

North Devon Coast

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Cultural Trails

4 self-guided walks in the North Devon AONB



View from Worthygate Woods, Bucks Mills



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Abbotsham & Westward Ho!

Start/Finish: Kipling Tors car park, Westward Ho!

- **Distance:** 5.5 miles (9km) **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Easy to moderate
- **Terrain:** Quiet country lanes, public footpath, green lane, and coast path. Fairly even going underfoot, with a few wet or muddy patches in damp weather
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** None
- **Accessibility:** A shorter Access for All route follows part of this walk along the coast path from Westward Ho!
- **Public transport:** Bus service 21 to Westward Ho! From Barnstaple and Bideford. For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or www.traveline.info
- **Toilets:** Public toilets by Kipling Tors car park
- **Parking:** Kipling Tors car park. Free
- **Other Facilities:** Public payphone by church in Abbotsham Post office and small village stores in Abbotsham
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Bideford Tourist Information Centre 01237 477676
- **OS map:** Explorer 139 Grid ref: SS 423291
- **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



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- Key**
- walk route
 - suggested walk direction
 - 5 No. refers to directions
 - 5 No. refers to Points of Interest
 - National Trust National Trust

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 also 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. Devon's stream sides are dotted with the old mills that were once used to grind grain, or produce 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 is home to three quarters of a million people and has roots sunk deep into a long and fascinating history.



Bideford Bay. Photo by Andrew Wheatley

Directions

1. At entrance to car park follow the public footpath up through the holiday park **(1)**. At top of holiday park take gate straight ahead and follow footpath left **(2)**. Ignore all right and left turns.
2. At the top, cross at path junction to continue along path between housing. Turn right at the road. Ignore right turn into Highcliffe Park, and follow lane straight on. Lane drops into valley and climbs again.



3. At T-junction at top of rise, turn left signed 'Abbotsham $\frac{3}{4}$ ', then take the green lane 40m on the right.
4. Bear left at the road, and continue into Abbotsham.
5. At T-junction in the village turn right opposite Vicarage Close. Turn right at next junction **(3,4)** up B3236, signed for Clovelly and Bude. Turn right again after 100m up lane signed for Greycliff.
6. After 600m turn right, signed for Greycliff.
7. At a sharp left hand bend after a further 700m, go straight on down Greycliff Farm drive, signed 'to Public Footpath'. After 100m, turn right through gate onto public footpath. Follow footpath down through plantation of young trees.
8. At the fingerpost, turn right over footbridge onto Coast Path, signed 'Westward Ho! 2.m'. (Just after footbridge, there is optional detour to left down to old lime kiln **(5)**. Retrace your steps back to coast path, and turn left). Follow coast path along the cliffs (6,7,8,9) back to the car park.



Points of Interest

1. Westward Ho! is the only settlement in England named after a book. Charles Kingsley's novel of the same name, published in 1855, was set in the area. Before long, property speculators formed a company to exploit the location's newfound fame, and construction began on a purpose built-holiday resort.
2. Early in the walk, your route skirts the left shoulder of Kipling Tors. The hill is owned by the National Trust and was named after the author Rudyard Kipling, who attended school in Westward Ho!, at the United Services College. This tough institution was dedicated to turning boys into army officers fit to serve the British Empire. Kipling later wrote a fictionalised account of his time at the school, titled 'Stalky & Co'. Amongst his other books were The Jungle Book and Just So Stories.
3. Back in the 12th century, the Abbotsham area was known as 'Hama'. When the village and church came into the ownership of the abbey at Tavistock, the name Abbotsham was born. Remarkably, this small agricultural village, whose population has never climbed much above 400, at one time had its own railway station. The parish church of St Helen was originally built by the Normans, and was rebuilt in the 13th century. Strong evidence of early human inhabitation has been found around Abbotsham. Signs of flint tool production from the Stone Age and Bronze Age have been uncovered here. A possible Neolithic long barrow, or burial mound, has also been discovered close to the village.
4. Abbotsham parish was also once the scene of a great battle. Odun, the Earl of Devon, slew the famous Viking chief Hubba at nearby Kenwith Castle, along with up to 1200 of his warriors. The Danish warlord is supposed to have been buried at the aptly named 'Bloody Corner' at nearby Northam.
5. The round ruin with the low arch above the beach at Greencliff is an old lime kiln. Limestone, brought by boat from South Wales, was loaded into the kiln from the top, interspersed with layers of coal. Burnt slowly, it produced powdered white lime for fertilizer and it was also used in limewash paint and lime mortar. It seems that the kiln was sited in this lonely spot to take advantage of a low grade coal found in the cliffs near here. The lime boats trading along North Devon's coast commonly carried



Abbotsham Cliffs from Cornborough

additional secret cargoes. They would meet foreign vessels out in the channel, to load up with illicit 'duty free' goods like brandy and tobacco. Under cover of the legitimate lime trade, the contraband was then smuggled ashore, to be transported inland and sold on by so called 'free traders'.



Cornborough Cliffs. Photo by Andrew Wheatley

6. This last section of the walk follows the route of an old railway which connected Bideford, Westward Ho!, and Appledore. The line had a difficult birth, involving several attempts to get construction going over a 30 year period, and a short life. Once built it lasted only 16 years, closing in 1917, but it must have made for a beautiful and spectacular train ride in its time.
7. Although the settlement you see today is entirely modern, human beings were at Westward Ho! long ago. Stone Age remains have been discovered beneath the sands here, amid the remnants of an ancient forest. These finds include a midden of bones, shells and other evidence of foods eaten by our distant ancestors.
8. Along the back of the beach runs a two mile pebble ridge made up of large sandstone cobbles, created by longshore drift from rocks eroded along the western cliffs. In an annual effort known as 'potwalloping', locals used to move many tons of slumped stones back up to the top of the ridge. This labour was carried out to help hold back the sea, protecting the grazing on the Burrows behind.
9. Behind the ridge, the delicate ecology of Northam Burrows demands special protection. A rare mixture of salt marsh, sand dunes, and unimproved grassland, it is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and forms part of the Buffer Zone of North Devon's Biosphere Reserve, which is based around Braunton Burrows, a much larger dune system north of the Taw and Torridge Estuary.

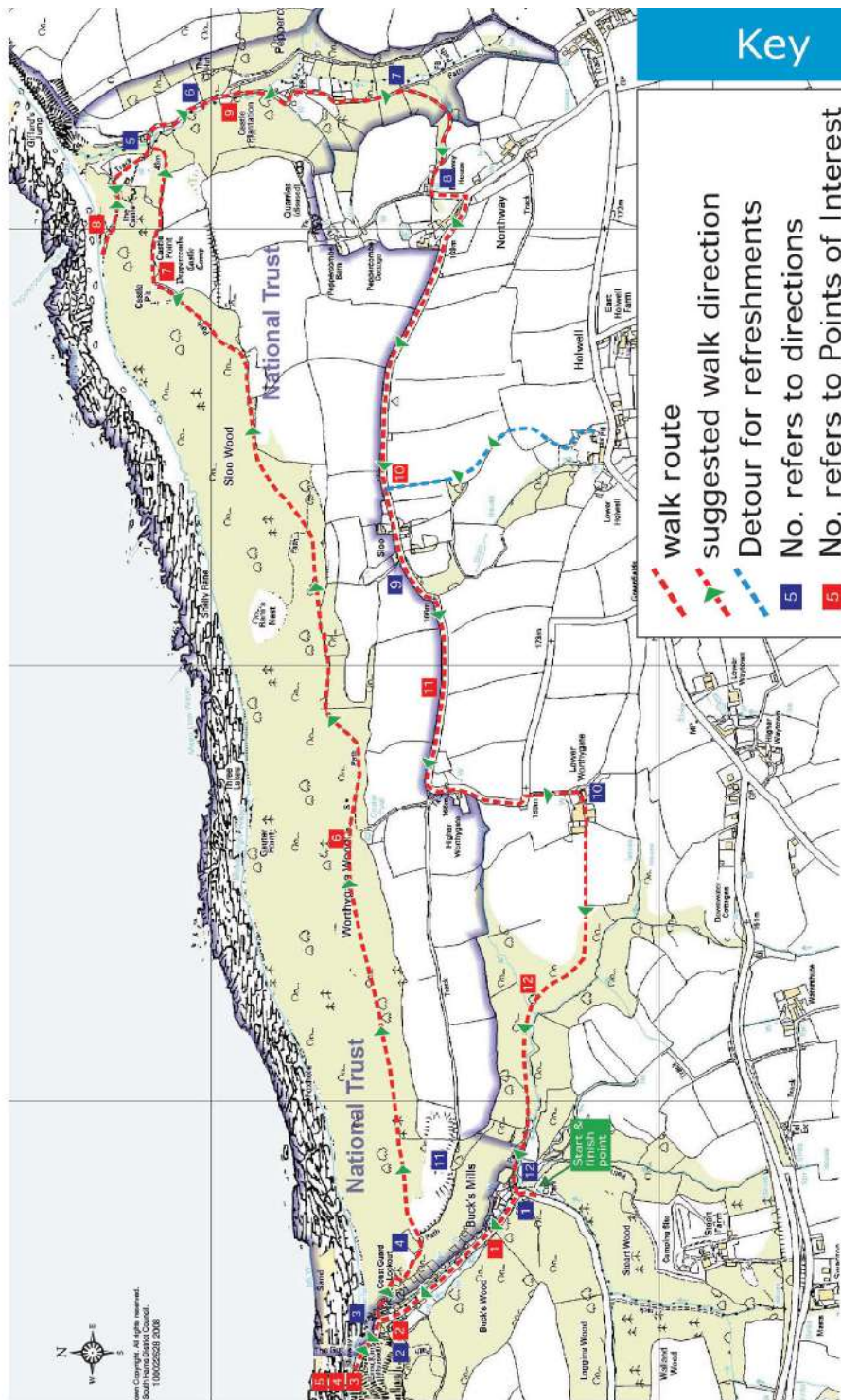


Old Railway Line, Cornborough

Bucks Mills

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
- **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
- **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



Key

walk route

suggested walk direction

Detour for refreshments

No. refers to directions

No. refers to Points of Interest

National Trust

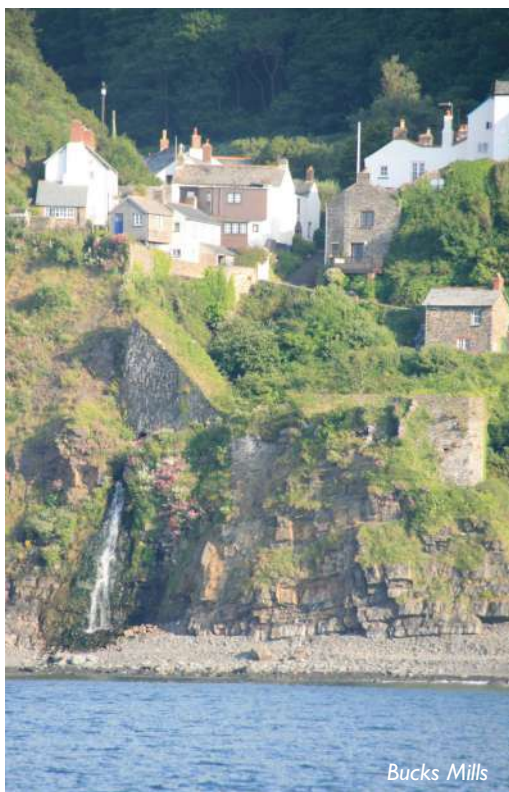


Directions

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 past 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. Continue along the lane for about 1/2 mile past Sloo Farm. At Higher Worthygate the road turns to the left, ignore the signs to the coast path, instead follow the road around, after the road turns left again follow a public footpath sign and turn right down the lane towards Lower Worthygate Farm.
10. 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.
11. 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.



Bucks Mills Cabin



Bluebell woods near Peppercombe



*Barometer,
Bucks Mills*

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.
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 points of Yes Tor and High Willhays.

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 Baggy 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.

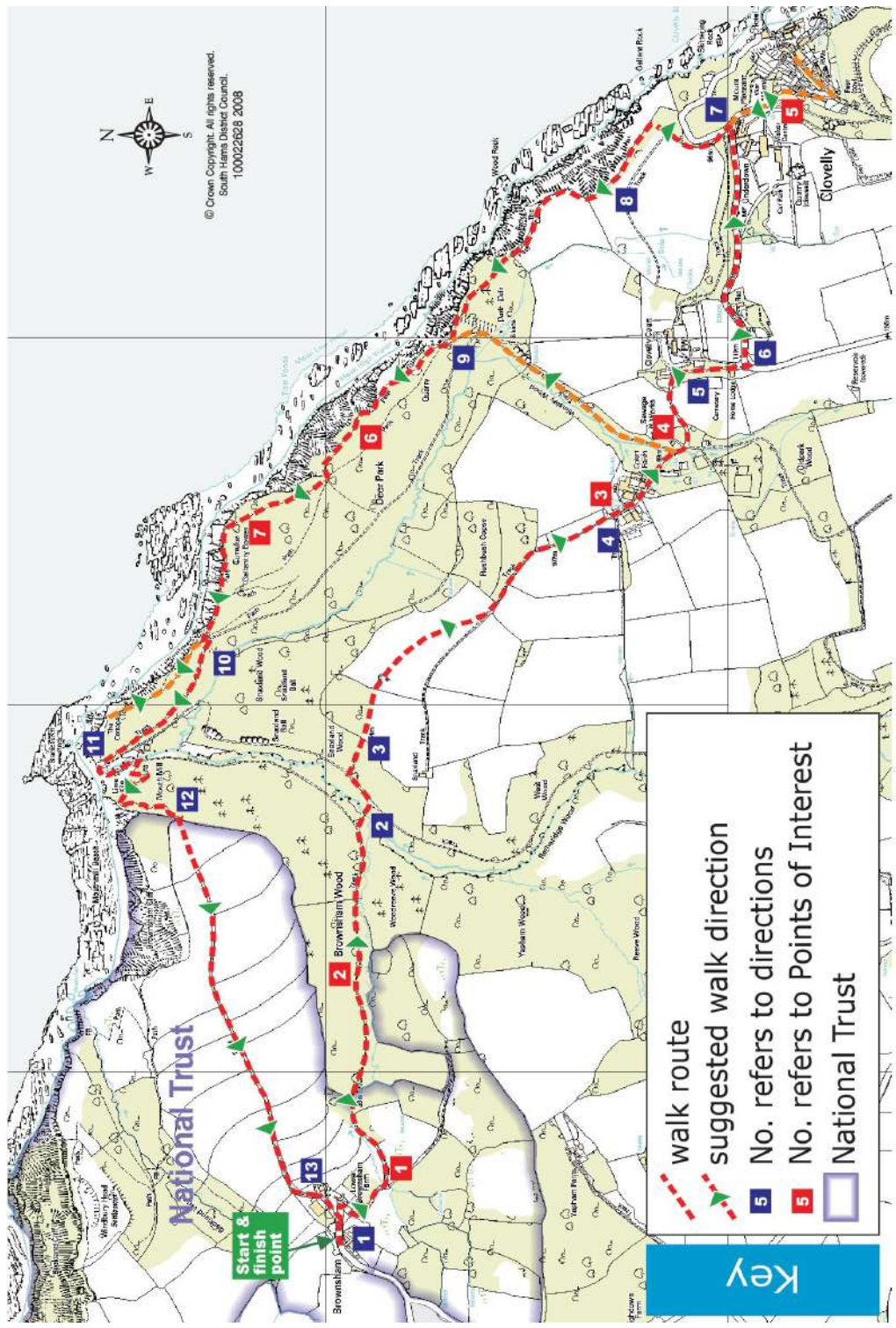
Brownsham & Clovelly

Start/Finish: Brownsham car park

- **Distance:** 5.5 miles (9km)
- **Circular walk:** Yes **Grade:** Moderate
- **Terrain:** Coast path, public rights of way, surfaced road, and green lane. One rocky and uneven stretch and some slippery patches in wet weather
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 3 flights of steps; 2 stiles; 1 steep ascent
1 steep descent
- **Accessibility:** Route is unsuitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** Bus service 519 to Clovelly from Bude. Bus service 319 to Clovelly from Barnstaple (Start walk from Coast Path above Clovelly). For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or www.traveline.info
- **Toilets:** No public toilets on route. Toilets are available in Clovelly, a short detour from main route
- **Parking:** Brownsham National Trust car park. By donation
- **Other Facilities:** Post office and general stores in Clovelly village, a short detour from main route
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Bideford Tourist Information centre 01237 477676
- **OS map:** Explorer 126 **Grid ref:** SS 285259
- **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.



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- National Trust

Key

Colourful landscape

Devon offers a glorious tapestry of colour throughout the seasons. From the dazzle of its coast and the inspiring open cliffs and heaths, to its richly wooded valleys and the patchwork of rolling field and pasture, this beautiful county offers a feast for the eyes. It is a land of lush greens in more shades than you would think possible. The exquisite lightness of spring's uncurling leaves, the deep greens of late summer's shaggy hedgerows, and the quiet beauty of winter meadows are just some of the delicate and delicious tones on view.

Amidst all of this, a ploughed field here and there reveals the rich red or deep brown of the fertile soil, and as summer fades, the autumn colours light up the land.

Down by the sea, the bright blue and fresh white of the waves invigorate the senses, while up on the cliffs, purple heather mixes deliciously with the yellow gorse. Drop down into the valleys, and the peaceful woods are thronged with wildlife, while Devon's hedgebanks are a glorious riot of wildflowers in spring and summer. Artists, whether poets, painters, sculptors or musicians have always been drawn here, seeking to capture the rich essence of the county, yet colour is not confined to the landscape here. Charming villages, seasonal traditions, quirky place names, and even quirkier individuals all contribute to Devon's vibrant character.

These guides introduce you to a few of Devon's larger than life characters. Some have lived within the law, and some beyond it, so be prepared for tales of smuggling, skulduggery, and eccentric antics!



Clovelly

Directions

1. From car park, return to road and turn left. After 100m turn right, signed 'Mouth Mill 1 mile', and follow track down hill (1,2).
2. At a major fork in the woods bear right signed 'Public Bridleway'. Bear left after 70m, and then after a further 70m turn right off the main track to follow public bridleway up Rocky track.
3. Go straight on through metal gate after 150m. Bear left along field edge. Follow bridleway across next field via gate left in middle of pasture as waymarker. At top corner of field bear left along track.
4. Follow bridleway down through Court Farm and continue along drive. If you prefer to follow shorter route, turn left by the stream below the farm and follow the track. At the bottom, track curves round to left. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way round the bend fork right following white waymarker. Bear left after 70m to re-join main route along coast path. Re-join main route directions at instruction 9.
5. At estate yard (3) and church bear right up drive (or to visit church or gardens, follow black and white signs ahead and to right, looping round to left).
6. At the road turn left along pavement (4). Where pavement peters out, continue along road, past 'T' no-through road signs.
7. At junction by small car park turn down to left signed 'Coast Path Brownsham 2 1/2m' then fork immediately left through large black gate with white 'Coast Path' sign. Bear right along track. (Alternatively to visit Clovelly (5), turn right at initial junction down path to village. To return to route retrace your steps and follow directions).
8. Follow coast path fingerposts, 'acorn' waymarkers, and yellow arrows along clifftop. Path passes through parkland field, woods, and field once more, before re-entering woods.
9. At path junction bear right signed 'Coast Path' (6). At a further path junction beyond 'Angel's Wings' shelter, bear right following coast path fingerpost (7)
10. At T-junction at bottom turn left signed 'Coast Path'. (Alternatively turn right to follow permissive path to viewpoint, then retrace your steps to here and go straight on). Turn sharp right after 30m to follow track.
11. At the sea wall at Mouthmill the track turns towards the house. (8) Look for a waymarker sign on your right, this will take you over a large wooden footbridge across the stream. After crossing turn right if you wish to visit Mouthmill Beach and Lime Kiln, otherwise look for a coast path sign that directs you up the hill and into the woods (9).
12. From the gate at top of woods, instead of following coast path round right edge of field, go straight ahead up over the brow to gate and stile. Follow the old green lane inland (Permissive Path) (10).
13. When you reach farm buildings bear right past front of large barn, then right again up road. Car park is 50m on right.

Points of Interest

1. The field beyond the gate to your right here contains Culm Grassland, which was a part of Brownsham Moor. The name comes from the rock beneath called Culm Measures, which give rise to heavy, acidic, and often wet soils, which are difficult to farm. The farmer's loss is nature's gain, as these grasslands are incredibly rich in wildlife, including scarce orchid varieties and the rare marsh fritillary butterfly. Both Brownsham Moor and the nearby woods are now owned by the National Trust.



2. Brownsham Wood supports a lavish variety of trees and woodland species. Oak, hazel, holly, and tall elegant ash trees all thrive here. Birch trees, with a dusting of lichen over their silvery or sometimes wine coloured bark, grow along the left of the track, as do greenish-barked willows. Hazel trees grow to both right and left, with tendrils of honeysuckle wrapped around some of their branches.



3. This is the heart of the Clovelly Estate, an ancient manor. At the time of the Domesday Book it was owned by the King, and has been associated with only three families since the mid-13th century. Of these, the famous Cary family included Robert Cary, knighted by Henry V after defeating the Knight Errant of Aragon. His grandson William, fighting for Henry VI, was captured and beheaded after the Battle of Tewkesbury during the War of the Roses; and another William, grandson of the first, was immortalised as 'Will Cary of Clovelly' by Charles Kingsley in his novel *Westward Ho!*

4. There is a good view from here of Clovelly Court. It is the family seat of the Hamlyns and their descendants, who have owned the estate since it was built in 1740. Fire destroyed all but one wing in 1789. Strangely, the same wing escaped damage once more in 1943 when fire broke out again. The walls in front and to the left shelter Clovelly Court Gardens. These famous Victorian kitchen gardens, now fully restored, grow peaches, lemons, melons, figs, and vines, along with vegetables and herbaceous plants.

5. Clovelly itself, a short detour from the walk route, is a quirky and charming village. Built into a 400ft cliff, it is even now in the 21st century a car-free zone, with its one steep cobbled main street named 'up-a-long' and 'down-a-long'. "And a mighty sing'lar and pretty place it is, as ever I saw in all the days of my life", was how Captain Jorgan, one of Charles Dickens' characters, described Clovelly. Painted by Turner and many other artists, Clovelly was also where author Charles Kingsley was brought up. He later returned here to write his celebrated novels *The Water Babies* and *Westward Ho!*. Clovelly owed its prosperity in former times to the herring shoals. An annual festival is still held in the village to celebrate the return of the 'silver darlings' on their annual migration.



6. This shelter, called Angel's Wings, was built by Sir James Hamlyn Williams in 1826, one of several shelters he constructed around the estate. Sir James' daughter, Lady Chichester, lived across the bay, and he sited the shelter here so that he could look across to where she lived.



7. The open area on the high cliff here is called Gallantry Bower; a small patch of coastal heathland amongst the woods. The remains of a Bronze Age 'Tumulus', or burial mound, can still be seen, linked possibly to the ancient hillfort at Windbury Head, which is visible to the west. During World War II, commandos trained by climbing up these formidable cliffs. A colony of baby-faced, gull-like Fulmars nests on the craggy rock face, sailing the winds on stiff outstretched wings.
8. Mouth Mill was a centre of smuggling in days gone by. Contraband goods could be secretly hauled ashore at this remote, sheltered cove with little fear of discovery. Down on the beach stands Blackchurch Rock, which has two windows dramatically cut through its sides by the sea. Legal trade also took place at Mouth Mill. The mill which gave the valley its name is now a cottage to your left up the valley. Across the stream stands a wonderfully well-preserved lime kiln. Limestone and coal, imported from South Wales, were placed in layers from the top, and then burnt slowly over several days. Afterwards the lime was shovelled out from the opening at the bottom.



9. This is a wonderful example of old coastal Oak Woodland. The broad green blade-like leaves of woodrush carpet the floor; which is also peppered with bluebells and primroses in the spring. Oak trees themselves provide a habitat for over 200 other organisms, more than any other British tree.



Coastline near Mouthmill

10. This green lane must be an old route indeed, if the hedges on either side are anything to go by. Research suggests that the more tree species found in a hedge, the older it is. Each species in a 30 metre stretch is said to represent 100 years in age. Holly, blackthorn, hazel, willow, hawthorn, sycamore, ash, and rose all grow in these wonderfully healthy hedgerows. Look through the gateways on your right to catch glimpses of the Iron Age Hillfort at Windbury Head. Many of these old hillforts are located along the North Devon Coast.



Windbury and Lundy from Permissive Path



Gallantry Bower

Hartland

Start/Finish: Hartland Quay car park (3 miles west of Hartland)

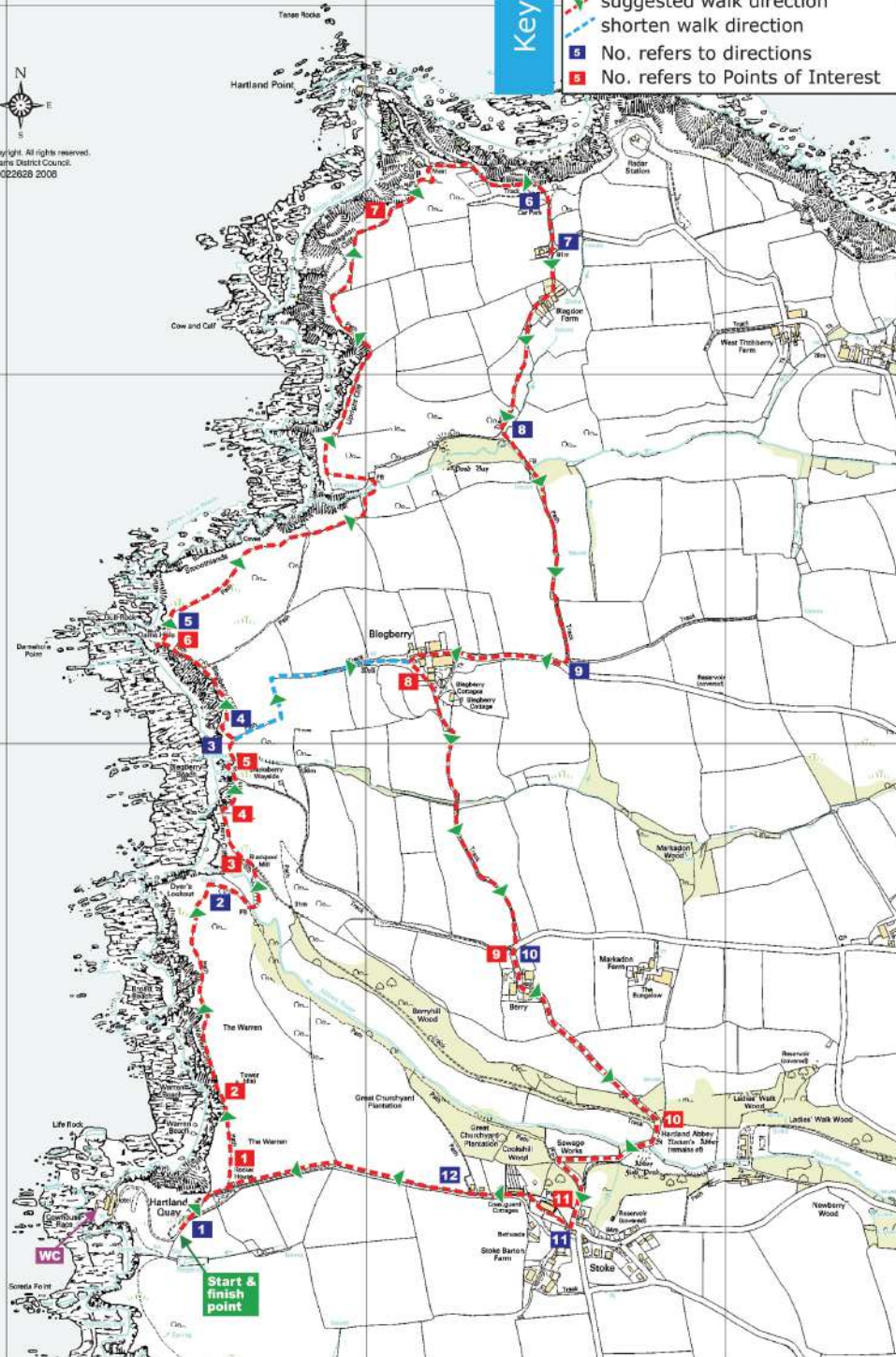
- **Distance:** 6 miles (9.5 km); shorter route 3.5 miles (5.5 km)
- **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Short route: moderate to strenuous. Full route: strenuous
- **Terrain:** Coast path, public rights of way, surfaced road. Mostly reasonable underfoot. Some tricky footing on coast path
- **Obstacles 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
- **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



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Key

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



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 .m' (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 to gate then follows valley a little inland before dropping down through a gate steps to left. Cross stream and bear left 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 1/2 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 hillfort 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



Blackpool Mill and Damehole Point

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 BBC productions of *Sense and Sensibility* and *The Night Manager*. 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.

4. 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 ran 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 Bidhout, made the basic error



Hartland Quay from North

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 able to convince Bidhout that his vessel and cargo were not in danger from the local mob! At the top of the climb, go through the gate then follow the waymarkers first right, and then down the slope to the left.

5. 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.

6. 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 way 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.

7. 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 offloading 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 gentry 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.



Stoke Church



North Devon Coast

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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