **OS map:** Explorer 126      ■ **Grid ref:** SS 224247
- **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 links 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 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. Park in top car park at Hartland Quay **(1)**. From car park return up road to Hartland Quay entrance at top, above attendant's hut. Turn left in front of Rocket House and follow Coast Path fingerpost along cliffs **(2)**. The coastal section of this walk follows Coast Path fingerpost signs and 'acorn' waymarkers.
2. Follow coast path down into valley **(3)**, and bear left at the fingerpost, signed 'Hartland Point 2m'. Bear left at field. At fingerpost behind cottage at Blackpool Mill turn left, then bear right to climb steeply up long flight of steps to Berry Cliff **(4)**.
3. At bottom of next valley, continue up far side. Alternatively, detour to left down footpath to visit Blegberry beach, then retrace your steps and bear left to continue along Coast Path **(5)**.
4. To follow shorter route, leave the coast path near top of climb turn right at fingerpost signed 'Blegberry ½m' **(6)**. Follow field along, then up to left between two fields, and right to join green lane to Blegberry Farm. Bear right in front of farmhouse to join directions at end of instruction 9.
5. Near the bottom of descent, bear right at waymarker post and follow coast path up valley at Smoothlands **(7)**.  
Coast path climbs and follows valley a little inland before dropping down steps to left. Cross stream and bear left past static caravan to continue along cliffs.
6. When you reach the car park below radar station ('mushroom') tower, turn right up lane.
7. Pass Lundy Heliport on right. At junction go straight on following fingerpost signed 'Public Bridleway Blegberry 1 mile'. Follow route down old track past farm and down fields.
8. At next fingerpost turn left signed 'Blegberry ½ mile'. Follow bridleway, which crosses stream and follows green lane up hill.
9. At the road turn right. Walk straight through Blegberry Farm **(8)**. Turn left around end of farmhouse to follow grassed track, then bear right to follow green lane down hill.



10. At road **(9)** go straight on, past 'Unsuitable for Motors' sign. Follow road down into valley and up other side to Stoke **(10)**.
11. At junction in village turn right through lych gate and along path to left of church **(11)**. Beyond the tower, fork right through back of churchyard. Cross stone stile and follow fingerpost along public footpath in front of houses.
12. Footpath continues along field edge, following route of road along ridge. At end of field, turn left through gate by Rocket House to return to car park.

## Points of Interest

1. You are standing above Hartland Quay a little known but historically important local port. The building of the Quay was authorised by Act of Parliament in 1566 and was sponsored by such notables as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake and John Hawkins. It was a small thriving port involved in trading along the north coast, South Wales and the Bristol Channel. Imports included limestone, coal, timber and glass, while exports included corn and malt.



The coastline along this part of Devon is treacherous; the small Rocket House was built to house the local life saving crew's wagon and equipment. The rocket apparatus, as it was called, was a contraption which could fire lines from the shore out to a ship in distress. Heavy ropes tied to these lines were then pulled out to the vessel. Suspended from each rope was a 'breeches buoy'. This consisted

of a pair of extra large trousers attached at the waist to a lifebelt and hung below a pulley.

One by one, stricken crew members would sit in these breeches and be hauled ashore.

A wreck in 1890, in which 8 lives were lost, prompted The Hartland Life Saving Apparatus Company to be formed, and the Rocket House to be built. Their bravery and knowledge was often needed, as this jagged and windswept coast has one of the greatest densities of wrecks in the country. The Rocket apparatus continued to be used around the country until the 1980s, when helicopter rescues made them redundant.

Turn left in front of the Rocket House to follow the Coast Path along the cliff.

2. This grassy area of clifftop is known as the Warren. So named, because in the past rabbits were farmed here, and artificial warrens were constructed of soft earth which the rabbits could easily burrow into. Warrening was an important part of the rural economy until the late 19th century.

Rabbits have undergone some evolutionary changes since they were first introduced to Britain, and are now relatively robust animals, well adapted to life in Britain. But when they first arrived with the Normans, they were rather delicate creatures, barely able to dig their own burrows.

Warrening was a significant element of the rural economy in England for many centuries until it declined in the late 19th century.



The striking ruin which sits eccentrically alone on the crown of the field is known as the Pleasure House. Its most likely use was as a refreshment stop for the owners of Hartland Abbey and their guests while out on carriage drives around their estate. The large arch is said to have been constructed so that the coach and horses could be backed inside. Others have claimed it was a lookout for spotting pirates off the coast.

Continue to follow the coast path along the cliff and down into the valley. At the bottom, turn left over the river, and then bear left to the cottage.

3. The Abbey river, which runs to the sea here, is the longest river in the parish, rising close



to the site of an Iron Age hill fort near Clovelly.

This lonely valley was once the site of Blackpool Mill, although all that remains of the original building is the cottage you see. It is thought that the mill was owned by the nearby Hartland Abbey. In past centuries, when the countryside had a feudal system, whoever controlled the milling process locally had a great deal of power. Usually it was the lord of the manor, and all those who worked his lands were obliged to mill their grain at his mills. So it is thought that Blackpool Mill may have been the Abbey's way of gaining some control of the milling process, avoiding the local lord's mills.

Today it is an exclusive holiday home, made famous by the recent BBC Production of *Sense and Sensibility*. Many films have been shot in and around this section of coastline, which is very popular with film producers.



Now head towards the beach, and climb steeply up the long flight of steps to the right

- The climb up from Blackpool offers a spectacular view of the ribbed rock strata running out into the sea from the beach below. It is the spot where a French ship managed to run aground on a fine summer's day in 1879. The lugger was making for Cardiff with a cargo of pit props, when the unfortunate captain, Monsieur Bidout, made the basic error of mistaking Hartland Point lighthouse for one on the Welsh Coast and the vessel ploughed into the rocks. The crew were unharmed, but the captain was convinced that locals would pillage his ship if he left it, and would not even trust the coastguard. Eventually the vicar's wife, a French speaker, was eventually able to convince Msr Bidout that his vessel and cargo were not in danger from the local mob!

At the top of the climb, cross the stile then follow the waymarkers first right, and then down the slope to the left.

- The path down to the beach here was an old sand path. Sea sand dug from the beach was transported up the valley inland on the backs of donkeys. The sand had agricultural uses, and was sold on to farmers inland. It was used to add minerals to the soil, and to lighten heavy clay of the fields. The beach was also an important source of seaweed, which was gathered at low tide and spread on the fields as fertilizer.

From here the route climbs again up out of the valley to Blegberry Cliff. To visit the beach here, turn left down the old sand path. Afterwards,

retrace your steps to the junction and bear left along the coast path.

- From the slope below Blegberry Cliff you have a wonderful view south down the coastline. The headland with a pronounced 'toe' protruding beneath its cliff is Sharpnose Head at Morwenstowe. Beyond that, the coast runs away down into Cornwall. If the weather is clear enough, you may be able to see Tintagel Head off in the distance.

Ahead of you on the path now, the chunky promontory jutting out into the sea below is called Damehole Point. It is a formidable block of rock which has claimed at least three ships. In 1887 a schooner poetically named the *Star of Peace* was smashed to pieces here, and only a year later a ship laden with 1300 tons of iron ore foundered on the same unforgiving rocks. The crew of both vessels managed to escape in their own lifeboats and survive.

Remains of another wreck can still be seen on the beach, with a well preserved anchor from the wreck of the French Ship *Hoche* which foundered in 1882.

As you descend towards Damehole Point, bear right at the waymarker post, and follow the path up the valley to the right.

- Hartland Point marks the junction of the Bristol Channel and the Atlantic Ocean and there is many a treacherous current here. The Romans referred to the point as the "Promontory of Hercules" because of the fierce current and winds here, no wonder there was a lighthouse here.

The lighthouse was once manned by 4 keepers. They lived with their families in homes which have since been demolished to make way for the helipad. The scouring of the waves against the cliffs caused the lighthouse to become in danger of being undermined by the sea, vulnerably perched on a small promontory as it is. It was to counter this threat that a thick sea wall was built in 1925, which you can see to the right of the lighthouse.



Looking out to sea beyond and to the left of the lighthouse, you can see the island of Lundy if visibility is fairly clear. The island has seen plenty of trade in its time, some of it less than legal.

It was occupied by Barbary pirates during the 1600s, and during the following century Lundy became the base for Thomas Benson, one time MP for Barnstaple, who became Devon's most notorious smuggler. Benson had a contract to transport convicts to America, but instead of the New World, he would ship them the few miles to Lundy. There, they worked as slaves, building



infrastructure for his smuggling operations, including a tobacco processing plant. When 14 desperate convicts made a bid for the mainland in a small boat, his scheme came to light.

To pay his fines from the scandal, Benson loaded a ship with expensive linen and pewter. After safely offloaded the cargo on Lundy, he scuttled the ship at sea and claimed on his insurance for the vessel and cargo. However, disgruntled members of his crew spilled the beans. The captain of the ship was hanged for his part in the scheme, but Benson managed to escape to Portugal, where it is said he built up a thriving trading business.

Follow the coast path from here around past Hartland Point. When you reach the car park, turn right up the lane, heading inland.

8. The farm at Blegberry was built by a staunch supporter of King Charles I named William Atkin. He cannot have been a popular man locally as he was a collector of what was known as 'ship money', a much hated tax which was levied on coastal communities to finance the navy. When the English Civil War broke out between the King and Parliament, Atkin had the farmhouse at Blegberry fortified. The thick walls he built around the end of the farmhouse still stand today, and you can see the small loopholes left in the stonework so that muskets could be fired through them.

The name Blegberry actually comes from a prehistoric hill fort nearby called 'Black Bury'. The



erosion of centuries of waves has long since sent the hillfort site toppling into the sea, but it is thought that it once stood close to Hartland Point.

Now follow the grassy track around the bottom of the farmhouse, and then bear right down the green lane.

9. Just after you join the road from the green lane, to the right stands a mound which is thought to have been used for winnowing in the days before mechanised farming. Winnowing was a labour intensive activity which involved tossing threshed grain into the air. The husks, or chaff, would be carried off on the wind, while the clean, usable grain would drop back to the floor.
- Hartland parish produced a good harvest of grain, and some locally grown corn and oats were even exported by ship from Hartland Quay during the 18th and 19th century, before the Quay was swept away by the sea in 1887.

The fields you pass through on this walk are part of the largest parish in Devon, which grew out of the old Saxon royal estate of Hartland, belonging to King Alfred, considered

the first true King of England. Looking out over the land, with its scattered farms and settlements, you can easily imagine what a remote and lonely outpost this was in the days before the motor car or modern communications, when the sea was the only link with the rest of the world.

Continue down the road now, and past Berry Farm, with the church tower in your sights.

10. Hartland Abbey became an Augustinian monastery shortly after it was built in the 12th century. The religious life of the Abbey came to an end 400 years later when it became the last monastery in England to be deconsecrated during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. The property and land was granted to the King's favourite butler, William Abbott, and the Abbey has had a fairly stable existence ever since, passing peacefully and placidly from one generation of the local squirearchy to the next.

The house was extensively rebuilt in 1779, and little of the original abbey remains, except for part of the cloisters and one or two doorways, which have been built into the present house.

From here follow the lane to the right, over the bridge and up the hill to Stoke.

11. The Church of Stoke St Nectan has what is thought to be the highest church tower in Devon. It is visible from many parts of the parish, and also from far out to sea, which has made it an important aid to shipping for centuries. Look up at the

tower and you can see several gargoyles protruding from the walls. Inside, the handsome church has many interesting features including a decorated wagon roof, and the long, finely carved rood screen.

A church was originally built here in 1050 by Gytha, as a thanksgiving for the saving of her husband from shipwreck. Gytha was the mother of King Harold, and held the ownership of the manor of Hartland at that time.

St Nectan is said to have lived here at Stoke, having sailed from Wales to pursue the life of a hermit. He died in 510 AD, after pursuing robbers who had stolen two cattle that had been given to him. He intended to try and convert the thieves to Christianity, but had his head hacked off for his troubles. It is said that St Nectan picked up his own severed head and carried it back to Stoke, where he finally laid it down and expired.

At the back of the church, fork right through the back of the churchyard and cross the stone stile. Follow the 'Public Footpath' fingerpost sign along the front of the old coastguard cottages.





**Key**

- walk route
- suggested walk direction
- shorten walk direction
- No. refers to directions
- No. refers to Points of Interest



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