

DEVON'S TRIASSIC COAST

The coastline of East Devon is part of the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site. This is England's first natural World Heritage Site, putting it on a par with the Great Barrier Reef and the Grand Canyon as one of the wonders of the natural world.

The World Heritage Site stretches from Studland Bay in Dorset to Orcombe Point near Exmouth, and is often referred to as the "Jurassic Coast". Its importance is that it shows the natural geological progression over 185 million years of earth history in just 95 miles. However, this progression includes geological eras older and younger than the Jurassic period. In the west of the site the geological era shown is the older Triassic, and it is in this part of the World Heritage Site that this walk is found.

The walk starts at the mouth of the River Otter at Budleigh Salterton, follows the river inland then crosses to the coast to follow the South West Coast Path back to Budleigh Salterton.

Fact File

Budleigh Salterton is served by buses from Exmouth and Sidmouth. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk.

Walk Length: 11km/7 miles; 1 stile; generally fairly level with one climb of 40m/130ft and another of 30m/100ft.

Facilities: Budleigh Salterton - all facilities; Otterton - shop, pub, refreshments, buses.

The Walk

The walk starts at the Limekiln Car Park at the mouth of the River Otter, at the eastern end of Budleigh Salterton. If arriving in the town by bus, alight at the Public Hall. Walk back to the High Street, turn left and continue along Fore Street and the seafront promenade to the car park.

Budleigh Salterton is known for its pebble beach. These pebbles are a feature of the geology of this part of Devon and they help to form the extensive common lands inland of the town. They are a result of action by the sea and rivers which covered this area in the Triassic era, over 200 million years ago.

Head for the rear right hand corner of the car park and follow the surfaced path alongside the Otter Estuary, signed as the Coast Path.

The Coast Path diverts inland here to get around the estuary. Although a relatively small estuary, the marsh and wetland has made it a valuable resource for wildlife and it is maintained as a nature reserve by the Devon Wildlife Trust. Look out for the information boards alongside the path to discover some of the estuary's nature conservation interest. This length of path is maintained as suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs and has a number of viewpoints over the estuary.

The all-ability path ends at White Bridge, the bridge which crosses the Otter. This also carries the Coast Path, and the walk returns this way.

To continue on the walk, at White Bridge follow the path opposite, still alongside the Otter, signed to Otterton.

The river gets its name from the animals which used to frequent it, and this name dates back to Saxon times. In more recent years otters virtually disappeared from the river, but are now making a welcome comeback. However, there is little chance of seeing one of these shy, largely nocturnal creatures. More likely to be seen is the brilliant flash of a kingfisher, these beautiful birds being relatively common here.

Keep ahead alongside the Otter at a junction of paths.

Off to the left is a short cut back to Budleigh Salterton. To use this, follow the red circles on the footpath signs.

The aqueduct coming into the Otter here carries water from Budleigh Brook, on the western side of the valley. It was originally built to help drain the water meadows in order to reclaim the land for agriculture. It dates to the early years of the 19th century.

Pass a footbridge over the Otter, then continue ahead through a gate.

As the path approaches a road bridge ahead, the distinctive appearance of a small country railway station can be seen over to the left. Now a private house, this was East Budleigh station on the branch line which ran through the valley. It was closed as part of the Beeching cuts in 1967.

Climb up to the road and carefully turn right and cross the bridge to the village of Otterton.

Immediately on the right is Otterton Mill, with its artists' studios, working mill exhibition, crafts and refreshments. It dates from the 18th century and is on the site of a monastic mill which originally belonged to Mont St. Michel in Brittany. It is an important example of a working water mill little altered since the mid-19th century.

Continue ahead through the village street, passing on the left the village pub, the Kings Arms, and the village Post Office and stores.

Otterton is a very attractive village lined with thatched cottages, some of which date back as far as the 16th century. It is also lent charm by the stream running the length of the village alongside the street.

At the road junction at the end of the village street turn sharp right into Lea Road. At the top turn left and follow the quiet lane uphill. Bear right at the next junction, still walking uphill.

At the top of the lane bear left opposite Stantyway Farm, signposted to the Coast Path.

Don't be surprised if you are puffing - the name Stantyway means steep way so our ancestors obviously felt the same.

Keep to the path, then bear right approaching Monks Wall. Cross the stile at the end and follow the hedge ahead on the right.

On the left there are superb views along the coast of the World Heritage Site, Ladram Bay prominent in the foreground. The red sandstone cliffs also owe their origins to the Triassic river systems. Beyond, the views take in Sidmouth and on to Beer Head, the most westerly chalk outcrop in England.

Continue down to meet the Coast Path

To the left, Ladram Bay has seasonal shops and a pub.

Turn right on the Coast Path, signposted to Budleigh Salterton. The path climbs to a World War II lookout, then continues to the viewpoint of Brandy Head.

This name reflects the importance smuggling once had on what was a remote coast in the 17th and 18th centuries.

To the right the view stretches down the coast to Straight Point. The walk start and finish point at Budleigh Salterton can be seen in the valley ahead.

Follow the Coast Path as it descends from Brandy Head and then continues down to the mouth of the Otter.

Budleigh Salterton is tantalisingly close here, but there is no crossing of the Otter at its mouth and wading is not recommended because of the depth and the strength of the current. This spot does give a good view of the ridge of pebbles across the mouth of the Otter, forcing the river to divert to the east. The longshore drift causing this diversion also results in spits across the mouths of other rivers in the area, most notably that at Dawlish Warren across the mouth of the Exe.

The Coast Path is now followed behind the pine trees which form a prominent landmark for Budleigh Salterton. Continue parallel to the river until the path reaches a lane at South Farm. Go on to the lane and fork left to the bridge over the Otter.

This is White Bridge again, passed on the outward leg.

Turn left immediately after White Bridge on the all-ability path back to the Limekiln car park at Budleigh Salterton.

Further Information

For details of the South West Coast Path, an annual guide including an accommodation list is published by the South West Coast Path Association, price £6. It may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £7.50 including p and p. [quote reference DTY/DP33; cheques payable to Devon County Council].

For further walking in the Otter Valley see "Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley" produced by the Otter Valley Association and available locally.

Also available locally is a free leaflet on the Jurassic Coast, as well as the Official Guide, "A Walk Through Time", price £4.95.

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 address above. Alternatively visit the website www.discoverdevon.com which has all the walks information and an order form.

Also available locally is a free leaflet on the Jurassic Coast, as well as the Official Guide, "A Walk Through Time", price £4.95.

OS maps for this walk:

Landranger [1: 50,000 scale] no. 192 Exeter, Sidmouth and surrounding areas.
Explorer [1: 25,000 scale] no. 115 Exmouth and Sidmouth.