

Walk No. 15 - Devon's Western Frontier

For most of its length, Devon's western frontier with Cornwall is marked by the River Tamar. The valley of the Tamar is highly attractive, a fact recognised by the designation of the southern end of the valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This designation is given only to areas deemed to be of landscape importance on a national basis.

One of Devon's long-distance walking routes, the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail, follows the valley between Plymouth and Launceston. This walk follows a length of that Trail and then doubles back to form a circuit.

The walk is based on the village of Bere Alston, in the heart of the designated area. Bere Alston has a long history as a mining town and mining is one of the recurring themes on this walk together with the Tamar's other important historical legacy, market gardening.

Fact File

Bere Alston station is on the Tamar Valley branch line. This very scenic line runs north from Plymouth up the valley to Gunnislake just over the border in Cornwall. It is an ideal introduction to the valley and the perfect way of reaching the start point. For timetable details contact National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950.

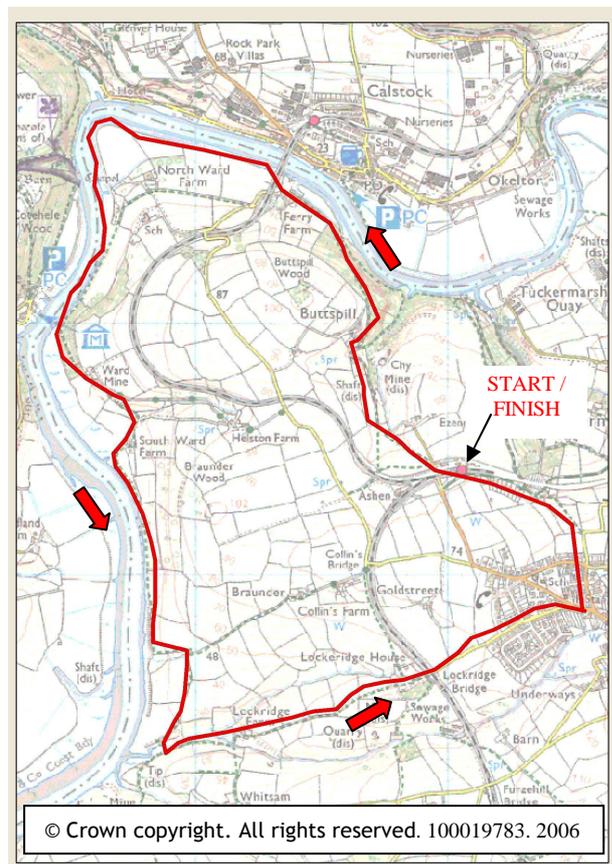
Bere Alston village and station are also served by buses to and from Tavistock. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

Walk Length: 8km/5 miles: one long but fairly gentle climb: 5 stiles.

OS Maps for this walk:

- Landranger (1: 50,000 scale) no.201 Plymouth and Launceston.
- Explorer (1:25,000 scale) no 108 Lower Tamar Valley and Plymouth

Facilities: Bere Alston (pub, refreshments, toilets, shops).



The Walk

Bere Alston is a large village with a long history of mining for metals, dating back to silver mines in the medieval period. During the 19th and early 20th centuries it also

became the centre of an important market gardening and flower growing industry, this importance being enhanced by the railway running through the Tamar Valley.

The valley is lucky to have retained the branch rail line, [although much of it was once part of the Waterloo-Plymouth main line], and this walk is based on the station at Bere Alston. The station is a little way out of the village and is well signposted. Bere Alston itself is signposted from Tavistock.

Leave the station forecourt and turn right under the railway bridge, following the sign for the pedestrian ferry. A little way down the lane cross the stile on the left and bear right across the field and downhill, following the apple symbol [the sign of the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail].

On the skyline ahead is the distinct chimney of the mine on Kit Hill, just over the Tamar in Cornwall. The chimney is a prominent landmark in the lower Tamar Valley.

At the bottom of the field keep walking ahead to a stile into woods. Cross this and follow the path downhill. When the path forks, keep left, still following the apple symbol.

These woods were once the site of mining activity centred on Buttspill Mine. In the 19th century lead and the mineral fluorspar were mined here.

After a short climb, the path descends steadily to the Tamar, the attractive old Cornish river port of Calstock visible on the opposite bank. Follow the green lane to the farm and turn right opposite the farmhouse to the river embankment.

The farm, now called Ferry Farm, was once the Passage Inn. This is the site of an ancient ferry crossing of the Tamar which is said to have originated in Saxon times and continued until the 1950's. A ferry service has recently been revived here for the summer season as part of the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail. There will be a timetable on the ferry landing stage; times depend on the state of the tide.

Follow the marked permitted path on the embankment to pass underneath the railway viaduct.

The viaduct carries the Tamar Valley railway line over the river. Built between 1904 and 1908, it is constructed of pre-cast concrete blocks, manufactured here on site. This is one of the earliest uses of this type of construction.

Continue on the embankment path.

Looking ahead and to the left, Cotehele House can be seen high up in the woods. This impressive National Trust house dates back to Tudor times and was the chief seat of the important Edgcumbe family. It can be reached by footpath from Calstock and the ferry also calls at Cotehele Quay.

Keep on the embankment as it follows a sharp bend to the left in the Tamar. At the end of the embankment cross the stile and turn right, following the apple symbol. Keeping parallel to the river, pass through the gap in the stone wall and continue ahead.

Through the trees and across the river will be seen Cotehele Quay, once an important Tamar landing point. Part of the National Trust's Cotehele estate, it is still a popular spot, with museum displays, pub and café and an old Tamar sailing barge, the *Shamrock*. This is also a landing stage for the Calstock Ferry.

At the end of the field cross the stile and follow the path into the woods. Keep to the main path as it climbs to a gate. Pass through and continue ahead past the house. After the gate at the far end of the yard is a junction of tracks. Fork right here, downhill.

The house just passed is Ward Mine, the site of a silver and lead mine of the 19th century, although records indicate silver mining was here as long ago as the 13th century. The farmhouse here is converted from mine buildings.

The hillside on the left was once one of the Tamar Valley soft fruit orchards. One or two trees still remain. A better impression of how the Tamar Valley would have looked at the height of the market gardening period is obtained from looking over the river, where the hillsides are still used for fruit and flower growing.

At the bottom of the track go straight ahead on a grassy path to a gate to the left of the house. Go through the left of the two gates here and continue ahead along the bottom of the field. Keep going to the far end where a gate leads into a wood. Follow the path through the wood to another gate and stile which lead into a field.

This wood is a fairly recent development. The hillside was formerly occupied by flower growing and in spring, daffodils are still seen all over the now wooded slopes.

Follow the bottom of the field to the bank of trees at the far end. Turn left uphill, alongside the bank. Just after a gate in the bank a track descends to the right. Follow this down, cross the stream carefully and climb to the corner of a field. Continue ahead along the top of this field, hedge to the left.

This spot gives a good view down the Tamar over the riverside reed beds. These areas are very important for their wildlife habitat and contribute towards the Lower Tamar being a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Go through the gap into the next field and continue alongside the hedge. Towards the bottom look out for a stile on the left. Cross this then pass over a marshy, often muddy area to another footpath. Turn left here, following the apple symbol once more.

Approaching the farm buildings at Lockeridge, bear left through a gate and then right, past the buildings and on to a hard track. Follow this uphill.

Views open up over the Cornish side of the Tamar, Kit Hill again becoming prominent on the skyline to the left. In the woodland near the top of the track are spoil heaps and remains of Lockeridge Mine. This silver and lead mine was another active working in the 19th century which had medieval origins.

Pass under the railway bridge and continue uphill. On reaching the edge of Bere Alston continue ahead to the junction with the main road. At this junction bear right and ahead. For shops, toilets and pub continue along this road. To continue the walk, take the next left.

At the junction with Broad Park Road go straight across into the narrow lane opposite. Where the lane swings right take the wooden gate on the left [apple symbol] and then follow the fenced path downhill.

There is a superb view of Calstock and its viaduct from here, as well as Kit Hill and other mine chimneys. On a clear day the outline of Bodmin Moor is visible behind Kit Hill. To the right the woodlands mark the course of the Tamar upstream.

The path descends to a small wooded area. Follow the path along the top edge of the wood and then descend some steps to a main track. Turn left here then fork left immediately [apple symbols]. Turn right at the end to return to the station forecourt.

Further Information

Information on the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail and other walking routes in Devon is available from www.discoverdevon.com and the Discover Devon Holiday Line 0870 608 5531 - quote DP19 for a Tamar Valley Discovery Trail Walking Guide (£4.50 inc. p&tp) or DP311 for Discover Devon Walking - A complete guide to walking trails in Devon (free publication). They can also be ordered from Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Rd, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW quoting references above.