



# North Devon Coast

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

## Silver, Smoke and Strawberries

'A self-guided, circular, 6 mile walk around Combe Martin

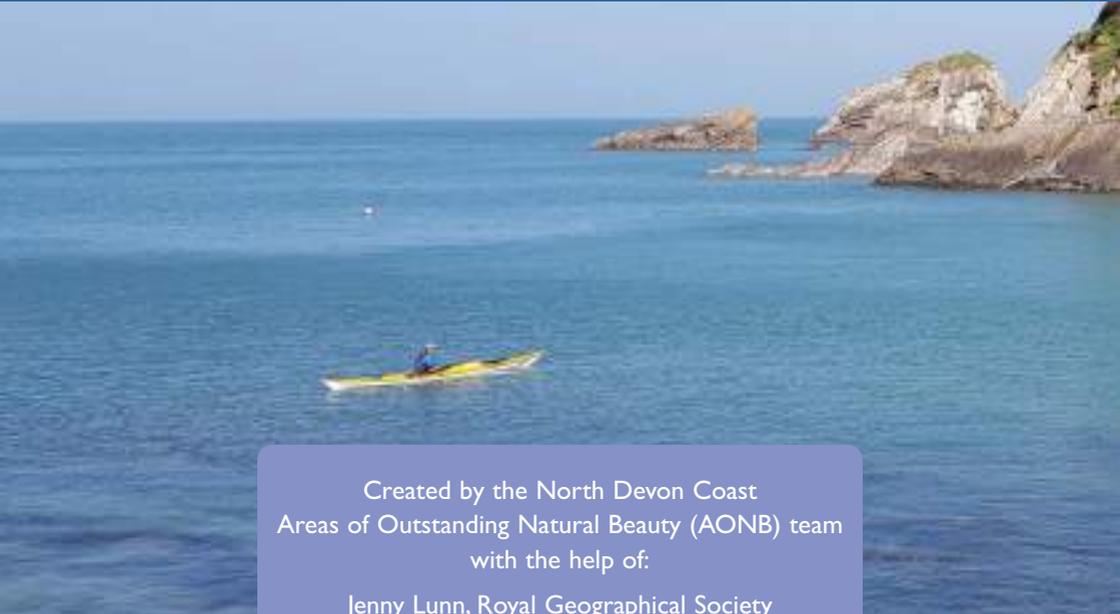


*Photo by Andrew Wheatley*



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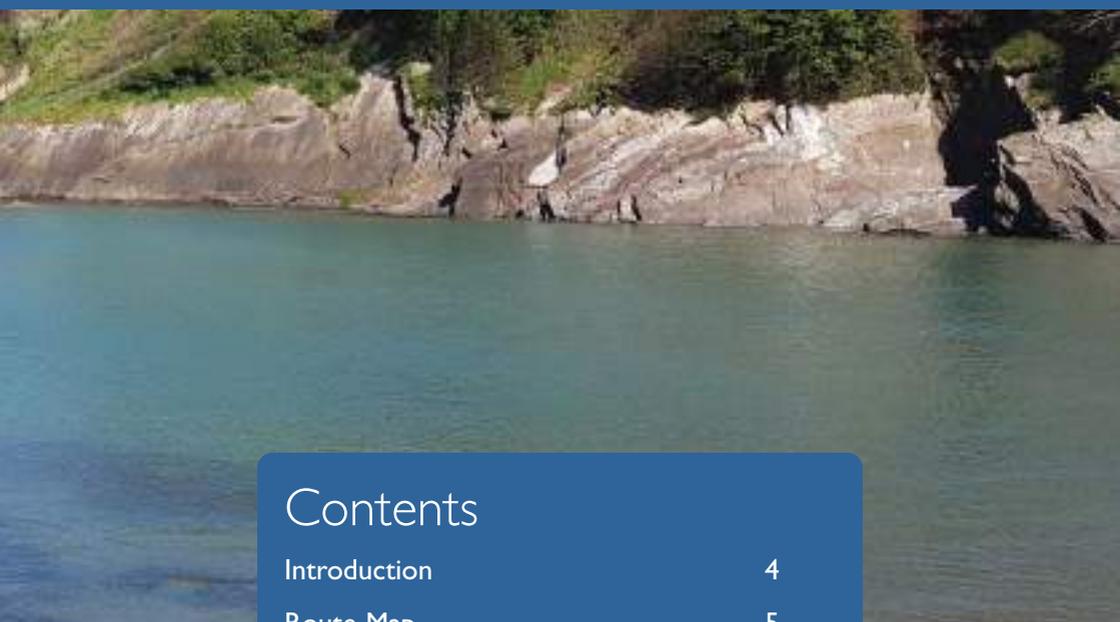
Created by the North Devon Coast  
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with the help of:

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Combe Martin Miners

Combe Martin Walk and Talk Group



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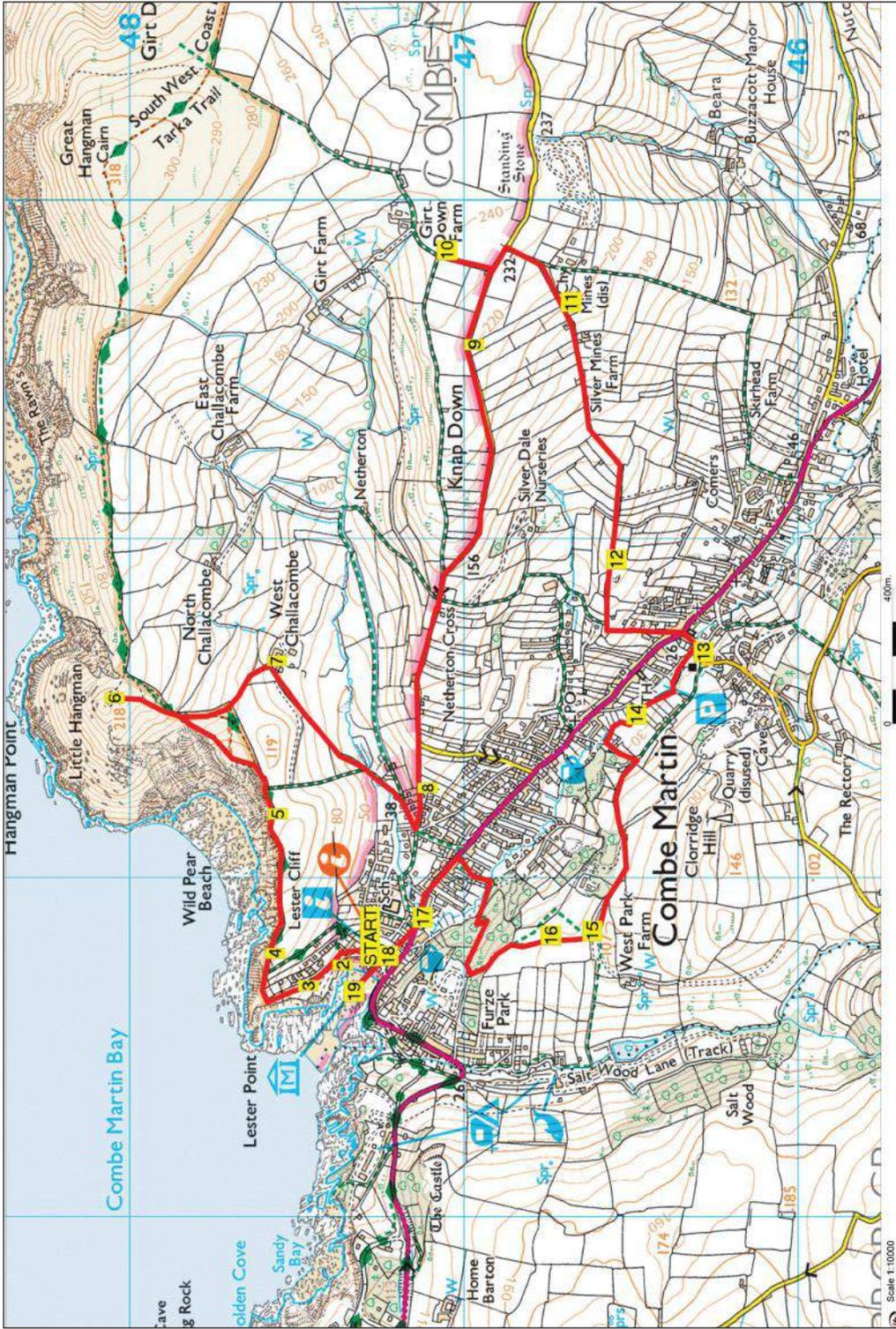
## Discover this historic hive of industry on the North Devon Coast

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This walk through the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a six mile, circular route that takes you on a journey through Combe Martin's industrial heritage. While you walk you will be looking at evidence that can still be found, to this day, of industry in the landscape.

Combe Martin's heritage is different to that of its neighbouring towns, in that its remoteness and industry, which left it a 'shammick' of a town, dirty and industrial, meant that it was not visited by tourists until relatively recently. In the landscape today you can see evidence of silver mines, lime burning, maritime industries and market gardening, all the while taking in the beautiful coastal landscape of North Devon.

As we walk thorough Combe Martin, names, buildings and fields reveal the industrial past of Combe Martin.



# Practical Information

**Location:** Combe Martin, North Devon, UK

Start and finish point is Lime Kiln car park, Cross Street, EX34 0DH

Grid reference of start point is SS 57775 47266

## Getting there:

Car - from the east, take the A361 then the A399 to Combe Martin. From the west, take the A39 from Barnstaple, then the A399 to Combe Martin. Follow the A399 through Combe Martin until you reach the right fork taking you onto Cross Street, follow signs to the car park.

Train - the nearest train station is at Barnstaple

Bus - Buses run from Barnstaple and Ilfracombe roughly every hour during the day (Monday to Saturday) - use [www.journeydevon.info](http://www.journeydevon.info) to plan your journey

Bicycle - on road route, regional route 51

**Walk distance:** 6 miles

**Level:** Challenging - predominantly off road with steep hills

**Terrain:** Rough terrain, near the cliff edge in places, with muddy, grassy or rocky tracks and small roads; crosses moderately busy main road twice

**Conditions:** Some exposure on cliff edge and at tops of hills, some shelter in the bottom of the valley. Not suitable in very inclement weather

**Suitable for:** Seasoned walkers - those with a good level of fitness and experience of walking on rough terrain

Dogs - good walk for active dogs. Keep dogs under close control near cliff edge and when crossing moor land and farm land, especially when close to livestock.

Dogs are not allowed on Combe Martin Beach in the summer but are allowed on neighbouring Newberry Beach

**Public Toilets:** Toilets are found at Lime kiln car park at the start and end of the walk

### Places to visit:

Combe Martin Museum and Information Point - this small museum has a wealth of activities for children and families in the summer and has a very interesting and wide ranging collection. They are a child friendly museum, encouraging children to engage with the artefacts. They are a Makaton friendly museum and have audio commentary for most of the displays. Cross Street, Combe Martin, EX34 0DH. Tel: 01271 889031

Website: [www.combe-martin-museum.co.uk/home](http://www.combe-martin-museum.co.uk/home)

North Devon Coast AONB - Find out about other parts of the coast that you can explore on foot or by bike; includes family-friendly activities - [www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk](http://www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk)

Exmoor National Park, Lynmouth Pavilion - a National Park Centre to explore and celebrate the fascinating heritage of Lynton and Lynmouth, as well as the wider area of Exmoor National Park. With a varied and vibrant events programme, there is always something happening. The Esplanade, Lynmouth, EX35 6EQ

[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enjoying/national-park-centres/lynmouth-national-park-centre](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enjoying/national-park-centres/lynmouth-national-park-centre)

The South West Coast Path - part of this walk takes in the South West Coast Path.

Originally created by coastguards, who used it to patrol the coast for smugglers; it is 630 miles long and is the longest National Trail in the country [www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/](http://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/)

### More information:

**Online:** For a quick look for local activities and events check out the Visit Combe Martin website [www.visitcombemartin.com/](http://www.visitcombemartin.com/)

The Combe Martin Miners have a facebook page: 'Combe martin silvermine', and are working on a website. You can find details of open days, etc, by visiting the museum

Combe Martin's Hidden Heritage - Going Underground by the younger Combe Martin Miners is a short film found on YouTube <http://bit.ly/1rntUAe>

**Printed:** Various books on the history of Combe Martin can be purchased at Combe Martin Museum

### Other books:

Out of the World and Into Combe Martin, Combe Martin Local History Group, 1989; ISBN 0950991724

The Combe Martin Mines, Peter Cloughton, Combe Martin Local History Group, 1992

# The Walk

## Stop 1: Welcome to Combe Martin

**Location:** Lime Kiln car park

**Topic:** Introduction

Welcome to Combe Martin which is situated at the northernmost part of the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The AONB stretches from here at Combe Martin, on the boundary of Exmoor National Park, and along the coast westwards to Marsland Mouth on the Cornish border.

Combe Martin has a history unlike any of its neighbouring towns and villages. Although situated on the edge of Exmoor and difficult to reach, it has had a thriving industrial past. There is evidence of very early settlers here, confirmed by the doomsday book of 1085 which indicates how significant this area was, with 150-200 inhabitants, and by 1249 it had become a borough.

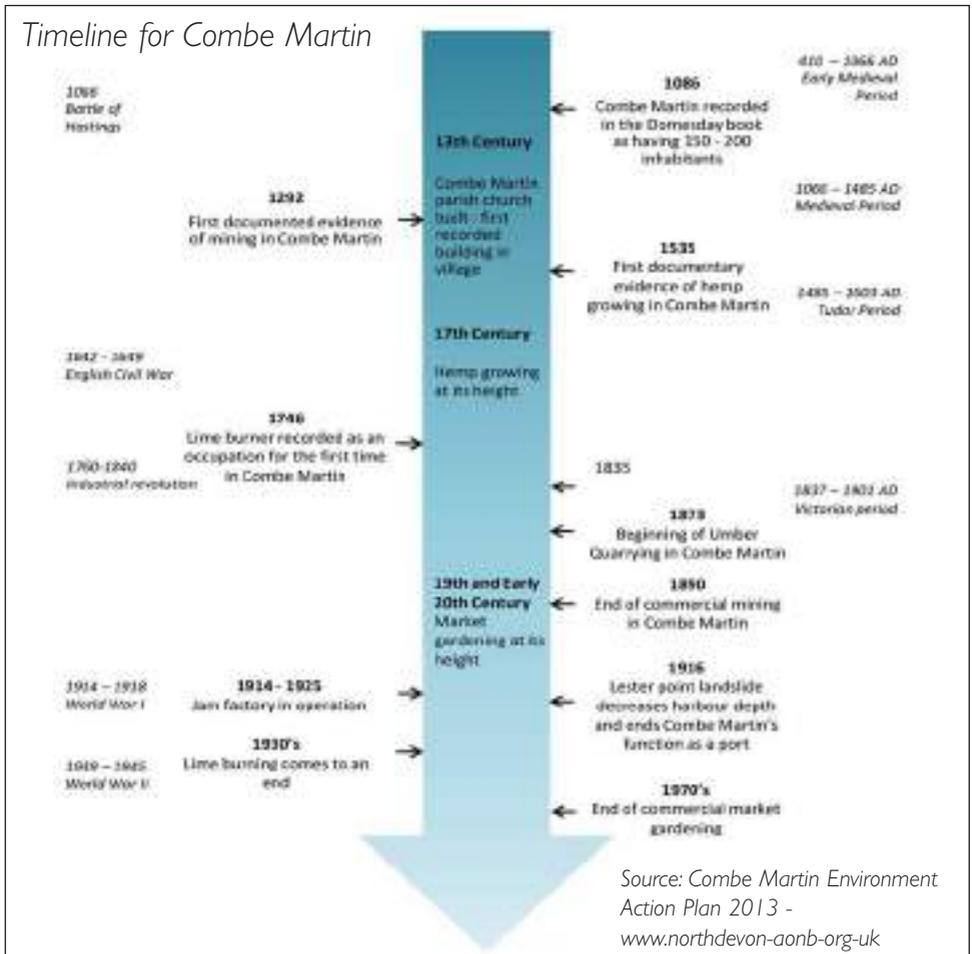
The medieval Charter Rolls confirm that mining took place in Combe Martin from at least 1292. The steep sided valley was advantageous for growing crops and by 1535 hemp was grown in the area. This may have been due to the need for rope for the mines, as mining for silver was at its most profitable at this time. Hemp growing reached its height here during the 17th Century. The Royal rights to the mines were removed at the end of the 17th Century indicating that the mines were no longer profitable at this point and it wasn't until the 19th Century that an increase in mining technology encouraged renewed interest in the mines.

In the mid-1700s lime burning was first recorded as an occupation in Combe Martin and became a significant industry in the area. At the end of the 1800s umber ore, used in paint manufacture, was quarried in the area and is thought to have been the last profitable mineral exploitation in the area.

The sheltered valley, which was suitable for hemp growing, was also suitable for market gardening producing grains, fruit and vegetables. The gardens may well have been originally owned by the miners, to grow food, but were later used to grow produce that was exported out of the area during the 20th Century to local towns that were seeing an influx of tourists and by sea to Wales and by rail as far as London.

The industry in Combe Martin meant that, while other areas on the North Devon coast became more attractive to tourists, Combe Martin remained a hive of industry well into the 20th Century. Our walk will take us on a circular route around Combe Martin to look at how its past has shaped its landscape today and how the unique geology and shape of the landscape led this area to be suitable for significant industry.

This walk was researched and written by Chrissie Ingle, working for the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty team.



## Directions I

Walk uphill to the top end of the car park and take the surfaced track to the left of the National Park cairn. Follow the wall below the houses and on the higher side of the greensward. Stop after about five metres.

## Stop 2: A Load of Old Cobblers

Location: Cobblers Park

Topic: Hemp growing

From here we can see one of the characteristics of the physical landscape that has shaped centuries of agricultural activity in this area: the natural shape of the valley. The steep-sided slopes provided shelter from strong

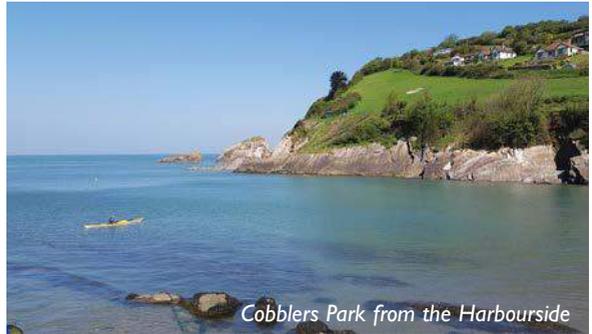
coastal winds and were ideal for cultivating crops. Later in our walk, we will find out about various phases of agricultural production but one crop of significance to the area was hemp.

Hemp is one of the earliest known domesticated plants, cultivated by humans for over 12,000 years. It was - and still is - valued for its diverse uses; its softer outer fibres can be woven into cloth, its more woody inner fibres can be used to make rope and other non-woven items, the oil from its fruits is used in the manufacture of paints and moisturising creams and its seeds are used for bird feed and fishing bait.

Hemp was grown in Combe Martin from at least 1535 and production continued into the 17th Century. Tithe records show that the harvest of hemp was equal to that of wool and second only to corn.

The hemp grown in Combe Martin was of such good quality that it was used to create thread for shoemaking, hence the possible origin of the name of this area: Cobblers Park. The historian Thomas Westcote in his book 'A view of Devonshire in 1630' stated that "the town is not rich; yet are the people industrious and painful: their greatest trade and profit is the making of shoemakers thread by spinning...furnishing therewith the most part of the shire."

To a lesser extent, hemp would also have been used to make rope for two of the village's other industries - mining and shipbuilding - but we'll find out more about those later in the walk.



### Directions 2

Continue to follow the wall then the hedge uphill on the greensward. Stop after about 100m when you are parallel with the Combe Martin crest which is set in the grass.

### Stop 3: Sloops and Schooners

**Location:** Top end of Cobblers Park parallel with the Combe Martin crest

**Topic:** Maritime industries - trading and shipbuilding

From this elevated viewpoint we get a better sense of Combe Martin's coastal position.

Down below is the main beach and on the other side of the promontory is the smaller Newberry Beach. This sheltered bay is one of the few natural harbours on the North Devon coast.



Early photo of ships moored in Combe Martin  
Photo: Combe Martin Museum

It is likely people have been launching boats from here for as long as humans have occupied the area.

In fact all the towns and villages along the North Devon coast have had strong maritime links as it was often easier to travel by boat than overland. The maritime link was so strong here that local children were educated in maritime navigation in the 17th and 18th Centuries. At different periods Combe Martin saw trading, fishing and shipbuilding.

Historical records show that ship building took place on Newberry Beach from 1837 for about sixty years. During this time eight sloops and schooners (both types of sailing boat) were built. In the harbour there are still remains of one of many hobbler's posts, which were used to moor sailing ships.

In 1916 there was a landslide at Lester Point (the headland to our right). The addition of extra material raised the beach and decreased the depth of the water which affected the ability of ships to moor at Combe Martin. In addition in the latter part of the 19th Century railway lines had been opened to both Lynton and Ilfracombe - towns east and west along the coast respectively - and this also brought about the decline of shipping from Combe Martin.

#### Directions 3

Continue to follow the wall/hedge up the hill to the top, farthest corner. Go through the gap in the hedge at the apex of the greensward and follow the narrow path up the hill. At the junction where the track forks backwards, bear slightly left to follow the National Trust footpath along the coast. Pause by the first set of benches.

## Stop 4: Two into One

Location: Lester Point

Topic: History of the settlement

Looking back down the valley we can see much of Combe Martin and appreciate how the natural landscape has influenced the shape of the settlement.

The settlement was originally known as Marhuscombe (Mary's Combe); its name change may well have happened when the manor was given by William the Conqueror to Martin de Touron (Martin of Tours) in the 11th Century. A combe is a small, steep sided valley and is a common landscape feature in the Southwest. The word comes from the Middle English 'coombe' or 'cumbe' or in Combe Martin's case, 'comb' and was derived from the Old English word 'cumb', which has Celtic origins.



*The linear settlement of Combe Martin*

The Domesday Book recorded between 150 and 200 inhabitants in 1086 - quite a sizeable village at that time. In the medieval period it was a thriving settlement with a manor house, deer park and market. By 1249 it had become a Borough, which indicated how significant this area was. If a town was granted self-governance by the crown (through Royal Charter) it became known as a Borough. These were generally governed by a self-selecting establishment and could send representatives to parliament.

Originally, Combe Martin was two separate settlements: 'Head Town' was the main medieval settlement slightly inland and further up the valley from the 13th Century church; later came 'Seaside' where we started our walk. As the population grew - both through natural increase and migration for work in the various local industries - the two settlements grew along the bottom of the valley where it is easier to build. Maps show that by the 20th Century the two parts of the village had joined together to form one settlement.

The natural landscape has strongly influenced the shape of the town. Combe Martin is an example of a 'linear settlement', laid out along a line (such as a valley, coastline or transport route) as opposed to a 'nuclear settlement' where buildings are clustered around a central point (such as a village green, market square or bridge). In fact, the main road through Combe Martin is one of the longest continuous village high streets in England, approximately two miles long, and boasts five name changes along its length (Borough Road - King Street - High Street - Castle Street - Victoria Street).

#### **Directions 4**

Continue to follow the footpath which leads up on to Lester Cliff. Stop at the third set of benches which overlook Wild Pear Beach.

## Stop 5: Geology Rocks!

Location: Lester Cliff above Wild Pear Beach

Topic: Geology and mining

From this point on Lester Cliff you can see Little Hangman Hill rising above Wild Pear Beach and further along the coast, Greater Hangman Hill, both with their distinctive Exmoor scrub.

The rocks underneath our feet have played a significant role in the industries and fortunes of Combe Martin. Underneath the ground here are rocks that were formed during the Devonian period 350-400 million years ago in a marine environment. The bedrock is older towards Exmoor (sandstones) and younger towards Combe Martin (slates and mudstones, interspersed with limestones). You can see the banding (stripes) of the rocks in the cliffs below us.

An ore is a type of rock that contains minerals with important elements including metals that can be extracted from the rock and turned into products. Ores are extracted from the ground through mining or quarrying then processed to extract the valuable elements. On this walk we will find out about three different ores that were extracted from the ground in this area - the most significant being silver, with iron and umber mined later in Combe Martin's history.



*Little Hangman from the cliff above Wild Pear Beach*



*A display at Combe Martin Museum of the different ores mined in Combe Martin*

Mining for ore has been documented in Combe Martin as early as 1292, but may have been earlier, as we shall find out later. There were periods of commercial mining in Combe Martin up to the end of the 19th Century. Wild Pear Beach, below us, was once the location of the administration offices for the miners who arrived by sea, from Wales, in the mid-1800s



### Directions 5

Continue to follow the coast path until you reach a gate. The footpath branches off right here but we continue to follow the coast path ahead. As the path widens out to a field, at the bottom of the hill, follow the path that runs alongside the walled bank to your right. Just before where the bank dog-legs to the left, take note of the right hand fork in the foot path as this is the route we will be taking later. [If you would like to miss out the walk to the top of Little Hangman, pause at the fork]. We will be following the left hand fork to follow the path to the top of Little Hangman Hill where we shall look out at the view.

***Please take care - in wet weather the grass can be slippery and this is a steep climb.***

## Stop 6: Prehistoric Mysteries

Location: Top of Little Hangman

Topic: Prehistoric settlers

This walk explores how humans have used the landscape and its natural resources for different industries during the last millennia but we have stopped here to acknowledge that there has been a human presence in this area for much longer.

In 2008 and 2009 the Exmoor National Park Authority studied aerial photographs of the Park to identify new areas of archaeological interest. We are standing on one of those areas that came to their attention. The National Trust, which manages this section of the coastline, used volunteers to clear the area of vegetation before further investigations took place.

Archaeologists then found a number of possible artificially created platforms (levelled areas) concentrated on the northern edge of the site. These artificially created platforms are usually interpreted as quarry scoops. In this case, however, the concentration of levelled areas on the northern side suggests the site may have been important for the views it provided along the coast. If you investigate the area, please stay away from the cliff edge and take care, as the ground can become slippery.



*Little Hangman from the air showing circular enclosure.  
© Crown copyright. Ordnance Survey OS 89114 653*



*A view from Little Hangman showing the Hogs Back cliffs of Exmoor*

The site has been dated to the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age period. It is similar in structure to 'tor enclosures' found on Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor; although these tend to be further inland and early prehistoric finds such as this are rare on Exmoor. This site is thought to have had a ritualistic or ceremonial purpose rather than being a settlement or defensive structure. We can only speculate why humans came here to an area that would have been quite isolated at the time.

From this viewpoint you can look down on the northern section of the North Devon Coast AONB and you can see why it was designated in 1960. From here you are looking at the 'Landscape Character Area' known as the 'North Devon High Coast' which makes up a large section of the AONB. Turn around and you can see the distinctive but different landscape of Exmoor National Park, which was designated in 1954.

The underlying geology of this area starts to change at this point from the sandstones of Exmoor to the slates of North Devon and clearly defines the landscape - with an apparent change from the distinctive and higher hogs back cliffs of the Exmoor Coast to the more rugged coastline of the North Devon Coast AONB.

### **Directions 6**

Turn back the way you came and go back down the hill. Follow the footpath that you used earlier but keep left to the bank, until you reach the dog leg where there is a stile [\*If you did not climb to Little Hangman, follow the right hand fork to the stile]. Go over the stile to follow the permissive path signed to West Challacombe. Follow this path until you reach a gate. Go through the gate and pass the edge of the stone building. Stop by the wall where you can see the front of the house.

## Stop 7: Manors and Mines

Location: West Challacombe

Topic: Medieval manor house

In the Middle Ages, England was under a feudal system. William the Conqueror had rewarded his supporters for their help in the conquest of England by giving land previously belonging to the Saxon English to Norman knights and nobles. These estates were known as manors. Look over the wall at the furthest whitewashed building with the porch; this is West Challacombe, a manor house that gives us some clues to life in this area during the medieval period.

Although parts of the building have been dated to the 12th Century the main building and some of the out-buildings were built in the late-14th and early-15th Centuries by the Challacomb [sic] family with various modifications to different parts of the building in subsequent centuries. The porch that you can see from here was added in the mid-16th Century but the jewel in the crown of West Challacombe is, unfortunately, inside the building - a very well preserved medieval roof, which is what remains of the original manor. The wood in the beams of the central hall has been dated, using dendrochronology, as being felled between 1449 and 1474 indicating that the roof was constructed in the third quarter of the 15th Century.

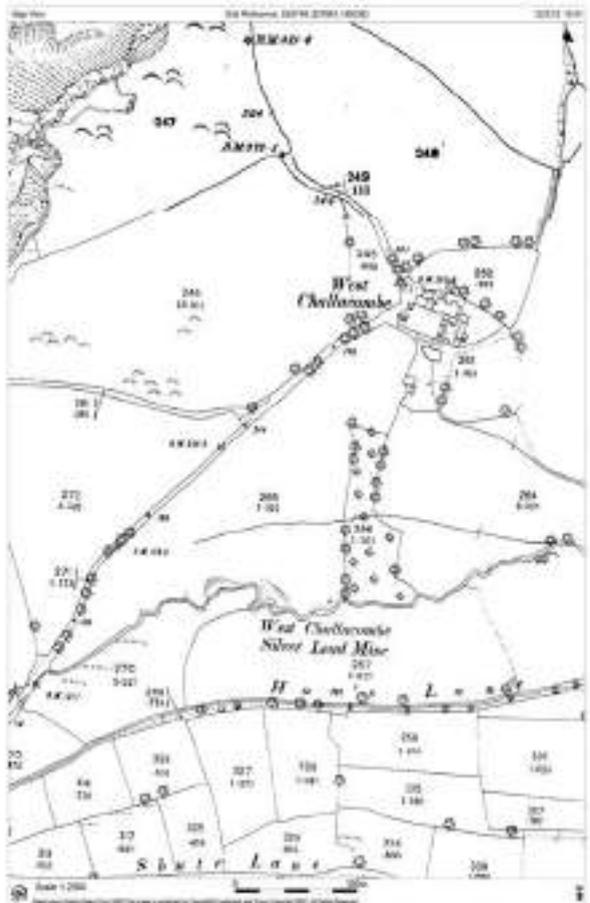


*The medieval roof of West Challacombe Manor*

At the far end of the house is a cruck barn dating back to the 14th Century. A cruck barn is where curved timbers (crucks) were used to support the ends of the roof. The current barn is only part of the original barn, which was significantly longer. This sizeable barn suggests that West Challacombe was a significant holding at one time but the historic use of the barn is unknown.

Agriculture would have been an important activity on manor land and we will find out more about that later. Although there is no documented evidence to link the farm to mining, the size of the building and the nearby remains of a mine, may indicate a link.

The building was acquired by the National Trust in 1992 and since then comprehensive restoration has been undertaken. Although it is now let as a holiday cottage there are a couple of open days held each year, which are a highly recommended opportunity for learning more about the building, and to see the interior and well-preserved medieval roof.



*1888 map of West Challacombe and West Challacombe mine*  
© Landmark & Crown copyright. 2007

## Directions 7

Turn away from the house and follow the rough track down the hill for about 500m. Cross the bridge and, ignoring the footpath on your left signposted 'Greater Hangman via Knap Down', follow the road through the houses. As the road curves round to the left you will see a distinctive wooden five-finger post in front. Turn left and follow the narrow stony path uphill, opposite the sign, along Rocky Lane. After a few metres, stop where you can see that the path is cut through the rock.

## Stop 8: Sunken Lanes

Location: Rocky Lane

Topic: Early mining

This is Rocky Lane, which is a fitting name since the path is cut into the bedrock in places and is an example of one of Combe Martin's sunken lanes. There are several such lanes around Combe Martin, some of which are cut



*One of Combe Martin's sunken lanes - Badgaver Lane*

even deeper into the bedrock. Sunken lanes, such as this, may indicate early mining operations. The Charter Rolls, medieval administrative records, show that mining was taking place in Combe Martin from 1292 -1297 but could well have started earlier. The earliest evidence of mining in the Combe Martin area is found in the 'feet of fines' (court copies of agreements following disputes over property) from 1198.

The earliest type of mining operations would have involved cutting into the bedrock from the surface to reach the ore. Surface mining such as quarrying, dredging and open cast mining still persist today. In fact, unlike conventional archaeology, older mines are found closer to the surface than newer ones, before technological developments allowed deeper workings.

Discussions with the current Combe Martin Miners (who we shall hear more about later) shows that lanes, such as these, run nearly parallel to cross-courses. A cross-course is where a smaller mineral vein crosses that of the main mineral lode (a sheet-like body of minerals). These cross-courses are generally found where there are faults in the rock, parallel to the bedding plane.

### Directions 8

Continue up Rocky Lane until you reach the bend in a surfaced lane (Shute Lane). Go over to the gateway on the left and look across the valley to the white buildings of West Challacombe where we were earlier. From here you can see the front of the complex including the original medieval building and cruck barn on the right and the newer cottage on the left. When you are ready, go straight on up Shute Lane. Do take care as there is no pavement. Ignore various footpaths and tracks which fork off on both sides and after about half a mile you reach the brow of the hill. Stop by a pair of gates on the right-hand side beside a telegraph pole.

## Stop 9: Chains and Furlongs

Location: Shute Lane, Knap Down

Topic: Relic medieval strip fields

From here we can see the relics of a medieval agricultural system. Through both these gates you can see long thin fields; look on the Ordnance Survey map and you will see a series of them on these, the south facing slopes of Combe Martin. Originally the strips were separated by shallow earth banks but you can see that hedges now divide the fields.

Medieval manors were often laid out in an open field system. There were generally three large open fields each containing a different crop. The open fields were split into sections called furlongs which in turn were divided into strips which were a chain (22 yards) wide by a furlong (220 yards) long, an area of one acre. Each villager was allocated by lot a set number of strips in a field every year. You can visit Braunton Great Field further west along the coast where the original open plan medieval strip field system is well preserved and still operational.

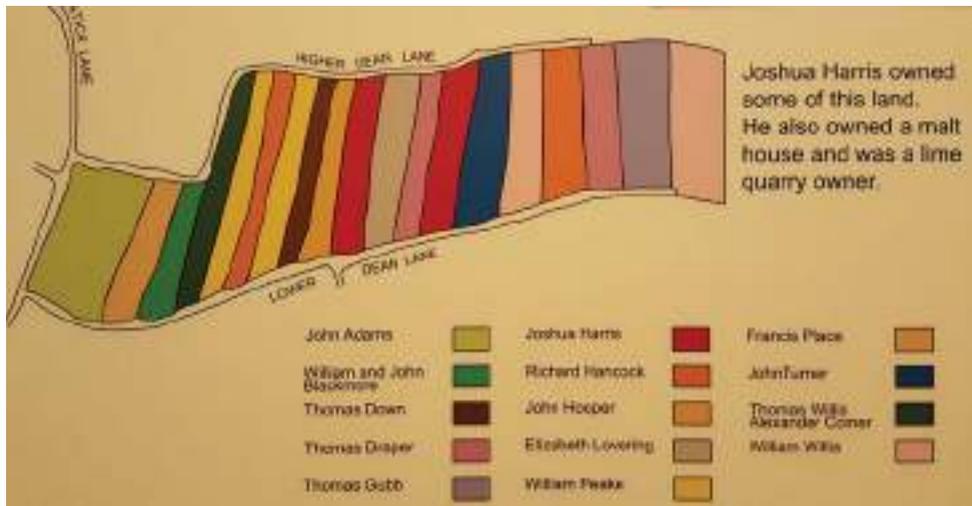
The open moorland came to an end here between 1842 - 1880 with an act of enclosure; parcels of land were enclosed with hedges and distributed amongst local landowners. Here in Combe Martin, the new enclosed fields duplicated the medieval strip field pattern, rather than the square fields seen elsewhere in North Devon. It is thought that this was a fair means of distributing the land: the long strip runs down the hill, thus each parcel of land benefited from an equal distribution of shelter and sun and no one was stuck with the sunless low ground or unsheltered high ground.



*Relic strip fields can be seen on the southwest facing slopes of the Combe Martin valley*

What makes Combe Martin special is that many of the enclosed strips survive into the 21st Century, whereas elsewhere in North Devon boundaries were removed to form larger fields, which are easier to farm using machinery. It is possible that the narrow enclosed strips were good for market gardening and were therefore retained.

These fields were farmed by locals, including the miners, who used them to grow food. We will find out about their subsequent agricultural use later in the walk.



*Detail from a display at Combe Martin Museum, showing how land was apportioned in 1842*

## Directions 9

Continue up the road, after the road bends round to the right there is a track on your left signed to Greater Hangman (Girt Down Farm) follow this track until you reach the junction with a left hand footpath, pause by the gate at this junction.

## Stop 10: The End of the Commons

### Location: The junction of Girt Lane and Knap Down Lane

From this view point through the gate take time to enjoy the view back down the valley to Little Hangman, Greater Hangman and Exmoor:

In addition to the open field system in medieval times, there was also common land where villagers had the right to graze their livestock and the right of turbarry (to cut turf). Turf was used where there was limited wood fuel and was burned for cooking

and heating. The other side of the valley, north from here was originally this common land.



When this common land was enclosed it was used for livestock, in contrast to the fields we saw at the last stop which were used for crops after enclosure. This different use explains the presence of beech hedges here. Beech hedges are not native to the southwest but rather were deliberately planted. Although deciduous, they retain some of their leaves in the winter months and provide shelter for livestock on the otherwise exposed hillsides on the edge of Exmoor.

Records show that it was not only silver that was mined in Combe Martin. In the late 18th Century there was large scale iron working around Wild Pear Beach, Little Hangman in the distance and here at Girt Down, which produced 9000 tonnes of iron ore between 1796 and 1802 that was shipped to Llanelli in Wales. Exactly where the mining was undertaken is unknown, as the maps of the mine works have been lost.

#### Directions 10

Retrace your steps along Girt Lane. At Shute Lane turn left. About 50 metres on the right is Badgaver Lane which is the access track to Knap Down Farm and signposted 'footpath'. Turn down here and after about 100 metres the track divides: take the right fork down the hill (Corner Lane). After about 150 metres there is a gate on the left, from where you can see an ivy covered building.

## Stop 11: Silver

Location: Former Engine House, Knap Down Mine, Corner Lane

Topic: Silver mining

This ivy-covered building, built in 1843, is a rare surviving example of a Sims combined engine house. A combined engine used two cylinders that produced more efficient, smoother operations for the pumping and extraction of water from the mines. Even though some of the stone was taken from this engine house after it closed in 1873, it remains a distinctive structure, visible on the skyline from most places in the village.

Earlier we found out about the mining of iron ore; here we find evidence of the mining of silver lead ore. It is the unique structural geology of this area, the steeply folded rock, and also the interaction of slate and limestone that made this area rich in veins of 'argentiferous galena' (silver-lead ore).

There is documentary evidence of silver lead mining in Combe Martin from the 13th Century, although it is possible that mining was taking place earlier. The earliest records show that rights to the silver at Combe Martin were vested with the Crown. All mine workers and overseers acted as servants of the Crown to supply silver, with profits going to the King. Significantly, the royal rights to the silver were retained until the end of the 17th Century, which indicates that it was still a profitable enterprise for quite some time.

The Charter Rolls, medieval administrative records, indicate that from 1292 - 1297 one-third of the silver that came from Devon was mined at Combe Martin with the rest from



*These three tankards were originally a cup (or bowl) made from Combe Martin Silver, which was a gift from Bevis Bulmer in 1594 to the then Lord Mayor of London. Photo courtesy of Mansion House, London*

mines at Bere Ferres (then known as Birland) in South Devon.

There are several stages to ore extraction, including: cobbling, gravitational washing and smelting. The ore was initially cleaned by breaking up the host rock to extract the ore - called 'cobbling'. Gravitational washing involved taking the smaller particles and

using water and gravity to separate further the mineral from the waste rock or 'gangue'. Smelting was when the ore was heated in a furnace to separate the metallic components from the ore bearing rock.

There would have been some refinement such as cobbling, gravitational washing and smelting here at Combe Martin but it is likely that it would have been shipped to South Devon for further refinement, with final refining and minting at the Tower of London.

There was further mining during the 14th and 15th Centuries when miners were impressed (a form of forced labour) from Derbyshire, the Mendips and East Wales, but it wasn't until the 16th Century that silver mining in Combe Martin was at its most profitable. It was the quality of the ore at Combe Martin, with a high percentage of silver, which made it such a significant mining area.

Westcote's 'View of Devonshire in 1630' notes that silver from Combe Martin was ordered by Bevis Bulmer (a knight of Elizabeth I) to be made into two cups. The two 'rich and fair cups' were made - one for William, the Earl of Bath, and the other for Sir Richard Martin, the Lord Mayor of London. The inscription on the Lord Mayor's cup read:

*When water-works in Broaken-wharf  
At first erected were  
And Bevis Bulmer with his art,  
The waters gan to rear,  
Dispersed I, in earth did lye  
Since all beginnings old,  
In place call'd Combe, where Martin long  
Had hid me in his mould.  
I did no service on the earth,  
Nor no man set me free,  
Till Bulmer by his skill and charge,  
Did form me thus to be.*



*Early photo of Knap Down Mine engine house  
Photo: Ilfracombe Museum*



*A diagram of the Engine House at Knap Down Mine.  
Drawing courtesy of Ilfracombe Museum*

The latter cup was subsequently melted down several times to finally make three tankards which are currently kept at Mansion House, seat of the current Lord Mayor of London. The royal rights to silver were removed at the end of the 17th Century and local landowners took over the right to mine for silver-lead ore but the mines were no longer profitable. Fast-forward to the 19th Century and two factors spurred renewed interest in the mines here. First there was demand for mixed ore which may have been used in a purification process for steel (the Bessemer process). Second there were improvements in mining technology including engines, which meant that pumps for extracting water from the mines were more efficient and mine shafts could go deeper. In both cases the interest was short lived.

The mining peaks and troughs were brought about not only by new technologies but also the availability of foreign ore for example the discovery of South American ores in 1492, the introduction of German mining techniques in the 16th Century, the use of explosives from the end of the 17th Century and the use of the beam engine from the 18th Century

Please take care as you progress down Corner Lane, as the track can become uneven and rutted after heavy rainfall.



*Knap Down Mine engine house in 2014*

## Directions 11

Continue down Corner Lane for about 500 metres during which time the track narrows, bends left then right. When you reach a section where a concrete gully runs down the path ahead of you, pause and look over the hedge to your left.

## Stop 12: Miners of Information

Location: Corner Lane

Topic: Current mining activity

Over this hedge are further remains of the silver mining industry. Nearby is Harris shaft (you may just be able to see a winch structure above the top of the hedge) and further down the hill, but not visible, is Williams shaft at Mine Tenement. The shafts were named after directors of the Combmartin and North Devon Silver Lead Mining Company. Harris shaft, originally called Eastern shaft, dated from around the English civil war 1640-48 and was the first vertical shaft on Harris mine and was used for hauling purposes, to bring ore to the surface. Williams shaft, originally an air shaft, was enlarged around 1835 to become a pumping engine shaft with a 50" normal Cornish beam engine, which was used to extract water from the mine. Williams shaft forms part of Mine Tenement, which was built in 1835 when there would have been Harris shaft and associated engine house, a blacksmiths, a powder house, a boiler house and a carpenter's shop and in about the 1840s a counting house was built. Some of these buildings are still apparent today, with the blacksmiths forge used by the current miners.

Commercial mining ceased in Combe Martin by the end of the 19th Century because the supplies of ore were almost exhausted and there were problems with flooding. But the significance of this industry cannot be underestimated. It sustained the village for about 700 years; and although workings would have been scattered over a wide area, the main locus of silver lead mining operations was found under the main street in Combe Martin.



*Harris Shaft winches at Mine Tenement - photo taken with permission of the Combe Martin Miners*

Although extraction of the Silver lead ore has finished, some people still go into the mines. The Combe Martin Silver Mines Research and Preservation Society (CMSMRPS) was set up in 2001 to investigate and preserve some of the features of this important industry. This self-funded organisation has worked closely with local archaeologists to excavate the mines, including Harris shaft and Williams shaft here. They have also done work at Mine Tenement, excavating an engine house there and a reservoir that may have been used to service the mine working.



*Remains of engine house at Mine Tenement - photo taken with permission of the Combe Martin Miners*

The Combe Martin Miners occasionally offer tours and talks at Mine Tenement which are worth attending if you can. You can find information about the miners at Combe Martin Museum.



*Excavations at Mine Tenement revealed this reservoir - photo taken with permission of the Combe Martin Miners*

## Directions 12

Continue down Corner Lane. After about 150 metres it makes a sharp turn to the left and shortly after goes between houses. When you reach the main road at the bottom of the hill go straight across into Church Street. At the war memorial, bear right down the narrow lane towards the church and quickly left to go through the gate ahead into the churchyard.

## Stop 13: Periods of Prosperity

Location: Parish Church, off Church Street

Topic: The development of the settlement

This is the parish church of St Peter ad Vincula (St Peter in Chains). Parts of the building date from the 13th Century with various additions in subsequent centuries. It is quite a sizable building which is indicative of the wealth of the village; indeed, the various additions and restorations of the church tie in with periods of renewed industry and prosperity in Combe Martin.



*The interior of St Peter Ad Vincula showing the beautifully restored medieval rood screen. Photo Neville Stanilak*

This is backed up by church records, now housed in Barnstaple Library, which reveal influxes of people during certain periods indicating growth periods in the mining industry. For example, surnames such as Peake indicate people from known mining areas (i.e. Peak District); others are clearly of Welsh or Germanic origin. See if you can find some such names on gravestones.



*Victorian brooch and lapel pin made from Combe Martin Silver - photo taken at Combe Martin Museum*

### Directions 13

The church is usually open (except during services) so do go inside to have a look. Follow the path that takes you through the churchyard to the rear of the church where there is an exit near the carpark. Go through Cornelles car park to the far end. Go through the gap between the gate and the wall onto a footpath. The path forks but you can take either as they converge after a short distance. Where the paths re-join and before the children's playground, turn left and cross a footbridge. Follow the path to the right that runs alongside the River UMBER. **Pause at a point beside the river.**

## Stop 14: Pigment and Paint

Location: On the footpath beside the River Umber

Topic: Umber Quarries in Combe Martin

This is the River Umber whose name is derived from another geological resource of this area. Umber is a natural earth pigment of the oxides and hydroxides of iron and manganese, which is formed through decomposition of these minerals. This ore was quarried rather than mined as the deposits were found near the surface, unlike the iron ore and silver lead ore that we heard about earlier.

This industry took place from at least 1873 in Combe Martin. The location of the quarries is undocumented but it is likely that they would have been found near here on the south side of Combe Martin and at nearby Berryarbor. There appears to be no other documented



local sources of Umber:

The river would have been used for washing the ore which would have then been dried in a smelt mill. The product wanted from this process was the pigment, which was used in the manufacture of paint.

Umber is a distinctive brown colour which becomes more intense in

colour upon heating; in fact you may be familiar with the colour 'burnt umber' which is its heated form. Mr Reeves, a well-known paint manufacturer advertised as 'the colour merchant of The Strand, London', said that he 'was never able to form a complete series of shades of colour' until he had the umber pigment from nearby Berryarbor.



*Path beside the River UMBER*

As with silver and iron, it is possible that quarry men were switching from quarrying limestone (which we shall find out about later in the walk) to umber, as many lime kilns began to cease working in the late 1800s /early 1900s.

#### **Directions 14**

Continue along the riverside path. When you meet a track that crosses the path, turn left. As the track bends round to the left follow the narrow path to the right of the houses. Follow this narrow stony path that has a drainage channel running along the left side until you reach the junction with a wider track (Park Lane). Turn right and follow the track until you reach a crossroads. Take the track that goes straight on up the hill. Cross the stile next to the five bar gate which has a sign for West Park. After about 150 metres follow the path that takes you to the right of a small coppice. After about 20 metres there is a stile on the right, cross the stile and follow the path, which crosses the field, for a few metres then stop.

## Stop 15: Strawberries

Location: Top of the field above Adderstable Wood

Topic: Market gardening

From here to the right we can see the long thin strip fields on Knap Down across the valley where we stopped earlier. There we discovered that once the fields were enclosed they were probably cultivated for crops to provide grains, fruit and vegetables to feed the miners of the area and their families. With the decline of mining in the late 1800s there was a shift of use.

You can see from here how the sun lights up the fields on that side of the valley. The narrow, sheltered fields on the steep, south-facing valley sides were particularly suitable for growing soft fruit. Combe Martin was famous for its strawberries and there was even a jam factory in the town, which was in production from 1914 to 1925.



*Combe Martin Jam factory, which was in production from 1911 to 1924.*

*Photo courtesy of Combe Martin Museum*

The produce was also exported throughout the West Country and beyond. Significant market gardening in Combe Martin continued until the latter part of the 20th Century, providing produce for local towns that were starting to see the growth of tourism.

Combe Martin's famous strawberries are celebrated on the first Saturday of every June with a Strawberry Fayre on Bowling Green by the church, which we passed earlier.



*Image courtesy of Combe Martin Museum*



*Picking strawberries at Silverdale, early 1900's. Photo courtesy of Combe Martin Museum*

## Directions 15

Continue across the field and stop by the built structure in the middle of the field.

## Stop 16: A Smoky Shammick

Location: Lime kiln above Adderstable Wood

Topic: Lime industry

We have already found out about three different ores found in the rocks of this area but there is another geological feature particular to this area that was exploited. The northern section of the North Devon AONB has one of the few outcrops of limestone in North Devon, from here at Combe Martin to Ilfracombe. There are other limestone outcrops running alongside the Codden Hill ridgeline (Landkey, Venn, Swimbridge).

For centuries across Britain limestone has been quarried and turned into lime for use in agriculture and in construction (lime wash and mortar). The addition of lime to acidic soils such as those found in North Devon makes them more productive for growing. We heard earlier about 'ores', rocks that can be heated to extract the minerals and metals within. In a similar way, limestone can be heated to extract the lime. Limestone was broken up in the quarries and the crushed rock was layered with wood or mineral fuel in the lime kilns and burned. The heating process produced quicklime which was then raked out of the bottom of the kiln. But quicklime is very dangerous and should not be handled. So water was added to 'slake' it and slaked lime is relatively safe.

Elsewhere in North Devon where there is no local outcrop of limestone, the rock and coal used to fire the kilns was imported via sea from South Wales. Limekilns are found all along the coast and on estuaries which then processed the rock and made lime. It is only here at Combe Martin and further down the coast at Ilfracombe that there are limekilns, such as this one, sited inland which would have been served by their own outcrop of limestone. Many lime kilns would have been fired by culm (low grade anthracite) brought by boat from Wales or even possibly Bideford, although some kilns found further inland at Henstridge and Indicknowle were likely to have been fired using charcoal from local wood sources.

Lime burning was first recorded as an occupation in Combe Martin in 1746 and it subsequently became a significant industry in the area. This is one of 18 such kilns in and around Combe Martin. It was a dangerous job which produced carbon monoxide fumes. Legend has it that the smoke from the kilns formed a thick fog which sat in the valley and

may have gone some way to giving the village a name as a 'shammick' of a town - dirty and industrial. As you walk to the next stop take note of the village; although it is considerably prettier than during its industrial heyday it still has an industrial feel to it.



*Lime kiln above Adderstable Wood*

### **Directions 15**

Continue across the field towards the wood. Go through the gate and follow the path, turning right where the path diverts to a caravan park. Continue to follow the path which zig-zags down the hill through the woods. At the bottom of the hill pass through a staggered gateway out of Adderstable woods and turn right along the track which becomes surfaced. At the T-junction turn left and follow the main road through the village (King Street which becomes Borough Road). After about 300 metres the road forks, signposted Watermouth Castle to the left and Parking, Toilets, Tourist Information and Museum to the right. Stop at this junction.

## Stop 17: Mills and Combe

Location: Junction of Borough Road and Cross Street

Topic: Mills

In common with most settlements, Combe Martin tapped into the natural supply of water to power a mill which ground corn. In fact there were two corn mills in the village - Higher Mill located near the Pack o' Cards (the eccentric looking white building that you can see from several locations around Combe Martin) and Lower Mill that was situated here at this junction. Lower Mill was fed from a mill leat which started just after the end of Adderstable woods, where we came from earlier. The mills are thought to have operated from around the 12th Century; Lower Mill closed around 1850.



*Loverings garage, the remains of the wall of the smelting mill in Combe Martin. Photo: Clare Manning*

For a short period from 1845 the site of Lovering's garage was also a silver smelting mill. It was built by the Combemartin [sic] and North Devon Smelting Company Limited, to smelt ore from the local silver mines but was only operational for about two years. As local ore dried up soon afterwards and ore would need to be imported from elsewhere, smelting became unprofitable and the mill closed.

### Directions 17

Continue down Cross Street which is the right fork past the Combe Martin Museum. When you reach the harbour-side, pause.

## Stop 18: Fish and Ships

### Location: Harbour side

### Topic: Maritime industries: Fishing

Earlier we looked down on the harbour and found out about the importance of this natural harbour for trading and shipbuilding. As elsewhere along the North Devon coast, small-scale fishing would also have been a significant activity in Combe Martin throughout the last centuries.

Although there is relatively little written documentation, old photographs show larger trading vessels as well as smaller boats, some of them drawn-up high on the sloped fringes of the beach (now the car park where we started our walk) for shelter. Old pictures also show impressive fish catches including a shark caught in herring nets! Many archive images are on display at the Combe Martin Museum.



*Early photo of Combe Martin fishermen. Photo: Combe Martin Museum*

The harbour-side opposite the Marine Public House was a known seating spot, traditionally and exclusively reserved for local fishermen until relatively recent years. Local catches would likely to be similar to what is currently landed on the North Devon coast, with a range of white fish, such as herring, cod, sole and bass and shellfish such as lobster and crab. Prior to World War II fishermen had successfully diversified into boat-trips popular with tourists. Although this continued after the war, it appears that it was not as successful, with local accounts that the last boat trips took place sometime in the 1980s. Like fishing, which appears to have tailed off almost completely by the 1960s, increasing demands on insurance and legislation have been cited as a major hurdle for the owners of the area's small fishing and pleasure boats.

### Directions 18

Follow Cross Street until you reach the access to the beach, go down on to the beach and pause.

## Stop 19: An Attractive Landscape

### Location: Beach

### Topic: Tourism and the landscape

Have a look around the beach and you can see where the UMBER River spills into the sea and on the opposite side of the beach there is an opening in the cliff that was a mining adit. Please be careful as you navigate the beach and be aware of tides and slippery rock surfaces. Follow the coastal code - take only photos, leave only footprints.

Georgian and Victorian fashions were instrumental to the development of tourism in North Devon. However, due to the perception of Combe Martin as a 'Shammick' of a place - dirty and industrial, tourism was slow to take off in the area. By the earliest parts of the 20th Century, the impression given by guide books of the area is of a poor village struggling with unemployment after the mine closures. Unlike a lot of the popular seaside resorts such as Ilfracombe and Westward Ho!, Combe Martin lacked a railway station, the closest being located at Blackmoor Gate or Ilfracombe. It was comparatively cut off even at the end of the 19th Century; there were two coaches a day to Ilfracombe and a twice weekly service to Barnstaple. The phrase 'Out of the world and into Combe Martin' was apparently quite common, reflecting how cut-off the village felt.



*Combe Martin Beach*

As time progressed, tourism began to grow. A local resident, Una Parson, whose memories were recorded in 1979, recalled how her family home at Seaside, Marine House, was one of the first places to receive visitors. Bathing huts were located at Newberry beach by the early 1900s and significant seaside development gathered pace into the 20th Century.



*Mining adit found in the cliffs of Combe Martin Beach*

As interest in coastal walking and other recreational activities expanded, the local community developed new enterprises to cater for visitors and today Combe Martin is a thriving tourist destination with lovely beaches and extensive well-kept footpaths. There are now other activities in and around Combe Martin for visitors such as fishing, horse riding, cycling, surfing, clay pigeon shooting, sub-aqua diving or exploring the Combe Martin Wildlife and Dinosaur Park.

Standing here it is hard to imagine that Combe Martin was a hive of industry for many centuries. Despite its relatively isolated position on the North Devon coast, the town developed diverse industries which all thrived because of the natural characteristics of the landscape: the underlying geology, the sheltered bay and the steep-sided combes. The geological characteristics of the area provided veins of silver lead ore and later iron ore which were mined and umber ore which was quarried, while the unusual limestone outcrop was quarried and crushed to make lime. The sheltered bay formed a natural harbour which was once a hub of ship building, busy with trading boats, and a centre for fishing. The fields on the steep-sided valley sides enclosed by hedges provided a sheltered setting for growing hemp for making rope and thread, food for the miners, and soft fruits for commercial sale. Meanwhile the river running down the combe provided power for the corn mills and was used to wash ore. Finally, the landscape - the coast, cliffs and combes - are the natural asset upon which today's tourist economy is built.

### **Directions 19**

This is the end of the walk. Combe Martin Museum (which we passed earlier) is well worth a visit. It has many interesting displays and artefacts relating to the town's industrial past. Return the way you came, leaving the beach, to reach the car park where we started our walk.

This walk through the North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Exmoor National Park is a circular route that takes you on a journey through Combe Martin's industrial heritage. While you walk you will be looking at evidence in the landscape of silver mines, lime burning, maritime industries and market gardening, all the while taking in the beautiful coastal landscape of North Devon.



# North Devon Coast

## Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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