

Totnes and Dartington

On this walk of fabulous country scenery, the river Dart is the lovely thread which connects Totnes and the Dartington Estate, both places with a fascinating past and vibrant present.

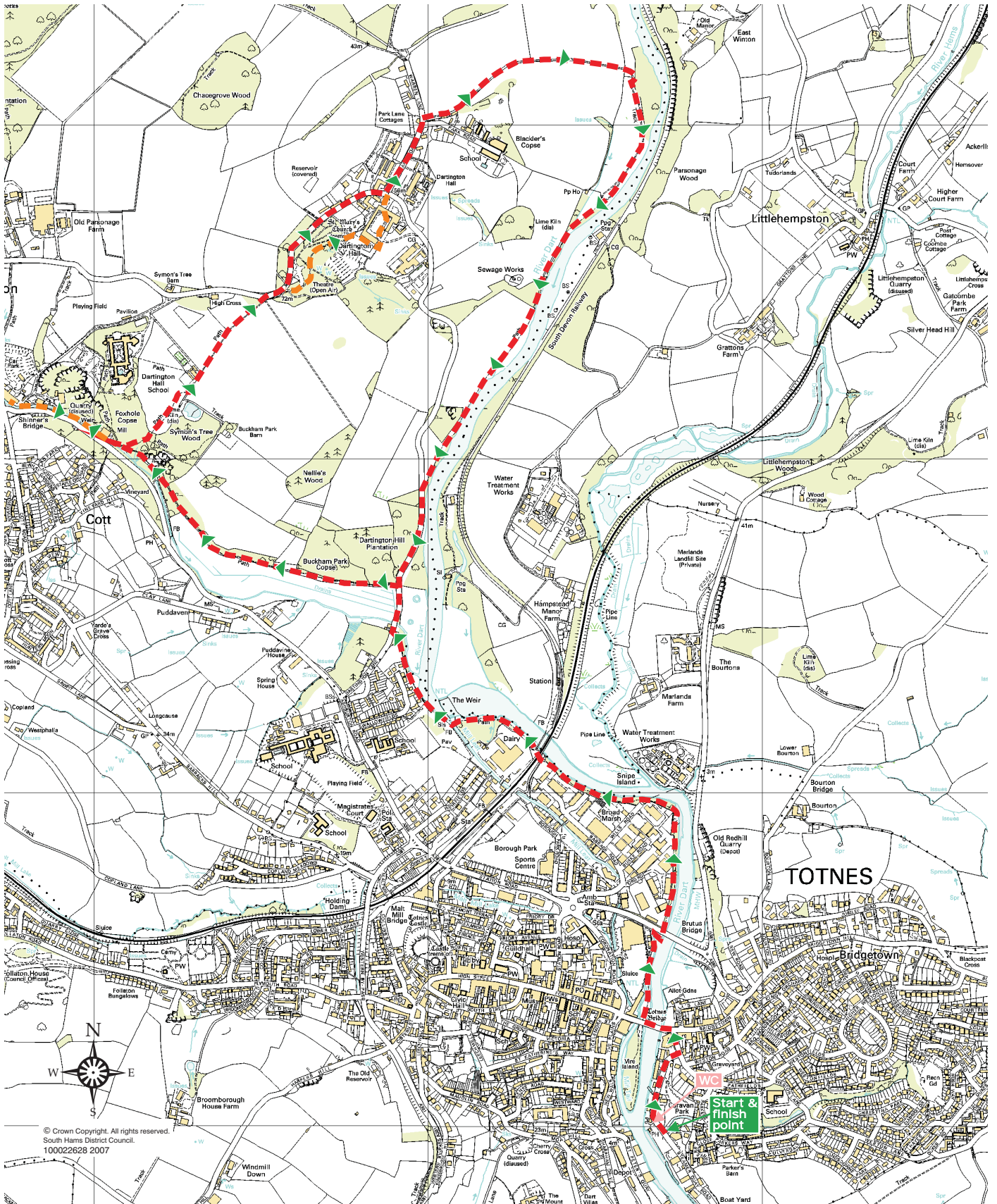
Start:	Steamer Quay Car Park, Totnes
Distance:	6 miles
Circular Walk:	Yes
Grade:	Moderate
Terrain:	The walk is reasonably even underfoot. Footpaths, occasional muddy patches along river in wet weather; farm track; surfaced road.
Obstacles & Steep Gradients:	3 stiles; 1 steep ascent. An Access for All walk following part of the route is in development and will be published on this website in the near future.
Public transport:	Totnes is well served by bus services from all over South Devon, and has a train station on the main West Coast rail line.
Refreshment stops:	Many cafes, restaurants and pubs in Totnes. Dartington Hall: White Hart Bar and Restaurant 01803 847111; Roundhouse Café open afternoons and evenings.
Toilets:	Public toilets at Steamer Quay Car Park, Totnes; also by Gatehouse, Dartington Hall.
Parking:	Steamer Quay Car Park, Totnes. Pay and Display
Accommodation:	Please contact Totnes Tourist Information Centre 01803 863168 www.totnesinformation.co.uk
Other facilities:	Public payphone at Steamer Quay Car Park, Totnes.
OS map:	Explorer OL20
Grid Ref:	SX 807599



Directions

1. From car park turn left along road. At t- junction turn left, and then left again at further t- junction opposite Seymour Terrace.
2. Three quarters of the way across Totnes Bridge turn right down steps to follow riverside footpath. Go under main road and continue beside river.
3. At next junction go under railway bridge then take left fork along river, signed 'Dartington 1 ½m'.
4. By weir, cross footbridge over leat and continue along river to right.
5. When you reach road, turn right through gates onto Dartington Hall Trust Estate. After 150m turn left to continue along Access For All Path.
6. Just before you reach the old watermill by the road, take the first footpath sharp right up through woods. Alternatively, to visit shops and cafes at Cider Press Centre, continue along Access Path for a further 350m. Afterwards, retrace your steps and rejoin main route here.
7. After 100m fork left up to stile then across field, heading to right of horticultural centre ahead. Turn left up track.
8. Bear right over squeeze stile and follow 'Public Footpath' fingerpost up hill.
9. At top of field, by next fingerpost, go through gate and right up road. At brow of hill you can cross and continue to follow the road. Alternatively, take a recommended detour right, through gate to visit Dartington Hall Gardens. The gardens are fairly easy to navigate. To exit, go past right hand side of the Hall, through the courtyard and out by the gatehouse. There is a suggested minimum donation of £2.00 for visiting the gardens which can be paid at slot in wall by gatehouse. Take road opposite to left to rejoin route.
10. Turn left above main car park opposite Dartington Hall entrance, along lane signed for Park Rd and Warren Lane.
11. At junction, go through wooden kissing gate on corner and down the concrete track. Turn right at the bottom and follow the riverside path.
12. When you reach the road turn left. At the Estate gates turn left and retrace your steps back along the riverside path to Totnes.
13. Turn left over Totnes Bridge, then right onto Seymour Road, and first right again back down Steamer quay Road to the car park.





Further Interest

Heritage

According to Medieval legend, Totnes was the place where the nation of Britain was founded. The tale has it that the Trojans found their way across the seas and up the Dart following their defeat by the Greeks.



Upon landing at Totnes, they slew the smattering of giants that made up the population, and named the country 'Britain' after their leader, Brutus.

The threat of Vikings raiding up the Dart was what actually put Totnes on the map. It was here, in the 10th century, that Saxon kings built a fortified town to repel them. Today, Totnes is a thriving market town and a centre of alternative culture.

The story of Dartington Hall begins with one John Holland, who was given the Estate by his half brother Richard II in 1348. Holland was eventually beheaded, and through the centuries the Estate passed through the hands of various minor royals, and a family called the Champerknownes, falling at last into serious neglect.

In 1925 the dilapidated Estate was bought by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst, a rich, energetic and visionary couple. They restored the Estate and transformed it into a renowned centre of educational, agricultural and artistic experiment. The Dartington Hall Trust now works to continue and develop their legacy. For more information on Dartington Hall Trust visit www.dartingtonhall.org.uk

There are a number of interesting buildings on the Dartington Hall Estate. The complex on your right as you walk up across the field after leaving the All Access Path is called Foxhole. It was built as part of Dartington Hall School, which famously developed a progressive model of education until its closure in the mid 1980s.

As you follow the footpath on up the hill, you can see the bold white and blue form of High Cross House to the left. This is a prime example of a house built in the Modernist style, designed to be 'a machine for living in'. The house is open to visitors.

The courtyard and Great Hall are part of the original manor house. Except when it is being used for a function, you are welcome to visit the Great Hall. Looking in there today it is hard to imagine that when the Elmhirsts bought the Estate in 1925, the Hall was in ruins, with no roof and a tree growing happily in the middle of the space.

Landscape

The wetland meadow on your left as you enter the Dartington Hall Estate is called Queen's Marsh. It used to be a holding area for barges, and you can still make out the old channels where the boats were moored.

The gardens at Dartington Hall include formal garden and parkland spaces; several sculptures including one by Henry Moore; tremendous displays of camellias and magnolias; and a blue and yellow herbaceous border designed by Dorothy Elmhirst.

The centrepiece of the garden is the lawn with grassed terracing known as the Tiltyard. It used to be thought that it had been used as a jousting arena. This now seems unlikely, but the area probably was used in past centuries for the unsavoury pastime of bear baiting.

Wildlife

The riverside footpath leading out of Totnes is spangled with Ramsons in the spring. Also known as Wild Garlic, the white stars of its flowers are held on bluebell-like stems, and it has long, oval, edible leaves.

The sandbank below the weir at Totnes is a daily gathering place for gulls, geese and wildfowl. Look out here for Canada Geese, Mallards, and the less-than-common Common Gull, with a dark eye, slim shape, and sleek grey and white plumage.

Along the Access for All Path on the Dartington Hall Estate grows Green Alkanet, with its hairy oval leaves and delicate blue flowers. Bluebells flower up on the bank to the right in spring, and you will also find Herb Robert, with its pink flowers and lacy leaves. It is a 'cranesbill', so called because of the long beak-like shape of its seed pods.

Where you leave the Access for All Path to climb the hill you pass through part of a wood of Ash. Aided by a sheltered situation, deep soils, and helpful woodland management, some of the tallest ash trees in the country grow on the Dartington Estate.

You may hear the laughing 'yaffle' call of the Green Woodpecker echoing through the woods of the Dartington Estate. This woodpecker is a striking sight with its red head, green body, and swooping, undulating flight.

Otters live on the Dart. They are occasionally seen on the river in broad daylight, but your best chance of a glimpse is at dawn or dusk. You are likely to spot their spraint, though, at any time of the day. This is a tarry substance left in small deposits on stones at the edge of the water.

Otters have two layers of fur, for warmth and waterproofing. Their eyes are set high up on their heads so that they can see when the rest of their body is underwater. Otters swim using their webbed feet and long powerful tail, and are one of the most playful of all creatures.

By the edges of the river – and of the leat by the weir – there is always a chance of seeing a Moorhen. With a bright red, yellow-tipped beak against a dark body, the moorhen should be easily spotted. However, it tends to skulk about in the weeds close to the riverbank, so you may have to peer hard to make it out.

The stylish Goosander is occasionally seen on the river. It has a rich chestnut brown head with a crest, and a long bill which is serrated for catching fish. In winter, the male has a black head, and black and white body.

