

Walk No. 30 Clovelly's Western Woods And Cliffs

Clovelly is undoubtedly among the best known and probably best loved of Devon's villages. Occupying as it does a dramatic cleft in the cliffs, the steeply cobbled village street lined by cottages clinging to the sides of the cliff, Clovelly is almost certainly unique.

Residents and visitors alike will enjoy their visit to the village, but while there it is well worth taking the time to explore some of the sights and experiences that a local walk can bring. This walk explores some of the woodland which clothes the valleys and cliffs to the west of the village, as well as passing through attractive farmland and parkland and offering superb coastal views.

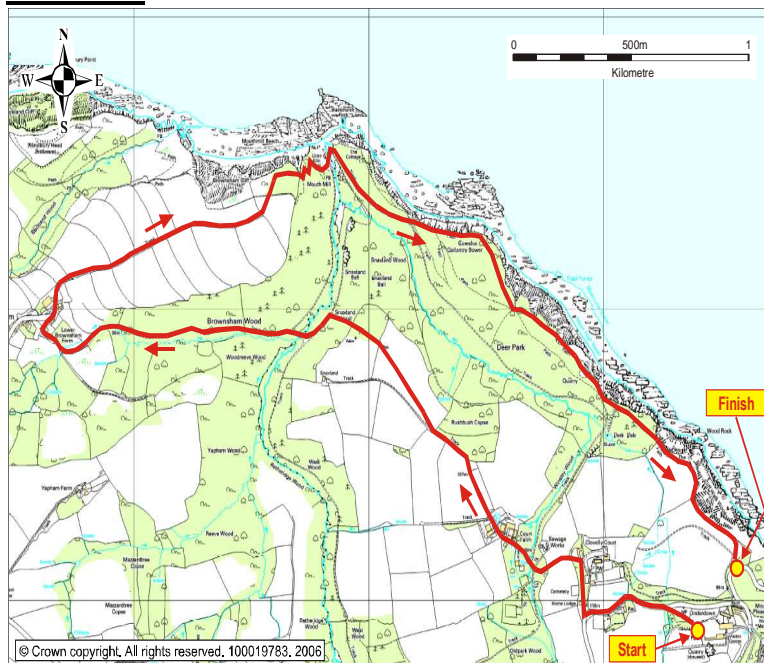
Fact File

Clovelly is on a regular bus service to Bude, Bideford and Barnstaple. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit the website at www.traveline.org.uk. There is also a large car park serving Clovelly.

Walk Length: 8km/5 miles; 1 stile; 1 steep descent and 1 steep climb of about 100m/230 feet, 1 long steady climb of 80m/260 feet.

Facilities: Clovelly - buses, shop, toilets, car park, pubs, café. Brownsam - car park.

The Walk



Clovelly owes its existence to being the only safe haven on the north coast between Appledore on the Torridge estuary and Boscastle in Cornwall. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book and during Elizabethan times largely depended on herring fishing. This industry had almost disappeared by the 1820s, and then in the late 19th century

the village was "discovered" as a destination for early tourists. It owes much of its unspoiled appearance to the local Estate, mostly owned since the 1730s by the Carys and then the Hamlyns. The Estate Company continues to ensure that the village retains its integrity.

The walk starts at the car park. Begin by walking down the car park's entrance road. Cross the road at the bottom to the footpath and continue walking ahead alongside the road. At the sharp left turn, go right at the entrance to Clovelly Court.

Just off to the right is Clovelly's parish church. The building largely dates from the 15th and 16th centuries. It includes a memorial to Charles Kingsley, the author famous for the "Water Babies" and "Westward Ho!". His father was rector here. Note the walls round the churchyard, some of which date back to medieval times.

Follow the main drive down towards Clovelly Court and turn left just in front of the buildings along another tarmac drive. Continue along the drive to reach Court Farm.

Clovelly Court was built in the 1740s by the Carys. This contrasts with the early 20th century buildings at Court Farm, built in the "arts and crafts" style.

Continue ahead through the gate and through the stock collecting area onto a rougher and sometimes muddy track. Follow this ahead.

As the track opens out there are views over the wooded valleys to the sea. The clear Atlantic climate allows a rich and diverse lichen flora to develop on the trees in these valleys. Much of this valley woodland was planted in the early 19th century by the Hamlyns.

Where the track enters a field, the right of way bears diagonally right and downhill over the field to a gate in the far hedge. However, you may be diverted along the top edge of the field; if so, turn right at the gate at the far end to another gate towards the bottom of the hedge.

Go through the gate near the bottom into the next field. Follow the bottom of this field to a small gap in the corner. Go through onto a track and through a gate. Continue downhill on this track and at the bottom this meets a wider track.

This is the Mouth Mill valley, one of the main wooded coastal valleys. The lichens may be seen on the trees here. The dominant tree is the sessile oak, which thrives in the mild damp climate but the rare Devon whitebeam is also present.

Turn left on the wider valley bottom track, then turn right at the next junction to cross the Mouth Mill stream. On the opposite side of the stream bear left and uphill.

The track climbs steadily through the wood. The trees and lichens and associated wildlife have prompted the designation of these woodlands as part of a formal Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI].

Follow the track uphill until it reaches Lower Brownsham Farm. Bear left to the lane. A little way up the lane and on its right is a car park and information board.

From the top of the bridleway at the farm continue ahead on the track opposite. Bear right then immediately left next to the barn. Continue along this good, clear hedged track as it gently rises then falls towards the coast. Cross the stile at the end to the open access land. Cross the field to the fence at the bottom.

Public use of the clear track leading to the coast and the access land has been made possible by an agreement with the landowner under the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

At the fence at the bottom of the field turn right.

The route has now reached the South West Coast Path, which is followed back to Clovelly. This is generally well waymarked with the acorn symbol of a National Trail.

The path zig-zags steeply down through woods to the beach at Mouth Mill.

This attractive location has some remains of lime kilns. Lime and poor quality coal was imported from South Wales and the lime burned in the kilns for fertiliser. It was then taken to the rural hinterland via the Mouth Mill valley.

Cross the stream just above the beach and climb a narrow path to a platform overlooking the beach, then continue up a clear track. Turn left onto another track as indicated by a Coast Path sign, and shortly afterwards do not miss the narrow path which leaves to the left again. This climbs steeply to open land at the top of Gallantry Bower.

There are one or two good spots for views on the climb to the top, and the opportunity for a breather will be appreciated. The viewpoints give the

chance to look at the contorted geological strata in the cliffs, another reason for the area's designation as an SSSI.

There are various stories about the origin of the name of Gallantry Bower. One legend associated with the cliff is that loving couples forbidden to marry would jump from the top holding hands.

The woodland and scrub at the top of Gallantry Bower has recently been cleared, restoring it to its earlier appearance. The view ahead along the coast is spectacular and extensive, stretching as far as Morte Point on a clear day. It also shows the stunted oaks growing on the sea cliffs, a further element in the SSSI here. Behind, Lundy shows clearly on the horizon.

Keep on the path over the cliff top and then follow the track through the wood ahead, turning left at the obvious junction. The path soon passes the unusual shelter known as the Angel's Wings.

The shelter was built as long ago as 1826 as part of the Hamlyns' landscaped park. It was thoroughly restored in the 1930s by Northam boat builders.

Keep left again at the next junction.

Another superb coastal view over Bideford Bay opens up here.

Pass through two metal kissing gates, then pass another shelter to emerge at a field. Keep to the field edge. Continue to follow the path as it drifts away from the field edge and then returns to meet a road at a gate.

This length passes through the parkland landscape of Clovelly Court, largely laid out in the 19th century.

Pass through the gate to the road. From here continue straight ahead to reach the top of Clovelly village. Alternatively, turn right along the road then left to return to the car park.

Further Information

For details of the South West Coast Path, an annual guide including an accommodation list is published by the South West Coast Path Association, price £6. It may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Holiday Line, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, Devon, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £7.50 including p and p. [Quote reference DP33; make cheques payable to Devon County Council].

Some further information on the area and some local walks may be found in the National Trust leaflet guide to the coastline of Bideford Bay to Welcombe Mouth, 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 from the address above. Alternatively visit the website www.discoverdevon.com which has all the walks information and an order form.