

Tamerton and Lopwell – The Mouth of the Tavy

Tamerton Foliot is an historic village on the northern edge of Plymouth. Although now within the City area, it retains something of its rural past and is well placed for access to the countryside north of Plymouth. This is the area where the River Tavy ends its course, meeting the Tamar at a wide estuary, and it is the lower valley of the Tavy and its tributary streams that this walk explores.

One of Devon's long-distance walking routes, the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail, has its southern terminus at Tamerton Foliot. Despite its name, geography dictates that this southern end of the Trail follows the Tavy rather than the Tamar to the edge of Plymouth. The walk described here crosses the quiet countryside just north of Plymouth as far as the tidal limit of the Tavy, then follows the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail back to Tamerton Foliot.

Note that this is a walk to be undertaken in the summer only. Two lengths of the route are on permitted paths, rather than rights of way, which are available to the public only from February to September inclusive. In addition, one of the public tracks used tends to get very wet in winter and can often only be negotiated in Wellingtons.

Fact File

Tamerton Foliot has a regular bus service from Plymouth City Centre. There is no formal car park in the village so if any of the residential roads are used for parking please be considerate to road users and residents. For timetable details of the bus services contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk.

Walk Length: 10km/6.25 miles: 3 stiles: 3 long and steady but not especially steep climbs, of 60m/200 feet, 85m/280 feet and 45m/150 feet.

Facilities: Tamerton Foliot has two general stores, an off-licence, a Post Office, telephone boxes and three pubs. There are public toilets at Lopwell, at the far end of the walk.

The Walk

Start the walk in the centre of the village of Tamerton Foliot, outside the Post Office and stores.

Tamerton is an ancient settlement, recorded as early as the 6th century as the landing place of three Celtic saints, Indract, Dominic and Budoc. By the time of the Domesday Book it is recorded as "Tambretona" and by the 1100s it was in the possession of the Foliots, a Norman family who gave their name to the settlement. It continued as a farming and fishing community until the 19th century, when it began to prosper as the centre of market gardens supplying Plymouth.

Follow the road through the village uphill, passing the Methodist Church, to a mini-roundabout. Bear slightly right here up Whitsoncross Lane and keep going uphill, passing three more mini-roundabouts.

There are some quite grand 19th century villas along this road, built for successful market gardeners. The Methodist Church also dates to this time.

At the top the road swings left and there are two minor lanes leaving to the right, one on the bend and one some 50m further on. Turn right at the second of these lanes, i.e. the turning before Linton Close.

This is a typical old Devon lane with high hedgebanks. Already the urban area seems far behind. After climbing gently, a vantage point is passed giving superb views over the Tavy valley, Bere Ferrers village prominent ahead and left. Behind is the distinctive landmark of Kit

Hill and its chimney, a feature of views along much of the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail between Plymouth and Launceston. To the left is the junction of the Tavy and Tamar, the former crossed by its railway viaduct.

Keep on the lane as it descends into a tributary valley of the Tavy, the valley of Blaxton Creek. Continue on to the bottom, passing Ashleigh Barton farm.

The farmhouse is of 16th century origin, although the first record of a farm here dates to 1244. Behind the farm is the probable site of a deserted medieval village – N.B. there is no public access. The village could well have been abandoned at the time of the Black Death.

After passing Ashleigh Barton bear right at the junction to descend steeply to the bridge over Blaxton Creek. Climb the other side to the junction of Blaxton Cross and here turn right, off the road, up the unsurfaced track and through the gate. On reaching the field keep to the left-hand edge, along the line of an old track, and climb to a gate. Pass through and continue up the green lane ahead.

This is Pound Lane, the line of an old road which would have given access between the farms at the top of the hill and a quay on Blaxton Creek – this will be passed on the return leg of the walk. It is recorded as a road on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps of the early 19th century.

Eventually the long steady climb eases and the green lane levels out. After passing through two sets of gates the lane arrives at a surfaced road by a farm. Continue ahead along the road.

This is Pound Farm. The buildings are largely 19th century in origin, when the farm was surrounded by orchards, but its name indicates that it was presumably at an earlier date the location of a stock pound.

The road soon arrives at a junction. Turn left here. At the next junction bear to the right, past the Old School.

The large houses just before the junction are old almshouses. Both these and the school date from the 19th century and are associated with the estate of Maristow House, the local manor house to be passed a little later.

About 100 metres/yards beyond the junction turn left along the unsurfaced track, past the gate.

Note that this is not a right of way but access is permitted by the Maristow Estate from 1st February to 30th September. It is an old estate carriage drive and now makes an attractive woodland walk.

On reaching a road cross over and continue on the carriage drive opposite. This then emerges on a road at a junction. Turn right, downhill, and cross the cattle grid.

The walk has now arrived at the Tavy. There are superb views down the river to the railway viaduct where the Tavy meets the Tamar. On the hillside on the left is Maristow House. The site is first recorded in 1291 as Martins-Stow, the site of an early chapel dedicated to St. Martin. The present mansion house dates from 1760, although the existing St. Martin's Chapel with its conspicuous spire was built as late as 1877-79. The house was the centre of the local estate and the seat of the Lopes family (Lord Roborough) until the early 20th century. Note that there is no access to the house.

Continue down the hill to the two cattle grids at the bottom.

Over the grid on the right is Lopwell Dam, the tidal limit of the Tavy. This is a good spot for a picnic and it is worth making the short diversion to the dam. There are also public toilets here. Most of the buildings here were constructed in connection with the dam by Plymouth

City Council in 1953. On the other side of the river are the remains of 19th century mines. At that time there was a small but thriving community here including a public house. Note that the ford and pedestrian walkway across the river is tidal and cannot be used for at least two hours either side of high tide. Tide tables are posted at the dam.

The walk has now joined the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail, which is followed back to Tamerton Foliot.

From the dam return to the cattle grids and cross both. A short way along the lane after the second grid bear off to the right and cross a stile.

This leads to another permitted path, although there is no time limit on the use of this one. It follows the embankment enclosing reclaimed land next to the Tavy. It offers a good opportunity to see the Tavy close up, a site of considerable importance for its wildlife. The mudflats and marshes and their reeds, seaweeds and sea-grasses mean that the area is of great value as a wintering site for wildfowl and waders. This importance has led to the whole estuary complex being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Leave the embankment over a stile and turn right along the narrow lane.

Note the unexpected sign about motor vehicles on the riverside. This is actually the location of an old ford across the river, known as Chucks Ford, and still a legal right of way. After many years of disuse it was fairly recently renovated for use largely as a result of efforts by a local horseriding group. A little further on is Maristow Quay, first recorded in the 1290's when silver was shipped from the Bere Ferrers mines over the river to here and then on to London. The present boat house is 19th century.

Continue along the lane. At the bottom of the hill, where the woods start on the right, look out for a kissing gate and pass through.

This is the start of another permitted path, again restricted in use to the period from February to September inclusive. Note the apple waymark, the symbol of the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail.

Cross a small footbridge and keep to the path that is parallel to and a little above the Tavy. The path passes the remains of an old boathouse then arrives at a viewpoint over the Tavy.

The viewpoint was constructed in the 19th century for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maristow House. It provides a superb river panorama, over to Bere Ferrers on the opposite bank and also up and down the river. It is noticeable how much the river has widened to a true estuary in the short distance from Lopwell.

Bear left here, away from the river, alongside the creek.

This is the mouth of Blaxton Creek, first crossed on the outward leg. Looking across the creek the remains of Blaxton Quay and its limekiln will be seen on the opposite side. Until the last couple of hundred years the rivers were the main means of transportation in the area and quays such as Blaxton were important places. There was also a tide mill here, the creek being dammed as a mill pond in use until the end of the 19th century.

After a couple of hundred metres/yards the path forks. Keep left, on the main path, to avoid descending to the foreshore. Keep following the path parallel to the creek until it arrives at a stile onto a surfaced lane. Cross the stile and turn right. Cross the creek at a ford then follow the lane sharp back and left at the next junction.

The public footpath straight ahead here is a cul-de-sac which leads to Blaxton Quay.

At the top of the short hill turn sharp right and back along the farm track. Follow the track to the yard at Horsham Farm.

The farm is first recorded in 1270. However, the name is of Saxon origin, meaning the meadow where horses are kept.

At the yard continue ahead on the concrete track then, after passing through the yard, bear slightly right and downhill, still on a concrete track. Continue as it becomes a slightly rougher track, following it round to the left at the end. The track enters a field on the right here but the path continues ahead, uphill on a green lane next to an electricity pylon.

This steep, enclosed and sometimes rocky green lane is Horsham Lane, an old packhorse track linking Tamerton Foliot with Horsham Farm and Blaxton Quay. Care may be needed near the bottom when the track is often wet and can be slippery.

The green lane soon levels out. Keep following to the end, then bear right to arrive at Warleigh Lodge.

This is the lodge to Warleigh House, probably built in the 18th century. There is a superb view from here over the Tamar into Cornwall.

Ahead is the entrance to Warleigh House, but there is no public access. The house has medieval origins, but is chiefly Tudor (16th century) and 19th century. Originally the house of the Foliots, it has been the possession of a number of landed families.

Bear left from the lodge along the road and soon Tamerton Foliot Church comes into view. Follow the lane to the bottom and at the junction turn right. At the mini-roundabout turn right into Fore Street to descend to Tamerton Foliot village centre.

Further Information

For details of the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail, an information pack is available in local Tourist Information Centres price £3. It may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Holiday Line, PO Box 55, Barnstaple, EX32 8YR, telephone 0870 608 5531 price £4.50 including post and packing. Quote reference DTY/DP19 and make cheques payable to Devon County Council.

Tamerton Foliot is also the end of the Plymouth Cross-City Link, a route which joins the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail with the West Devon Way, another long-distance route linking Plymouth with Okehampton. There is a free leaflet on the Cross-City Link, available from local Tourist Information Centres or from the above address – quote reference DTY/DP80.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon obtain the free brochure "Discover Devon – Walking" from local Tourist Information Centres or from the address above. Alternatively visit www.discoverdevon.com.

OS Maps for this walk: Explorer (1:25,000 scale): No. 108 Lower Tamar Valley and Plymouth;
Landranger (1:50,000 scale): No. 201 Plymouth and Launceston.