

Walk No. 13 - Kingsley, Kipling and a Horizontal Cliff Railway

Westward Ho! is on the western edge of the town of Northam, itself a couple of miles north of Bideford. It sits between the vast open area of Northam Burrows, situated where the Taw and Torridge rivers meet the sea, and the cliffs which rise to the west and lead to Devon's north western extremity, Hartland Point.

Until the mid 19th century this was a remote area. Then in 1855 Charles Kingsley set his novel Westward Ho! here and a small resort was developed on the coast and named after the book. It is now the only town in Britain with an exclamation mark as part of its spelling.

This walk starts by circling inland behind the town before heading to the cliffs to the west. It then returns along the South West Coast Path.

Fact File

Westward Ho! is served by buses to and from Northam, Bideford, Instow and Barnstaple. Buses run approximately hourly Mondays to Saturdays, slightly less frequently on Sundays. For up-to-date timetable information simply call the Traveline on 0870 608 2608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

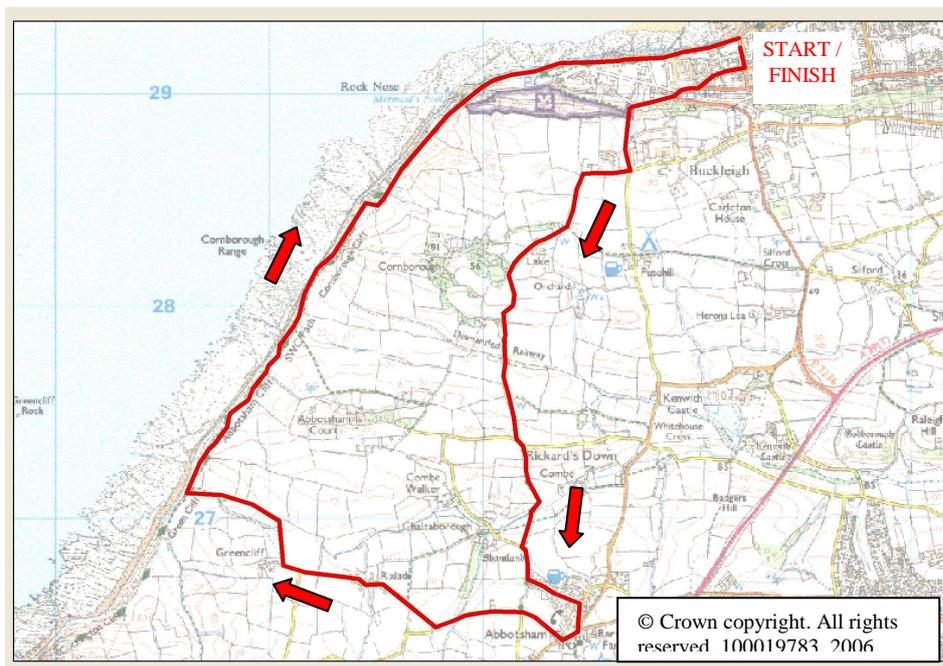
OS maps for this walk: Landranger [scale 1: 50,000] 180 Barnstaple and Ilfracombe; Explorer (scale 1: 25,000) no. 139 Bideford, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple.

Walk length: 9.5 km/6 miles: one short steep climb of 60m/230ft: 5 stiles.

Facilities: Westward Ho! (pubs, refreshments, toilets, shops): Abbotsham (pub, shop, buses).

The Walk

Use the Post Office in the centre of Westward Ho! as your starting point. From here, with your back to the Post Office turn right and walk along the road. Cross Golf Links Road, which goes down to the sea on the right, and continue ahead. Pass Holy Trinity church.



The church was built for the town in 1867 as it was being developed as a resort. It was largely constructed of local stone.

Follow the road round and up to the left. On the corner go along the track on the right marked as a public footpath. Follow the path to the left of the gate ahead and continue to a junction of paths at a National Trust sign for Kipling Tors. Go left here, up the stepped path. After a climb this path arrives at another junction. Go left again, still uphill.

This prominent hill is Kipling Tors. The name derives from Rudyard Kipling, who attended the United Services College in Westward Ho!, a public school for the sons of servicemen which was founded in 1874. One of his books, *Stalky and Co*, was about boys at the college.

Before turning left up the hill it is worth taking the opposite path ahead for a short distance. From here a panoramic view opens up over Northam Burrows and the estuary of the Taw and Torridge rivers, extending to the left to Saunton Sands, Croyde and Baggy Point.

Return to the junction then take the uphill path as described previously. This passes a small housing estate and then passes through a wooden gate to a road. Turn right here and follow the lane as it narrows and bears left.

Before the lane descends superb views are obtained over the coast of the bay towards Clovelly and Hartland Point.

Keep to the quiet, attractive lane as it first descends then climbs to a small road junction.

A slightly unusual feature, at Lake Farm as the lane descends, is the base for Lomas Helicopters. Here flying lessons can be arranged and also private helicopter flights to Lundy.

At the road junction go left then take the track almost immediately afterwards on the right. This pleasant green lane descends then climbs to meet a surfaced road.

Note that this green lane can often be muddy at its lowest point half-way along.

Continue ahead on the road. A short way along the road swings sharply to the left. For a short cut here continue straight ahead on the narrow path. Note, however, it can be a little overgrown at times.

For a more pleasant, if slightly longer, route follow the lane to the left into the village of Abbotsham. Go through the modern housing to the end and turn right to the old part of the village with its shop and Post Office [or turn left for the pub].

Abbotsham also has a bus service to Bideford and so could be used as a starting point for those wishing to concentrate on the coastal part of the walk.

The attractive church has a number of items of interest, including medieval wagon roofs, Norman font and unusual covered bench ends.

Turn right along the lane immediately after the Post Office and shop. Pass the Baptist Church [dating to 1852] and a little further along on the right is the short cut path. If you have taken that, turn right when you reach the lane.

After about 0.5km/600 yards turn right along the side lane [just after the Neighbourhood Watch sign]. Shortly after passing through the hamlet of Rixlade the lane turns sharp left and the farm road to Greycliff Farm continues ahead. Take this farm road and then cross the stile on the right shortly before arriving at the farm. Follow the field edge path to the stile at the end then bear left down the valley towards the coast.

If the day is at all clear Lundy will be visible on the horizon ahead. To the left the coast of Bideford Bay sweeps round to Hartland Point. Nearer can be seen the buildings at Clovelly in their cleft on the cliff face.

At the bottom of the field a stile leads on towards the coast. On arriving at the Coast Path turn right over the footbridge; from here it is a simple question of following the Coast Path back to Westward Ho!

Just beyond the footbridge the path passes a lime kiln by the beach. There were a number of lime kilns along this coast. Limestone was shipped across the Bristol Channel from South Wales and after being burnt in the kilns was spread over the fields to fertilise the soil. In the early 19th century a small seam of anthracite was found nearby and used to fire the kilns.

The Coast Path continues with a series of minor ups and downs over Abbotsham Cliff and Cornborough Cliff.

Lundy continues to dominate the view to seaward while ahead the outline of Baggy Point, Saunton and the mouth of the estuary take up the skyline.

Approximately 1.25km/0.75 miles after reaching the coast, the Coast Path climbs to the top of a small rise to reach a long level stretch of path.

The path has now joined the line of the Bideford, Westward Ho! and Appledore Railway. This unusual line operated for a relatively short time, between 1901 and 1917. From Bideford it headed due west to meet the coast here then continued along the cliffs into Westward Ho! and on to its terminus at Appledore. In Bideford it ran on rails in the road along the Quay, and the locomotives were fitted with "cow catcher" arrangements to prevent pedestrians being run over. This cliff section must have been a spectacular ride.

At the edge of Westward Ho!, just past the small car park bear left to the sea front path in front of the beach huts.

Almost at the end of the path, notice an embankment behind the beach huts. At the end of the huts are abutments for a bridge. This embankment carried the railway into Westward Ho!, but the remainder of the line through the town has now been built on.

Shortly after the end of the huts the path meets Golf Links Road in Westward Ho! Turn right to return to the town centre.

Further Information

For details of the South West Coast Path, an annual Guide is published by the South West Coast Path Association and is available in local book shops. In addition, a National Trail Guide for the Minehead to Padstow section of the Coast Path by Roland Tarr has been published by Aurum Press and the Ordnance Survey, also available locally. Alternatively, the Association's guide book may be purchased by contacting: Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Rd, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW or from www.discoverdevon.com and the Discover Devon Holiday Line 0870 608 5531- price £7.50 including post and packing: quote reference DP 33.

The National Trust also publish a guide to the coastline of Bideford Bay to Welcombe Mouth. This is available from National Trust outlets.

Information on the other walking routes in Devon is also available including Discover Devon Walking, a free publication, from the above address.