

## **OTTERTON - PEAK AND VALLEY**

Otterton sits near the mouth of the river which gives it its name. Between the towns of Budleigh Salterton and Sidmouth, it is just inland of the renowned Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. An attractive village in its own right, the parish surrounding it also boasts some fine scenery. This walk explores much of the splendid local landscape, ranging from the prominent point of High Peak over 100m/330 feet above the English Channel to the floor of the valley of the River Otter. In between, the walk explores a series of quiet, remote and almost forgotten green lanes as well as the magnificent Jurassic Coast.

The walk is described as starting and finishing at Otterton, where there is a regular bus service. However, it can also be based on Ladram Bay, where there is a large car park and, since there is no public car park in Otterton it is advised to use Ladram Bay as a base if it is intended to visit the area by car.

### **Fact File**

Otterton is served by a regular bus service to and from Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit [www.traveline.org.uk](http://www.traveline.org.uk).

**Walk Length:** 10km/6.25 miles; 1 stile; one long and steady but never very steep climb of 55m/180 feet.

**Facilities:** Otterton has shop, pub, buses and toilets; also refreshments at Otterton Mill. Ladram Bay has shop, pub, toilets, refreshments (seasonal) and car park.

### **The Walk**

The walk is described as starting in Otterton, although those arriving by car are recommended to use Ladram Bay as their base. Otterton is a very attractive village, the main street lined with thatched cottages with some dating back as far as the 16th century. Further charm is added by the stream running through the village alongside the street.

At one end of the village is Otterton Mill. This is a working mill, grinding corn flour for sale and as the basis for its delicious bread and cakes. It also includes a craft centre and café. The current mill dates from the 19th century, but it is built on the site of a medieval monastic mill and is powered by a leat from the River Otter which powered the original medieval mill.

**Start outside Otterton Mill. Walk along the village street into the village, as far as the green on the left. At the Otterton village sign on the green turn left along a public footpath between houses and on up the slope to a kissing gate. Go through and follow the left-hand edge of the field ahead.**

This path is parallel to the River Otter, down on the left through the trees. Soon the sound of a weir will be heard and there are glimpses of the river through the trees.

**Continue on through another kissing gate, keeping to the left-hand edge of the next field.**

This hill above the river is called Anchoring Hill. In medieval times the River Otter was navigable to here and Otterton served as a small port. Anchoring Hill is said to have provided shelter for sailors to moor their vessels in the river.

**Keep to the field edge as it descends to a gate leading to a bridge across the river. Have a look at the river if you like, but the walk passes the gate and continues a short way to a stile. Cross the stile and go down a couple of steps to a green lane.**

This is an old lane leading to the river, probably at one time to a ford. In the first half of the 20th century there was a footbridge over the river at the bottom of the lane, now replaced by the bridge passed a little earlier.

**From the stile turn right, uphill, up the lane cut deeply into the countryside. This rises to become a pleasant hedged track.**

This is known as Rydon Lane. There are occasional glimpses of the prominent wooded height of High Peak on the left ahead, to be tackled later in the walk.

**Rydon Lane arrives at a road. Turn right then almost immediately left along another green lane. Follow this to the first T-junction and turn right here. Continue along this green lane, climbing slightly, to arrive by the red brick building of Sea View Farm. Turn left here.**

There is a short cut to Ladram Bay from here; to take this turn right immediately before the farm and follow the lane, which then becomes an enclosed track, to arrive at Ladram.

Sea View Farm is a brick building of the mid 19th century. It was one of the farms of the local extensive Rolle Estate, many of which were rebuilt at this time.

**To continue the full walk, continue ahead, farm on your right, along the track known as Bars Lane. At the fork shortly after the farm keep straight ahead on the hedged track.**

Bars Lane runs parallel to the sea and a little inland. Glimpses of the sea are visible through gaps in the hedge on the right.

**Keep following Bars Lane as it climbs steadily, though never particularly steeply, alongside woodland. Continue as far as a path junction at a gate on the right. Turn right here, through the gate.**

The walk has now joined the South West Coast Path, as the signpost indicates. This is also part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

This is England's first natural World Heritage Site, designated by Unesco. It stretches from Studland Bay in Dorset to Orcombe Point near Exmouth, its importance being that it shows the natural geological progression over 185 million years at earth history in just 95 miles.

**Go through the gate and into the woodland, continuing to climb slightly.**

The walk has now reached the woodlands surrounding High Peak, which reaches 157m/520 feet at its highest point. The Coast Path, however, skirts the rear of the highest point and there is actually no view of the sea here. The woodland rises

steeply up on the left and there is no access to the cliff itself because of the danger of the unstable nature of the land here.

On the sea edge at the top, although not accessible to the public, are the remains of an old hill fort, much of it now lost to the sea as a result of erosion and cliff falls. This seems to have its origins way back in the Neolithic period, but was later used both in the Iron age and later still, in the post-Roman period of the 6th-8th centuries. It may well not have been right on the coast originally, such is the rate of erosion here.

**The path then descends, quite steeply for a short while, to emerge from the woodland of High Peak.**

At last the sea comes into view with, in the immediate foreground, Ladram Bay. Beyond is the prominent headland of Brandy Head and, in the far distance, if it is clear the coast can be seen receding past the Exe Estuary and on as far as Tor Bay.

**Follow the Coast Path down to Ladram Bay**

Although popularly known as the Jurassic Coast, most of the World Heritage Site in Devon is composed of older, Triassic rocks. Here at Ladram cliffs are a striking red and they, and the distinctive sea stacks in the bays here, are composed of Triassic sandstone, a rock which was laid down in a great river which once flowed across this part of Devon.

**Have a look at the Jurassic Coast information board overlooking the bay then continue down the Coast Path to pass the thatched cottage.**

For those in need of refreshment, the pub is just up on the right and there are shopping facilities just up the lane inland.

Those who started at Ladram leave the walk here.

**Those who are starting at Ladram, head for the thatched cottage above the beach and fork right, following the Coast Path as below.**

**For those who have walked from Otterton, cross the access track and follow the Coast Path along a tarmac path and through a field to a kissing gate. Continue ahead over the next field, climbing slightly to another kissing gate. Keep on the Coast Path for a further 0.75km/0.5 mile, as far as a junction with a path going inland at right angles, signed as a permitted path.**

Ahead along the coast is Brandy Head. Its name reflects the importance smuggling once had on what was a remote coast in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**However, the walk leaves the Coast Path and turns inland here, along the permitted path. After a little while turn left then right on a track past the water treatment works. At the junction at the end turn left along the unsurfaced track. After a while this track forks. Bear right here and keep right at the next junction to follow the surfaced lane as it descends gently.**

From here there is a good view over to the wooded High Peak on the coast, passed earlier in the walk. The good vantage point it would have offered is easily appreciated from here.

**At the bottom of the slope on a double bend a narrow bridleway goes off to the left. Turn along this track. It widens out somewhat then at the end go through a gate. Immediately afterwards turn right through another gate. Follow the field edge round to the left then right to arrive at a narrow road by a pair of brick pillars.**

The pillars are associated with what was known as Otterton Park, part of the Rolle Estate. They date to the mid-19th century, when much building and renovation was going on around the Estate.

**Turn left past the pillars then almost immediately right, down some steps to a footbridge over the river, the Otter again.**

This is Clamour Bridge. It probably derives its name not from any shouting but from an earlier bridge formed by a stone slab which would have spanned the river here. Such slab bridges were often referred to in Devon as clams or clammers.

**The walk has circled around to rejoin the River Otter, downstream of Otterton now. On the far side turn right, go through the kissing gate and follow the riverside footpath.**

The river gets its name from the animals which used to frequent it, and this name dates back to Saxon times. In more recent years otters virtually disappeared from the river, but they are now making a welcome comeback. However, there is little chance of seeing one of these shy nocturnal creatures. More likely to be seen is the brilliant flash of a kingfisher, these beautiful birds being relatively common here.

**Continue along the riverside path to reach the road. Climb the steps at the end and turn right over Otterton Bridge and on the far side is the mill, the starting point.**

For those who started at Ladram, go to the start of the walk description to follow the directions back to Ladram.

### **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 Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £7.50 including p and p - quote reference DTY/DP33 and make cheques payable to Devon County Council.

For further walking in the area see "Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley" produced by the Otter Valley Association and available locally.

Also available locally is a free leaflet on the Jurassic Coast, was well as the Official Guide, "A Walk Through Time", price £4.95.

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](http://www.discoverdevon.com) which has all the walks information and an order form.

OS maps for this walks:

Landranger (1:50,000 scale) no. 152 Exeter and Sidmouth  
Explorer (1:25,000 scale) no. 115 Exmouth and Sidmouth.