

FOLLOWING JOHN MUSGRAVE TO COCKINGTON

In 2005 the South Devon Group of the Ramblers' Association were left a legacy by one of their members, John Musgrave, on his death. The legacy was used to create a lasting reminder of John, and his passion for walking, by the establishment of a long-distance walk skirting the inland side of Torbay. The route, which stretches from Maidencombe in the north to Brixham in the south, was created by the South Devon Ramblers in partnership with a variety of local bodies - the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, Torbay Council, Devon County Council, South Hams District Council and Teignbridge District Council. The result is the John Musgrave Heritage Trail, a 35 mile trail which explores much of what makes up the area's unique and varied landscape - coastline, rolling hills, combes, estuary and villages.

This walk offers a sample of the route, using the very frequent and convenient bus service which links Torbay to Newton Abbot. This sample starts at Kingskerswell, just north of Torquay, and winds through the countryside on this edge of the town to the little gem of Cockington. The walk description begins and ends at Cockington, but there is also a description for those arriving at Torquay by train. The walk is well waymarked throughout.

Fact File

Walk Length: 6 miles/9.5km; three stiles; some relatively short ups and downs, and one climb of 45m/150 feet.

Facilities: Torquay has all facilities; Kingskerswell has pubs and shops; Cockington has pub, shops and café.

Torquay is accessible by bus from Plymouth, Exeter and all parts of South Devon. It is also served by the rail network. There is a bus service from Torquay to Cockington during the summer. Cockington also has car parks.

The Walk

The walk is described here starting and finishing at Cockington. However, it is also possible to use Torquay's railway station as the start and finish point, and this alternative is also indicated.

From the centre of Cockington follow Cockington Lane, next to the thatched forge, towards the seafront. A couple of hundred yards down the lane, just after passing Lanscombe Lodge Cottage and Lanscombe House, a path leaves on the left at a low stile. Follow this path over a stream and on along the valley.

This part of the walk, between Cockington and the seafront, follows another waymarked route, the Torbay-Totnes Trail. Look out for the blue signs.

Originally, the centre of Cockington village had been some way distant, next to the church and Cockington Court, both of which will be passed near the end of the walk. However, in the early years of the 1800s the Lord of the Manor, Roger Mallock, decided he wanted a view from the Court uncluttered by buildings. He therefore had the barns and the cottages knocked down and a new village rebuilt out of sight, but in "picturesque" style. The result is today's Cockington. Most of the buildings therefore date to around 1800-1810, although several of the farm buildings are considerably older, pre-dating the building of the new village.

Continue down the valley next to the stream on a boardwalk over the water meadows and then on down the valley until the path ends at a picturesque gate by a road junction. Go straight across into Cockington Lane and walk along the path next to the road. At the end of the path cross the road to the path on the opposite side. Pass under the railway bridge to arrive at the seafront.

For those starting and ending at Cockington, this is where to catch the bus to Kingskerswell to walk the John Musgrave Heritage Trail back to Cockington. The bus stop is a short way along the seafront to the left. Get the bus going to Newton Abbot.

As indicated earlier, it is also possible to begin and end at Torquay station, as the bus to Kingskerswell also passes there.

Alight from the bus at Jury's Corner at Kingskerswell and walk back to the traffic lights at the crossroads by the Sloop. Turn right down Barnhill Road. At Hall's Lane turn right, next to Broadgate Lodge. At School Road at the end turn left, then immediately right into Rose Hill, opposite the War Memorial.

Kingskerswell is an old village, but those travelling along the Torquay-Newton Abbot Road are generally unaware of its attractions. The old part of the village was on the original road between Newton Abbot and Torre Abbey until bypassed by the 19th century turnpike road.

Continue across the railway bridge and turn right at the far end. Turn left immediately before the church.

The railway bridge was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and opened in 1848 for the South Devon Railway.

Kingskerswell Church is in an attractive setting. Originating in the 1300s, much was added in the 1400s, including the tower. There was much restoration in the 1870s.

Having turned left before the church, continue past the thatched Pitt House.

Pitt House is an old building. Originally a farmhouse, it dates from the early 16th century.

At the end go left, then almost immediately right, into a narrow lane. This is Church Way.

Up on the right is the now largely wooded area of Kerswell Downs. There is evidence of prehistoric field systems on the Downs.

The mostly well-surfaced Church Way makes a delightful means to pass through this attractive and surprisingly quiet countryside.

Bear left at the converted farm buildings to reach a lane. Turn right here, passing Whilborough House, into the hamlet of North Whilborough. At the junction turn left. Climb to another junction at the top and turn right then immediately left, down a narrow lane.

Although there is the faint sound of distant traffic on the Torbay Ring Road, the character and "feel" of the landscape here, all steep hills and deep valleys, is that of an unexpectedly remote area.

At the bottom, follow the lane round to the right and through the delightful hamlet of South Whilborough.

This tiny lane follows the edge of an attractive valley which eventually opens out as it nears the line of the Torquay - Newton Abbot road, now to be seen and heard ahead.

Follow the lane to the junction at the end and turn right. Pass underneath the Ring Road and on into the old village of Edginswell.

Edginswell was once a relatively remote rural village. Despite its proximity to modern development, it is surprisingly unchanged in appearance from earlier days, centred as it is around old farm buildings.

Fork right up the hill, into Higher Edginswell Lane, following the steeply rising hill round to the right.

This lane marks an abrupt boundary between modern suburban Torquay on the left and a more traditional South Devon landscape of hills, hedges and copses on the right.

Higher Edginswell Lane eventually ends at Exe Hill. Turn right here, still climbing, then take the second turning on the left, Fernworthy Close. Follow the road through the housing to a main road, cross via the refuge island and descend to a gate and stile.

The walk has now reached the Cockington Estate. All the land on the Estate is the property of the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, and maintained by the Trust for the benefit of the landscape and wildlife and for public access.

Go into the Estate and continue on the right hand side of the two paths ahead. Keep to the obvious path as it descends a little and follows the side of an attractive valley. As the path descends to a junction by a copse, bear right, into the valley bottom. At the junction at the bottom cross the valley floor and climb the other side. Climb fairly steeply then at the top of the field follow the path round to the left. A little further on, follow the path round to the right, away from the valley, next to a copse.

The vistas from here over the unspoiled valley to Torquay and the headland beyond are superb. Now and again the tower of Cockington Church may be glimpsed in the foreground.

Follow the path away from the copse and then round to the left where it crosses two dry valleys to arrive at a junction of paths. Turn left here then continue ahead along the hedged green lane.

Soon the church at Cockington will be seen ahead and on the right.

At the gateway where the church is seen, a path goes off to the right. Follow this path, which then descends to the left. At the bottom cross the low stile to arrive next to Cockington Court and behind Cockington Church.

Cockington Court was the home of the Cary family from the 14th century until the 17th century and then the Mallock family. The current house dates largely from the 16th and 17th centuries and has had its current appearance since its rebuilding by the Mallocks in 1820. It was purchased by Torquay Corporation in 1935 and is now the property of the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, who use it as their headquarters. There is also a craft centre and restaurant here.

As mentioned earlier, this part of Cockington was the original village centre until it was moved by the Mallocks in the early 1800s. The parkland in front of the Court now makes an attractive open area.

From the front of Cockington Court follow the main drive ahead, forking left at the end past the Higher Lodge to the road. Turn left at the road to the centre of Cockington Village.

For those who started at Cockington, this completes the walk.

Those who started from Torquay Station should now follow the walk instructions at the beginning to the seafront. Arriving at the seafront, turn left and continue for 500m/550 yards to reach the station.

Further Information

A guide book on the John Musgrave Heritage Trail is available in local Tourist Information Centres and bookshops, price £2. It may also be obtained from the Discover Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £3.99 including postage and packing. Make cheques payable to Devon County Council and quote reference DP107. There is also a free introductory leaflet, available locally or from the above address quoting reference DP106.

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.

OS maps for this walk:

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

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