



**North Devon
Coast**
National
Landscape

Cultural Trails 2

3 self-guided walks in the
North Devon Coast
National Landscape



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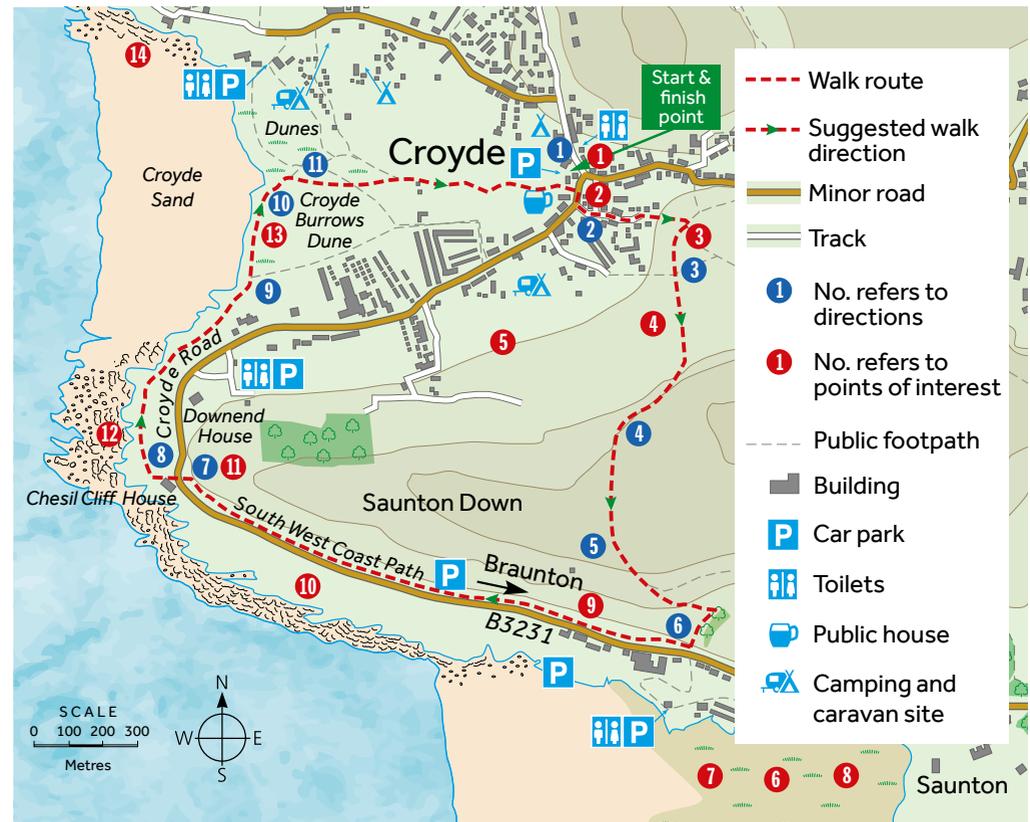
Croyde & Saunton



Baggy Point from Downend

Start/Finish: Start/Finish: Croyde Village Car Park

- **Distance:** 3.5 miles
- **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Moderate
- **Terrain:** Coast path, public footpath, surfaced road. Fairly even underfoot, with a few slippery stretches.
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 8 flights of steps; 7 stiles
- **Accessibility:** This route is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** Bus service 308 from Barnstaple and Braunton to Croyde. For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or traveline.info
- **Toilets:** Public toilets at entrance to car park.
- **Parking:** Croyde Village Car Park. Pay and Display
- **Other Facilities:** Village stores, pubs and Post Office opposite car park entrance.
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Braunton Tourist Information Centre 01271 816400 or brauntontic.co.uk
- **OS map:** Explorer 139
- **Grid ref:** SS 444392
- **Countryside Code:** When walking in the National Landscape always follow the Countryside Code, which is dedicated to helping members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.



Braunton Burrows and Saunton Sands

Man and the Landscape – Croyde & Saunton

The countryside of the National Landscape has been shaped and affected by man for thousands of years, and the land has a fascinating tale to tell. From scratching at the earth with sticks and bones, to flicking switches in today's sophisticated farm machinery, we have left our mark as we have sought to meet our needs from the land. The result is an epic story of quiet heroism and struggle, ambition and desperation, triumph and defeat, etched indelibly into the Devon landscape.

Thousands of years ago ancient Celtic tribes people were creating enclosures and huge earthworks. Saxon settlers imported their unique systems of agriculture, and medieval farmers set out to claw the land back from nature. Clearing heaths and woods acre by hard won acre for cultivation, they made strides which have been built upon by generations of farmers and workers right up to the present day. The characteristic hedge-banks which enclose Devon's fields are jewels in the county's crown. Many of them date back over 800 years and some, incredibly, are up to 4000 years old. These sturdy and beautiful boundaries, spangled with wildflowers in spring and summer, are a haven for wildlife of all kinds. Thousands of years of toil and muscle have produced the patchwork landscape of field and farm you see today. The earth has been cut, dug, ploughed and moved for as long as man has been here, and it is no exaggeration to say that, as you look out over the countryside, Devon's history really is laid out before you.

Woolacombe Bay from
Saunton Down



Croyde & Saunton Directions

1 No. refers to directions

1 No. refers to points of interest

- 1 Turn right out of car park **1**, **2**, then right again up Hobb's Hill (main road). Where the pavement ends, cross road with care, then turn left onto Cloutman's Lane.
- 2 Follow lane, which heads up hill and round sharp right hand bend, then turn right through five-barred gate onto public footpath **3**.
- 3 Go straight on at next junction, signed 'Public Footpath to Saunton'. Path follows old green lane up hill **4**.
- 4 Cross first field diagonally to right up hill **5**. Head for fingerpost and stile on the skyline, and cross further two fields straight over the saddle of the ridge.
- 5 At gate overlooking Saunton Sands **6**, **7**, **8**, bear left, following public footpath down across field. At next fingerpost before abandoned farm, bear right downhill, signed for Saunton Sands.
- 6 At the bottom of the hill just before the road, turn right signed 'Coast Path' **9**, **10**. Note that refreshments may be obtained from Saunton Sands Hotel or the Sands car park opposite but take care when crossing the road.
- 7 Where Coast Path drops down steps to main road, cross with extreme care and turn left. Just on the sharp left hand bend, turn right through narrow gap and down steps, following 'coast path' sign.
- 8 Follow coast path down and round to the right, along low cliff edge.
- 9 At path junction beyond two benches, follow 'Coast Path' sign left down steps and along beach to right **11**.
- 10 After 500m, follow edge of stream inland **12** to a concrete pipe bridge, and bear right up track. Around the corner, bear left to continue following track.
- 11 At field, follow line of evergreen trees up left hand edge, to the end of the row. Turn left here, take the gate straight ahead, and follow footpath.
- 12 At the road turn left, then left again along Jones's Hill. Car park is immediately on left.

Points of interest

- 1 Legend has it that the village of Croyde takes its name from a Viking raider called Crydda, who settled in the area. In the late Saxon period (10th Century), Croyde was a manor belonging to one Ordulf II. The Lord of 19 manors in Devon, Ordulf was said to be a man of exceptional height and might, capable of great feats of strength. Evidence of human occupation here goes back still further, Stone Age flint scatters have been found both on Saunton Down and Baggly Point.
- 2 Although part of the parish of nearby Georgeham, the centre of Croyde village is quite old with many thatched cottages. At one time there were supposed to be 14 farms located in the core of the village with associated farmhouses, today sadly, none of the farms remain but many of the old building do. Since the mid-20th Century the settlement has grown rapidly becoming a popular seaside resort.
- 3 Much of the area surrounding Croyde used to be orchards producing a variety of local apples for eating and for cider-making. In the 19th Century, cider was often used as an "agricultural wage". Today little remains of this once thriving industry other than the names of some of the more modern streets. Work has been undertaken on land bordering this stretch of the route to increase and enhance natural habitat. Trees have been planted to provide 'wildlife corridors' with a wild flower meadow created and an orchard restored.
- 4 The route here follows a classic Devon green lane. These ancient routes formed the rural communications network before the coming of surfaced roads. Farmers, traders, smugglers and drovers relied on these byways in days gone by. This lane is known as Alf 's Path, and was in regular use by locals before the building of the coast road round from Saunton in 1906. If you look closely you will

Croyde from Saunton Down



notice the presence of elm in the hedgerows here. Whilst mature elm trees were lost in the 1960's as a result of Dutch Elm disease, smaller hedgerow specimens can survive for up to 20 years before they succumb to the disease.

- 5 Farming techniques from well over a millenium ago are imprinted on land on the edge of Croyde. Back then, peasants worked strips the width of one 'chain' (22 yards) and one 'furlong' in length (one acre), within a very large enclosure. As time went on, those who managed to accumulate a few strips together would often enclose them with a hedge. This practice has produced the slender oblong fields which survive here to this day.
- 6 At over 2,500 hectares, Braunton Burrows is the largest sand dune system in England. The Burrows has been 'fed' by windblown sand from the broad strand of Saunton Sands. A botanist's paradise, it is home to almost 500 species of flowering plant including many rare and specialised species. It is also one of only two sites in the country where the Amber Sandbowl Snail is found. During World War II, it was used as a site of invasion practice by American troops before the D-Day landings. American soldiers of the Engineer Combat Battalions trained here and they were some of the first ashore during the Normandy landings. The dunes are still used today by the armed forces for military training exercises.
- 7 The dunes and beach are a Site of Special Scientific Interest and form the core area of a UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve. This prestigious designation aspires to more than simple conservation. The aim is to bring people and the land together in a harmonious and sustainable living relationship. (See: www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk)
- 8 Look inland towards Braunton and you can just make out the landscapes of Braunton Great Field and Braunton Marshes. The Great Field is a large open arable field and is one of only two surviving examples of a Mediaeval Open Strip field system in the country. Unlike the narrow enclosed strips we saw earlier, this field has remained unenclosed and some narrow open strips survive to this day. Braunton Marshes is the flat, low lying area beyond the rumpled landscape of the Burrows. Once a wilderness of marsh and mudflat, the area was drained and reclaimed in the early 19th Century by Dutch engineers. The passing of a dedicated Enclosures Act through parliament made this venture possible, and now freshwater drains separate the pasture fields, providing a valuable grazing area for Braunton which complements the large arable Great Field. Both are now iconic landscapes associated with Braunton and defined as a Heritage Coast which affords it some protection from development.



Braunton Burrows
© Neville Stanikk

9 Ancient medieval cultivation terraces are still just visible on the slopes here amongst the gorse and have now been designated as a Scheduled Monument. It is not known when exactly the hard work of digging these flat plots into the hillside was carried out. However, it may be that they are a continuation of the Saxon agriculture practised at nearby Braunton. You can still just make out where peasants would have ploughed their skinny single strips of land, sandwiched between those of their neighbours in a series of terraces.

10 Among the rocks at the bottom of the cliff are boulders from Western Scotland. They were carried here by the huge ice sheets which moved down over the country during the Ice Ages. These curiosities, which include a 12 tonne boulder of pink granite, are known as 'erratics'. Today they lie at the base of much later cliffs, created by the accumulation of sand and the freeze thaw erosion action of the old cliffs line on Saunton Down which is known as solifluction. These virgin cliffs are very susceptible to erosion as we shall see.



Saunton Erratic

11 The low cliffs here are the result of erosion from the original cliff line behind. In interglacial periods, when the world was much warmer, sea levels were much higher, creating a cliff line that Saunton Down was a part of. During colder periods and especially during the Ice Age sea levels would have fallen. During this period 'freeze thaw' action on the cliffs would have created much eroded material, in times of thaw this would slump down to the base of the old cliffs. The cliff that you are standing on is the remains of that erosion process, which has left the rounded hills and a cliff line made up of soft material (known as head deposit) which is very susceptible to erosion. As sea levels rise, these newer cliffs are easily eroded and the line of the cliffs is beginning to retreat here quite quickly.



Cliffs at Saunton

12 The fast retreating cliffs here have sometimes revealed an interesting past. In 1997 human bones were discovered in the eroded cliff edge. This led to excavations by North Devon Museums Service of the bodies of 4 shipwrecked mariners. At first it was believed they were the bodies from the infamous wreck of HMS Weazle which foundered off Baggly Point in 1799 with the loss of all on board. However, further investigation of the pewter and silver buttons at the site indicated that they were probably buried in the mid 1600's and that the fast eroding cliffs had revealed their final resting place. One of the bodies is on display in the North Devon Museum in Barnstaple.



Croyde Bay from Downend Spring, 2010

13 The dunes here are part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which covers the coastline from Saunton Sands to the far side of Baggly Point. Protected because of its geological interest, it is also important for plants, amphibians and reptiles, including lizards. The beach here was also used for D Day invasion practice as evidenced by a number of "dummy pillboxes" that can be found on the cliffs and on Baggly Point. Baggly Point was used also to practice cliff assaults, which would be required when attacking German fortifications on the Pont D'Hoc in Normandy.

14 At the far end of the beach you will notice a strange stone structure on the edge of the cliffs, this is a lime kiln. Lime kilns are commonly found on many parts of the North Devon coast where ships could get in. Limestone and coal from South Wales was slowly burnt in large kilns, the reduced material being used as an agricultural fertiliser. This "quick lime" was also used for building in the form of mortar, cement and whitewash for buildings. This has had a big influence on the number of white walled traditional buildings within Croyde village.



Croyde Old Limekiln

Croyde is rated by many as the best surfing beach in the country. The shape of the coast funnels waves towards the shore, producing fast, fulfilling rides for experienced surfers. It is not the place for beginners. There are strong rip currents, and the incline of the beach builds powerful waves which 'dump' with considerable force. However it is a beautiful beach with impressive rock pools at low tide.

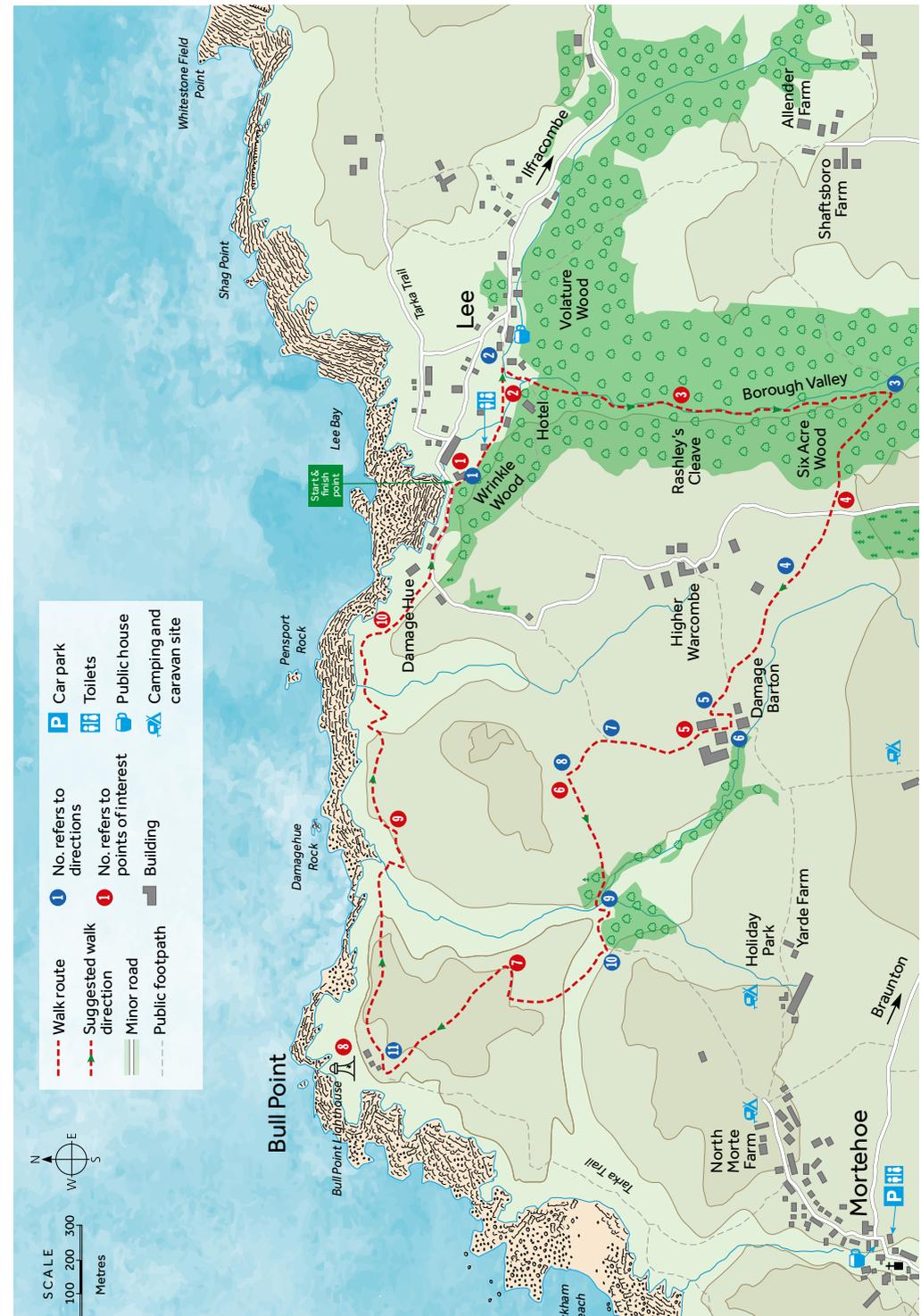
Lee Valley & Bull Point



Coastline above Lee

Start/Finish: Lee Cove car park

- **Distance:** 5 miles (8 km)
- **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Moderate to Strenuous
- **Terrain:** Coast path and public footpath. Some rocky, uneven, slippery and muddy patches
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 6 flights of steps; 14 stiles (4 can be avoided); 3 steep ascents; 2 steep descents
- **Accessibility:** This route is unsuitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** Bus service Filers Travel 35 from Ilfracombe. For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or traveline.info
- **Toilets:** Public toilets 75m up footpath along route from car park (closed in Winter)
- **Parking:** Lee Cove Car Park
- **Other Facilities:** Public payphone on right, 700m back up through Lee village from Cove car park
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Ilfracombe Tourist Information Centre 01271 863001 visitilfracombe.co.uk
- **OS map:** Explorer 139 Grid ref: SS 480464
- **Countryside Code:** When walking in the National Landscape always follow the Countryside Code, which is dedicated to helping members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.



A Colourful Landscape – Lee Valley and Bull Point

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.

Flagstaff Hill and Lee Bay
© Neville Stanikk



Lee Valley & Bull Point

Directions

- 1 No. refers to directions
- 1 No. refers to points of interest

- 1 From entrance to car park **1**, turn sharp left to follow footpath up valley along Tarmac lane, then between fences alongside pasture.
- 2 At the end of the field **2**, turn right over stile following 'Public Footpath' fingerpost. Cross the footbridge, then take left hand footpath following stream **3**. Walk for about 1 km through the woods
- 3 Just beyond the kissing gate, turn right signed 'Public Footpath to Damage Barton'.
- 4 At top of the hill **4**, follow footpath across field, over the road, and on through three hilltop fields, following 'Public Footpath' signs.
- 5 After 600m **5**, ignore footpath signed to right, and follow yellow waymarker down slope to the left. Turn right through a small gate, then left back onto track, following 'Public Footpath' sign.
- 6 Skirt around the side of the stone buildings of Damage Barton, then turn right, **6** signposted public footpath to Lee Bay and Bull Point.
- 7 Bear left, signposted footpath to Bull Point. **7** (Alternatively you can shorten the walk at this point by turning right. After a short while turn left when you join the tarmacked lane which will take you quickly down into Lee and back to the car park.)
- 8 After 100m or so and in the dip in the track turn left, **8** sign posted public footpath. Follow the field edge and drop down through a small gate into an ash woodland following the path.
- 9 Immediately after the footbridge **9** turn left, sign posted Morteheo and climb up to the road to Bull Point Lighthouse for the tremendous Atlantic panoramas to be seen there. (Or you can stroll down the valley at this point, turning right and signed to Bennett's Mouth.)
- 10 At the top of the steps **10** turn right on to the Lighthouse Road.
- 11 At the lighthouse turn right signed 'Lee 1½m'. Follow the coast path along the cliffs for 1¼ miles **11** until you drop down to road.
- 12 Turn left down the hill to Lee. At the bottom turn right to return to car park.

Bull Point



Points of interest

1 Tucked away and awkward to get to for the law enforcers, Lee was a perfect spot for smuggling activity. The illicit cargoes would be landed here on moonless nights. Then, the smugglers would transport the contraband inland using trains of donkeys, their hooves wrapped in rags to prevent any noise. Although the smugglers often got clean away, there are records of government seizures of brandy, wine, silks, and salt at Lee, found buried beneath the sands and hidden in villagers' homes. Lee was also famous for its wrecking activities and many an unfortunate ship ran aground on the treacherous beach, mistaking the small harbour for that of nearby Ilfracombe.



Lee Church

2 The valley at Lee is known as 'Fuchsia Valley'. The vivid red, pink and purple bells of the fuchsia can be seen in bloom here and there during the summer months. Although there were a few isolated buildings in Lee, the majority of the village was built in the mid 1800's by local developer Robert Smith. The original hamlet was called Warmcombe changing its name to Lee, which is why Lee is not a parish in its own right, but is shared between the neighbouring parishes of Ilfracombe and Morteohoe.

3 Borough Woods is a tremendously rich and varied woodland habitat. The pointed oval leaves of the smooth limbed beech trees growing here have an almost translucent pale green when young. They darken through the summer and turn a burnished bronze come the autumn. Other trees in these woods include alder and ash, evergreen holly and the silvery barked hazel. You may also spot sweet chestnut, with its long serrated leaves and spiky seed cases. This woodland lost many of its oaks during the demand for timber during the two world wars, but some stately specimens remain. During the spring months the woodland floor is a riot of colour with yellow celandines, primroses and bluebells. Look out for the early purple orchid which thrives adjacent to the path in the middle of the woods.



Inside Borough Woods

Not content with adorning gardens, the glossy leaved Rhododendron has, like the fuchsia, jumped the garden gate into the wild. It thrives here in Borough Valley, producing massed heads of glamorous purple flowers which light up the scene. Unfortunately, this woody shrub also shades out native plants. It is poisonous to many creatures, sours the land and spreads like wildfire. Like many of our 'problem' plants, it was introduced to this country by adventurous Victorian gardeners.



Coniferous woodland in Borough Valley

4 A glance back across the valley from here offers fine views of the conifer plantations on the opposite slope. Early Ordnance Survey maps show the hillside opposite as being clear of trees until the 1950's when it was planted up with conifers. The dark green areas are Sitka Spruce, a fast growing timber tree from North America. In the midst of the spruce grows a large stand of larch. The larch is a lighter green than the spruce, especially in the spring when its delicate new growth emerges. It is also one of the few conifer trees to lose its leaves in the winter, and in the autumn its needles turn a beautiful light golden colour.

5 Damage Barton. The ancient farmhouse, surrounding buildings and courtyard wall are all Grade 11* Listed Buildings as a historically interesting complex dating from at least the 16th Century. A "Barton" is the old name given to one of the most important farms in the parish, in Old English it derives from "beretun" meaning a "barley yard" or enclosure. For many years the farm was home to the Cutcliffe Family, who were Lords of the Manor in Lincombe and nearby Warcombe.



Standing Stone near Damage Barton

6 In the field you are crossing sits the southernmost of a line of three prehistoric standing stones. They were thought to be ritual or ceremonial monuments ranging from the Late Neolithic period to the Bronze Age and are protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

7 Gorse grows thickly on this hilltop, filling the air with the coconut smell of its flowers on warm days. You can usually find some gorse in bloom at almost any time of year, which accounts for the convenient old folk saying, 'when the gorse is in flower, it's kissing season'!

8 Bull Point Lighthouse was built by Trinity House in 1879, partly in response to the "barbarous conduct of lawless wreckers". After luring a ship onto the rocks with deliberately misplaced lights, the wreckers would then plunder its cargo. The coming of the lighthouse meant that at last, ships had reliable information to help them steer clear of danger. In 1972 part of the lighthouse was extensively damaged by a cliff collapse and had to be re-built. It was automated in 1995 and the lighthouse keeper's accommodation has become an exclusive holiday home.



Hillymouth and Lee Bay

9 Clinging to the cliff edge are the remnants of coastal heath, now a very rare habitat. The harsh conditions of thin acid soils and Atlantic salt laden winds make it a habitat for only the hardiest of plants. It is here that heather and gorse have traditionally thrived forming a mosaic of purple and yellow. Originally managed by sheep grazing, cutting and burning (gorse had many uses for firing bread ovens and lime kilns) most of the heathland has been lost to intensive grazing or agricultural abandonment, the latter leading to the formation of coastal scrub and bracken.



Coastline near Lee

10 The sheltered nook of Sandy Cove was a look out for local smuggler Hannibal Richards. Once a member of the notorious Cruel Coppinger's gang in Cornwall, he moved to Lee for the quiet life. He could not resist the lure of his old profession, however, and soon returned to crime. His vantage point was a cave in the cliff behind the beach, now covered by a rockfall.



Lee from Sandy Cove



Hillsborough



Ilfracombe harbour

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 National Landscape 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.

Hillsborough



Hillsborough Directions

- 1 No. refers to directions
- 1 No. refers to points of interest

- 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.



Ilfracombe Harbour in 1864 © Ilfracombe Museum

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 name 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.

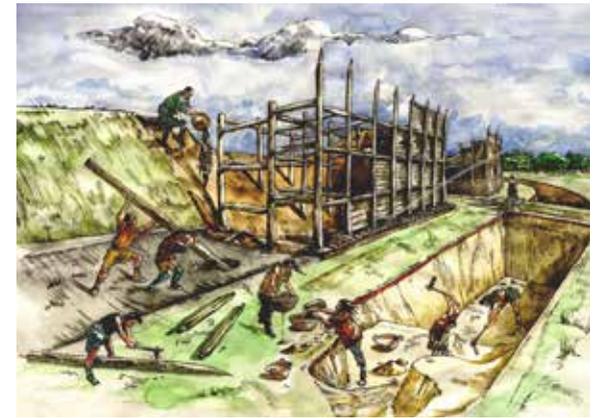
In the 13th Century Ilfracombe was an important naval port, with King John's troops setting sail from here, bound for battle in Ireland. 300 years later, more were heading the same way. Up to 800 troops at a time embarked from the harbour below, this time sent by Elizabeth I to put down an Irish rebellion. 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.

View of Ilfracombe Harbour from Hillsborough



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.



© Oxford Archaeology

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.



French Soldiers

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”.

Porpoises by Dave Jenkins



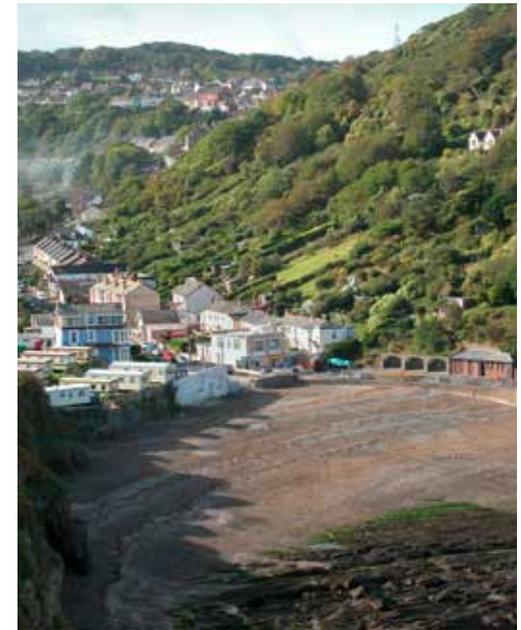
6 The viewpoint here is an excellent place to observe the coastal and marine life, from seabirds to cetaceans. The rich variety of marine life off the coast attracted many a Victorian Naturalist including Phillip Henry Gosse. In 1994 the North Devon Voluntary Marine Conservation Area (VMCA) was set up 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.

*Old Victorian Gun Battery
© Ilfracombe Museum*



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!



Hele Beach

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.

*View of Hillsborough
from Capstone*





**North Devon
Coast
National
Landscape**

Hillsborough

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