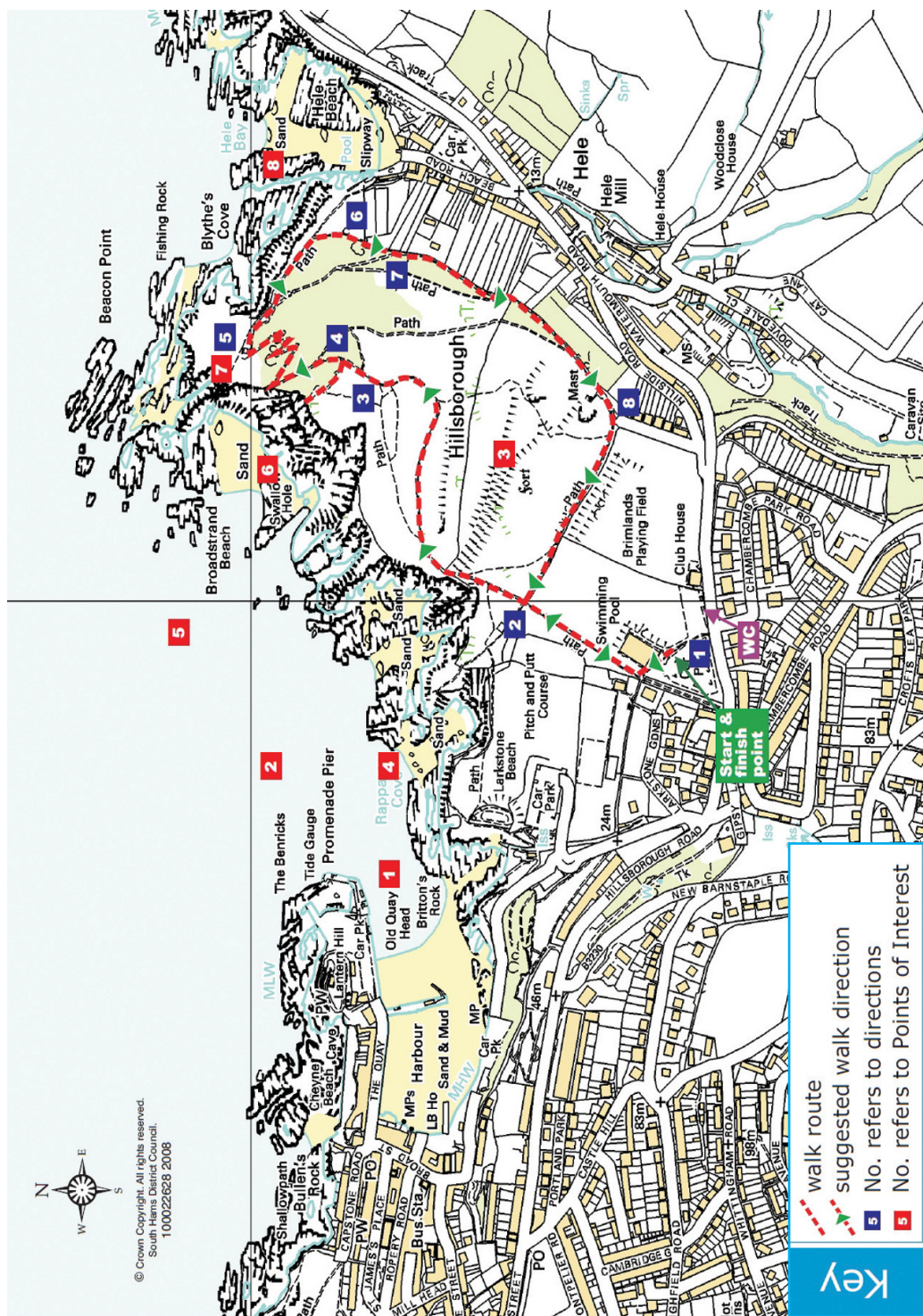


Hillsborough

Start/Finish: Hillsborough Car Park, Hillsborough Rd, Ilfracombe

- **Distance:** 1.5 miles (2.5km)
- **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Moderate
- **Terrain:** Coast path and public footpath. Some rocky, uneven, slippery and muddy patches
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 10 flights of steps; 1 steep descent
- **Accessibility:** Route is unsuitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** Bus service 3 and 3a from Ilfracombe and Barnstaple stops on Hillsborough Rd 100m downhill from walk start point.
For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or www.traveline.info
- **Toilets:** Public toilets at Hillsborough Car Park; also at Hele Beach
- **Parking:** Hillsborough Car Park, Hillsborough Rd, Ilfracombe. Pay and Display
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Ilfracombe Tourist Information Centre 01271 863001 or visitilfracombe.co.uk
- **OS map:** Explorer 139
- **Grid ref:** SS 529473
- **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.



Coast in Conflict – Hillsborough, Ilfracombe

As part of the frontline of an island kingdom, for centuries Devon's coast has been a scene of confrontation and combat. Along with the fruits of the sea, the county's two long coastlines have also brought the constant threat and reality of attack and invasion.

Well over a thousand years ago, coastal dwellers here lived in dread of the swift longships bearing Viking raiders. A millennium later, Devon folk still could not sleep soundly in their beds, as corsair pirates from North Africa scoured the county's coast seeking booty and slaves. Throughout ages, the seas you look upon were a treacherous and lawless place. These cliffs, beaches and bays have witnessed centuries of tension and clashes. Spain, Holland, and of course France have all threatened these shores, while during the Civil War, the English fought each other along this coast. More recently, the sea's rim bristled with armaments, as both the first line of defence and the launch pad for attack through two world wars.

Meanwhile another fierce and age-old conflict continues to rage along the Devon coast. Day in, day out, the titanic forces of sea and land meet in a mighty clash. The breath-taking Devon coastline we see today is the result of this relentless battle between pounding waves and enduring rock. The vast power of the ocean, and the jagged rocks of the land have claimed other lives, in the form of the shipwrecks that litter the coast, each telling a vivid tale of heroism and tragedy, of lives, times, and treasures.



Directions

1. From the car park, follow tarmac path up along left hand side of swimming pool, climbing gradually.
2. At path junction by hedge-bank and Hillsborough information panel, go straight on, signed 'Coast Path to Hele Beach' **(1, 2)**.
3. Follow well used path up to the top of the hill **(3)**. Near the top there is a short diversion on the left to a viewpoint, signed 'Path to Viewpoint' **(4, 5)**.
4. Back on the main path, continue over the brow of the hill and down to a fenced viewpoint by the information panel **(6)**. Turn sharp right to follow zigzag path down the hill.
5. At footpath T-junction at the bottom of a short flight of steps, turn left following yellow way-marker arrow.
6. At fingerpost signed 'Public Footpath to Ilfracombe' turn right. (Alternatively, to visit Hele Beach continue straight on **(7)**, then retrace your steps and turn left here).
7. Follow path up hill, and along the contour, ignoring all paths joining to the right.
8. Fork right just after the phone mast. Continue straight on to path junction by information panel. Turn left here and retrace your steps past swimming pool and back to car park



Points of Interest

1. The name Ilfracombe comes from the Anglo-Saxon word Alfreincoma or Alfred's Combe meaning in Devon, a small wooded valley. However, the town's roots go back much further. Evidence of both Stone Age and Bronze Age life has been found on Hillsborough. Earlier called 'Hele's Barrow', suggesting a link with former times, its named has changed through 'Helesborough' in 1809, to its present day name. The word Borough is thought to derive from the German word "Burgh" meaning a fortified place.

In the 13th Century Ilfracombe was an important naval port, with King John's troops setting sail from here, bound for battle in Ireland. 300 years later, more were heading the same way. Up to 800 troops at a time embarked from the harbour below, this time sent by Elizabeth I to put down an Irish rebellion. When the siege of Calais took place in 1346, Ilfracombe contributed six ships to the fight, compared with just one from Liverpool.

2. In 1797 four French vessels, with 1400 men aboard, approached Ilfracombe harbour, apparently intending to invade. The story is told that the townswomen assembled on the hillside at Capstone, with their red petticoats slung over their shoulders. The would-be attackers took them for a formidable force of redcoat soldiers, and swiftly retreated. Interestingly the same legend is told in South Wales, visible from here on a clear day, and the Welsh national costume is a red cape and black hat.



3. The commanding heights of Hillsborough are the site of the remains of a prehistoric promontory hillfort, which was occupied between 300BC - 50AD. This commanding location, overlooking a safe harbour drew the Dumnonii, a Celtic tribe which occupied much of the Westcountry during the Iron Age. The great double banked earthworks



still very much visible today, were thrown up to create a safe haven which was protected by sea cliffs on most sides. Little is known about this promontory hillfort, some say the banks were linked to an impressive defensive structure, others that it was a huge status symbol erected by the local chieftain.

A current conundrum is the fact that the earth banks do not appear to completely encircle the promontory. There has been some suggestion that Hillsborough was the site of the ancient Battle of Cynuit between Viking Hubba the Dane and the forces of Alfred the Great in the 800s. Interestingly, the Anglo Saxon Chronicles make reference to Hubba laying siege to a fortress with incomplete defences on the eastern side, before he was routed and killed.

4. Ilfracombe can be a dangerous harbour for shipping to try and enter in a storm, and this stretch of coast has claimed many vessels. They include the London, a transport ship which in 1796, during the Revolutionary wars with France, was carrying prisoners from the West Indies, along with gold and silver. Not only did many of the crew and prisoners perish in the wreck at Rapparee Cove, but so did 16 local people in trying to save them. Today you can find a memorial stone placed above Rapparee Cove commemorating the event.



5. In Victorian times, Ilfracombe became a fashionable seaside resort served by both the railway and by paddle steamers that operated in the Bristol Channel. Many important people came to visit and Rapparee Cove below us, was the scene for a famous “fight” between the German Kaiser Wilhelm and local boatman Alfred Price, when in 1878, the Crown Prince was on holiday staying at the Ilfracombe Hotel. Local legend has it, that the altercation occurred after Wilhelm was caught throwing stones at the bathing huts on the beach. Later, many in Ilfracombe reckoned this was the cause of the First World War as the Kaiser had not forgiven the Englishman that had “given him a bloody nose”.

6. The viewpoint here is an excellent place to observe the coastal and marine life, from seabirds to cetaceans. The rich variety of marine life off the coast attracted many a Victorian Naturalist including Phillip Henry Gosse. In 1994 the North Devon Voluntary Marine Conservation Area (VMCA) was set up in recognition of this marine diversity and since 2016 the area has been legally protected through the Foreland Point to Bideford ‘Marine Conservation Zone’ (MCZ) designation. The area includes a range of valuable marine habitats from rocky shores and muddy harbours to sandy beaches and coves. They support a great diversity of wildlife including rare and unusual creatures such as cold water corals, porpoises and seals.



7. Beacon Point just below the viewpoint became the site of a Gun Battery in 1876, manned by a local force of volunteers. However, despite their vigilance, the heavy artillery guns were never fired in anger. At the beginning of World War One they were removed, to avoid the town being classed as a fortified harbour and thus open to enemy attack.



8. Hele and Ilfracombe were once hotbeds of smuggling. For over 200 years this coast saw a nightly battle of wits and muscle between 'free traders' and the Revenue men. In those days, due to the taxes imposed on importing "luxury goods" like Brandy and Tobacco, almost everyone living by the coast was involved in smuggling in some way, which made it hugely difficult to catch and convict any culprits. In 1783 it was reported that every single pilot boat in Ilfracombe was suspected of smuggling. The last boat caught in the act in these parts was a smack called Lively, seized with 300 'tubs' of brandy aboard in 1831. It suffered the standard fate of the time, being sawn up into 3 pieces. The Coastguard, which today is noted for saving lives, was originally set up in 1809 to combat smuggling!



9. Hillsborough has another historic claim to fame. Today it is a Local Nature Reserve owned and managed by North Devon Council, but the origins of this are fascinating. The land was purchased in 1896 by the Ilfracombe Urban District Council to prevent it from being built on at a time when Victorian Ilfracombe was rapidly expanding as a seaside resort. Shelters were built and the various pathways were laid out, to provide both locals and visitors with the opportunity to enjoy quiet informal recreation, one of the first examples of this kind of provision in Britain.

