

Walk No. 51 The Bere Peninsula - A Branch Line Railway Walk

The Bere Peninsula is the triangle of land between the Tamar and Tavy rivers, in the south west corner of Devon just north of Plymouth. Despite the geographical proximity to Plymouth, the peninsula is surprisingly remote by reason of its poor road access. It is, however, blessed with a very scenic branch railway line, the Tamar Valley Line, which passes through the peninsula on its way between Plymouth and Gunnislake.

The Bere Peninsula also has part of one of Devon's long-distance walking routes, the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail. The walk described here uses the train and the Discovery Trail to look at one of Devon's unknown corners.

Fact File

The walk links the two Tamar Valley branch line stations of Bere Alston and Bere Ferrers, using the train to link the finish and start of the walk. The train could be taken either before doing the walk or after finishing it, but the former is recommended since this does not give you a time limit for the walk. Better still, take the train from Plymouth to the start at Bere Alston, then another train back to Plymouth from Bere Ferrers at the end. For timetable details contact National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950, or visit www.thetrainline.com.

Parking at Bere Ferrers station is quite limited. If parking in the village streets, please park considerately. Bere Alston has rather better parking provision at the station, but if full the nearest alternative parking is some way away in the centre of the village.

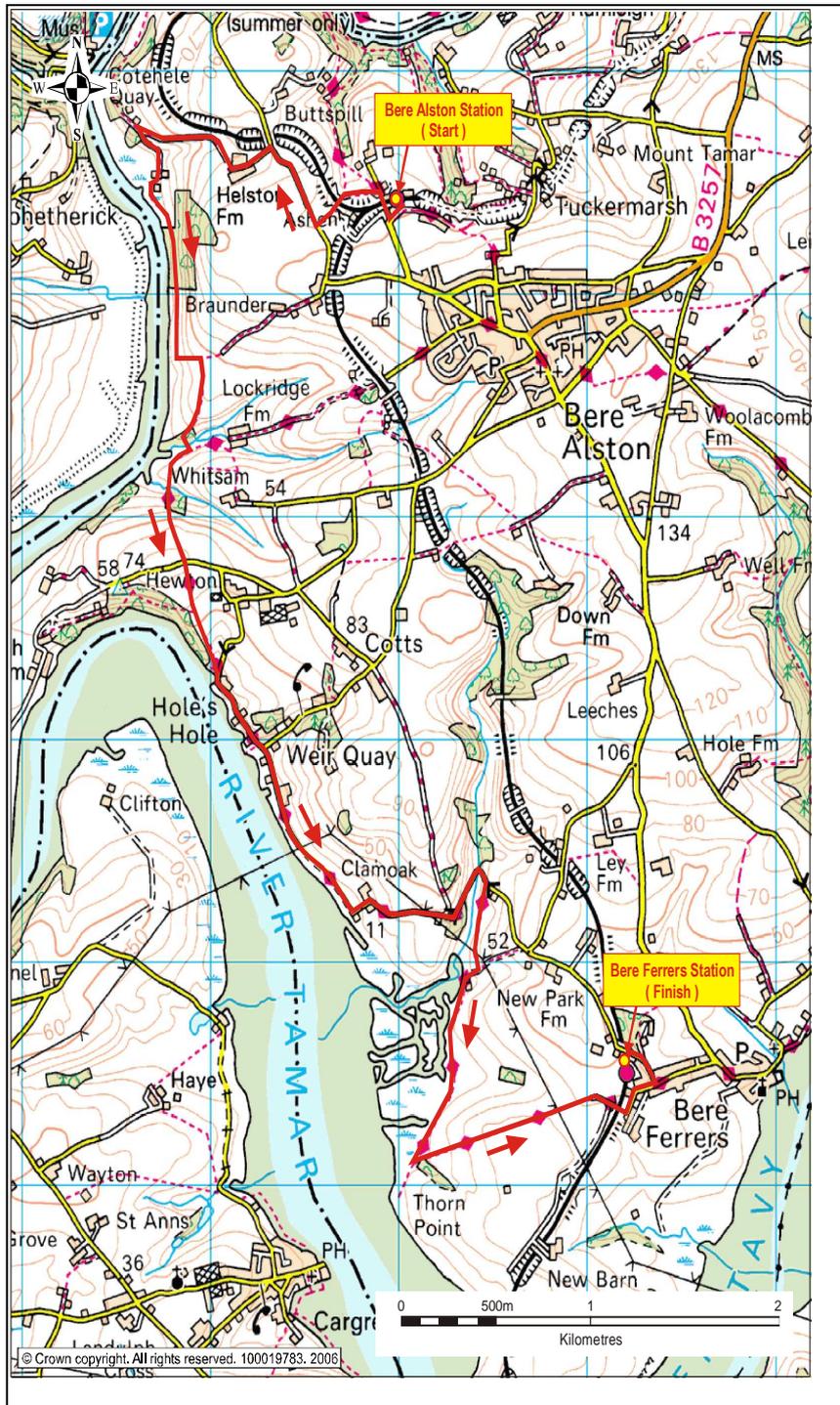
There are also buses between Tavistock, Bere Alston and Bere Ferrers. For timetable details call Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk.

By road, Bere Alston is signposted beyond Tavistock, and Bere Ferrers from Bere Alston.

Walk Length: 6.5 miles/10km; 14 stiles; 3 climbs, of which one is quite steep, 70m/230ft; one short and sharp, 45m/150ft; one long and relatively gentle, 40m/130ft.

Facilities: Bere Alston - shops, pub, toilets, car park; Bere Ferrers - village shop, pub, and toilets. There are no facilities along the walk.

The Walk



Starting from Bere Alston station, leave the forecourt and walk down the approach drive. At the junction at the bottom turn right and go under the railway bridge.

Note that there are actually two railway bridges, the line from Plymouth and Bere Ferrers coming in on one bridge with the line continuing to Gunnislake returning out on the other. Originally the Gunnislake line was the branch, the line from Plymouth continuing through Bere Alston station and on to Tavistock and ultimately London Waterloo, as the London and South Western Railway's main line.

On the far side of the field follow the path alongside a row of bushes to a gate

Go through and under another railway bridge then follow the path to a lane. Turn right here.

As the lane descends views ahead to the opposite side of the Tamar reveal a number of old mine chimneys, of which that on top of the large dome-shaped hill, Kit Hill, is especially obvious. Mining for metal ores was once very

important to the Tamar Valley, dating back to silver mines in the medieval period.

Keep on the lane to the first junction, at the bottom of a dip, and turn left here towards Helston Farm. Follow the surfaced lane through the farm and keep on it as it descends towards the Tamar.

Towards the bottom of the lane the market gardening on the opposite of the river becomes obvious. During the first half of the 20th century this was very important to the Tamar, and most of the valley slopes were used for horticulture. Relatively little remains today, the area opposite being one of the largest areas.

At the junction of tracks at the bottom turn sharp left and back towards the house, South Ward Farm. Go through the gate at the bottom of the track and then, approaching the house, bear left along a grassy path to another gate. Go through and continue along the bottom of the field ahead. At the far end of the field pass through a gate into a wood.

The field was formally one of the Tamar Valley orchards. A few fruit trees remain. The wood is relatively recent and was previously used for the cultivation of bulbs. In the spring, the floor of the wood is still covered in daffodils.

Go through a gate at the far end of the wood and continue along the bottom of the field, next to the trees. At the end of the next field follow the edge round to the left and uphill. As the hill begins to flatten out, bear right down a clear path into a gully. Cross the gully on a footbridge and climb the other side. At the top continue ahead along the lower side of a hedge, parallel to the Tamar.

There are superb views down the Tamar from here.

Follow the field top hedge into the next field. Keep along the field edge down and to the right - keep an eye open as you near the bottom for a stile in the bank on the left. Cross this carefully [it is steep on the far side] and follow the path through the often wet area of reeds to meet a cross path.

The walk now joins the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail coming from the left from Bere Alston village. If you have had enough walking, you can follow the Discovery Trail back to Bere Alston from here.

To continue, turn right here. Pass through a gate and follow the path down to a wet area with a plank bridge over a stream leading to a stile. Cross, climb to another stile, then climb steps to yet another stile. More

steps continue as the path climbs very steeply up a field edge to a further stile.

The worst of the climb is over now. You will probably need a rest, and this is a good place to stop and look back up the Tamar. Kit Hill forms the background of the skyline, while on the far bend of the Tamar are the buildings at Cotehele Quay, a fascinating National Trust property on the Cornish bank.

At this point the Tamar takes a great meander in its course, and the Discovery Trail cuts across the neck of this loop. When we next meet the river it will have changed its character completely, reappearing very definitely as an estuary, a surprising change for such a short distance.

Cross the stile and continue following the field edge as it flattens out to arrive at a lane. Go left for a couple of metres then right. Walk along the next field edge, hedge to the left.

Almost immediately the Tamar appears again, now a wide estuary.

Follow the hedge to the bottom left hand corner of the field and cross the stile into a wood. Continue ahead, downhill. The path emerges at a lane. Turn right here.

This spot has the lovely name of Hole's Hole. The quay on the right was once an important point for loading market produce onto boats to Plymouth. The building on the left was a pub.

Keep on the lane as it follows parallel to the Tamar, now a substantial estuary.

Near Weir Quay are the remains of mines. The last were abandoned in the mid-19th century when the river broke into the workings. There were also smelting works here. Later, one of the works became a jam factory using the local produce. Just beyond Weir Quay are the remains of some substantial lime kilns, the burnt lime being used to fertilise the soil.

Follow the lane as it rises away from the river and then descends to a dip. Leave the lane here, descending the steps to a public footpath. Go ahead, following the hedge on the right and then keeping along the bottom of three fields. A stile leads alongside a small orchard to a drive.

This is Liphill, believed to be the site of Tavistock Abbey's medieval salt pan. More recently, it was the home of TV wildlife broadcaster Tony Soper.

At the drive go left then immediately right up the steps to follow the permissive path which avoids the foreshore footpath which is often wet. Follow this path round the back of Liphill. At the top cross the stile and turn right along the field edge, down towards the Tamar then round left, parallel to the river. Continue into the next field and keep close to the fence line, crossing one or two sometimes boggy sections, to a stile. Turn right and follow the field edge, continuing to the far corner of the field.

A cul-de-sac footpath goes through the gate here, leading to Thorn Point. This was an historic ferry crossing point, said to have been used as a pilgrim route in medieval times [Landulph on the Cornish bank was a pilgrims' embarkation point]. When the railway arrived the ferry was used to bring produce from Cornwall to the trains at Bere Ferrers.

To continue to Bere Ferrers, turn left at the field corner, alongside the fence.

Climbing alongside the fence, there are superb views behind, both upstream back to Weir Quay and beyond and downstream to the Tamar Bridge at Plymouth.

Keep ahead on a tractor track to a stile. Cross this to a farm track and immediately fork right to pass under a railway bridge. Continue ahead, passing some bungalows to arrive at a road junction.

The walk has now reached Bere Ferrers. Go straight ahead for the village centre, turn left to return to the station.

Further Information

An information pack on the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail is available from local Tourist Information Centres, price £3. Alternatively, it may be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 6085531, price £4,50 [including p and p]. Quote reference DP19; cheques payable to Devon County Council.

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

OS maps for this walk:

Landranger [1:50,000 scale] no. 201 Plymouth and Launceston
Explorer [1:25,000 scale] no. 108 Lower Tamar Valley