

The Dawlish Discovery Walk

This walk is based around Dawlish, a small picturesque Victorian town with an interesting seaside history. The town dates back to Saxon times and all time periods have left their mark with a variety of buildings from different eras.

Fact File

Walk length: 8.75 km / 5.5 miles

Public Transport: Dawlish Warren is easily accessed by frequent trains from main line trains from the Plymouth and Exeter directions. For shorter walking options, trains also run regularly between Dawlish and Dawlish Warren. For up to date train times call the Traveline on 0871 200 22 33.

OS Maps: Explorer No. 31 Torquay and Dawlish (1:25,000).

Facilities: Dawlish and Dawlish Warren have an abundance of refreshments outlets, gift shops and both have public toilets.

The Walk

The walk begins at Dawlish Warren Railway Station. Head left under the railway arch and continue straight ahead, along past the car park towards the cluster of buildings, including a pub, and up to the sea wall.

From here you will have fantastic sea views. Looking east (or left – as you gaze out to sea) across Dawlish Warren and over the Exe Estuary to Exmouth. You can see the start of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site at Orcombe Point and further beyond into Dorset, on a clear day.

Dawlish Warren is a National Nature Reserve (NNR) supporting over 2000 species of invertebrates and 620 different plants, many of them rare species. Conservation grazing by ponies along the Warren is essential to maintain the site in good order for its many wild and human visitors. The Warren is also holder of the European Blue Flag Award.

The walk heads south (turn right as you meet the sea), and follow the sea wall and cliff side path towards the red rock stacks, known as Langstone Rock.

These stunning red Permian rocks are separated from the mainland by Brunel's railway cutting. The Red Rock Café has set up residence at the headland. It is not unusual to see dolphins swimming along this part of the coast on early summer mornings when the sea is calm.

Continue south on the coastpath alongside the railway line towards Dawlish where the walk arrives in Dawlish near to the railway station.

The present station dates from the 1870s and retains an unusual signal box in what is now the station's car park. At the far end of the car park are the remains of one of the pumping houses designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel for his ingenious yet ill-fated atmospheric railway in the 1840s.

From the station car park continue along the road with the sea to your left, turn right along Brookdale Terrace and enter Brunswick Place.

On the left you will see the buildings and huge wheel of the former Strand or Torbay Mill, now a restaurant. The water wheel, 30ft in diameter and of pitchback type, was cast by Bodleys of Exeter. The brick built launder has been restored in recent years and the wheel now turns again.

Head along Brunswick Place, noting the fine Regency houses in this road and across the lawn. Keeping the Gothic-style houses on your left, cross over the road bridge and take the path marked 'Manor Grounds' which goes along the left bank of the brook.

You might spot the unusual residents of the brook which runs through Dawlish – the famous black swans. They were introduced to the town from New Zealand by John Nash, a Dawlish-borne man who emigrated during adulthood but paid frequent visits to the town. The swan has been the town emblem for over forty years.

Go under the arch of the building in front and to your left you will see the rear of the Dawlish Museum which is well worth a visit. Pass through the Manor Grounds leaving the brook to your right. At the far end cross the little bridge over the Mill Leat. The Mill Leat supplied power for several water wheels in the town, including the Strand Mill.

Go along the path from the grounds with the Leat on your right. Turn left into Church Street. Continue along this pretty street and go through the gate by the lime tree and follow the path through the ancient Glebe Field called the Newhay. St. Gregory's Parish Church stands nearby on the left. The tower is the oldest part of the church as the rest of the building was rebuilt in the 19th Century.

Continue along the footpath and soon the millpond narrows again into the Leat. By the Newhay Falls you will see another sluice and the junction where the Leat comes off the Brook from the Alley Valley. Go through the gate, and continue ahead until you reach the road. Turn right and right again into Weech Road.

Continue along Weech Road and on your right you will see an imposing grey stone house, formerly the vicarage. Many years ago there was an idea to run a railway line around the back of Dawlish and this building was earmarked as the potential station.

Walk on past some attractive thatch cottages on your left at the bottom of Badlake Hill, a former cider making farm and malt house. Go past The Swan and continue along passing the attractive cottages and noting the Victorian Gothic drinking fountain set in the corner of the opposite wall.

Continue your walk, passing the Manor House on your right, soon you will reach the grey stone Public Library, originally built as a Soup Kitchen. As you walk on you will pass many attractive buildings and eventually turn left up to the High Street where the Ferris Brewery once stood. The Brewery made beers from local barley and mineral waters. From time to time, bottles used by the brewery with a unique round marble stopper, are found in the area.

Turn right along the High Street until you reach the crossroads, continue straight ahead passing a garage on your left. This is the main road to Exeter. Continue along it for 1km / 0.6 miles, passing a church on your left. Cross over at the pedestrian crossing always walking along the pavement until you pass the Post Office on your right. Take the next right into Warren Road and take the path signed straight ahead.

This path forms part of the National Cycle Network (Route No. 2). Continue along this path along the cliff top, past the Langstone Hotel until you arrive back at Dawlish Warren station where the journey began.

Further Information

For details of the South West Coast Path, an annual guide including an accommodation list is published by the South West Coast Path Association, price £6 and available in bookshops and Tourist Information Centres.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon obtain the free leaflet "Walking Trails in Devon" from local Tourist Information Centres. Alternatively visit the websites www.discoverdevon.com and www.devon.gov.uk/prow .