

Walk No. 54 Look Sharp - with a Spring in your Step Totnes to Sharpham and Ashprington

The town of Totnes has a superb location at the limit of navigation of the River Dart. It also provides the inland end of the Dart Valley Trail, a scenic walking route following the lower valley of the Dart to its estuary at Dartmouth.

The first length of the Dart Valley Trail out of Totnes links the town to the village of Ashprington. There is also a cycle route between the two which is largely parallel to the Dart Valley Trail, although the routes share some short lengths. It is therefore possible to walk from Totnes to Ashprington and back using mostly different paths.

An added attraction to such a walk is a diversion to the riverside vineyard and cheese making centre at Sharpham, and there is a further option of an extension from the walk to a picturesque riverside inn - plenty of options, so take your pick, all provide a superb walk, let alone the attractions to the appetite.

Fact File

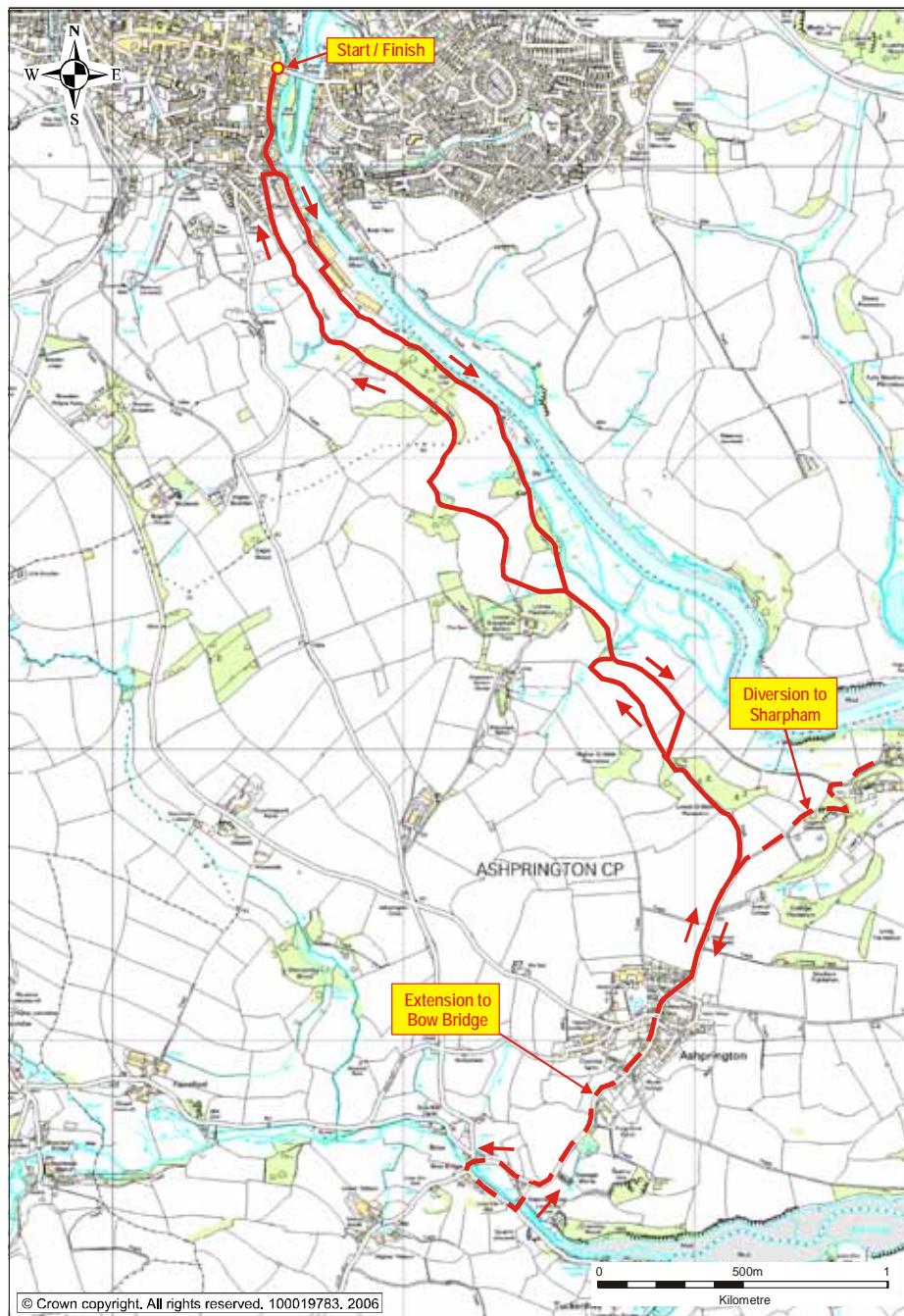
Totnes is well served by public transport - buses to and from Torbay, Exeter, Newton Abbot and Plymouth as well as trains to and from Exeter and Plymouth and indeed, London, the Midlands and the North. For bus timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk . For train timetables call the National Rail Enquiry Line on 08457 484950 or visit www.thetrainline.com.

Walk length: Totnes to Ashprington and return 4.5 miles/7.5 km
Totnes to Sharpham and return 4.5 miles/7.5 km
Totnes to Ashprington and return via Sharpham 6 miles/9.5 km
To extend any of the above to the Watermans Arms at Bow Bridge add a further 1.25 miles/2 km

There are a total of 7 stiles: there is one long steady climb of 85m/280ft between Totnes and Ashprington; diverting to Sharpham adds another steady climb of 70m/230ft; the extension to Bow Bridge will bring another steady climb of 100m/330ft

Facilities: Totnes has all facilities; there is a pub at Ashprington and Bow Bridge and the vineyard, cheese making centre and associated shop at Sharpham. For Sharpham opening times and other details call 01803 732203

The Walk



Start the walk at the roundabout at the bottom of Fore Street, where it meets Totnes Bridge and The Plains.

Totnes is a superb little town of great attractiveness and also great interest. Only a small proportion of its interest is seen on this walk - it is well worth exploring further.

Notice at the end of The Plains the memorial to William John Wills, a Totnes man who with his companion Burke was the first man to cross the Australian continent in the 1860's.

From the roundabout walk along The Plains.

Originally a riverside marsh, The Plains later became Totnes' industrial quarter. The restored buildings on the left are mostly old warehouses and behind them is a leat, an artificial watercourse originally used as water power.

As the road swings right, bear left on to the footpath alongside the leat.

This path is waymarked with a Dart Valley Trail sign. Notice also a brown and yellow waymark for the John Musgrave Heritage Trail. John Musgrave was a Torquay man who left a legacy for a long distance footpath to be set up to encircle Torbay. This route links Maidencombe at the northern end of Torbay to Brixham, via Totnes. This length out of Totnes uses the same route as the Dart Valley Trail.

Where the leat joins the River Dart, follow the path back to the road.

The lime kiln on the right is probably of 19th century origin. Lime was brought in by the river, probably from Torbay, and burnt here before being spread over the local fields to fertilise the soil. On the left is the Steam Packet Inn. Until the late 1800s there was a quay here, St Peter's Quay.

Opposite the Steam Packet bear right to the forecourt of Baltic Wharf and continue past the business park.

Baltic Wharf was developed in the 1960's for the timber trade. Reeves and Co had begun importing timber from the Baltic region early in the 20th century. The trade has now gone but the name remains.

Just before the gate at the end bear right, up some steps and over a stile. Continue along the fenced path.

The path continues parallel to the River Dart. On the opposite side of the river are workshops occupying what was until the early 20th century Town Marsh.

At the end of the fenced path continue ahead into the wood. After undulating through the wood close to the river it emerges in a field. Continue along the bottom of this field, still parallel to the Dart, then bear right, continuing along the bottom of the field, now above riverside marshes.

Just before the marshes can be seen the remains of the old Totnes sewage treatment works, gradually disappearing into undergrowth.

Follow the path to a stile and descend alongside the reed beds.

On the right are the remains of an old quarry, which once supplied building stone for Totnes and the farms around. Until the 1800's, most parishes of Devon had a small quarry to provide local material for building.

Two stiles and some steps lead to the bottom of another field. Follow the bottom of the field to another stile into woodland. Go into this wood and continue to a gate into a further field. Go through into the field, cross a little valley and head diagonally left over the field and uphill to a track next to the trees at the top.

The Dart Valley Trail has now joined the cycle route, which follows the old drive from Totnes to Sharpham House for much of its length. There are good views over the reed beds to the river and the opposite side of the valley.

Follow the track alongside the trees. Just after passing through a gate there is a junction. The cycle route (and our walk's return) leaves the Sharpham Drive here and goes off to the right, but for the outward leg of the walk continue ahead and slightly left, still on the line of the Sharpham Drive and still following the Dart Valley Trail.

On the hillside on the opposite side of the river can be seen the buildings at Windwhistle Cottage. The winds here are said to be so strong that it was built with no windows on its north-facing side. The last occupant had nineteen children and as many cows and sheep in the adjoining barn.

Look out for a stile on the right by a gate across the track. Cross the stile and climb diagonally across the field to another stile at the top.

The top of the field gives superb views up and down the Dart Valley. Stop for a breather and look upstream to see the outline of Dartmoor on the skyline, the distinctive shape of Haytor unmistakable.

Climb the stile to re-join the cycle route and continue climbing the path through the woods. Emerging from the wood the gradient eases and soon the path reaches a lane.

Down the lane to the left is the diversion to Sharpham. If you do visit Sharpham, you will have to return the same way to this point.

Sharpham House was re-built in its present form in 1765 by Captain Pownall, who had acquired a fortune by capturing a Spanish galleon. The gardens were laid out by the famous Capability Brown.

To continue on to Ashprington follow the lane ahead. Soon the lane begins to descend and enters the village.

On the right is the village church. This is one of the few in England dedicated to St David, and may represent a very old Christian site. The body of the church dates from the 15th century, although the tower is

older, from the 12th century. Notice the prominent stair turret on one corner of the tower.

In the 19th century Ashprington was very much an estate village, based on Sharpham House. The estate cottages in the village were built at that time. On the right is Langham House, built in the mid 19th century as the village school and master's house by Richard Durrant of Sharpham. The village pub, the Durrant Arms, also dates from the same period although the foundations are earlier.

For an additional walk on the Dart Valley Trail to a waterside pub continue along the road through the village - take care, although not a busy road it does carry some traffic. Keep on to the bottom of the hill then turn left over Bow Bridge.

The bridge was built in the late 1600's, widened in the 1800's. It carried the road over Bow Creek, one of the many picturesque creeks branching off the lower Dart. Together with the Waterman's Arms alongside it makes a very attractive location.

For a slightly different, and tidal, return route, continue along the lane past the Waterman's Arms and its car park then take the footpath which leaves the road to the left. This leads to some stepping stones across the creek. Very carefully cross these and then follow the path uphill to the road. Turn right, uphill, to return to Ashprington.

To return to Totnes from Ashprington retrace your steps up the hill past the church and follow the lane to the entrance gates to Sharpham. Bear left along the path next to the gate and continue downhill through the wood. Pass the stile used for the outward leg and continue ahead downhill on the cycle route.

Again the views up the Dart Valley and on to Haytor on the skyline are very impressive.

Follow the cycle route as it curves to the right, past the wetland County Wildlife Site, to return to the Dart Valley Trail at the Sharpham Drive. Turn left here, along the drive. Keep following the drive, passing the footpath used by the Dart Valley Trail and John Musgrave Heritage Trail and for the outward leg.

The drive passes through a cutting engineered for the route. On emerging, there are again fine views, this time downstream, the meandering course of the Dart very clear.

Follow the drive through a couple of sets of gate posts and then on a long, gentle downhill stretch - views over Totnes open up here.

At a gate, the route leaves the Sharpham Drive and continues along the top of a field parallel to the drive.

There are views from here to Totnes Bridge, the town centre a little to the left and Bridgetown Church visible to the right.

At the end of the path turn right and then immediately left next to the Steam Packet Inn. Continue along the road to return to The Plains and the walk's starting point.

Further Information

For details of the Dart Valley Trail, an information pack is available from Tourist Information Centres, price £2. It may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £3.50 including postage and packing. Quote reference DP42 and make any cheques payable to Devon County Council.

A booklet on the John Musgrave Heritage Trail is also available. It may be purchased at local Tourist Information Centres or contact the address above quote reference DP 107 price £3.99 including postage and packing. There is also a free leaflet on the John Musgrave Heritage Trail.

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 above address.

Information on the Devon walking network, including the Dart Valley Trail, is also available by visiting www.discoverdevon.com.

OS maps for this walk:

Explorer (1:25,000 scale) OL20 South Devon

Landranger (1:50,000 scale) 202 Torbay and South Dartmoor