

A Walk with a Point

Hartland Point is Devon's north westerly extreme. It marks where the Bristol Channel effectively becomes the open sea and the change in the nature of the coast at this sharp "corner", from relatively sheltered north facing cliffs to a jagged coastline facing the Atlantic Ocean, is quite dramatic.

The Point marks the end of what is sometimes referred to as the Hartland Peninsula, Devon's own Land's End. In the centre of this "last" part of Devon sits the village of Hartland, the ideal centre for exploring this remote corner of the County. This walk starts and finishes at Hartland, crossing the peninsula to the north west and following the South West Coast Path to Hartland Point and down the west coast before returning across country to the village centre.

This walk is longer than some and a number of stiles and a few climbs to overcome, so is not to be taken too lightly. It is, however, very scenic and atmospheric, so give yourself plenty of time to savour a magical corner of Devon.

Fact File

Walk length: 8 miles/12.5km; a total of 13 stiles; five climbs ranging from 65 ft/20m to 200 ft/60m. The climbs mean that this walk should only be attempted by the reasonably fit.

Facilities: Harland has pubs, shops, toilets, buses and car parks: there are seasonal refreshments at Hartland Point Car Park, otherwise nothing on the walk.

Hartland village is served by regular bus services to and from Barnstaple, Bideford and Bude. For timetable details call Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk.

The Walk

Start the walk at the War Memorial in the centre of the village. Go up the road behind the memorial, next to St John's Art Centre.

The Art Centre was originally St John's Chapel, built in the 1830s to serve the inhabitants of the village, whose parish church is a couple of miles away at the hamlet of Stoke. Previously, a Town Hall had stood here, Hartland having been created a borough in medieval times with a market and annual fair. However, it was always too isolated to thrive and the market ceased about 1780. The Town Hall clock, from the 1620s, remains in the chapel.

Turn left at the Hart Inn then right at the road junction into North Street. Follow the road round to the right then take the first on the left, a narrow lane signed to Hartland Point and Lighthouse.

The lane descends into the wooded valley of the Abbey River, a major landscape feature crossing the Harland peninsula. At this inland location the river is also known as Pattard Water.

At the bottom, cross Pattard Bridge and immediately turn left along an even narrower lane. A short way along, leave the lane for a public footpath which bears off to the left parallel to the stream. Follow the path the, after leaving the wood, keep to the right hard edge of the open area to reach a stile and gate. Cross the stile and a few yards

further on, when the path forks, bear right and uphill through the woods. Cross the stile at the top of the woods and continue ahead next to the right-hand field hedge, still climbing, to arrive at a gate.

The route has now climbed out of the Abbey River valley and is giving some splendid views to the left. Prominent is the hamlet of Stoke, with the tower of Hartland parish church particularly obvious. The tower is the second highest in Devon, and has served for centuries as a landmark for mariners.

Continue along the hedged track ahead then on to the surfaced lane through the hamlet of Cheristow.

Cheristow's name means "place of the church". This seems to refer to an ancient chapel here, dedicated to the Cornish St. Wenn. The whole parish seems to have an association with ancient Celtic saints, the parish church being dedicated to another, St. Necton, who is said to have established a hermitage at a holy well nearby.

Pass through Cheristow, and at the junction at the top turn right then immediately left. Keep straight ahead at the next junction, Pitt Cross.

The almost peninsula-like nature of the area becomes apparent as the sea becomes visible ahead as well as to the left. Hartland is not really a true peninsula, as it is faced by the sea on only two sides, but certainly has the character of a land's end.

As the descent to another valley begins, the outline of Lundy should become visible on the horizon, together with the radar "golf ball" near Hartland Point.

Cross the bridge at the bottom, and at the junction turn left. Climb the lane to arrive at the small National Trust car park at East Titchberry (or Titchbury). Leave the lane here, turning right along the bridleway past the farmyard.

East Titchberry is a 15th century farmstead. In front of the main house is a cob and thatch former granary dating from the 1600s. Some information on the farm and its history and working is given on the National Trust information board next to the path.

Go through the gate ahead to arrive at the South West Coast Park above Shipload Bay.

The walk now follows the Coast Path to Hartland Point and beyond – follow the Coast Path signs and the acorn symbols for a National Trail for this next stretch.

At the Coast Path turn left, towards Hartland Point

There are some superb views of the spectacularly twisted rock strata in the cliffs of Shipload Bay from a little way along the path. A little further on, as the Coast Path approaches the radar "golf ball" via a series of stiles, the view to sea focuses on Lundy, 11 miles/18km offshore in the middle of the entrance to the Bristol Channel.

Continue on the Coast Path to arrive at the Hartland Point car park. Pass along the front of the car park to the entrance gate to the lighthouse.

The lighthouse was built between 1872 and 1874 of rendered stone hewn from the rock on site. Before its building the location was virtually inaccessible and a new road had to be specially built.

Follow the concrete path on the left of the access gate and climb to the communications mast.

At this point it is worth taking the diversion to the right signposted to the viewpoint. This gives a scenic overview of the lighthouse. Also, on the foreshore ahead, can be seen the remains of the wreck of the "Johanna", which was driven ashore here in gales in 1982.

This is the far north west point of Devon, where the Bristol Channel meets the Atlantic Ocean, and the effect of this sharp corner of land on the currents will almost certainly be seen, the sea off offshore usually showing signs of disturbance. The Point is said to have been famous in antiquity, and it is claimed that what is called the "Promontory of Hercules" in a Roman geography refers to Hartland Point.

Return along the path to the entrance to the mast enclosure, then bear right following the Coast Path along the field edge.

This is a superb length of coast, characterised by long bony "fingers" of rock stretching out into the sea. The cliffs here are the first land that the Atlantic has encountered since North America, and they may have to withstand pressures of 3 – 4 tons per square foot in a rough sea.

The Coast Path soon descends into a valley. Turn inland for a little way to reach the footbridge to cross the deeply incised stream. Climb the steps and turn right at the top. Very soon the path descends again to pass along the floor of an unused dry valley.

This valley, known as Smoothlands, is the result of geological processes diverting the stream that used to flow along the valley and which formed it so that it now flows directly into the sea. The valley is separated from the sea by the impressive sheer cliffs of Damehole Point, itself the result of erosion by the sea.

Follow the path out of the far end of the valley, then continue up a rocky slope and a long flight of steps to the cliff top. Keep to the Coast Path and another descent quickly follows, to Blegberry Beach.

Follow the Coast Path as it climbs away from the beach, as far as the stile at the top of the first climb. This is where we leave the Coast path for the return cross-country leg to Hartland village.

Turn left after the stile onto a broad track going inland. As the track climbs the top of a tower comes into view ahead. This is the top of a folly, built by the local landowner and said to date back to the 1500s.

The track bends to run along the lip of the valley. This is the valley of the Abbey River again, the same as was crossed just after leaving the village. The river's mouth can be seen just behind and below, a superb location.

Keep following the track until it arrives at a surfaced lane. Turn right here, downhill towards the church tower ahead. Keep following the lane past the buildings then look out for the second gate on the left, with a public footpath sign pointing into the field. Go through the gate and follow the hedge on the left.

There is another good view of Hartland's parish church at Stoke down to the right from the road junction. Hartland was owned in Saxon times by the royal family, and in 1050 a church was established by Gytha, mother of King Harold, as a gesture of thanks for the saving of

her husband from a shipwreck. The present building dates from 1360 and is both interesting and beautiful. Its features include one of the finest late Norman fonts in the country and a fine medieval rood screen.

Looking back can be seen the outline of the folly seen earlier. Its position makes it a prominent part of the view as seen from Hartland Abbey, which is in the wooded valley.

At the end of the first field bear slightly to the right to cross a double stile. Keep ahead then bear right at the end to a gate onto a lane. Turn right here, downhill.

Near the bottom of the lane is the entrance to Hartland Abbey. This traces its origins to an 11th century Norman establishment. Fragments of this early building remain in the present house, in private ownership since the Dissolution of the 16th century. It was largely rebuilt in 1779. On the other side of the road are the gardens, planted with advice from Gertrude Jekyll.

Continue down the hill past the abbey entrance then take the track on the left just before the bridge. After a little way where the track forks keep left. Follow this pleasant woodland track to reach a stile. Cross this and bear right to a wooden footbridge over the river. Pass over this then bear left up through the woods.

Near the top the path emerges from the woods next to a fence – follow alongside the fence then at a kissing-gate turn right along the lane. At the road at the end, turn left to return to the centre of Hartland.

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 £6.00. It may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Holiday Line, Westacott Road, Barnstaple EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £7.50 including postage and packing. Quote reference DTY/DP 33 and make any cheques payable to Devon County Council.

There is a National Trust booklet "Bideford Nay to Welcombe Mouth", which includes details of walks on Trust land on parts of the Hartland coast, available from Trust outlets price £0.75.

There is also a free locally produced leaflet on the Harland Peninsula, available in local Tourist Information Centres and other outlets.

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 address above. Alternatively, there are details on the website www.discoverdevon.co.uk.

OS maps for this walk:

Landranger (1:50,000 scale) no. 90	Bude and Clovelly
Explorer (1:25,000 scale) no. 126	Clovelly and Hartland