

## Walk No. 2 - Torridge Estuary Rail Trail

This walk follows the Tarka Trail between Instow and Bideford. It is recommended that you start at Bideford, catch the bus from here to Instow and walk back. Alternatively, it is possible to start the trip from Barnstaple; if doing so, get the bus from Barnstaple to Instow, walk to Bideford and then take the bus back to Barnstaple.

Since the route uses a former railway, it is also suitable for use by cyclists, wheelchair users or as a pushchair walk.

### Fact File

A regular bus service operates between Bideford, Instow and Barnstaple. During most of the day buses run approximately every half an hour. For up-to-date travel information simply call the Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit [www.traveline.org.uk](http://www.traveline.org.uk). The bus stop is in Bideford on the Quay, opposite Kingsley House. From Barnstaple, catch the bus at the bus station in Silver Street.

Walk length: 5km/3 miles.

OS Maps : Explorer (1:25000) no. 139 Bideford, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple  
Landranger (1:50000) no. 180 Barnstaple and Ilfracombe

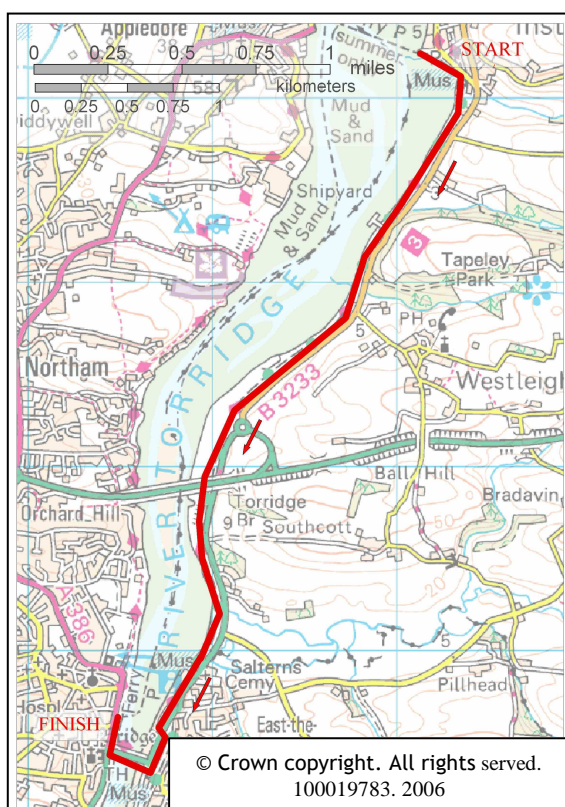
Refreshments: Instow (pub and shops); East-the-Water (pub and shops); Bideford (all facilities).

### The Walk

Get off the bus at Instow Quay. Arriving from Bideford, walk forward 100m towards the Promenade (arriving from Barnstaple, walk back 100m to the Promenade).

The Promenade offers a superb view of the Torridge Estuary, joined by its "twin" the Taw from the right, and across the river to Appledore.

Now walk back to the bus stop at the Quay and continue along the road past the general store, pub, and Post Office. At the end of the road is the level crossing at Instow Station. Cross the line and turn right towards the station platform.



Immediately on your left is Instow signal box. Built in 1861 it has the distinction of being a listed building, very unusual for a signal box. Threatened with demolition when the railway closed, it was saved by the efforts of a local pressure group. The restored rails provide an appropriate setting.

Approaching the station platform you will see an information panel regarding the Tarka Trail and Instow and the plaque commemorating the Trail opening.

**Continue through the station and along the old railway.**

Note the post marking the mileage from Waterloo at the end of the station.

The railway was built in 1855 to link Bideford with Barnstaple and became part of the London and South Western Railway. Passenger services ended in the 1960s but the line was retained for clay trains into the 1980s. It now forms part of the Tarka Trail, a route following the wanderings of Tarka the Otter in the book of that name. This part of the railway is also used as part of the South West Coast Path as an alternative to the ferry crossing between Instow and Appledore.

**In the cutting some 300m after the station look out for a path leaving the track to the right.**

This leads to a viewpoint over the estuary at a restored lime kiln. These kilns burnt lime imported from South Wales; the burnt lime was used as a fertiliser. You will pass another alongside the track nearing Bideford.

**Return to the main track and continue onward.**

As the track opens out it gives superb views across to Appledore Shipyard. Appledore has a long history as a fishing and shipbuilding centre. The present covered shipyard dates to 1969.

It is also worth looking back at this point, down the estuary. The panorama shows Appledore and Instow framing the dunes of Braunton Burrows with the line of Saunton Down behind.

After passing the MOD's Zeta Berth, used for amphibious training, the track passes the entrance to Tapeley Gardens. Open to the public at certain times, the Italian style gardens were established by the mother of John Christie, the founder of Glyndebourne.

Shortly after Tapeley notice the church and village of Westleigh, on the hilltop to the left. (There is access to the road and bus stop at the Westleigh road turn).

Continuing, the estuary begins to narrow - a flood embankment was built into the river here resulting in marshland now occupying the area between the railway and the river. Not in use now for agriculture, it is an important wildlife habitat.

Further on, the view ahead is dominated by the A39 Torridge Bridge. Built in 1988, it carries the A39 high over the estuary. Having passed under the bridge, the view now centres on Bideford and its Long Bridge over the Torridge.

Bideford has an attractive location, seen to advantage from the track. Described by Charles Kingsley as "the little white town", it rises on a hillside above the estuary. The medieval Long Bridge enhances its setting. Its 24 arches are each of different span, said to be because local parishes paid different amounts towards its building, the span width reflecting the amount of money supplied.

**The track now enters East-the-Water and arrives at Bideford station.**

As the name suggests, East-the-Water is the extension to Bideford across the river and dates back as a suburb to the 1300's when the bridge was first built. Bideford Station includes an information point and refreshments are available in season. It is also the location of Bideford Railway Museum, housed in a replica signal box at the far end of the station. There is also a re-laid length of railway track where enthusiasts run a diesel locomotive.

**To return to Bideford go down the slope from the platform on the right.**

The Tarka Trail continues on the railway to Torrington Station, 9km/5.5miles distant, and beyond into the heart of Devon.

**From the platform go down the slope and steps and walk ahead over the Long Bridge. Turn right on the far side to return to the Quay.**

### Further Information

Information on the Tarka Trail and other walking routes in Devon is available from [www.discoverdevon.com](http://www.discoverdevon.com) and the Discover Devon Holiday Line 0870 608 5531.

Please quote:

DP311 - Discover Devon Walking - A complete guide to walking trails in Devon (free)

DP101 - Tarka Trail Information Leaflet (free)

DP102 - Tarka Trail Walkers' Guide Book (£3.50 inc. p and p)

Publications can also be ordered from Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Rd, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW quoting references above.