



## Ilfracombe – Lee Circuit

- ◆ **Start/Finish** Landmark Theatre, Ilfracombe, EX34 9BZ. This walk takes you up the old railway line from Ilfracombe to Morteohoe, passing the Slade reservoirs and on to the coastal village of Lee. From Lee the walk follows the old coaching road across the Torrs, returning to Ilfracombe
- ◆ **Distance** 13.6km approx.
- ◆ **Circular Walk**
- ◆ **Grade** moderate
- ◆ **Terrain** Old railway line/cycleway, coastpath, public rights of way and quiet lanes
- ◆ **Obstacles and steep gradients** steep gradients on the Torrs and out of Borough valley to Windcutter Hill. Obstacles: stiles and Kissing Gates
- ◆ **Accessibility** Not suitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs – except railway section
- ◆ **Public Transport** Frequent buses to Ilfracombe [Filers Travel](#) [Stagecoach](#)
- ◆ **Toilets** Ilfracombe Harbour and behind the seafront at Lee village (en-route)
- ◆ **Parking:** Outside the Landmark Theatre, Pay and Display
- ◆ **OS Map** Explorer 139
- ◆ **Grid Ref** 180/SS 518 478
- ◆ **Countryside Code** Please respect, protect and enjoy the countryside. Please also note that all dogs must be on a short lead between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> July

## Special qualities of a special area

From the edge of Exmoor to the border of Cornwall, The North Devon Coast is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) stretching over 171sq kms. It recognises the very special landscape, habitats, wildlife and heritage of this area. This ensures that North Devon will remain as beautiful and special tomorrow for future generations to enjoy, as it is for us today.

In 1960 North Devon was designated as an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) because it was cited as an area which "possessed some of the

finest coastal scenery in the country". This is particularly evident in the scenery of this walk which includes some very dramatic and breath-taking seascapes.

The walk is located in the North Devon High Coast landscape character area, with some stunning views westwards towards Bull Point and Lundy Island, and eastwards towards the Exmoor National Park.



View from Topscope



Torr, Ilfracombe ©Neville Stanikk

The coastline is a mixture of high cliff downland with coastal grasslands and the distinct wooded Borough Valley running down to the coast. The geology is primarily of Ilfracombe and Morteohoe slates, which is reflected in the architecture of the distinct field boundaries and the older buildings in the village of Lee.

The coastline is steeped in history and area for Smuggling and wrecking between the port of Ilfracombe and the small coastal settlement of Lee.

The railway line is a unique feature and major feat of engineering. A significant route in its heyday, it once formed part of the mainline which ran all the way to Waterloo. The line helped establish Ilfracombe as one of the premier seaside resorts in the South West.

## Directions – Start to finish of circular loop

1. From the Landmark Theatre turn left and head towards the railings overlooking Wildersmouth Beach.

2. Turn back towards the Landmark Theatre and take the flight of steps heading up the right hand side of the building. At the top enjoy the view back towards Capstone Hill. [You now join the South West Coast Path, the 1014km route is Britain's longest National Trail.](#)

3. Follow the path uphill which then merges with 'Runnacleave' Gardens and exit through metal gate on the right hand side. Keep to the right pavement for 250m and the wall on the right becomes waist high, so you can look below. [Here you can see the remains of the famous 'Tunnels Beaches', popular with the Victorians](#)

4. Continue along the road for 50m then bear right. Follow the unsurfaced road, signposted 'Coast Path to Lee'. Follow road for another 180m until it forks again and turn right, and then left by the gate to 'White pebbles' apartments. The path forks again after 25m take the right sign-posted 'Torrs walk/Lee'. Follow the zig-zag path until you see the first bench. [This spot offers a great view right across the Bristol Channel to Wales and Lundy Island to the west.](#)

5. Continue to follow the path until hair pin bend. At the National Trust signpost take the left turn and continue for about 50m. [On the right, you can see a well preserved lime kiln, many of which are found along the North Devon coastline.](#)



Tunnels Beaches

Lime Kiln



6. Re-join the main footpath and continue to follow the path upwards. To the wooden gate at the top. Turn right at the 'Viewpoint' up the embankment to the top to the stone cairn. [At this point you can enjoy a spectacular view of Ilfracombe harbour.](#)

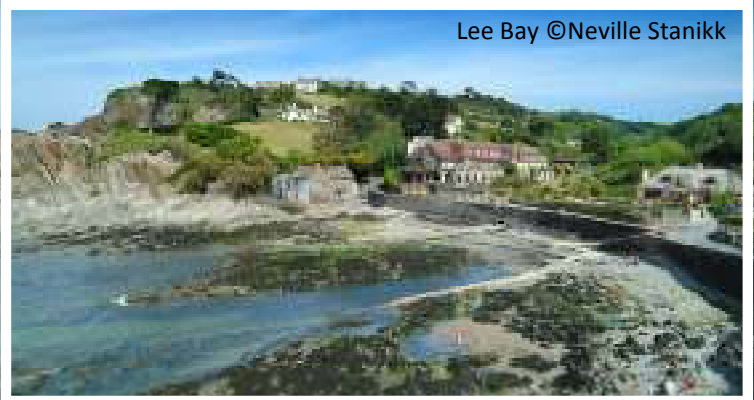
7. Directly behind the Toposcope take the small path to the right of the steps downhill. Once clear of the gorse, turn right and exit the field via a small stile in the field boundary. You have now re-joined the coast path. [The names of the coves along this part of the coast are legacy to the smuggling of bygone days such as Brandy Cove.](#)

8. Continue around the headland and follow the coast path over a stile and then head towards a well-defined track leading across the downland. On reaching the track turn right and continue up the hill, over the downland towards Lee. Follow

path around the headland and over a stile, heading towards a well-defined track across the downland. At the track, turn right and continue up the hill, towards Lee. [Further along this track great views of Lee and Morte Point, with Bull Point at the headland in the distance.](#)



**9.** After approx 1.5km track ends at a gate. Beyond the gate, continue down a surfaced road, towards Lee. After approx. 1km, turn left at T junction, down to the seafront of Lee Village. Home to many seafaring tales of smuggling and wrecking, today a peaceful cove.



**10.** Continue along the seafront for a further 25 metres and then turn inland towards a small car park. Keep the Car park on your left, follow the track past the toilets and property called 'Gwythers'. Continue along the track past Gwythers for 150m until public footpath sign, crossing field on your right. 'Gwythers' originally a farm and home of infamous smuggler Hannibal Richards.



**11.** At the end of this field go through the gate and turn left and follow the path through Borough Woods which follows a small stream for about a kilometre. Dating back to mediaeval times, Borough woods is one of the most important coastal woodlands in the AONB, with a special biodiversity and variety of habitats unique to deciduous forests.



**12.** At the second kissing gate, take the left hand ford where the footpath divides, signposted to 'Windcutter'. Follow path over a stream and walk up the hill to the other side. After reaching a forest track continue into the coniferous plantations above you. A coniferous forest, planted in the 1950s during the drive to replace depleted woodlands with commercial timber.

**13.** Continue through the woodland, crossing another forest track which exits into a field. Aim for the top of the field, marked with public footpath yellow waymarker. Follow the path, keeping the field boundary on your right until footpath junction, near the entrance to Shaftsborough Farm. Turn right here, proceed through the farmyard to join a surfaced road, near the main farm buildings. Continue walking up the lane for about 1km. Just before T junction, turn right down a narrow path which joins surfaced cycleway, next to the road bridge. You are now standing on what was the railway line from Barnstaple to Ilfracombe, opened in 1874, reputed to have one of the steepest inclines in the country at 'Slade Bank'.

**14.** Proceed down the cycleway for approx. 1.5kms, passing under Bickenbridge and by the old workman's hut. On your left, through the trees you can see a reservoir dam. Further along, at opening on your left, take steps to grassland beside the water. **Constructed in the 1850s, these dams were a direct response to a cholera outbreak and a subsequent demand for clean drinking water.**

**15.** Continue 750m down the cycleway until you arrive at a twin bore masonry Slade tunnels, 63 metres (69 yards) in length, a legacy of the railway days. **In its heyday, just before the 2nd World War, 10,000 people per day flocked to the area by train from London and beyond.**

**16.** Continue through the tunnel and follow original terminus of the line. After 1km the path breaks to the right circles a large factory complex. **In 1925 express trains ran direct from here to London and Ilfracombe. The wooded hill behind is Cairn Local Nature Reserve.**

Old Railway Tunnels at Slade



Holy Trinity Church



**17.** Follow path around the factory to Station Road. Proceed down the road for 250m then turn left up Richmond road. At the next crossroads turn right and walk down Belmont Road. After 250m you will be standing outside the Lych Gate of Ilfracombe Holy Trinity Church. **Dating back to Saxon times although much Norman architecture remains, famed for the largest collection of Victorian stained glass in Devon.**

**18.** Exit church on left and take path which leaves the churchyard passing a stone building on your right. At the road turn left then immediately right down Church Lane. At the bottom of the hill turn right (Brookdale Avenue) and then join Wilder Road towards the seafront, until traffic lights. Then turn left into Runnacleave Road, and stop outside the Bathhouse. **Housing a labyrinth of hot and cold sea water, pumped up from Tunnels beaches for the Victorians 'taking the waters'.**

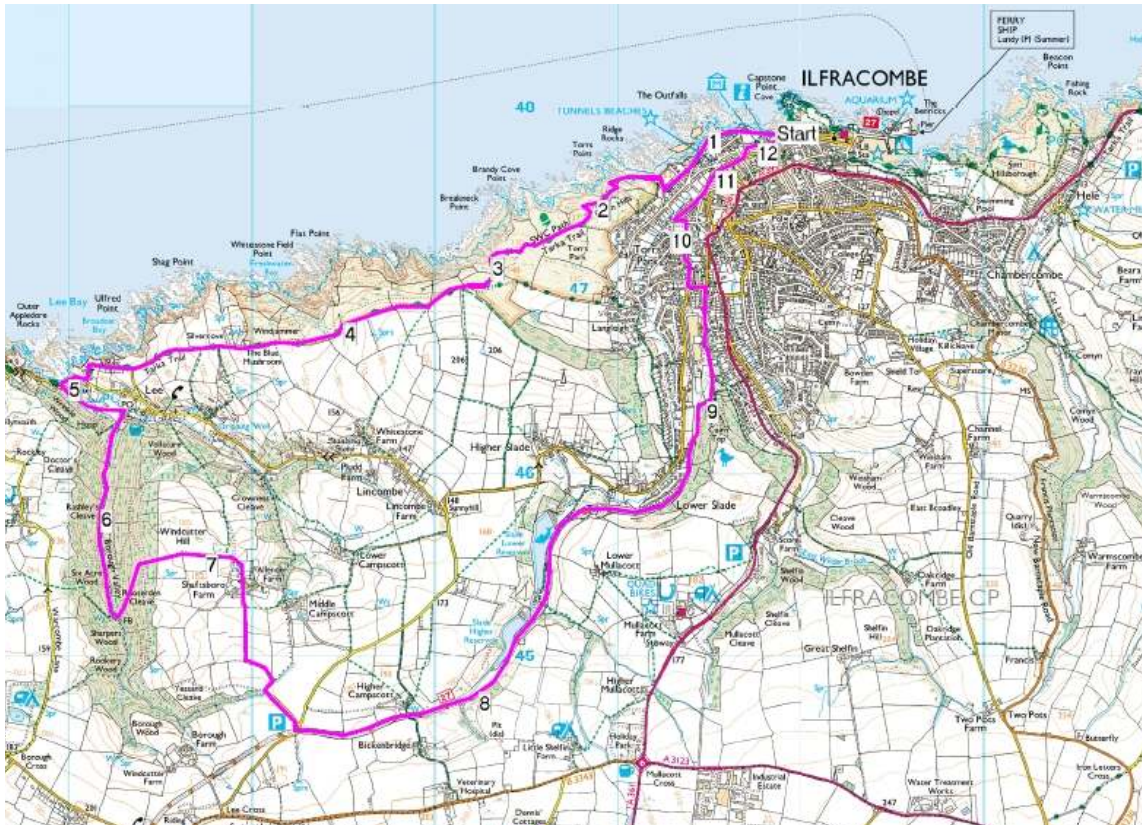
Bath House



**19.** Continue along Runnacleave road passing the Carlton Hotel on your left, after about 80m the road bears to the right, next to the Catholic Church. It then exits out onto Wilder Road (the main road to the harbour) on entering Wilder Road, turn left, down a narrow road towards the Landmark Theatre. After 100 metres you enter a car park and arrive outside the Ilfracombe Museum. **A museum with everything from a shrunken head to a collection of pickled bats!**

**20.** Proceed up the ramp and go back to the front of the Landmark Theatre, Runnacleave Gardens, the original lawns and tennis courts of the Ilfracombe Hotel.





## The North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

North Devon Coast AONB is rich in its spectacular scenery and distinctive characteristics, from rugged cliffs capped by Iron Age hill forts; twisted and folded rocks carved by the sea, sheltered harbours and fishing villages; oak woodlands; ancient burial mounds; hamlets, farms and fields steeped in history.

There are over 40 AONBs in England and Wales and they share a common commitment to secure sustainable living landscapes. Each AONB has designated for special attention because of the quality of the wildlife, cultural and historical heritage, as well as the outstanding scenery.

The work of the North Devon Coast AONB staff promotes and co-ordinates positive landscape management.

[North Devon Coast AONB](#)

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This is a short summarised version of this circuit.  
For a full, detailed account of this walk please download the 'Full Version'