

East Prawle to Prawle Point



Start: | East Prawle Village Green

Distance: | 3.5 miles

Difficulty: | Strenuous; No stiles but several steep climbs.

Terrain: | Coastal footpath with some uneven and rocky sections; green lanes; surfaced roads.

Parking: | Parking around the village green.

OS map: | Explorer OL20

Grid Ref: | SX782364

Public transport: | See www.travelinesw.com

Refreshments: | In East Prawle

Toilets: | Public toilets by the village green.

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



online walk



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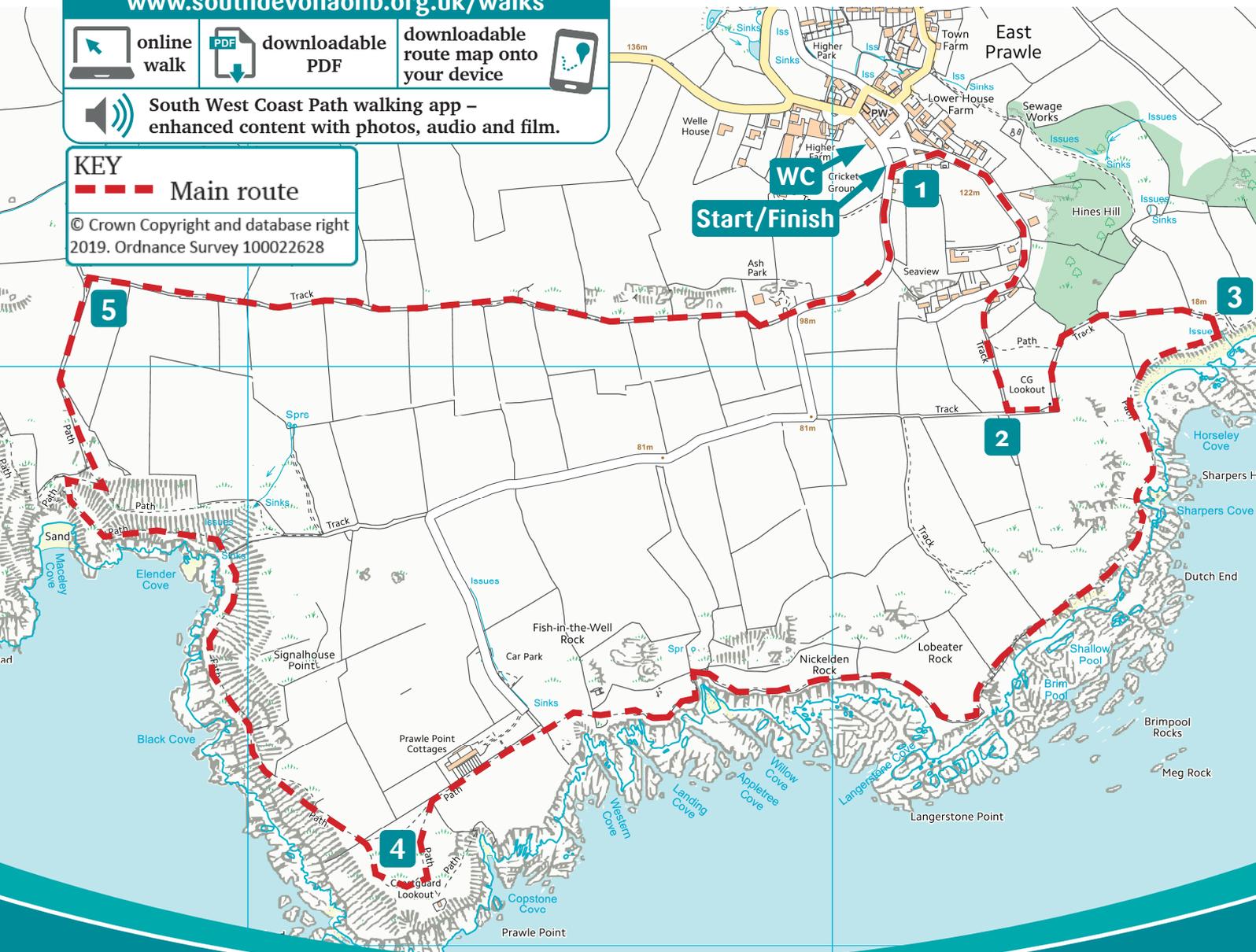
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KEY
--- Main route

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Directions

- 1** Starting out from the village green in East Prawle, with the entrance to the café facing you, turn right along the lane leading out of the village.
- 2** By the post box, turn left down the bridleway, then left again down the old green lane which passes through a gate and between fields towards the sea.
- 3** Bear right at the finger post onto the coast path, signed for Prawle Point and follow the field edge path along the low cliff. In time you will see Prawle Point ahead, with the lookout station perched on top, and the aptly named Horse's Head rock below.
- 4** Continue along the coast path beyond Prawle Point. Turn right at the waymarker post above Maceley Cove, and then left after about 50 metres at the next waymarker, heading up hill and inland.
- 5** Turn right following the blue waymarked arrow onto another ancient track. This leads you back to East Prawle via a final stretch of metalled country lane.

Further Interest

Heritage

In the field to the left as you drop down the bridleway after leaving the road out of the village, a tall standing post can be seen. This is a rare example of an old coastguard rocket post. It was used to simulate the mast of a ship when training rescue teams in the use of the rocket apparatus, a system of rescue from land to sea that has since been superseded, most notably by the helicopter.

Just before the climb up towards Prawle Point begins, the curious looking bunker to the left of the path is the remains of a radar station. It is one of two built at Prawle during the Second World War. The grass-covered bunker near the path, and others to the east, housed the transmitter, receiver and generator blocks. The site was protected by light anti-aircraft guns to the north and on the cliffs below the coastguard look-out.



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On Prawle Point stands a lookout station. Formerly a coastguard station, it was abandoned in 1982, but reopened in 1998 under the auspices of the National Coastwatch Institute and is now staffed by volunteers. The station welcomes visitors to pop in and say hello, and to peruse the display housed there. The name Prawle stems from the Anglo Saxon word 'Prawhyll' meaning lookout hill, and it seems likely that this spot has been used for that purpose for many centuries, in 1204, Prawle Point was also the site of a medieval chapel.

At Signalhouse Point in the late 18th century, there was a admiralty signalling station. At this time, England was at war with France. A chain of 25 structures were built along the Channel coast to keep watch for approaching French ships and pass messages rapidly along the line to the Admiralty and English fleets moored at Plymouth and Portsmouth. The next ones from here were at Start Point and West Soar, where the signalling station still stands.

Landscape

The area of low lying fields by the sea was formed as mud springs flowed over the cliffs behind, many millions of years ago. These deposits have created a fertile, south-facing pasture and cropland. In the fairly recent past this land was renowned for its produce of cauliflowers, from fields 'top-dressed' with seaweed collected from the shore below.

Beyond the cliffs, rocky shelves run unevenly out into the sea. These unusual platforms were cut by waves towards the end of the last ice age - a time when the sea level was 7 metres higher than it is today.

By the path beyond Prawle Point, you may come across short rows of single large flat stone slabs set on edge. These are the remains of old field systems, still marked on maps, but no longer present on the ground.

South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walks

Wildlife

Prawle Point is the most southerly point in Devon. Because of this, it is both the departure and arrival point for many migrating birds and butterflies. The climate and richness of the habitat also contribute to a tremendous natural abundance. Migrating butterflies including painted ladies, red admirals, and clouded yellows arrive here, and can be seen along with many other species of butterfly during the summer months, particularly along the lanes, which act as 'rides' for the butterflies.

The fields along the coast are rich in wildflowers, and are a haven for many birds, in particular the nationally rare Gull Bunting. This is a small green and brown bird with a yellow and black striped face. It thrives on the arable weed seeds here and feeds its young on the abundant grasshoppers and similar insects in the area. Stonechats and Whitethroats are also common sightings, perched on gorse and blackthorn scrub along the cliff edge.

Residents of the many rockpools along the coast include the colourfully patterned cones of topshells, and the spiral whorls of winkles, with typically purple or yellow shells. The Oystercatcher, with its orange beak and black and white plumage, is one of the many wading birds to be seen here. Further out over the water, the seabirds include gannets, wheeling on long black-tipped wings and plummeting dramatically into the sea to catch fish.

The lacy white rosettes of wild carrot grow abundantly along the coast path, and the small blue stars of spring and autumn squill are also to be found. Seals can sometimes be seen from the coast path here, and very occasionally dolphins and even basking sharks.

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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.



South West Coast Path Association