

Walk No. 37 LYNTON AND THE VALLEY OF ROCKS

The spectacular landscape of the Lynton area, where Exmoor meets the sea, lends itself to superb walking. Lynton itself is on the South West Coast Path, but also, together with its twin town of Lynmouth, forms the northern terminus of the Two Moors Way. This outstanding walking route spans Devon south to north, crossing both Dartmoor and Exmoor and also the lesser-known areas between. With a link from the Two Moors Way to the South Devon coast at Wembury, a Devon Coast to Coast walk has been created with Lynton or Lynmouth the northern starting or finishing point.

The walk described here starts and finishes at Lynton, the higher of the two twin towns. It skirts the dramatic landscape of the Valley of Rocks, to the west of the town, giving superb views over the Valley and the sea beyond. It returns to Lynton along the South West Coast Path.

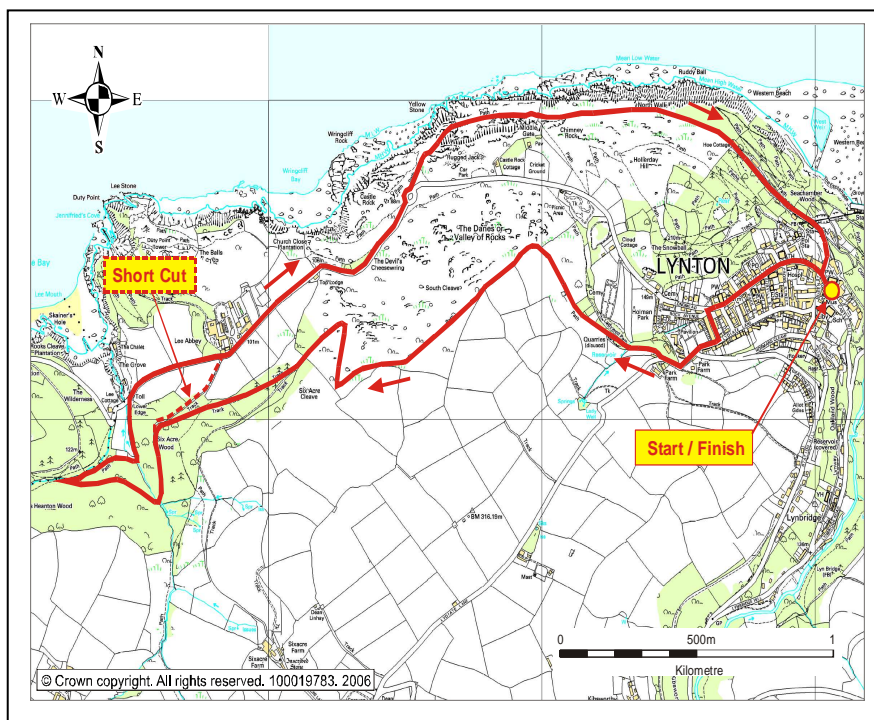
Fact File

Lynton has bus services to and from Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, Combe Martin and Minehead plus, occasionally, Taunton. For timetable details call Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk. There is a large car park in the town and, for access between Lynton and Lynmouth, a cliff railway. During the summer a horse and carriage operates between Lynton and the Valley of Rocks.

Walk Length: 5 miles/8 km: no stiles; one long steady climb of 90m/300 ft, a shorter steady climb of 50m/165ft and a short, sharp one of 35m/115 ft.

Facilities: Lynton has all facilities; other than a car park at Lee Bay there are no facilities along the route.

The Walk



Start outside the church, which is just up the hill from the bus stop and main [Bottom Meadow] car park.

Although it has a 13th century tower, and parts of the church date from the 18th century, most of Lynton church was substantially rebuilt in the 1890s and early 1900s.

This coincides with the town's main period of growth, when the old church was outgrown by the developing town. Nevertheless, the internal fittings are highly regarded.

Follow the main road [Church Hill and Lee Road] through the town, going gently uphill.

The town was little more than a hamlet until late Victorian times. It began to grow in popularity as a result of its dramatic location in the early 19th century, but access remained very difficult until a narrow-gauge railway reached the town from Barnstaple in the 1890s. It then grew rapidly, and the architecture now reflects this period of growth during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.

At the far end of the town, where the main road bears to the right, turn left up Crossmead. At the junction at the top of Crossmead turn right. This road soon turns sharp back and left - at this bend take the footpath directly ahead, signed to Lee Abbey and Bay. Pass a disused quarry then after a short while the path forks; take the left fork, signed to Lee Abbey and Bay. The path climbs gently through woodland.

The woodland forms part of an important wildlife area, the West Exmoor Coast and Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest, supporting valuable areas of ancient oak woodland, coastal lichen flora and a rich bird population.

As the path climbs, the woods thin out.

Superb views open up ahead to the sea and to the right over the high land of Hollerday Hill and back to Lynton. As the path bears round to the left the views become ever more spectacular. Far below is the Valley of Rocks, flanked to the seaward by the craggy landmarks of Castle Rock and Rugged Jack. Ahead is Woody Bay and, on the nearer headland, the landmark of Duty Point Tower. This is a mid 19th century folly - whether there ever was actually a "duty" associated with the location is unknown, although it does occupy a commanding position.

Having crossed the high point of what is variously called South Cleave or South Cliffe, the southern tip of the Valley of Rocks, the path begins to descend.

Soon, the imposing sight of Lee Abbey comes into view. Behind is the little inlet of Lee Bay with the larger Woody Bay beyond.

The path follows a wide Z downhill. Go through a gate to arrive at a fork in the path at the edge of woodland. Fork right, signposted to Lee Abbey.

We are back in the West Exmoor woodlands here. Dominated by sessile oak, the woodlands also include birch, rowan, holly and hazel and the moist,

clean air has also encouraged ferns and lichens. In addition, the variety of habitats in the woodlands has given rise to a diverse breeding bird population.

Follow the path as it descends to the junction of paths by a seat. For a short cut, take the path back to the right. Otherwise, continue ahead, signposted to Lee Bay.

Keep to the main track through the woods to cross a footbridge over a stream by a picturesque pond, the stream having been dammed here. On the far side of the footbridge follow the path round to the right and continue to arrive at a junction of paths by a footbridge on the right. Turn sharp back right here, before the footbridge, and follow this narrower path [signposted to Lee Bay] as it descends alongside the stream.

This is a very attractive location, and the stream makes an appealing feature tumbling over rocks and boulders as it descends rapidly. Keep a look out for dippers on the rocks in the stream bottom.

Pass an old cottage, keeping it well to the left, and soon the path reaches and crosses another stream - actually the same as was crossed earlier, higher in the woods. Follow the path as it bears to the left and then arrives at a road.

The walk has now reached the South West Coast Path, which on this length follows this minor road. If you fancy a dip, or a sit on the beach, the path to Lee Bay is down the track opposite.

For the return leg turn right, up the road, past the 20 mph sign. Follow the road as it climbs steadily to Lee Abbey. [The short cut mentioned earlier comes down the track opposite the Abbey].

The site of Lee Abbey was originally owned by the Cistercian monks of Forde Abbey in Dorset, but has never itself been an abbey. The site passed to the family of a Barnstaple merchant in the 1550s, and they built a farmhouse here. By the middle of the 19th century it had passed to a Charles Frederick Bailey, who built what he called Lee Abbey, incorporating the earlier farmhouse. Later, the building was acquired by a Christian fellowship, and from 1966 onwards the building was adapted and extended as a conference and residential centre.

The Coast Path continues along the road into the Valley of Rocks, although shortly after the lodge there is a short cut to the left avoiding a short stretch of the road.

The Valley of Rocks, seen earlier from the high flanking cliffs, is now experienced at close hand. It represents the residue of the bed of the West Lyn River, which used to flow this way to the sea until the cliffs at Lynmouth were breached and its course shortened.

You will almost certainly see some of the goats for which the Valley is well-known. In fact, the Domesday Book entry for Lynton in 1086 records 75 goats. After these herds were lost, they were later reintroduced to help graze the rough pasture of the Valley. The present herd dates from the second half of the 20th century when three feral goats were introduced from the Cheviots in Northumberland. They now number over 100.

Just after the little roundabout in the road, bear left, to pass between the two rocky outcrops of Castle Rock and Rugged Jack, and follow the signposted Coast Path.

Although well surfaced all the way, this path is superbly sited on the cliff, some 130m/430 feet above the sea. It gives breathtaking views over the Bristol Channel to the Welsh coast.

Eventually the path becomes a lane and enters Lynton as North Walk. It passes substantial Victorian hotels and then crosses the line of the cliff railway between Lynton and Lynmouth.

The cliff railway dates from 1890, when it was originally built to carry freight brought by sea to Lynmouth Harbour up to Lynton, although it soon became a tourist attraction. It was financed by the publisher Sir George Newnes who had a local property. It is powered by the weight of water, 700 gallons of river water filling tanks underneath the car at Lynton Station at the top of the railway. The weight of the water takes this top car downhill and draws the lower car uphill on the continuous cable. When the water-filled car reaches Lynmouth at the bottom the tank is emptied and the tank of the other car, now at the top, filled.

At the fork just after the cliff railway the Coast Path bears left to descend to Lynmouth. To return to Lynton on our walk bear right, up the hill. At the top, the path returns to Lynton Church.

Further Information

A range of information is available on the South West Coast Path. Especially useful is the guidebook and accommodation list produced by the South West Coast Path Association, price £6 and available locally. Alternatively, it may be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 6085531, price £7.50 including p and p. Quote reference DP33 and make cheques payable to Devon County Council. There is also a free introductory leaflet on the Coast Path, available from the same address; quote reference DP86.

A guidebook on the Two Moors Way is also available from the above address, price £6.45 including p and p; quote reference DP15, and there is a free introductory guide, reference DP34.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon, a free brochure “Discover Devon-Walking” is available in local Tourist Information Centres or from the above address. Information is also available at the website address www.discoverdevon.com.

OS Maps for this walk:

Explorer (1: 25,000) no. OL9 Exmoor
Landranger No. 180 Barnstaple and Ilfracombe.