

Brixham Headlands Walk



Start: | Berry head car park – pay and display
(it is also possible to start and finish at Brixham harbour – go straight to point 8)

Parking: | Berry Head car park – pay and display

Distance: | 5.5 miles (shorter route 3 miles)

OS map: | Explorer OL20

Difficulty: | Moderate. Some steps and stiles, short inclines but not too steep

Grid Ref: | SX 903 510

Terrain: | Route fairly even underfoot. Coastal footpath and field footpaths with occasional mud in wet weather; surfaced road.

Public transport: | See www.travelinesw.com

Refreshments: | Café at Berry Head or in Brixham

Toilets: | Berry Head and Brixham

This walk is available in the following formats from www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walks



online walk



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KEY

— Main route

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Directions

- 1 Head south out of the car park and take the footpath on your left. Follow the acorn symbol for the coast path along the top of the cliffs.
- 2 For a shorter route, turn right and follow the lane to the junction. Cross over onto Centry Road, then Higher Ranscombe Road and Ranscombe Road back down towards the harbour, to rejoin the route at point 8.
- 3 Bear left to remain on the coast path and follow this around Sharkham Point.
- 4 Having gone through the gate, bear right and follow the path at the right hand field edge to the kissing gate at the end of the field onto a green lane. Follow this lane to its end past the holiday park.
- 5 Carry straight on into St Mary's Road
- 6 Stay on St Mary's Road, passing an entrance to a holiday park and Upton Manor campsite. Carry on downhill around a right hand bend. At a junction with a big tree turn right onto Castor Road. Follow this until the crossroads.
- 7 At the crossroads, turn right onto Greenwood Road, past the hospital. Cross straight over the traffic lights onto Bolton Road. Follow this to the crossroads and traffic lights by the Town Hall.
- 8 Bear right towards the Harbour then right again at the road sign for Berry Head. Pass the William of Orange statue and continue around the harbour walking up towards Breakwater beach.
(Keep following the acorn symbols as you see them)
- 9 Turn right up the hill, then left onto Berry Head Road. If the tide is out, you can walk along the beach and up the steps on the other side, to join the road.
- 10 Turn left to follow the path around Shoalstone pool, then left at the end to rejoin the road. Remain on Berry Head Rd as it curves around past the hotel entrance.
- 11 Take the footpath on the left, just past the Hotel entrance. Follow the path up the steps and through the woods to Berry Head Country Park.



This walk along with many more can be downloaded from www.southdevonaonb.org.uk

- 12 Follow the path to your right, around the top of the old quarry.
- 13 Take a detour down through the fort, to the tip of the headland to see the lighthouse and enjoy the views, before returning to follow the path back to the car park.

Further Information

Heritage

The route between Berry Head and Sharkham Point was originally the Coastguard Walk, along which the coastguards regularly patrolled. Sharkham Point was once the site of extensive iron workings and old adits can be found dating from the period 1790-1930.

In its early days, Brixham consisted of two settlements: an inland farming community (Cowtown) and a fishing community (known as Fishtown). In medieval days it was south-west England's largest fishing port and was known as the 'Mother of Deep Sea Fisheries'. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were some 300 trawlers in the fleet, today it is one of the largest fishing fleets in the UK and has a thriving fish market on the Quayside. A visitor viewing platform on the seaward side of the inner harbour is a great place to watch the comings and goings of the fleet, made up of large beam trawlers and the smaller day boats. You can experience the early morning buzz of the fish market on special guided tours, visit the Information Centre in the town for more details.

As well as a base for the busy fishing fleet, there are various monuments around the harbour which help tell the story of its past. The statue of William of Orange was erected in Victorian times to commemorate the landing of William and his men in 1688, when he was called upon to depose his father-in-law James II and restore Protestant reign.

South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walks

The galleon in dock is a replica of Sir Francis Drake's Golden Hind, which he sailed around the world in 1577-1580. This boat was used in a tv series in 1963 and is now a museum, which you can visit to find out more about life aboard a Tudor ship.

The Man and Boy statue was commissioned to honour those lost at sea and celebrating the port's fishing heritage. After fundraising by residents of the town over a period of 10 years, it was created by artist Elisabeth Hadley and unveiled in 2016. The statue is based on an etching by the Brixham artist Arthur Briscoe (1873-1943) called 'The Wheel'.

To the left of the breakwater car park you can see the Torbay Lifeboat Station. Brixham Lifeboat Station was opened in 1866 but since 1924 it has been known as 'Torbay'. The lifeboat station was granted the Honorary Freedom of the Borough of Torbay on 29 April 1988. Since 2005 it has operated an all-weather lifeboat and an inshore lifeboat.

The Berry Head Hotel was originally built as a military hospital as part of the Napoleonic fortifications on the headland. After it was decommissioned it became the home of Brixham's vicar, the Reverend Henry Francis Lyte. A poet and an accomplished flautist, Lyte composed the hymn 'Abide With Me'. After he arrived in 1824, his services were so popular that the church had to be enlarged!

The name 'Berry Head' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'bury', meaning 'fort' - there was a primitive cliff castle on the headland in the Iron Age, some two thousand years ago, consisting of ramparts and ditches forming a defensive settlement.

The limestone, of which Berry Head is made, was a rich resource for industry, agriculture and construction. The stone here is very pure at nearly 99% calcium carbonate and was quarried extensively over the last 300 years. You can see a huge chunk of the landmass has been removed when you look at aerial photographs, but you can get an idea of the scale if you walk down the path to the foot of the quarries on the Torbay side of the headland. The quarry was in its heyday during the 1930s - 50s, with production in some years exceeding 200,000 tons.

Berry Head Lighthouse was built in 1906 and automated in 1921 and converted to run on acetylene. It was not until 1994 that it was adapted again to run on mains electricity. It is claimed that it is Britain's shortest lighthouse (5m), one of the highest (58m above sea level) and was once the deepest -because the optic was originally turned by a weight falling through a 45m deep shaft. Today an electric motor is used instead. Its white light flashes twice every 15 seconds and can be seen for 19 nautical miles.

Landscape and wildlife

St Mary's Bay was once known as Mudstone Bay, and a nearby lane is still called Mudstone Lane. As the area became more popular for tourism, the name was changed.

The local bedrock is indeed mudstone, interbedded with limestone, laid down as sediments in warm shallow seas, some 392 to 398 million years ago in the Devonian Period. As you walk around St Mary's Bay you are moving over distinct bands of rock types, they are all limestone and mudstone and contain many fossilised corals and shellfish.

The stretch of coastline around Berry Head and Sharkham Point is a National and Local Nature Reserve, as well as being a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its birds, bats and plants. The exposed conditions on the two headlands and the thin limestone soil provide an unusual habitat in the mild climate for a number of nationally rare species that are under threat. It is one of only two locations in Britain where the white rock-rose can be found, and the small hare's-ear, a delicate low-growing plant with tiny yellow flowers growing in clusters in spiky triangular-leaved bracts. Another rare plant found here is the small restharrow, whose pink flowers resemble miniature sweet peas.

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South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walks

One of the south coast's largest colonies of guillemots nest on the cliffs beneath the South Fort, as you will hear if you visit during the nesting season! They are known as 'Brixham penguins' because of their upright stance and their black and white (actually dark brown and white) colouring. Apart from the breeding season, when they rear their chicks on the cliffs, guillemots spend their whole lives at sea. This colony can be seen live on CCTV in the visitor centre.

Caves in the cliffs provide a roost for Greater Horseshoe Bats, an endangered species. A herd of North Devon cattle has been brought in to graze around the headland so that the dung beetles attracted by the cow pats are themselves a source of food for the bats.

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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas has supported Explore South Devon to promote circular walks within the South Devon AONB using the South West Coast Path National Trail.