

East Portlemouth to Gara Rock

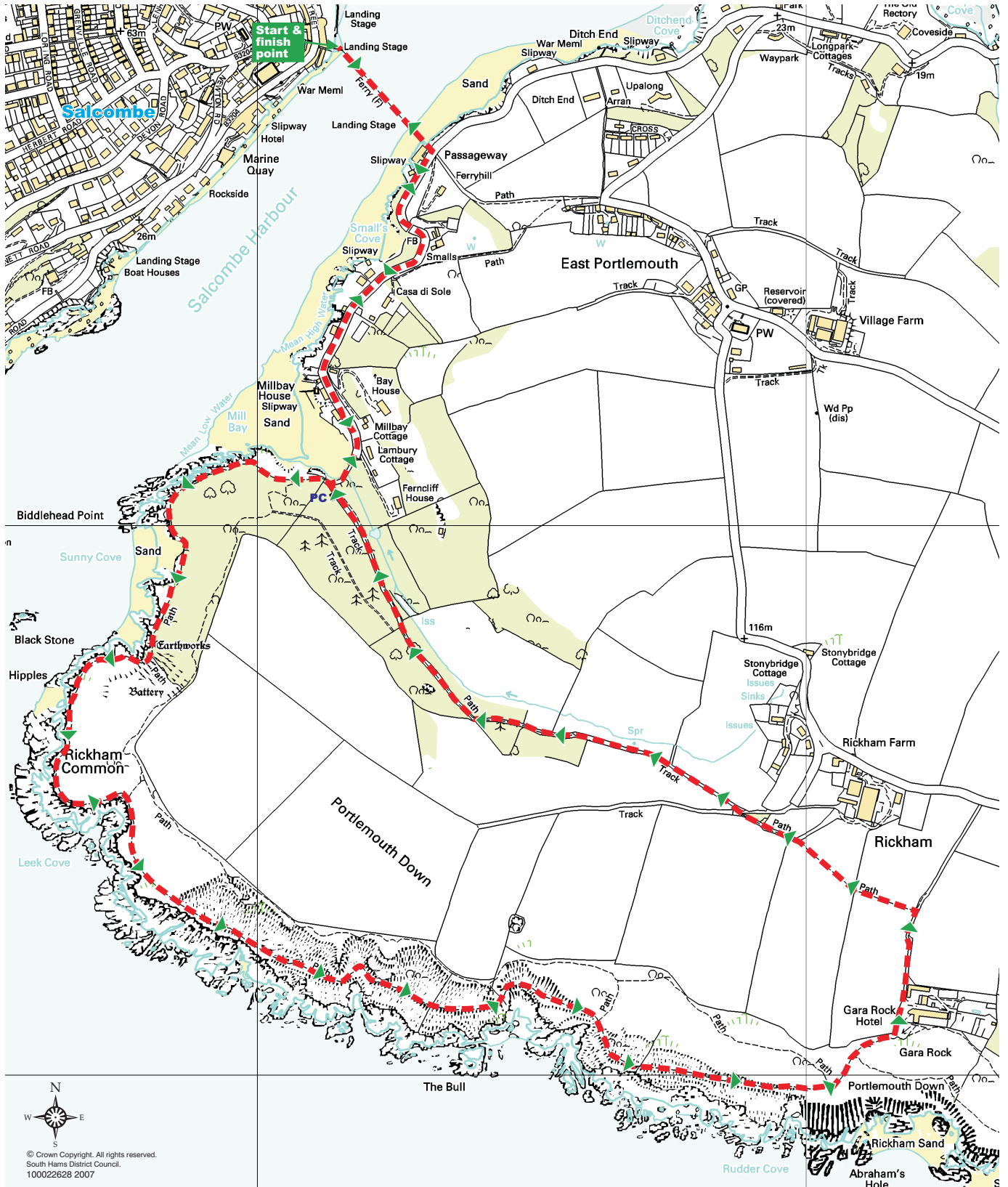
Step out along the coast path, from the Salcombe Estuary and out to meet the wide open sea. Exhilarating scenery, and a wonderful way to get the wind in your sails

Start:	Ferry Pier, Salcombe
Distance:	3.75 miles.
Circular Walk:	Yes
Grade:	Moderate
Terrain:	Coastal footpath, uneven and rocky in places; surfaced road; green lane; field footpath.
Obstacles & Steep Gradients:	1 steep ascent. This route is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs.
Public transport:	Bus services to Salcombe: 606 from Kingsbridge; 92 from Plymouth and Kingsbridge. Follow pedestrian signs into town centre from bus stop.
Refreshment stops:	Several pubs, cafes, and restaurants in Salcombe
Toilets:	Public toilets at Mill Bay; also at Whitestrand, Salcombe.
Parking:	Shadycombe Car Park, Shadycombe Rd, Salcombe.
Accommodation:	Please contact Salcombe Tourist Information Centre 01548 853195 www.kingsbridgeinfo.co.uk
Other facilities:	Post office and variety of shops in Salcombe. Tourist Information Centre in Council Hall, Market St, Salcombe. Public payphone at Whitestrand, Salcombe.
OS map:	Explorer 0L20
Grid Ref:	SX 742388

Directions

1. From spring to autumn the ferry to East Portlemouth runs from the ferry Pier, 200m beyond Whitestrand along Fore St.
2. At the top of the steps from the jetty turn right along the road.
3. At Mill Bay bear right, signed 'Gara rock 2 ½m'. Ignore both a left turn signed 'Top Path to Gara Rock' and a left fork for the beach, and follow the 'acorn' waymarkers along the coast path.
4. When you reach the 'Gara Rock' waymarker, bear left and head up to the small round white lookout post. Pass in front of the lookout, through the gate, and turn left at the fingerpost, signed 'Mill Bay 1 ¼m'.
5. Follow the lane leading inland. After 200m turn left onto public footpath.
6. Cross straight over the field ahead. Where you drop down to a track, cross over and down bridleway, following blue waymarker arrows.
7. At Mill Bay turn right and retrace you steps along the road to the jetty, and the ferry back to Salcombe.





Further Interest

Heritage

East Portlemouth has always looked to the sea. These days a small and sleepy settlement, in the Middle Ages it was a thriving port and a centre of ship building.

A report survives of an 18th century service in the church being interrupted by news of a shipwreck in the locality. The church emptied immediately, with the service abandoned and the rector tearing off his surplice to join the rush to see what could be plundered.

In the 1800s the owner of East Portlemouth was the Duke of Cleveland. He was advised by his land agent that his tenants there seemed to be interested only in the sea, that they would not work the land, and that the Estate would be better off without them.

The Duke duly evicted almost half the population, demolished their homes, and turned the land into three large farms. This destructive behaviour eventually came to national attention, and the Duchess of Cleveland was shamed into financing the restoration of the parish church.

During World War II, the beach at Mill Bay had a concrete slipway built across it. Landing craft used in the Normandy Landings were prepared, maintained and repaired here.

Behind the small white thatched lookout that marks the end of the outward route, the Gara Rock Hotel once stood, until it was demolished in 2006. The hotel was a stylish and trendy place to stay in the 1930s, with a succession of glamorous and famous guests. The site was originally developed as a coastguard station in 1847.

Landscape

The land above you as you walk out towards, and beyond, the mouth of the estuary, is known as Rickham Common. Part of the land was once divided into 141 long thin strips, on which the local people grew vegetables, and a 9-hole golf course occupied the cliff top here at one time.



The National Trust now owns Rickham Common. The land is managed under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme to restore rare maritime grassland.

The Trust is working to reduce the amount of scrub cover, and create a rich variety of habitats for wildlife. For more information on the National Trust visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk

As you approach Gara Rock, you may be able to make out the signs of ancient field systems on the hillside across the valley. This hill is called Deckler's Cliff, and the fields here are thought to date from the Bronze Age.

Wildlife

In the late spring, Bluebells bloom along the coastal part of the walk. The presence of bluebells are often a sign of ancient woodland, so it may well be that this stretch of coast was



once wooded. Other flowers include the bobbing pink clusters of thrift, along with Sea Campion, which has a small 'bladder' at the base of its white-petalled flowers.

You may also find the dramatically-named Bloody Cranesbill, a wild geranium with vivid magenta flowers. The 'bird's beak' shape of the seed cases give these flowers their name.

The sea occasionally yields sightings of dolphins, seals, and even whales – and basking sharks sometimes visit these waters in the summer to feed on plankton.

Seabirds seen here include herring gulls, blackbacked gulls and cormorants. You may also see Gannets gliding on long, slender, black-tipped wings over the sea, before plummeting abruptly to dive into the sea after fish, sometimes from great heights. They have a cushioned, reinforced head and neck to enable them to withstand the impact as they bullet into the water.

Among the rarer butterflies found here are the Pearl and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries – beautiful species with black markings on deep orange wings and delicately patterned fringing around the edges. You may also spot the striking black and white Marbled White, and the Green Hairstreak, a small butterfly whose brilliant green underwings stand out when it is at rest.

Reptiles find a home along this stretch of the coast. A Common Lizard may occasionally be seen on a quiet day, basking on the path or the rocks nearby, as may the Slow Worm, a legless lizard which closely resembles a snake.

The shy Adder – a true snake with distinctive diamond patterning down the back – is a rare sight here. Although their bite is poisonous, adders are shy creatures and will avoid people if they can, unless pestered.

The green lane that takes you back down to Mill Bay is lined with old lime trees. Limes, with their elegant heart-shaped leaves and yellow flowers, are a rarity in Devon.