

Torcross

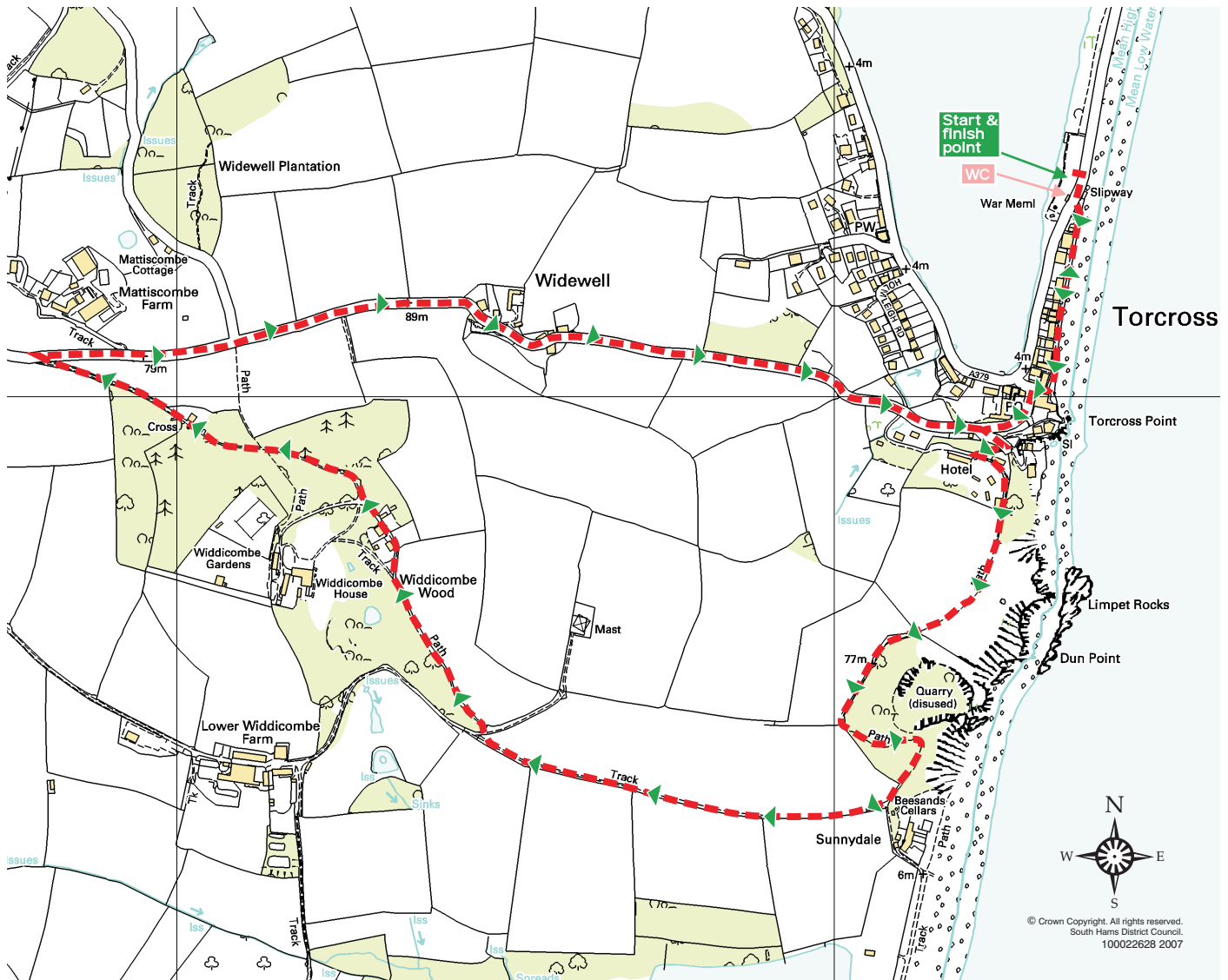
A gentle walk through a sumptuous landscape: the graceful form of Start Bay curling away to the north and south, freshwater lagoons, meadows, woodland, and peaceful Devon lanes meandering between blossoming banks.

Start:	Torcross Car Park
Distance:	2.5 miles
Circular Walk:	Yes
Grade:	Moderate
Terrain:	Route fairly even underfoot. Coastal footpath and field footpaths with occasional mud in wet weather; surfaced road.
Obstacles & Steep Gradients:	2 stiles; 2 flights of steps; This route is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs.
Public transport:	Bus service 93 to Torcross from Dartmouth, Kingsbridge and Plymouth
Refreshment stops:	In Torcross: Start Bay Inn, locally well known for seafood 01548 580553; Torcross Tavern 01548 580669; Sea Breeze Cafe.
Toilets:	Public toilets at Torcross Car Park.
Parking:	Torcross Car Park. Pay and display.
Accommodation:	Please contact Dartmouth Tourist Information Centre 01803 834224. www.discoverdartmouth.com
Other facilities:	Start Bay Stores and Post Office, Torcross; public payphone in Torcross, 400m from post office along main road around back of Ley.
OS map:	Explorer 0L20
Grid Ref:	SX 824423

Directions

1. From car park, cross road to seafront and turn right along the sea wall. At the end, go up steps signed 'Coast Path up steps to Beesands, Hallsands and Start Point'.
2. Follow the track at the top then turn left following yellow waymarker arrow up hill and onto footpath. The path climbs inland around the back of an old quarry and drops down to Beesands Cellars.
3. Shortly before the path reaches the beach, turn right at fingerpost onto public footpath signed for Widewell. Alternatively, go straight on here for detour to visit beach – and the quarry, which is left along the beach. Retrace your steps, and turn left here.
4. Follow path up field edge, cross track, and continue, following yellow waymarkers.
5. The route emerges from woods past cottages at Widdicombe then bears right up drive.
6. After 200m turn right at fingerpost along public footpath signed 'Widewell ¼m', and drop down through field.
7. At the road turn right and follow lane to return to Torcross and the car park.





Further Interest

Heritage

Slapton Sands resembles the beaches of Normandy targeted in the Allied D-Day landings in WWII. Because of this similarity it was used for live ammunition exercises in advance of the real assault. During this training German E-boats attacked ships in the bay, killing over 600 American troops in one disastrous day.

The black tank which sits by the car park at Torcross was one of a number modified during the war to be an amphibious vehicle. This particular tank, however, had a fairly crucial fault in the form of a hole underneath, and it sank. It was raised from the seabed in 1984, and now forms a memorial to the American service personnel who died here.

Torcross is a relatively modern village in the scheme of things. Centuries ago, there would have only been a clutch of shacks storing fishing tackle here.

Living near the sea was a hazardous business right up until the 18th century. People depended on the sea for food and



livelihoods, but lived in fear of pirates and raiders landing on the undefended coast. Most people compromised by living a mile or two inland at settlements like Widewell, for safety's sake, and just went down to the shore to work the sea.

Beesands Cellars is another site of fishermen's stores from times past. The 'cellars' have now disappeared, but were cut into the rock and used to salt and store fish. This spot must have a regular little hive of industry at one time – you can see the remains of a lime kiln here, as well as the old quarry.

The entrance to the quarry is no more than a fissure in the rock, well up above the beach. During the 18th and 19th centuries the quarry produced a soft slate transported from here by sea.



Once harder Cornish and Welsh slate came on the scene, the quarry here couldn't compete and closed down.

At its highest point, the walk passes through the grounds of Widdicombe House. This estate is said to date from Saxon times. Later, Captain Cook is thought to have stayed here after returning from Tahiti. During WWII, General Eisenhower took over the house and grounds as a Combined Services Headquarters.

Landscape

The shingle ridge of Slapton Sands has been pushed up over the last 10,000 years by the sea as its levels have risen following the last ice age.

Slapton Ley, the lagoon behind the shingle ridge, has been around for the last 3,000 years. It is the largest natural expanse of freshwater in South West England. The Ley and the area around it form an abundant oasis for a huge variety of plant and animal life, and it is designated a National Nature Reserve.

Looking south down the coast after climbing around the back of Beesands Quarry, you will see Widdicombe Ley in the valley below. Like Slapton Ley, this is a freshwater lagoon, and over 180 species of birds have been seen there.



Beyond the Ley is the fishing village of Beesands, and a little further on lies the 'lost village' of Hallsands, destroyed by the sea in 1917. The coast then reaches round to the lighthouse at Start Point. The jagged rock formations on the ridge there are formed from a glittery, crystalline rock called schist.

Wildlife

A clutch of wildfowl are often gathered on the little beach across the road from the shops at Torcross. These feathered residents of the Ley often include the common but nonetheless striking green-headed, yellow-billed Mallard, and the Coot, a rounded black bird with an unmistakable white forehead and beak.

The Ley is frequented by a variety of gulls, often to be seen sitting on the water in large armadas. They include the black-headed gull, a smallish gull with red legs whose head is black only from spring to autumn, and white through the winter.

Perhaps the most glamorous resident of the Ley is The Great Crested Grebe. Larger than a duck, with a slender, elegant shape, this grebe has a rich brown and black ruff around its white face. It sports feathery plumes on the top of its head, and a bill like a dagger.

The coast path, field edges, and sunny, sheltered Devon lanes are all good places to see butterflies. Just off the road on the left as you drop back down to Torcross, is a viewpoint and small recreation area that is perhaps the best butterfly spot of all.

Likely butterfly species to spot on your walk include the large, pale yellow Brimstone, and the Gatekeeper. This small dusky orange and brown butterfly gets its name from the two tiny white 'eyes' on a black patch on each wing. Small Tortoiseshells have orange-red wings with black markings and intricate green, blue and black scalloped fringes.

Alexanders grows by the side of the route in several places. The foliage of this plant resembles large dark glossy celery tops. In spring it produces light green flowers in parachute-shaped clusters. Originally brought to Britain from the Mediterranean by the Romans as a vegetable, Alexanders was still being grown for food in cottage gardens as late as the 18th century before falling out of fashion.

