

Walk No. 21 Wembury, Wembury, Here We Come

The village of Wembury is on the south coast of Devon, not far from Plymouth. As well as being situated on the South West Coast Path, it is also the southern end of Devon's own Coast to Coast walk. This walk between the County's north and south coast follows the Two Moors Way from Lynmouth to Ivybridge, then one arm of the Erme-Plym Trail to reach the south coast at Wembury [the other arm goes to Plymouth].

This is a circular walk which follows the southern most end of the Erme-Plym Trail before doubling back across country to finish with a length of the Coast Path. If you are tempted to continue inland towards the north coast, check on the information on Devon's Coast to Coast given at the end of the walk description.

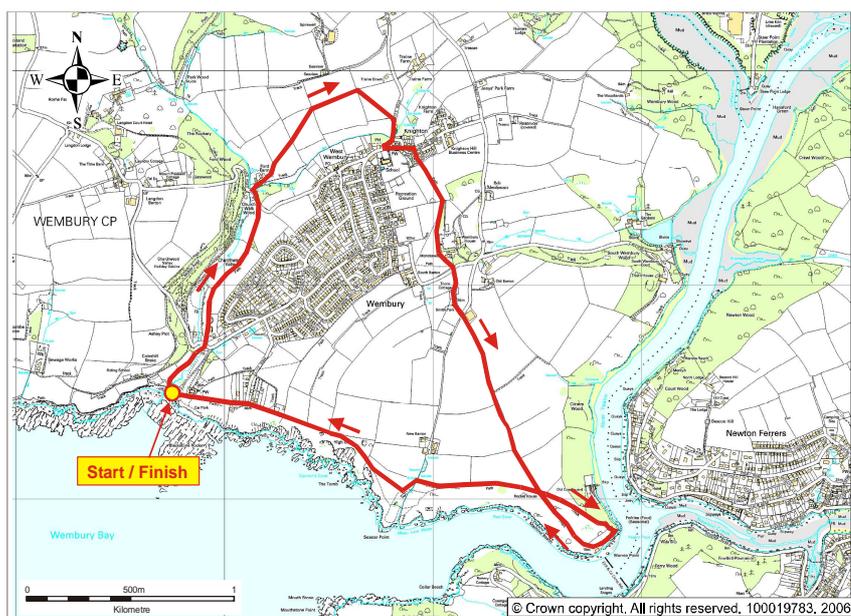
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There is a regular bus service to Wembury from Plymouth. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608.

Walk Length: 7km/4.5 miles; 2 stiles and 2 squeeze stiles; one climb of 50m/160ft and another of 80m/260ft if the optional loop at the Yealm is followed.

Facilities: Wembury Beach - car park, toilets, café; Knighton - shop, pub, buses.

The Walk



Start the walk at Wembury Beach, next to the Old Mill café.

This was formerly a water-powered corn mill. The sitting area outside the café is the old wheel pit and old millstones are used for café tables.

Turn right, along the Coast Path. Cross the top of the beach then go over the footbridge. Immediately afterwards go right along the signed path inland, parallel to the stream.

Note the information board on the Coast to Coast walk which begins and ends here.

This area was the subject of plans in the early 20th century to create an enormous harbour area which it was hoped would rival Liverpool and Southampton as a passenger port. Fortunately for the local landscape, the scheme never progressed.

At the end the path meets a lane. Turn left, then bear left up the concrete track, follow the coast to coast waymarks. Fork immediately left onto the path and continue to the gate. From here take the higher, right hand, of the two parallel paths ahead. [The lower path straight ahead will take you where you need to go, but being a bridleway is usually quite muddy].

This is the Churchwood Valley. This was to be the route of the railway access to the Wembury dock scheme mentioned earlier.

Keep on the higher parallel path until it ends at a squeeze stile onto the lane. Turn left along the lane [signed Erme - Plym Trail]. At the bottom of the hill turn right, along the public footpath signposted to Train Road and featuring an Erme-Plym Trail disc.

This is Ford, the location of the family cottage of the Galsworthy family. John Galsworthy, author of "The Forsyte Saga", often visited, and Wembury and its church is used as the description of one of the Saga locations, although placed in Dorset in the book.

Pass houses converted from barns on either side of the track, and then continue ahead uphill through the brushes. Where this path forks, bear right and ahead uphill. Emerging in the corner of a field, climb the right hand edge of the field to the top corner [there is an Erme-Plym Trail disc part-way up].

There is a nicely framed view back down the Churchwood Valley to the sea from here.

Go to the next field and follow the path over the field ahead. From the next field corner follow the path ahead and slightly right.

From this high vantage point behind and to the left can be seen Langdon Court, surrounded by trees. This was one of the four Domesday manors of Wembury, although the present house, now a hotel, is largely Elizabethan in origin.

On the right can be seen Knighton, an ancient settlement in its own right. First recorded in 1281, although almost certainly earlier in origin, it now largely forms a residential part of Wembury. This is the location of the village school, and there is a shop and pub.

At the next field boundary bear right, diagonally across the field [an Erme-Plym Trail disc shows the way]. At the bottom go through the squeeze stile to a lane.

The walk leaves the Erme-Plym Trail here. The Trail goes left here, on its way to meet the Two Moors Way at Ivybridge, but our walk goes right, downhill.

Turn right; the lane falls then rises to the village pub at Knighton. Turn left along the main road.

It is possible to catch the bus to Plymouth from here.

Opposite the Knighton Stores take the public footpath on the right, signposted to Brownhill Lane. At the end of this path turn left, then almost immediately right, up some stone steps. Follow the path over the field ahead, then pass through two metal kissing gates and continue next to a stone wall.

The stone wall surrounds Wembury House. The current house dates from 1803, built on the site of an earlier house. Earlier still, the site had been the location of a cell, or "branch" of Plympton Priory. The buttressed wall alongside the path is the only remnant of this building.

At the end go through a metal gate and down stone steps to a lane. Bear right and ahead along this lane. Keep ahead where the lane's surface becomes rougher [signed to Coast Path].

This pleasant, wide green lane gives views back to the edge of Dartmoor and glimpses ahead of the village of Newton Ferrers to the left and the sea to the right. As the lane descends, superb views open up of the estuary of the River Yealm.

Go through two wooden gates to a white house.

This is the Rocket House, so called because it was earlier used to store coastguard apparatus, including rockets used for flares and for launching lines to ships in trouble.

The direct route back to Wembury from here is to turn right immediately after the second gate, but for a scenic addition a loop down to the estuary side is recommended. For this, bear left along the narrow path next to the wire fence after the second gate.

This leads to a superb viewpoint over the Yealm and the riverside village of Newton Ferrers.

Continue on the zig-zags down to the bottom and turn right to the Coast Path Ferry crossing point.

The seasonal ferry forms the Coast Path link across the river to Noss Mayo, but also operates to and from Newton Ferrers.

Continue along the Coast Path, past some riverside cottages, then climb the track back up to the Rocket House.

From the Rocket House, simply follow the well-signed Coast Path [acorn symbol] back to Wembury beach.

The coastal views are very fine. Ahead they are dominated by the Mew Stone. Its name derived from the Saxon word for "gull", the Stone is owned by the Ministry of Defence. For a while it was used as a prison, a criminal being sentenced to live there for seven years in the 1700s. Later, Sam Wakeham, a rabbit warrener, lived there and supplied rabbit meat to Langdon Court.

On the near headland, Wembury Point, can be seen the buildings of the shore base HMS Cambridge. Until recently this was the site of the Royal Navy's gunnery school, and the noise of the guns was frequently heard echoing across the bay. It has now been acquired by the National Trust.

Beyond, the far headland with the distinctive triangular shape topped by a narrow needle shape is Rame Head, guarding the western entrance to Plymouth Sound. The needle is actually St. Michael's Chapel, said to be Norman in origin, and long used by sailors as a landmark for Plymouth.

Approaching the beach the path descends steeply past Wembury Church.

The church is, unusually, dedicated to St. Werburgh, a Saxon saint. It holds some interesting memorials to local families. Once very remote, the church

and its 14th century tower was also important as a landmark for sailors approaching Plymouth.

Follow the path down to the car park and café.

Before leaving, it is worth looking around the Wembury Marine Centre [open Easter-September] for information on the local marine wildlife which has led to the bay being designated as a Marine Conservation Area.

Further Information

A leaflet pack on the Erme-Plym Trail is available from local Tourist Information Centres, price £2. Alternatively, it may be obtained from Discover Devon Information Line, Westacott Road, Barnstaple EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 6085531, price £3.50 including post and packing [cheques payable to Devon County Council]. Quote reference DP40.

A range of information is available on the South West Coast Path. Especially useful is the guidebook and accommodation list produced by the South West Coast Path Association, price £6 and available locally. It may also be obtained from the address above, price £7.50 including post and packing. Quote reference DP33.

For further local information, there is a National Trust leaflet on walks between Wembury and Ayrmer Cove, available from National Trust outlets price £0.75.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon, obtain the free leaflet "Discover Devon Walking" from local Tourist Information Centres or the above address. Alternatively, visit the website www.discoverdevon.com.co.uk which has all the walks information and an order form.

OS maps for this walk: Explorer [1:25,000 scale] no. OL20 South Devon: Landranger [1:50,000 scale] no. 201 Plymouth and Launceston.