

Walk No. 44 Hidden Torquay - Lincombe, Ilsham and Meadfoot

The South West Coast Path is justifiably renowned for the quality of its walking experience, with its high cliffs, wooded estuaries and sandy beaches. However, it is worth remembering that it also offers superb walks where it passes through some of Devon's seaside towns. In winter or early spring especially, when some of the more remote parts of the coast can be damp or muddy, these urban Coast Path walks are well worth doing.

This walk is based on the Harbour at Torquay. It winds its way eastward through a quiet area of surprisingly rural aspect before returning to the Harbour along the Coast Path, which here offers splendid views over the bay.

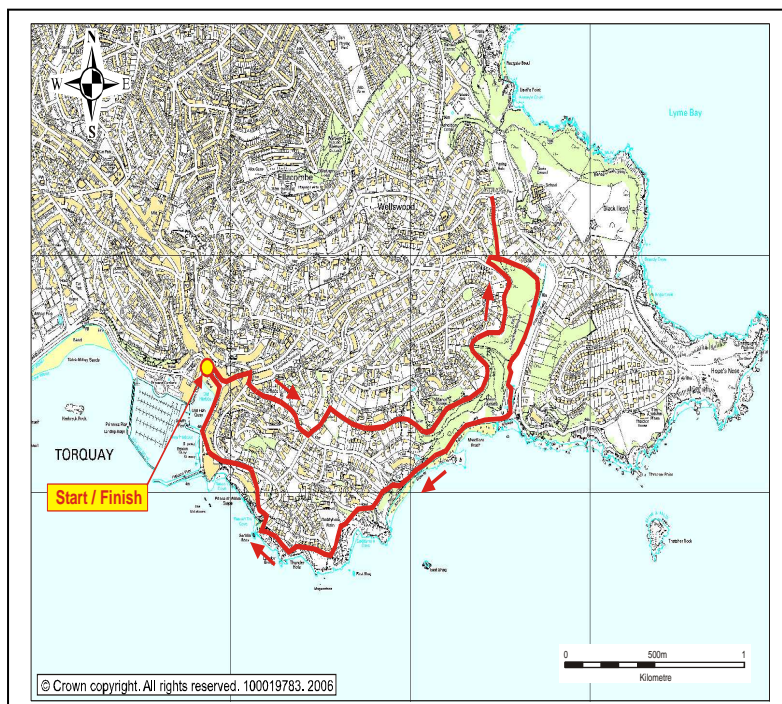
Fact File

Torquay is well served by public transport, with bus services to and from most places in South Devon. It also has national Traveline rail connections via Newton Abbot and Exeter. For bus timetables details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk ; for train times contact National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50 or visit www.thetrainline.com.

Walk Length: 7m/4.5 miles; no stiles, but a number of steps; no steep hills, but one long steady climb of nearly 50m/160 feet.

Facilities: Torquay town centre and Harbour area has all facilities; there is a shop, restaurant and toilets at Kent's Cavern and toilets (open summer only) at the western end of Meadfoot Beach.

The Walk



Torquay began to arise as a resort for the well-to-do when the fleet of the Royal Navy used Tor Bay as an anchorage during the Napoleonic Wars.

It became fashionable for naval officers and their families during the first half of the 19th century. This prompted the building of many large and fashionable villas as well as exclusive hotels as Torquay aimed at the higher end of the market.

This holiday trade was given an especial boost after the railway arrived in 1848.

Start the walk on the Strand by Torquay Harbour.

The Inner Harbour dates back to the beginning of Torquay's expansion, in 1806. It was established by Lord Haldon of the Palk family who at that time owned large tracts of land in and around Torquay. After the Outer Harbour was built later in the 19th century it had for a while an emigrant trade to Canada.

Walk towards the Clock Tower and at the junction bear left. Walk up the road as far as the traffic lights and turn right here into Parkhill Road.

The church on the left, Holy Trinity, was built 1894-96. It became redundant as a church and was converted for use as a sports centre in 1982. It is now the Rainbow Fun House for children, but remains a significant local landmark with its prominent spire.

Follow the road round to the left and uphill - now Meadfoot Road.

The walk now enters Lincombe, an area of Torquay developed with exclusive villas for the well-to-do during the 19th century. They remain impressive houses.

Keep along the road until it levels out and bears left. At the next junction turn left into Higher Woodfield Road. A little way along this road turn right into Lincombe Drive.

Lincombe Drive passes more imposing Victorian villas, especially on the right hand seaward side. In contrast on the inland side is an area of more modern development. This whole area was owned by the Palk family in the 1800s, and it was the manager of the Palk Estate, William Kitson, who effectively shaped this part of the town.

Further on the road begins to run along the top of a steep, wooded slope which forms the cliff above Meadfoot Beach. The walk now gives views out to sea through the trees, and the sound of the sea on the beach can be heard. The feeling here is very rural.

Keep following this very pleasant quiet road as it contours along the lip of a valley leading inland away from the sea. The road rounds the "castle" at Lincombe Keep.

This unexpected building was originally a folly designed as an entrance gateway to the garden of the early 20th century house of Castle Tor above. It was originally designed by Fred Harrild in the 1930s; he was a pupil of the renowned architect Edwin Lutyens and those who know Castle Drogo, designed by Lutyens, may be able to see a resemblance.

Soon, if the weather is clear, views ahead open up to the distinctive red cliffs of the East Devon coast.

As the road contours around to the left again, look out for some steps downhill on the right at a metal kissing gate. They are immediately before the first house on the right, opposite the approach to “Highlands”. Go down the steps and at the bottom turn right. A little way along this track is a junction with a footpath to the left, signposted to Kent’s Cavern.

It is worth taking the short diversion along this path to Kent’s Cavern and, if you have the time, looking around the caves. They comprise a series of connected limestone caves and from the dates scratched in the walls have been considered a curiosity since the 16th century. Human beings inhabited the caves in prehistoric times with sabre-toothed tigers, woolly rhinoceros and mammoths. There is a shop with information, toilets and a restaurant.

After visiting Kent’s Cavern, return along the footpath to the junction and turn left along the path signed to Meadfoot Beach. (If not visiting Kent’s Cavern, go straight ahead at the junction).

Keep left downhill at the fork. Follow the clear path as it continues to descend, bearing right to reach the floor of the Ilsham Valley.

Although now hidden in Torquay’s suburbs, Ilsham has a longer history, being mentioned in the Domesday Book. There is also a medieval house which was used as a grange by Torre Abbey.

Approaching the mouth of the valley the path forks. Keep left, at the lower level, signed towards Thatcher Point. The path soon arrives at the sea at Meadfoot.

From here the South West Coast Path is followed back to the Harbour. Meadfoot gives views over the whole sweep of Tor Bay, with Berry Head the prominent landmark at the far side of the Bay.

Turn right along the back of Meadfoot Beach. At the far end go uphill for a short distance then turn left up the steps immediately after the public toilets (open summer only), signed to car park and Daddyhole and, a little later, Beacon Cove.

On the opposite side of the road here is the imposing sight of Hesketh Crescent, one of Torquay’s most notable buildings. It dates from 1849, again built on the Palk estate and when completed included a hotel and ten large houses for rent.

At the top of the steps go through the archway and bear left, still going uphill. Just before some bollards by the Duchy Hotel bear left along a

path and up some more steps to arrive at the coastal plateau of Daddyhole Plain.

This spot gets its name from a 19th century cliff landslide which was attributed to the devil, or Daddy to use the local name. It is a good viewpoint to look over the villas in Palk's estate inland (and some more modern development) and also for splendid sea views.

Walk along the seaward edge of the car parking area and on along the cliff top to another archway by a shelter. Go through the arch then follow the Coast Path as it descends some steps then passes through an unusual tunnel under a private lookout.

This part of the coast is the Rock End Estate. It used to be part of the grounds of a grand house built in the 1840s. The house was later demolished and the estate developed for housing in 1950. The Coast Path generally avoids these houses and continues to give superb views over Tor Bay.

The path descends a long series of steps then, after rising slightly to a viewpoint, descends another flight of steps. Turn right at the bottom.

The area on the left just beyond here is a public space. Known as Peaked Tor, this was a public terraced garden in the later 19th century, the beach below being used as a gentleman's bathing cove. The pill box is a World War 2 mine watcher's post from where mines protecting Torquay Harbour would have been remotely detonated. It has now been adapted to make it a suitable roost for bats.

Continue ahead past some bollards and then alongside the Imperial Hotel to arrive at a road.

The Imperial, although now somewhat altered, was Torquay's first major hotel, dating from 1863. Another Palk venture, it encouraged many notable people to visit the town, including in 1877 the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII.

At the road turn downhill past Living Coasts.

An offshoot of Paignton Zoo, Living Coasts includes reconstructed beaches, artificial cliff faces and estuary features. There is an aviary of sea birds (you may see some flying inside the net mesh) and viewing areas for seals. It includes a shop and restaurant.

Continue on down the hill to arrive back at Torquay Harbour.

Further Information

A range of information is available on the South West Coast Path; especially useful is the guide book and accommodation list produced by the South West Coast Path Association, price £6.00 and available locally. Alternatively, it may be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Line, Westacott Road, Barnstaple EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £7.50 including post and packaging (cheques made payable to Devon County Council). Quote reference DP33.

There is also a brochure on Coast and Countryside Walks in Torbay. This is published by the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust and is available at local Tourist Information Centres.

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

OS Maps for this walk:

Landranger (1:50,000 scale): no 202 Torbay and South Dartmoor

Explorer (1:25,000 scale): no 110 Torquay and Dawlish