

WALKING FROWARD

Kingswear is an attractive village overlooking the Dart Estuary, just across the river from Dartmouth. No fewer than three ferries cross the river at or near Kingswear, so it is an important location on the South West Coast Path in South Devon. In addition, the Dart Valley Trail route from Totnes passes along the estuary, with one of its seaward termini at Kingswear.

As well as its scenic estuary setting, Kingswear is also blessed with some superb coastal and country landscapes nearby. This walk gives a sample of some of the best of these landscapes. It crosses inland over the quiet peninsula between Kingswear and Brixham as far as the viewpoint of Scabbacombe Head, returning along the Coast Path via Froward Point. There are some wonderful views, and the walk also has its share of ups and downs, so pick a bright day, take a snack with you and take your time to savour this relatively unknown part of South Devon.

Fact File

Kingswear is served by buses from Paignton and Brixham and by ferries from Dartmouth. More exotic transport access is provided by the Paignton and Kingswear Steam Railway. It should be noted that parking is very limited in Kingswear and Dartmouth.

Walk Length: 7.5 miles/12 km (there is a shorter version of 4.5 miles/7 km); 4 stiles; one climb of 100m/330 feet and several shorter ones ranging from 25m/80 feet to 60m/200 feet.

Facilities: Dartmouth has all facilities; Kingswear – pubs, shop, toilets, also a café at the station open when trains are running; there is a tea room at Coleton Fishacre when the grounds are open.

For bus timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk. For dates and times for the Steam Railway (which usually operates April-October), contact 01803 555872 or visit www.paignton-steamrailway.co.uk. For opening times for Coleton Fishacre contact 01803 752466 (generally open weekends and some weekdays from March to October).

The Walk

Start outside the Royal Dart Hotel in Kingswear, situated between the passenger ferry and the car ferry and next to the railway station.

Notice the early 19th Century milestone next to the entrance to the car ferry. Next to it is a memorial plaque to Colonel H. Jones, who lost his life in the Falklands War in 1982. Colonel Jones will figure again later in the walk.

Walk downhill and go through the arch next to Kingswear Post Office. Under the arch turn left up Alma Steps and at the top of the steps turn right, following the Coast Path signs.

If you turn left you will come to Kingswear Church. The tower is all that remains of the original medieval church, the remainder being rebuilt in the 1840s. This rebuilding marked the change in Kingswear's status to a separate parish; previously it had been part of Brixham parish and the church merely a chapel.

Turn right at the top of the steps. Keep following the lane until it narrows to a footpath, then continue ahead at two junctions as it joins a private road (but public footpath).

There is a good view ahead over the river to Dartmouth Castle. It was built in the late 1400s as a public defensive work, unusual when most castles were the private property of lords. It was the first to be purpose designed for defence by cannon.

Keep following the lane towards the mouth of the estuary. It then swings left and a little further on the signed Coast Path leaves it to go down a flight of steps to the right. This is the route of the return leg. To continue on our walk, carry on along the lane ahead.

Note that there is another memorial to Colonel Jones here.

Our route ahead continues along the lip of a valley leading from the coast. Looking back, there are scenic views over the sea at Mill Bay Cove.

At the fork in the lane bear right and downhill, signposted towards Brownstone. Bear right at the bottom, crossing the stream in the valley, then start the climb up a rocky track.

This track, cut into the surrounding landscape down to the bedrock, is an old packhorse track. It is one of a number of such green lanes in the South Hams of Devon, this network being a superb way of exploring the countryside.

Towards the top it joins a concrete track - continue ahead, still uphill though less steeply now. Keep on to the top, then bear slightly left to the surfaced lane next to Higher Brownstone and follow this lane.

A little further on, a track goes off to the right. This is a short cut back to the Coast Path for the return leg, passing Dartmouth's Daymark, the top of which can be seen on the skyline. The 80 foot/24m Daymark was built in 1864 by the Dartmouth Harbour Commissioners as a guide to mariners to the position of the harbour entrance. The short cut reaches the Coast Path at Froward Point.

To continue on the full route, carry on along the lane ahead. Keep going past a small National Trust car park. The lane then arrives at a junction by the entrance to the Trust's property of Coleton Fishacre.

Coleton Fishacre is a house built in the arts and crafts style in 1925/6 by Oswald Milne for the D'Oyly Carte family, best known for their association with Gilbert and Sullivan. It is superbly located in a valley leading to the sea and surrounded by gardens originally planted by Lady Dorothy D'Oyly Carte.

At the junction here bear ahead and right, signposted to Coleton Camp. This track soon reaches a car park.

This is the site of Coleton Camp, a World War II establishment used as a base for coastal defence.

Pass the car park and continue to a stile. Cross this and bear left along the track, now heading towards the sea.

This pleasant track continues across the high pastureland of the peninsula east of Kingswear; there are good views all round, with the sea ahead and to the right.

The track ends at two gates ahead. Go through the left hand of the two gates, a pedestrian gate, the narrower of the two. Follow the path ahead outside the edge of the field. The path descends to a stile. Cross this to arrive at a bench at a cross path.

This attractive spot is Scabbacombe Head, and the bench is a good place to stop and reflect. To the left the Devon coast curves away to Berry Head with its lighthouse. In front is the headland of Sharkham Point and nearer still the distinctive pointed shape of Crabrock Point.

Having crossed the stile turn right along the cross path. A little way along this path it meets the South West Coast Path.

From here, the Coast Path is followed back to Kingswear - keep an eye open for the Coast Path signs and the acorn symbol for a National Trail.

At the junction with the Coast Path bear right. Cross the stile then immediately descend to the left and follow the Coast Path as it descends from the cliff top to a lower level just above the rocks. The path then climbs steps to get around the back of Ivy Cove - something of a pull!

The path now gives superb views ahead of Froward Point with the Mew Stone offshore and, on the skyline ahead, the Dartmouth Daymark, previously seen from inland.

Another descent goes down to Pudcombe Cove, with its exotic vegetation.

This is the mouth of the valley in which sits Coleton Fishacre. The entrance to this National Trust house and garden was passed earlier - access is not normally permitted from the Coast Path unless you have a National Trust membership card.

At the T-junction turn left towards the sea then, when the path is immediately behind the cove, turn right, up the steps. Follow this path as it climbs away from the cove, zig-zagging inland slightly, until it reaches a stile.

The superb coastal walk continues with another magically scenic section. A series of short climbs then leads to the rocky ridge of Outer Froward Point, where views open up ahead of the coast around Start Bay to Start Point in the distance, its lighthouse just visible. Nearer, the entrance to the Dart Estuary can be seen receding to the right.

Another climb leads to a gate and, just beyond, a fork in the path. Keep to the left and descend in a wide zig-zag.

Until 1990 this relatively open area was an area of pine woodland. Some remnants may still be seen. The woodland was devastated by the storms which swept across South Devon in January 1990. Some re-planting is now taking place.

Continue downhill to arrive at the World War II searchlight installation at Inner Froward Point. Pass this and climb the steps to reach a gun emplacement.

This was the site of two guns installed in 1940 to protect Dartmouth and Slapton Sands. The guns had a range of 14 miles/22 km. The miniature railway carried the shells to and from the battery.

Climb up the railway and then more steps to arrive at the coastguard lookout.

The National Coastwatch Institution has a visitor centre here with local information. This is also where the short cut past the Daymark arrives at the coast.

From the top of the steps turn left, towards Kingswear.

The path becomes something of a rollercoaster as it passes behind Newfoundland Cove. The name of the cove is said to derive from the local trade with Newfoundland and its fishing banks from the 1600s to the 1800s.

The route then levels out and becomes more wooded as it enters the Warren Estate at a squeeze stile.

The path through the Warren Estate is dedicated to the memory of Colonel H. Jones, whose memorials have been seen earlier in the walk. He owned this land and was tragically killed in the Falklands campaign in 1982, when he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

A vantage point gives a superb view over the mouth of the estuary to Dartmouth Castle. It also allows Kingswear Castle to be seen. This smaller castle was built at about the same time as that on the Dartmouth side, around 1500. However, it became obsolete by the mid-1600s as a result of the development of long-range guns which were installed at Dartmouth. Nevertheless, it did hold out for a while in the Civil War until captured by Fairfax for the Parliamentary army.

There follows a steep descent to Mill Bay Cove. Turn right along the track then left just before the cattle grid.

The castellated building at the top of the beach was originally a mill, hence the name of the bay. It was later made more ornamental by the estate.

There follows a steep climb up zig-zag steps to arrive at the Colonel Jones memorial seen on the outward leg. Turn left and retrace your outward steps to Kingswear, remembering to bear left twice, to reach the top of Alma Steps. Descend to the Royal Dart, the ferries and the railway station.

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 and available in bookshops and Tourist Information Centres. It may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £7.50 including post and packing - quote reference DTY/DP33.

An information pack on the Dart Valley Trail is available from local Tourist Information Centres price £2 or from the address above price £5.50 including post and packing - quote reference DTY/DP42.

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 the walks information.

For further local information, there is a National Trust leaflet "Walks around Dartmouth South Devon", available from Trust outlets locally price £0.75. The Tourist Information Centre in Dartmouth also carries a variety of local walks information.

O.S. Maps for this walk:-

Explorer (1:25,000 scale) No. OL20 South Devon
Landranger (1:50,000 scale) No. 202 Torbay and South Dartmoor