

## Salcombe and Bolt Head



- Start:** | South Sands, Salcombe, TQ8 8LL

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- Distance:** | 2.75 miles.  
3.25 miles extended route

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- Grade:** | Moderate. 2 flights of steps; 1 steep ascent (+1 on extended route)

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- Terrain:** | Coastal footpath, uneven and rocky in places; surfaced road; field footpath.

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- Parking:** | Shadycombe Car Park, Salcombe for ferry to South Sands from Whitestrand Pontoon. Pay and display. (Summer Only)

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- OS map:** | Explorer OL20

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- Grid Ref:** | SX 728377

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- Public transport:**  
| See [www.travelinesw.com](http://www.travelinesw.com)

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- Refreshments:**  
| At Salcombe and South Sands.

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- Toilets:** | Public toilets at South Sands; also at Whitestrand, Salcombe.



This walk is available in the following formats from [www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walk](http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walk)



online walk



downloadable PDF

downloadable route map onto your device



South West Coast Path walking app – enhanced content with photos, audio and film.

## Directions

- 1** The ferry for South Sands leaves from Whitestrand Pontoon in the centre of Salcombe. To get there from the car park and bus stop at Shadycombe, follow pedestrian signs into the town centre, turn left along Fore Street, and left again after 100m to the waterfront at Whitestrand.
- 2** From South Sands as you disembark from the ferry turn left along the road which curves uphill.
- 3** Continue straight on past National Trust hut. Follow sign for Overbecks along winding drive up hill.
- 4** Right in front of gates to Overbecks, turn right up footpath, keeping wall on left.
- 5** At the next fingerpost turn left up steps signed for Sharp Tor, Starehole and Bolt Head.
- 6** Continue along footpath past Sharp Tor – marked by compass on plinth. Go straight on at next fingerpost signed for Starehole and Bolt Head to drop down into valley.
- 7** Cross the stream at the bottom. Turn left here down the valley, and left again onto the coast path.  

A short diversion will take you to East Soar Farm Experience which has a walkers hut with self service cakes, cream teas and drinks. (follow the signs, before returning to this point). Otherwise continue on the path leaving the sign to the farm on your right.

*Jump to point 11 for the shorter route*
- 8** Alternatively, for an extended walk taking in Bolt Head itself, go straight on after crossing the stream up the steep path opposite and along the wall.
- 9** At the fingerpost take 2nd path left signed 'Coast Path Salcombe 2½m'. This path drops along flank of ridge.
- 10** Bear round to the left at the tip of the ridge to follow the coast path. At fork, take right hand path downhill. You rejoin the shorter route at the bottom of the next dip at Starehole Bay.
- 11** Follow the coast path back into the estuary mouth and through the woods. Bear right where you meet the road to return to South Sands.

## Further Interest

### Heritage

This walk is best begun and ended with the lovely ferry trip from Whitestrand Pontoon, which gives a completely different perspective on the town and the land.

From the ferry you can see the tiny waterside castle-shaped fort built on the Salcombe side during the Napoleonic wars to give the French the impression that the estuary was well fortified. From the sea it looks like a second fort, but from the side more like a stage set!

A little further along down by the water stands Fort Charles. This one is a real fort, probably built originally by Henry VIII. It was occupied by Royalist troops during the English Civil War in 1644. The fort withstood 5 months of siege, when Salcombe was the last place in England to hold out against Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads.

The ornate old boathouse at South Sands was built in 1870 to house the first of Salcombe's rowing lifeboats. When the alarm was raised, the crew had to run from Salcombe to launch the 33 foot boat and row it out to sea.

On October 27 1916, the lifeboat 'William and Emma' capsized on Salcombe Bar as it attempted to return to harbour, leading to 13 of the crew losing their lives. The ill-fated trip came after the 15-strong crew departed in heavy storms to assist the Western Lass. They reached the wreck and discovered that its crew had already been rescued, and so made their way back to harbour.

But this time, the storm was too strong. The lifeboat capsized, sparing only two lives. This event was a tragic blow to the small community of Salcombe, and one of the worst incidents recorded in RNLI history. Further along the coast you will see a memorial to the men who lost their lives.



This walk along with many more can be downloaded from [www.southdevonaonb.org.uk](http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk)

# South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walks

The National Trust property of Overbecks was known as Sharpitor House until it was bought by an eccentric chemist, collector and inventor, Otto Overbecks. He invented the 'electrical rejuvenator'; a contraption he claimed would be able to cure most maladies and allow people to live for 350 years. It didn't do the trick for Otto himself, who died in 1937, leaving the property to the National Trust.

Vikings once landed and settled in the valley at Starehole Bay. Centuries later the bay became the last resting place of the wrecked Herzogin Cecilie. This handsome four-masted vessel had an acre of sail and was one of the fastest sailing ships on the seas, outstripping allcomers in the great grain races. The ship struck the nearby Ham Stone and was towed into Starehole Bay where she broke up in high seas.

The wreck is still visible as a dark outline in the water, and part of the vessel still appears above the water at very low tides.

The old blockhouses perched on the rocks at Bolt Head are the remains of WWII observation posts.

## Landscape

The entrance to the estuary at Salcombe is notoriously hazardous to navigate. A sandbar just below the water extends most of the way across the river mouth, leaving only a narrow channel close to the near shore. This reef inspired Tennyson's famous poem 'Crossing the Bar'.

The spectacular jagged cliffs are formed of mica-schist, a relatively soft rock that weathers into the spires and crags you see here. The author Henry Williamson dubbed this little rocky wonderland 'Valhalla'.

Much of the land around Bolt Head is coastal heathland. The National Trust manages this rare and important habitat with its tenant farmers.

## Wildlife

Along the sides of the lane up to Overbecks grows Winter Heliotrope, a plant originally introduced to Britain as a garden plant from Africa, and which has spread into the wild. It has broad heart-shaped leaves and in winter throws up chunky spikes of lilac flowers with a delicate marzipan aroma.

The clifftop path between Overbecks and Sharp Tor is lined with dense Blackthorn scrub in places. Blackthorn's snowy flurry of white blossom appears before the small oval leaves emerge, in early spring. Thickets like those here provide tremendous cover for small birds and mammals.

Lichen festoons the blackthorn and many of the rocks along the walk. Lichen is actually a combination of two kinds of organism: a fungus and an alga. Some form a thin crust on rock, others tiny fairy cups on stalks, and yet others hang like strange pale bluish-green plants from the trees. The presence of plenty of lichen is a sign of good clean air.

The birdlife is rich here. Ravens, Peregrine Falcons, and Kestrels ride the wind along the cliffs, and gulls and shags perch on the rocks down by the water.

The dense forests of coastal scrub provide nesting sites for the brightly yellow-headed Yellowhammer and the black-headed Stonechat, which has a reddish breast and a call that sounds like two stones being tapped together.

Flowers to look out for on the coastal grassland include the short succulent Stonecrop, with pinkish-white stars of flowers, and Sea Campion, which has small pointed oval leaves, and a 'bladder' at the base of the white flowers. Birdsfoot Trefoil grows low to the ground with yellow and red lipped flowers, while the flower-heads of Sheepsbit Scabious are beautiful and delicate bluish-violet masses.

## Working in partnership



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.

