

Walk No. 47 Beside The Seaside At Blackpool

At Easter 2005 a new length of the South West Coast Path was opened in South Devon. This length, which replaces the earlier more inland route, is centred on the charming little bay of Blackpool Sands, a little way to the west of Dartmouth, between the villages of Stoke Fleming and Strete. This walk explores the new length of Coast Path in two sections, using Blackpool as the focal point. This means that the whole walk can be followed but, if preferred, either of the two sections, east or west of Blackpool, could be walked as a shorter circuit. Both circuits include one of the villages, Stoke Fleming to the east and Strete to the west.

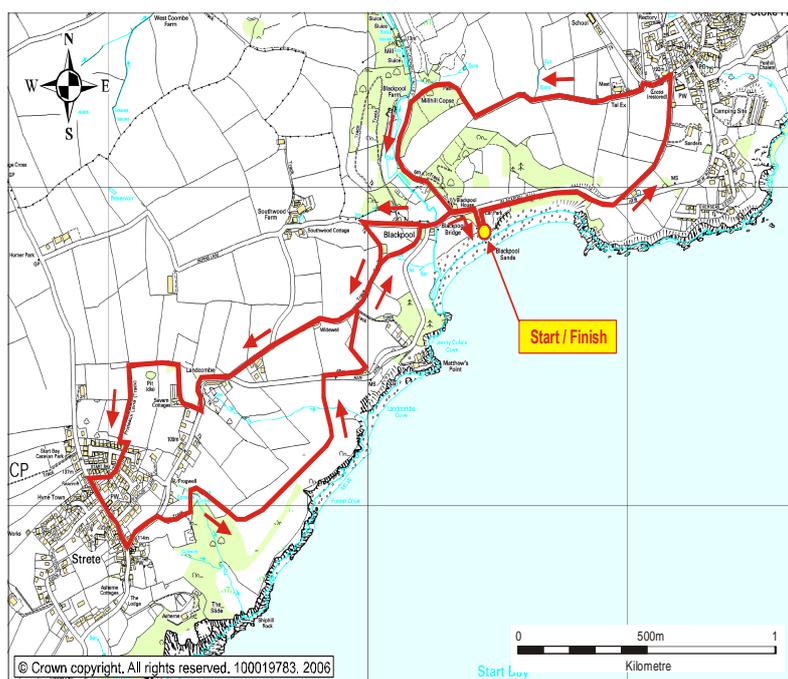
Fact File

Blackpool Sands is served by a regular bus service between Dartmouth, Kingsbridge and Plymouth. There are between 9 and 10 journeys a day each way on this route. Many of these journeys use double decker buses which, with the high vantage point for views such buses provide, make it a trip worth doing for its own sake, let alone the scenic walk. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk.

Walk Length: The whole walk is 8km/5 miles; to do the eastern circuit only [Blackpool-Stoke Fleming] is 3km/1.75 miles; the western circuit only [Blackpool-Strete] is 5km/3.25 miles. There are seven stiles [all on the western circuit]. There is a very steep descent and climb of some 40m/130 feet, also on the western circuit, and also a short stretch of main road to be carefully walked, again on the western circuit. (Despite these drawbacks, the western circuit also has superb views.)

Facilities: There are seasonal toilets and a seasonal café and beach shop at Blackpool Sands, and also a year-round car park. Both Stoke Fleming and Strete have a village shop and pub, and the buses serve both villages. There are also toilets at Stoke Fleming. However, parking is virtually impossible in both villages.

The Walk



The walk starts by following the new coast path eastwards from Blackpool Sands to the village of Stoke Fleming.

Start at the car park and toilets at Blackpool Sands. Follow the path towards the road from the rear of the toilets. Continue past the steps, following the path signposted to Stoke Fleming.

The path passes the bus shelter erected in conjunction with the establishment of the new Coast Path. This was designed locally to ensure it fits into the landscape and built by local craftsmen.

Continue uphill on the path through the trees parallel to the road.

There are some pleasant views over the beach at Blackpool to the sea through the trees on the right.

The path leads up to a roadside pavement. Follow this as it continues uphill.

At the top there is a handy seat on the opposite side of the road. There is a superb view along the coast from this area, over Blackpool Sands, Slapton Sands and Ley and on to Start Point with its lighthouse.

Carefully cross the main road and take the narrow lane rising uphill to the left.

This is Old Road. As the name suggests, it is the original road to Stoke Fleming, being superseded by the current main road built by the Kingsbridge-Dartmouth Turnpike Trust during the early 19th century. This new road became necessary as the increasing use of coaches meant that Old Road was becoming too narrow and steep for their use.

At the top Old Road arrives at Stoke Fleming, opposite the Green Dragon public house. On the right is the parish church.

The proximity of the pub to the church is no accident. Probably dating from the 17th century, the Green Dragon was likely to have originally been built as the Church House for use by the clergy and visitors.

The church dates back to the 13th century, although it was enlarged later. The tower was always of importance as a landmark for sailors and marks the approach to Dartmouth Harbour, which is difficult to make out from the sea. In the 19th century a daymark was built on the opposite side of the Dart Estuary so that between the two towers sailors could get a fix on the Harbour entrance.

The Coast Path towards Dartmouth continues on the lane ahead, but this walk leaves the Coast Path here to return to Blackpool Sands.

At the crossroads at the Green Dragon turn left. Just beyond the public toilets bear left along the narrow lane signed as Mill Lane. Continue ahead as the lane becomes an unsurfaced track.

This is a very pleasant, quiet stretch, giving attractive views over a beautiful, tranquil countryside.

Keep to the track as it descends quite steeply to a valley bottom.

This is the Blackpool Valley, an attractive feature cutting deep into the surrounding landscape.

Turn left along the lane.

On the right of the lane is Blackpool Farm. Until the late 1800s this was Lower Blackpool Corn Mill, the reason for the name of the track (Mill Lane) and also for the woodland on the left, which is Millhill Copse. The origin of the farm as a mill can clearly be seen from the architecture.

The lane leads back to the main road at Blackpool Sands.

Just before the road junction are some attractive thatched cottages on the left. These date back to the late 1700s and greatly add to the charm of the location.

This completes the eastern circuit of the walk and those who wish to finish here can take the path on the opposite side of the main road back to the toilets, car park and bus stop.

To continue the walk on the western circuit, turn right at the main road and immediately right again, through the gate. Follow the path to cross the little packhorse bridge.

The walk has now returned to the new Coast Path for a little way, going westwards here. The packhorse bridge was built to carry the new path over

the Blackpool Stream, being designed to fit in with the landscape at this attractive spot and to reflect the design of the road bridge. The current road bridge is probably 18th century in date, built by the Kingsbridge-Dartmouth Turnpike Trust when the road was improved at that time. However, a written reference to Blackpool Bridge of 1809 describes it as being only 4 feet wide, so an earlier bridge is probably incorporated in this rebuilding. There is some evidence for this by the existence of the date 1652 found on the downstream side of the bridge. To match this, a date stone engraved 2004 has been built into the new bridge.

At the lane on the far side of the bridge the walk leaves the Coast Path again. Turn right here and follow the lane uphill. Near the top of the hill take the wide track bearing back and to the left, still going uphill but less steeply.

This track is Widewell Lane, a riot of colour in the spring from the hedgerow flowers. There are some super views to the left over the Blackpool Valley and Sands.

A little further on the lane rejoins the Coast Path for a short way. Continue up the track, ahead on the surfaced lane when the Coast Path leaves to the left [we will be returning from that way]. Keep on along this pleasant lane until it arrives at the main A379 road.

This next short stretch uses the main road. Be very careful of the traffic, keeping dogs and children closely under control.

Go right at the main road, keeping close in to the right hand side. After the road swings to the left cross over to the other side to keep on the outer side of the right hand bend. Just after the right bend double back to the right along the track signed as a Public Bridleway, Prideaux Lane.

Follow this track to the left, then turn right just before the house, next to a garage, along a green lane. Keep to the green lane as it turns left until it arrives at a housing estate on the edge of the village of Strete. Go ahead along a grass track then a gravel drive and another grass track to emerge at a road into Strete. Turn left here to the village.

On the left is the village church. As Devon village churches go, it is relatively new, being built in 1836, although the tower is much earlier. This is because Strete was originally part of the parish of Blackawton, some miles inland. The church was built as a chapel for the village, to avoid the need to travel to Blackawton. Strete became a separate parish in 1881.

A little further down the road the Laughing Monk restaurant occupies the old village school. As can be seen by the date stone, this goes back to 1859.

The lane arrives at the main road opposite Strete's Post Office Stores and pub. Turn left along the main road. Just past the car parking area

is a stile on the right. This marks the start of the new Coast Path as it returns to Blackpool.

Cross the stile and walk parallel to the road to a wooden gate. Go through and follow the concrete track downhill, bearing off left at the waymark to a large new footbridge. Cross this and follow the path ahead over the field, parallel to the valley.

Strete was evacuated between 1943 and 1944 when the area was the site of preparations for the D-Day landings and these valleys, so quiet and peaceful now, were important wartime training areas.

At the end of the field go through a small copse and ahead to a wide field overlooking the sea. Continue ahead following the waymarks, parallel to the sea.

The views from this field are stunning, encompassing a wide vista from Start Point on the far right, over Slapton Sands and the Ley and round to the left to the Mew Stone and Froward Point, beyond the Dart Estuary. The importance of Stoke Fleming church as a landmark is clear from here.

Continue ahead downhill to a gate. Go through the area of gorse to emerge at the top of a wide and deep valley.

This striking feature is the Landcombe Valley. Until the relatively recent past it was criss-crossed by hedges which divided it into a number of small fields. The lines of these field boundaries can be made out here and there.

The Coast Path now heads for the stile at the top of the far side of the Valley. Pick your own way down the near side to the wooden footbridge across the stream at the bottom, then choose your route up the far side.

In case you had not noticed, these slopes are very steep. Good luck!

Cross the road at the top and follow the bottom of the field, then turn right into a little wood. Go left at the next field, uphill again. Near the top bear right, over the field, to a stile into a lane. Cross the stile and turn left then immediately right.

The walk has now arrived back at Widewell Lane, used for part of the outward leg. This part of the Coast Path has to be inland of the main road because there is no room on its seaward side at the headland of Matt's Point, where there have also been cliff falls in the past.

Leave Widewell Lane at the next stile on the right. Go ahead over the field, bearing slightly right towards Blackpool Sands.

The views over Blackpool Sands from here are stunning. In medieval times this area would have looked quite different, most of the valley bottom appearing at that time as a wet, boggy area from where the name "the black

pool” arose. Today it can look idyllic, the almost Mediterranean appearance accentuated by the evergreen pines which have been planted around the valley by the landowners to enhance the environment.

Continue to the bottom and cross a stile, then descend some steps to a prominent tree behind iron railings.

This is a holm oak, planted in the 1890’s as a memorial by the present landowner’s great-grandfather on the birth of his first son.

Cross the lane at the bottom to the packhorse bridge again and continue to the main road.

In 1404 this was the site of a bloody battle. Breton forces had landed at Slapton and made their way along the coast intending to plunder Dartmouth. However, they were overwhelmed by the local militia, especially the archers, helped by the stone-throwing of the women folk and by the fact that the heavily armoured Breton knights on horseback foundered in the “black pool”. An information board by the beach gives some more information about the Battle of Blackpool.

Carefully cross the main road and follow the path back to Blackpool Sands car park and bus stop.

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, EX32 8YR, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £7.50 including post and packing. Quote reference DP33 and make any cheque payable to Devon County Council.

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 the information and an order form.

OS maps for this walk: Landranger (1:50,000 scale) no. 202 Torbay and South Dartmoor
 Explorer: (1:25,000 scale) no. OL20 South Devon