

Walk No. 48 TETCOTT - JESTER WALK AROUND THE ESTATE

In the far west of Devon, in a remote part of the Tamar Valley, lies the tiny settlement of Tetcott. For many centuries this atmospheric location has been the centre of a local estate. It was acquired in the mid-1500s by John Arscott, and for hundreds of years the Arscotts of Tetcott were typical of the small-scale landed gentry of the more secluded parts of the county. In some ways they were surprisingly modern, in other ways very traditional. As late as the 1700s the Arscotts had a jester, a dwarf known as Black John, he and his master a throw-back to the Middle Ages.

In 1788 the direct family line failed and the estate went to cousins, the Molesworths of Pencarrow in Cornwall. The Molesworths, and later the Molesworth-St. Aubyn family, continued to use Tetcott first as a farm and then as the family seat and the estate remains in the hands of the Molesworth-St Aubyns to this day.

This walk explores some of the old estate, passing through a remote length of the Tamar Valley and its surroundings, and makes an atmospheric and tranquil excursion. It is one of the Ruby Trails, a series of walks set up in the north west part of Devon to encourage visitors to come to the area to help the local economy of this quiet and secluded part of the county in an appropriate way.

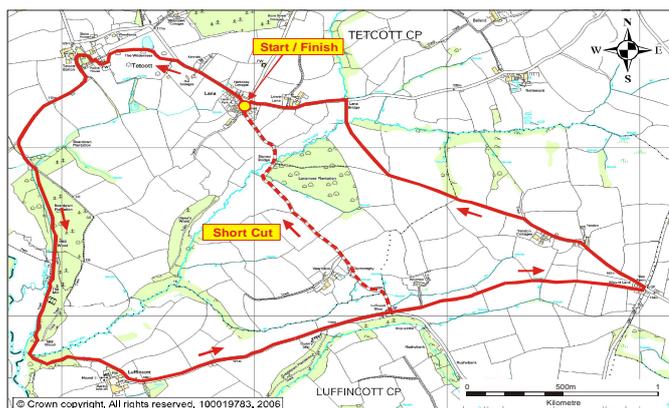
Fact File

There is no public transport provision to Tetcott. The settlement is somewhat scattered, but the main hamlet (known as Lana) includes the parish hall and plenty of car parking, and is the start and finish of the walk. Follow the signs to Tetcott from the A388 Holsworthy - Launceston Road and park either in the car park at the parish hall or the smaller parking area in the road alongside the hall.

Walk Length: 5.5 miles/9 km; if wished it may be shortened to 4 miles/6.25 km. There are two stiles and no steep climbs.

Facilities: There is a village shop at Lana, open three mornings a week only. No facilities on the route.

The Walk



If parked in the car park at the parish hall walk past the hall's main entrance (signed) and through the gate to the smaller parking area on the road.

Note the estate connection at the parish hall. The hall is called the Arscott Hall and there is a plaque commemorating its opening in 1993 by Sir Arscott Molesworth St. Aubyn.

From the car parking area outside the hall head up the lane opposite, past the bus shelter and Cox's Meadow and continue on the lane ahead.

This hamlet on the Tetcott estate is called Lana, and is now the main population centre of the parish. Walking along the lane, pleasant views open up to the left over the Tamar Valley and into Cornwall.

Turn left through the gate by the large pillars - there is a public footpath signpost with a Ruby Trails waymark here. Follow the track ahead over the parkland towards the church.

The pillars date from the early 1700s and marked the entrance to the grounds of the Manor House. The track would have been the grand drive to the house from the hamlet of Lana. The parkland is, confusingly, called The Wilderness. Whether this refers back to its original condition before it became parkland or is an ironical reference to its relatively tidy and sophisticated appearance is debatable.

Immediately after the gate at the far end turn left down the grassy path, past the War Memorial and on through the lych gate to the church entrance.

Note the plaque next to the gates commemorating their maker. There are some fascinating old gravestones propped up around the church wall here.

The church dates to the 13th century, relatively early for Devon, although the tower was added in the 15th century. Inside are memorials to the Arscotts and an ornate Arscott family pew.

Continue on to another gate to emerge opposite Tetcott Manor.

This is a lovely house with a complex architectural history. However, its origins can be dated to the mid 1500s when it was started by the first of the Arscotts, John Arscott. Note the dated stone of 1603 - this was actually

built into the house during some 20th century renovation work, having been brought here from Tetcott Mill (to be passed later).

Around 1700 the house was downgraded when the Arscotts built a new brick manor house immediately to the east - the right as we look. This is extremely early for brick building in Devon; the first brick building in the County is said to be Exeter's Custom House, built in 1680, yet only some 20 years later brick was being used in this remote location.

When the Molesworths inherited the estate it became less important because their main seat was in Cornwall, so they demolished the brick manor house in 1831. The old manor, used at that time as a farmhouse, was retained for that use. Later still, in 1925, the Molesworth-St. Aubyns returned to Tetcott as their main seat and the original house resumed its former importance as the manor.

The old granaries, stables and cart sheds on the left, also of brick, were built at the same time as the house.

Turn left between the brick buildings and then follow the track round to the right.

Note at the top of the track another 18th century brick outbuilding. This was a granary, built on stilts in an attempt to keep vermin out. There is also another set of 18th century gate pillars here.

Before leaving the area around the Manor, just cast an eye over your shoulder, especially if the light is fading. The ghost of Black John, the Arscotts' last jester and an 18th century throwback to medieval times, is said to haunt the Manor - listen for the tinkling of bells!

From the granary on stilts turn left, down the track past the farm, forking right to pass through the right-hand gate. The track bears right and continues to descend gently into the Tamar Valley.

As the track descends, the flat floor of the valley, with its attractive unimproved grassland, important for wildlife, becomes a clear landscape feature.

Near the bottom the track forks. Take the main track which bears left, waymarked. This track soon reaches an area of woodland. Almost immediately there is another junction of tracks. Turn right here, waymarked again, keeping in the woodland.

This is Beardown Plantation. It would have originally been planted as a source of timber for the estate. It now makes a valuable wildlife refuge. If you move quietly you may see deer, and will probably hear the cry of a buzzard flying above.

Continuing to follow the track, notice the feature parallel and to the right. This is often wet, and marks the line of the old mill leat for Tetcott Mill.

Keep to the track to arrive at Tetcott Mill.

The mill was the corn mill for the Tetcott estate. The early 17th century date stone on the Manor is said to have come from here, although the present building is later than that. The current air of remote seclusion belies the busy picture it must have once presented.

The track ends here. Continue ahead along the narrow grassy path between the wall and the leat. The path is a little faint at times, but keep ahead next to the leat, along the base of the wooded hillside, until the path arrives at a gate to a track.

This length has been along the floor of the Tamar Valley, Devon's western boundary. The river itself is on the far side of the flat grassland, the hills beyond being in Cornwall.

Go through the gate ahead and follow the track round to the left towards another gate. Do not pass through this one but turn right, following the fence. This leads to a footbridge. Cross the bridge.

This is Lana Lake, a tributary of the Tamar (the name "Lake" comes from a Saxon word meaning a stream - there is no area of open water). As in many of these remote tributary valleys, the woodland here is very ancient, the damp valley bottom having never been properly cultivated.

Walk ahead, following the yellow stakes, using a series of timber stepping stones to cross a rather boggy area. The steps lead to a gate into a field. Pass through and continue up the right hand edge of the field to join a track leading towards a farmstead at the top.

This is Luffincott. Originally a separate parish, the church, over to the right, is remote from everywhere except the farm. Although medieval in origin, it was completely rebuilt in the 1700s. Virtually untouched since then, it is unusual in being a very rare example of an unrestored Georgian church. Notable from the outside are the domestic-type Georgian windows. No longer used for worship, it is now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust.

The remainder of the farm buildings at Luffincott were built in the mid-1800s as an estate farm by the Tetcott Estate.

Continue past the barn and then ahead along the lane.

An unusual historical fact relates to the disappearance of the parish parson in 1904. Not known to be in financial trouble - or to have any woman troubles - he simply walked out one evening and disappeared. Stories relate to the sexton seeing his shape walking up the lane shortly afterwards, not

turning as the sexton called his name and having vanished when the sexton reached the bend in the lane.

Walking up the lane keep an eye open for the settlement on the hillside to the left. That is Lana, where the walk starts and finishes, the parish hall especially prominent. This long lane gives some idea of how remote farmsteads such as Luffincott were and, indeed, still are.

The lane eventually reaches a road junction. This is Luffincott Shop.

The shop refers to the fact that the house here was once the blacksmith's shop for Luffincott and its surrounding area. The house is still called Luffincott Smithy.

Those who feel they have walked far enough can take a short cut back to the car park from here. Just turn left at the junction and follow the lane down then up to arrive at the parish hall at Lana after a mile.

The full walk has another 2.5 miles/4 km to go. To continue, take the track opposite, next to the gate. When the track bends, keep ahead through the gate into the field and follow the hedge ahead, keeping the hedge on the left. Follow on to a further field gate in the far corner of the field and go through, crossing a little stream. Keep ahead to yet another gate and pass through and ahead, hedge now on the right.

Note that horses are kept in these fields and consequently the ground around the gates can be rather muddy.

Continue next to the hedge to the yard at Yeo Farm. Go through the yard to emerge on the A388 Holsworthy - Launceston road. Turn immediately back left along the track and through the gates.

There are wide views ahead to Cornwall from this track, including on a clear day the outline of Bodmin Moor ahead and left.

Follow the track past a barn and on to a farmyard. Keep to the right hand edge and through a gate at an often muddy area. Continue ahead over a muddy track to another gate and pass through to the field beyond. Go ahead in the field alongside the hedge, keeping it to the right.

This is Yendon Farm, although old records refer to it as Hendon. The name Hendon means "high hill" and the wide views from here are witness to how appropriate the name is.

Continue through the gate at the end into the next field. Half way down this field go through the gate on the right and continue in the same direction downhill, the hedge now on the left. Go through the gate at the bottom into another field. Walk alongside the edge of the woodland then head straight across the field, aiming towards the obvious landmark

of the white parish hall in the distance. This will lead to a gate in the hedge on the opposite side of the field.

Now pasture land, these fields were until the relatively recent past areas of unimproved rough grazing.

Go through the gate in the hedge and bear right and downhill, following the faint tractor tracks.

On the hillside ahead can be seen Lower Lana Farm. This is another estate farm, built in the 1850s probably using the bricks from the demolished manor house.

Walk down to the ford at the bottom, cross, then continue up the track to the gate. At the lane turn left and up the hill, passing Lower Lana, to return to the parish hall.

Further Information

A pack containing the Ruby Country walks is available in local Tourist Information Centres, price £3.50. Alternatively, it may be obtained from the Discover Devon Holiday Line, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW telephone 0870 608 5531. Quote reference DP104 and make any cheques payable to Devon County Council.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon, obtain the free brochure "Discover Devon - Walking" from local Tourist Information Centres or the address above. Alternatively visit the website www.discoverdevon.com which has all the information and order forms.

OS maps for this walk: Explorer (1:25,000 scale)
 No. 112 Launceston and Holsworthy
 Landranger (1:50,000 scale)
 No. 190 Bude and Clovelly.