

Walk No. 22 BISHOPS AND A SAINT - A DIFFERENT ASPECT OF THE TARKA TRAIL

The Tarka Trail tends to be best known for its cycleway element using the former railway lines of North Devon - Braunton, Barnstaple, Bideford, Torrington and south to the Petrockstow area. But it should be remembered that for walkers, the Tarka Trail is much more. It comprises a total of 180 miles in a figure of eight centred on Barnstaple, all of it reflecting the wanderings of Tarka the Otter in Henry Williamson's 1927 classic.

This walk from Barnstaple to Landkey, although generally easy and based on the urban centre of Barnstaple, follows a length of the route not so readily associated with the Tarka Trail. It is designed to use the regular local bus service to return to Barnstaple.

Fact File

Barnstaple is the hub of public transport for northern Devon and is well served by buses from all over this part of the County. It is also at the end of the Tarka Line branch railway from Exeter.

The walk is designed to use the local bus service between Landkey and Barnstaple. The buses generally run at half-hourly intervals Mondays to Saturdays but Sunday services are more limited, and may not run on winter Sundays. For details of all bus services and timings, contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk. For enquiries on the Tarka Line railway, telephone 08457 484950.

Walk Length: 8km/5 miles; 6 stiles; no steep climbs.

Facilities: Barnstaple - all facilities; Bishop's Tawton - pub, buses; Landkey - pub; Landkey Newland - pub, post office/stores.

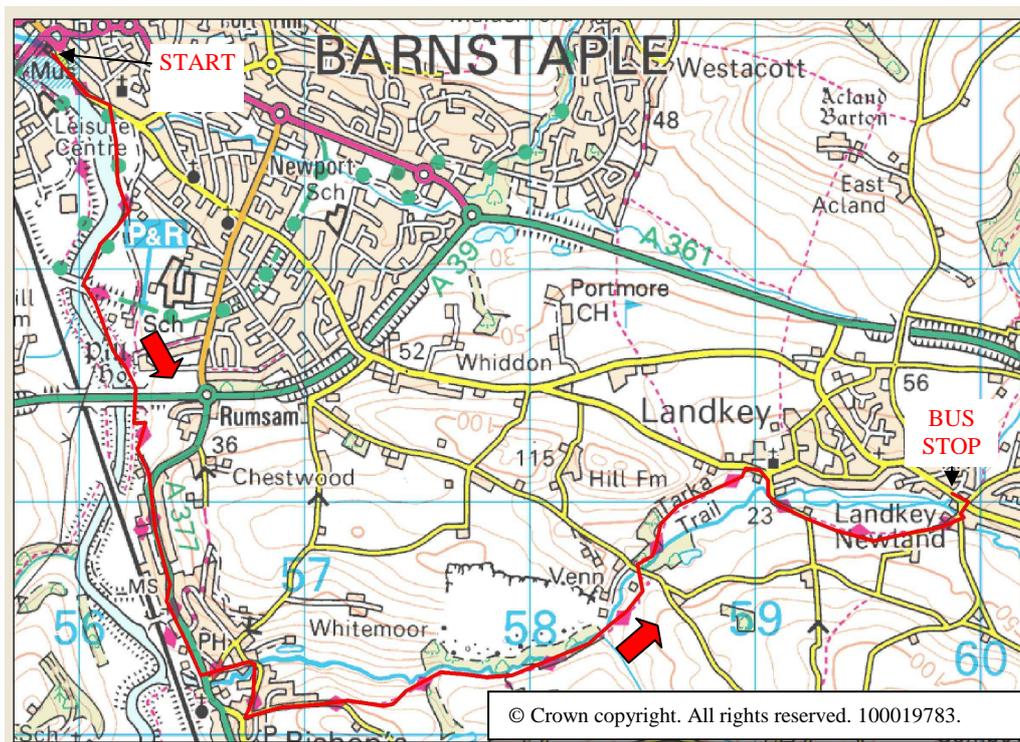
Note that the walk follows the Tarka Trail, and is waymarked using an otter pawprint logo.

The Walk

The walk starts at the Clock Tower, at the town end of Barnstaple Long Bridge. Begin outside the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon.

With your back to the museum, turn right, passing the Clock Tower on your left and walking parallel to the River Taw on your right.

The Clock Tower was built in 1862 as a memorial to Prince Albert.



At the entrance to Rock Park, bear right at the stone “needle” to follow the surfaced path on the top of the embankment.

The stone commemorates the opening of the park by William Rock, who donated the land for its establishment in the 1870's.

Keep to the path on the embankment alongside the River Taw until it arrives at an iron bridge crossing the river.

This bridge once carried a railway line linking the Taunton line with that to and from Exeter and Bideford. It now carries one of the cycle routes in Barnstaple's network.

Continue ahead through the metal kissing gate on the embankment, the path no longer surfaced here. This then joins another surfaced path a little further along the embankment. Continue ahead here, to pass under a road bridge.

The road bridge above carries the A39 Barnstaple by-pass.

Leave the embankment here and follow the surfaced path which bears left away from the river. The path then turns parallel to the river and rises to meet a road. Continue ahead on the footway next to the road.

This is Bishop's Tawton. This part of the village has a somewhat suburban air, but the old part down the hill is much more quaint. Views over the Taw Valley behind the roadside houses are very attractive. Tarka followed the Taw up to Barnstaple from Dartmoor and then used this length of the Taw quite extensively. Later, he made the journey to Exmoor from Barnstaple and again followed this part of the Taw.

Look out for the Tarka Trail sign pointing left along School Lane, and fork left down this narrow lane. At the bottom go left then immediately bear right along the track. At the end continue on the lane ahead and cross the bridge over the stream.

The stream is Landkey Brook, a tributary of the Taw. Tarka would have used the brook as part of his route to Exmoor, and the Trail follows the valley of the Brook from here.

Climb to the junction at the top, where the Tarka Trail turns left along Sentry Lane.

For those interested, a diversion through the village to Bishop's Tawton church would be worthwhile. For this diversion, turn right at the junction with Sentry Lane to the Square, then right again. The church spire will guide you on. This also takes you past the Chichester Arms in the Square.

The church's medieval octagonal stone spire is unique in Devon. The church's importance partly derives from the existence here in medieval times of one of the palaces of the Bishop of Exeter, hence the village's name. A few remains of the 15th Century building are now incorporated into the farmhouse next to the church, but are not available to the public.

There is in fact a tradition that Devon's first Anglo-Saxon bishop was based here, before the bishopric became established at Crediton and then Exeter. However, nothing has ever been found to suggest the tradition is true.

The churchyard also gives views across the Taw to the house and church of Tawstock. Tawstock House dates from the 1780's, built by the family of the Earls of Bath after the previous house burnt down. It is now a school.

Return to the Tarka Trail and continue up Sentry Lane.

The name has no connection with soldiers but is a corruption of "Sanctuary". Note the new development of Sanctuary Close on the left.

Keep on the lane until it bears right then look out for a stile next to a gate, with a Tarka Trail sign. Cross the stile and bear left across the field to the hedge along the field bottom.

When the hedge ends continue across the field in the same direction to the gap in another hedge opposite. Now cross the next field diagonally left and downhill to a stile in the far bottom corner. Follow the bottom of the next field, alongside the stream, Landkey Brook again.

The valley of Landkey Brook here is bounded on the right by Codden Hill. This very distinctive hill is a landmark throughout this part of North Devon. Although there are no formal rights of way to the top, well-used tracks exist and lead to superb views.

On the left the valley is bounded by Venn Quarry, much of it reinstated here to form an attractive valley side.

A little way further on the path leaves the field to keep next to the brook. Follow this path, parallel to the brook - you may have to pick your way through one or two boggy patches. Continue ahead at a path junction then follow as the path turns away from the brook and arrives at a metal gate on an access track. Turn left here through the gate and then follow the signed path, crossing a footbridge over part of the quarry workings on the way, until it meets a road.

Go ahead on the road, taking care of quarry traffic, crossing Landkey Brook again. Cross the stile on the right almost opposite the quarry entrance.

The lumps and bumps in the wood are the remains of spoil tips of much older quarries once here. There are remains of quarry buildings on the right of the path, now almost reclaimed by nature. In the book, Tarka hid in these quarries.

Follow the path through the wood to a stile then continue along the fenced path through more open land towards the church tower ahead. Follow this to the end and turn right at the road.

It is worth diverting through the churchyard here. This is Landkey Church and has an unusual interior, plastered throughout. The name is evidence of an early Christian site here, being Celtic and indicating a dedication to St Kay. Similar dedications are found in Wales and Cornwall but Celtic names of this kind are rare in Devon and may indicate a monastic community here in the 6th Century. The church has since been rededicated to St Paul.

If you go through the churchyard, leave via the old cobbled street next to the Ring 'o' Bells pub. Turn right, back on yourself, at the road then left down Bableigh Road, opposite the church. Cross Landkey Brook yet again and follow the lane until it bears right at Pendragon. Cross the stile on the left here and head for the gate in the hedge opposite. Go through and follow the hedge on the left ahead to a stile in the far corner.

Continue across the next field in the same direction to a stile on the far side leading to a lane. Cross the stile and turn left along the lane. Turn left at Millbridge at the bottom, over Landkey Brook for the last time, to meet the main village road at Landkey Newland.

From here the Tarka Trail heads for the hills over the road and on to Exmoor. To return to Barnstaple after this sample of the Trail turn left along the road and 100m/yards along is a bus stop. If in need of sustenance, a little further along is a public house and a Post Office and Stores.

Further Information

A guidepack for the Tarka Trail is available locally priced £2.00, and there is a free leaflet giving general information on the Trail. Alternatively both may be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 6085531; the price of the pack is £3.50, including post and packing. Quote reference DP102 for the guidepack and DP101 for the leaflet. Any cheques should be payable to Devon County Council.

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

OS Maps for this walk:

- Landranger (1:50,000 scale) no. 180 Barnstaple and Ilfracombe.
- Explorer (1:25,000 scale) no. 139 Bideford, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple.