

Walk No. 23 Soar from Salcombe

Salcombe is perhaps Devon's best-known yachting centre, but it can also serve as a centre for a variety of attractive walks. This one explores the mouth of Salcombe's estuary and the area around and inland of Bolt Head, one of South Devon's most prominent headlands. At its furthest extent the walk reaches the well-named high point of Soar, before descending to the nearby charming inlet of Soar Mill Cove.

In summer it is possible to shorten the walk by omitting the leg of the walk into and out of Salcombe and instead using the South Sands Ferry. This very scenic boat trip reduces the walking by approximately 2km/1.25 miles each way. Alternatively, car users can use car parks at North Sands or South Sands which also shorten the walk.

Fact File

There is a regular bus service from Kingsbridge to Salcombe, and a good but less regular service from Totnes. There are also buses from Exeter and Newton Abbot, some of which are direct, others timed to link at Kingsbridge with the local services. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608.

During summer there is a park and ride service between the edge of the town and the town centre.

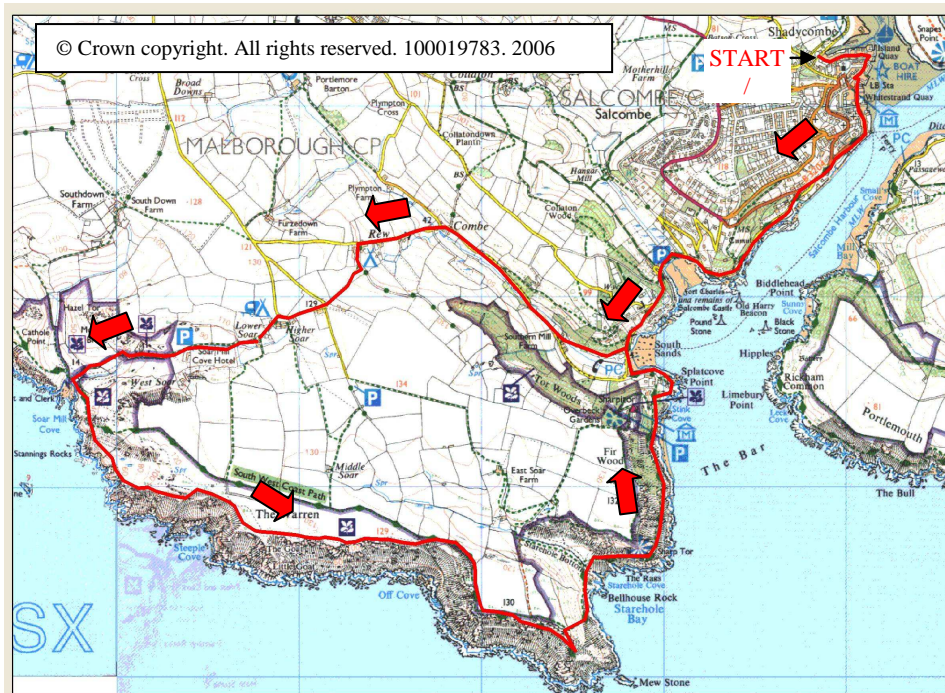
Walk Length: 14km/8.75 miles, reduced to 12km/7.5 miles by using the South Sands Ferry one way, or 10km/6.25 miles by using it both ways; 3 stiles; one climb of 100m/330ft, 3 climbs of 75m/250ft.

Facilities:

Salcombe - all facilities; North Sands car park, café, toilets; South Sands - car park, pub, kiosk, toilets; Soar Mill valley - car park, hotel.

The Walk

The walk starts in Salcombe at the junction of Gould Road and Island Street. The main bus terminus in Salcombe is in Gould Road, and the park and ride service also stops here - walk downhill about 25m/30 yards from the bus stop to the walk start. Alternatively, from the large main car park [The Creek] walk back along the road towards the town - the walk start is just past the toilets.



There is another, smaller, car park nearby [Shadycombe] - steps at the bottom of this car park lead directly to the walk start.

From the road junction walk along Island Street.

As the name suggests this little headland extending into the estuary was once an island, although there is no trace of this now. Island Street backs onto Shadycombe Creek, one of the side creeks off the main estuary, and is lined by boat repair shops and yards, many of them looking much the same as they would have done a hundred years ago. At that time the "Island" built small wooden ships, coasters and "fruit clippers" for the Azores fruit trade.

At the end of the street turn right then immediately fork left onto a footpath, signed to the "Town Centre".

This footpath follows the edge of the estuary and offers wide views over the water to East Portlemouth on the opposite bank. Although referred to as the Salcombe or Kingsbridge Estuary, this area is technically a ria or drowned valley, there being no river flowing into it.

Follow the path under the arch then turn right at the end. At the "Fortescue" pub turn left into the main street [Fore Street]. At the junction keep ahead, still in Fore Street.

A little way along here on the left is Whitestrand Quay. If you are making use of the South Sands Ferry, it sails from here.

Continue along the road as it begins to leave the town, flanking the estuary. At the fork in the road go left, next to the estuary, on the minor of the two roads.

This road gives attractive views over the estuary and down to Bolt Head at its mouth. Look out for the sand spit of The Bar across the mouth of the estuary. The Salcombe lifeboat was lost here in 1916.

The road descends to the charming little beach of North Sands, with its car park, toilets and café. Pass the beach and climb the zig zag road steeply uphill.

Looking across to the other side of North Sands from here is seen the remains of Fort Charles alongside the estuary. This was built at the time of Henry VIII and was effectively destroyed after its capture from the Royalists during the Civil War.

Towards the top of the hill you will notice the entrance to a house called The Moulton. Although Salcombe traditionally flourished on shipbuilding with some piracy and smuggling thrown in, its picturesque location began to attract the well-to-do from the 18th century. Today, spacious villas are a feature of Salcombe's outskirts and The Moulton was the first of these to be built, dating back to 1764.

At the top of the hill fork right.

[If arriving by ferry at South Sands, turn right at the top of the beach and climb the hill. At the top take the road doubling back towards the left and then follow the directions below].

A short way up this road fork left into Moul Road. Keep ahead as the road becomes a track, past a Private Road sign [the road is private but it is a public footpath]. The track rises to bollards at the end. Continue ahead on the path into woods, keeping left at the fork just inside the woods. After crossing a stile the footpath descends gently through woodland to arrive at a minor lane in a steep-sided valley.

This is the Combe valley, cut by one of the tributary streams flowing into the Salcombe Estuary.

The lane leads to the attractive little hamlet of Combe, complete with thatched cottages. At the junction bear left [signposted to Rew] and follow the lane as it climbs steeply out of the valley. Near the top of the hill turn left into Higher Rew [public footpath sign to Soar]. Past the yard go ahead along a green lane next to a barn. Follow this path as it bears left and then enters a field.

At the field turn right and climb alongside the field edge. At the top continue ahead on a track and then go through a gate on the right at a cattle grid to a junction of lanes by some coastguard cottages.

The walk has now reached the appropriately-named hamlet of Soar. However, the name apparently reflects not its high location but the Old English word for the plant sorrel, which presumably grew here.

At the junction continue on the lane ahead, keeping the rear of the coastguard cottages to the left. Fork left at the next junction, past the renovated farm buildings, then continue downhill past Lower Soar and the Soar Mill Cove Hotel.

At the bottom the lane bears left into the hotel grounds. Follow this and almost immediately go right, through a kissing-gate. Continue on this path down the valley to the coast at Soar Mill Cove.

Soar Mill Cove can be an idyllic spot on a sunny day, but it is not always like that. In 1887 the tea clipper "Hallow E'en" was wrecked here. In 1936 another storm ran the 4 masted sailing barque, "Herzogin Cecilie", onto the Ham Stone, the large rock just offshore. It was refloated and towed to the shelter of Starehole Bay, at the mouth of the Salcombe Estuary, but another storm a couple of months later finally sank her.

From here the walk follows the Coast Path back to Salcombe, and is well waymarked with the acorn symbol.

Turn left at the bottom of the valley and climb steadily to the top. After crossing another small valley the path climbs again to a prominent hilltop tor-like rock.

A rest will probably be called for here and will give the opportunity to study the view back along the coast - Gammon Head immediately ahead, then Stoke Point, the Mew Stone off Wembury, Plymouth Sound and beyond, in Cornwall, the distinctive triangular shape of Rame Head.

Following the climb, there follows a long level stretch of cliff top known as The Warren.

One of a number of lengths on the South Devon coast with this name, it reflects the importance of rabbit meat in the diet in medieval times, when warrens were deliberately established in these areas to provide this resource.

This superb high level walk leads to two successive kissing-gates through stone walls.

Stone walls are not generally a feature of the Devon countryside away from Dartmoor, but are found locally on these South Devon coastal plateaux, making use of the local mica schist rock.

The path then leads to a stile at another stone wall. The Coast Path bears ahead and right, down the valley to the rugged setting of Bolt Head.

The path passes the remains of a World War II observation post on Bolt Head then, as it rounds the headland into the estuary, gives views along the coast opposite to Prawle Point, the most southerly point in Devon.

The path descends to Starehole Bay.

As mentioned earlier, the "Herzogin Cecilie" ended her days here and the outline is supposed to be visible in the clear water at low tides.

Leaving Starehole Bay the path uses a series of rough-hewn steps and narrow rock ledges to round the prominent point of Sharptor.

This is known as the Courtenay Walk, cut in the 1860s by Viscount Courtenay, son of the Earl of Devon, to allow visitors to Salcombe to reach Bolt Head.

The path passes through estuary-side woodland before emerging at the car park for Overbecks.

This National Trust property, named after a German eccentric Otto Overbeck who owned it, contains a collection of oddities from around the world which he collected on his travels.

Continue down the lane ahead to South Sands [car park, toilets, pub, kiosk].

During summer there is a ferry service back to Salcombe from here which has the attraction of being reached by an unusual sea tractor.

Now follow the road up the hill and down the other side to North Sands. From here, retrace your outward steps to Salcombe; continue up the hill and along the lane. Continue ahead where it meets a wider road and on into Salcombe. At the "Fortescue" turn right, then left under the arch and along the estuary-side footpath. At the end go right and immediately left into Island Street and on to the starting point at the end.

Further information

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. Alternatively, it may be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 6085531, price £7.50 including post and packing [cheques payable to Devon County Council]. Quote reference DTY/DP33.

For further local information, there is a National Trust leaflet on walks around the Salcombe Estuary, available from National Trust outlets price £0.75. The Tourist Information Centre also carries a series of leaflets on the Coast Path locally, produced by the South Devon Coast and Countryside Service.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon, obtain the free leaflet "Discover Devon - Walking Trails" 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 the walk: Landranger [1:50,000 scale] No. 202 Torbay and South Dartmoor; Explorer [1:25,000 scale] No. OL20 South Devon.