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Crumbling cliffs and crashing waves

A self guided walk along the South Devon Railway



See one of Britain's most spectacular railways

Find out how and why it was built between cliffs and the sea

Explore the coastal processes and manmade features that shape the line

Discover how dramatic forces of nature affect the trains

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks





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Crumbling cliffs and crashing waves

Keeping the trains on track in South Devon

Seeing is believing! Travelling by train along the South Devon coast between Exeter and Newton Abbot is one of the most spectacular rides on the British railway system.

Ever since the line was built in the 1840s it has been closed many times by cliff collapses and sea wall breaches. Today the trains are still affected by gale force winds and flooded tracks, including the devastating storms of February 2014.



Waves over the line - a train caught in a storm at Dawlish
© Anthony T Steel

The line is expensive to maintain but kept open because it is a vital communication link for the people and economy of the southwest. This walk follows the railway between Teignmouth and Dawlish Warren as it passes along the side of estuaries and bays and through dramatic coastal tunnels.

The route reveals the precariousness of this railway line balanced between steep cliffs and the sea. You will see stunning views and spectacular coastal features but there are also some fascinating stories and hidden secrets to discover.

Note: The winter storms of January and February 2014 completely destroyed part of this walk - not only the sea wall at Dawlish but a large section of the railway line too. The storms also created large and dangerous land slips between Teignmouth and the first railway tunnel.

At the time of writing (February 2015) the section of the walk between Teignmouth and Dawlish Station (Stops 1- 15) was open with the usual precautions regarding the state of the tides. The seawall reconstruction is still ongoing between Stop 16 and Stop 18. An alternative route to complete the walk is now included.

Route overview



Practical information

Location	Teignmouth to Dawlish Warren, Devon, South West England
Getting there	<p>Train - served by long distance services from London Paddington, Leeds, Manchester and Edinburgh. Also served by local trains running between Torbay and Exmouth via Newton Abbot and Exeter.</p> <p>Car - about 6 miles from Newton Abbot which is on the main A380 Exeter to Torquay road. Town and seafront parking available (charges apply).</p> <p>Bus - served by long distance coaches plus local routes running from Exeter, Newton Abbot and Torquay.</p>
Start point	Teignmouth railway station, TQ14 8PG
Finish point	Dawlish Warren railway station, EX7 0NF
Onward journey	You can return to Teignmouth by train (4 per hour at peak times; 1 per hour off-peak) or bus (every 20 minutes)
Distance	5 ¼ miles
Level	Moderate – Seawall sections of the walk are flat but there are two sections with a steep climb and descent.
Conditions	At times the seawall and sections of the path can be closed due to high tides and bad weather. Check local weather information and tide times before going. Alternative routes are provided in the directions.

Suitable for

Families - children will enjoy the beaches and the thrill of close-passing trains, although there is a limited barrier between the path and line so be vigilant.

Dogs - should be kept on a lead near the railway line and are only allowed on beaches at certain times of year.

Refreshments

Various places to eat and drink in Teignmouth (the start) and Dawlish (half way point). There is also a seasonal cafe at Coryton Cove (Stop 14) and Red Rock Cafe (after Stop 19).

Facilities

Public toilets are available at the following locations:

- Teignmouth railway station (Stop 1)
- Teign Heritage Centre (Stop 2)
- Promenade near Yacht Club (after Stop 3)
- Bottom of Smugglers Lane - Easter-September (after Stop 7)
- Boat Cove, near Kennaway Tunnel (after Stop 14)
- Dawlish railway station (Stop 16)
- Dawlish Warren car park near railway station (after Stop 21)

Other info

You might want to bring binoculars to enjoy the views of the coastline.

Wear suitable footwear for walking.

Tourist information

Teignmouth Tourist Information Centre (Tel: 01626 215666)
Located at The Den next to the bowling green

Dawlish Tourist Information Centre (Tel: 01626 215665)
Located at The Lawn behind Dawlish railway station

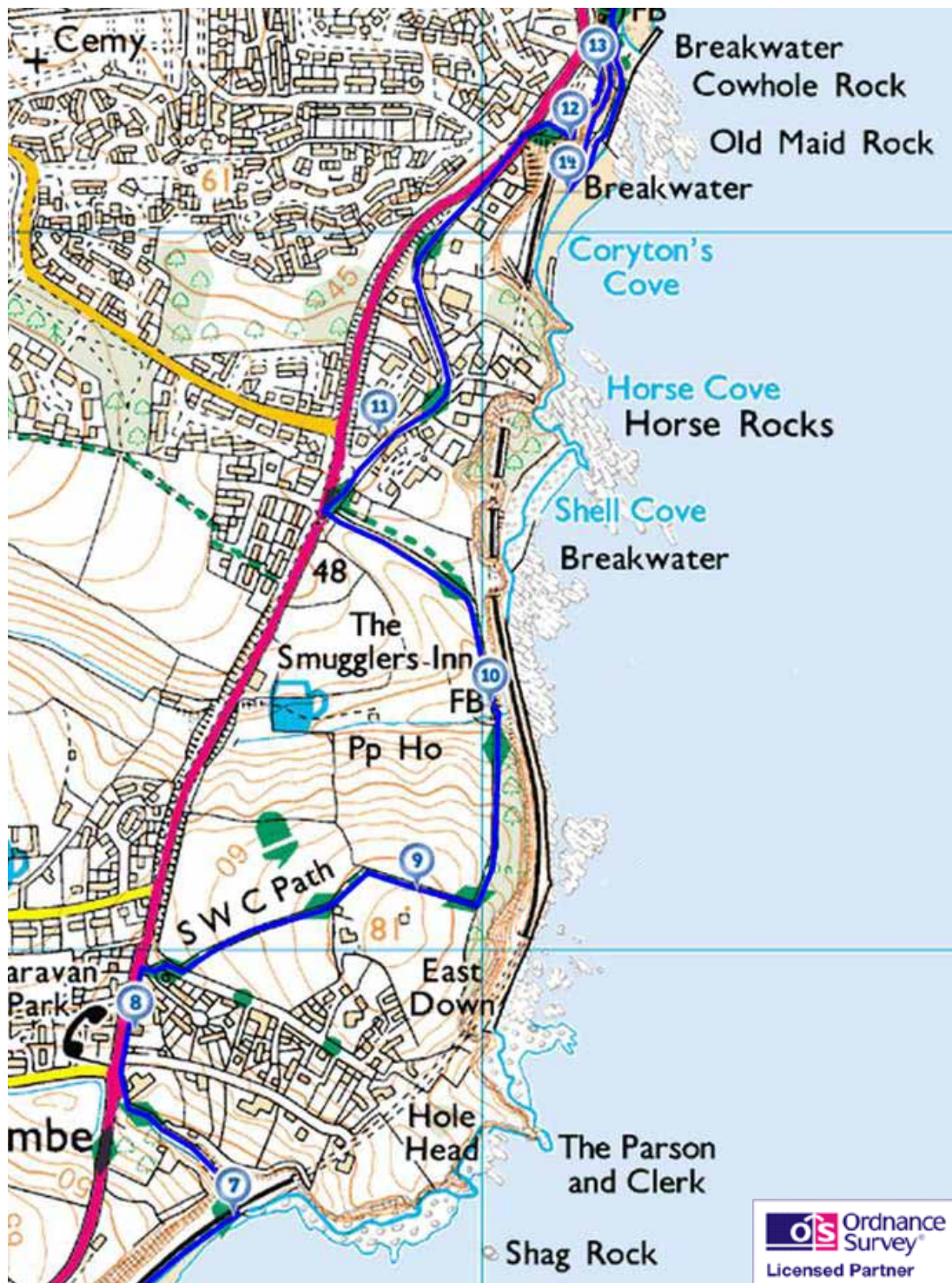
Detail of the first part of the route



Stopping points

- Start.** Teignmouth railway station
1. Teignmouth railway station
 2. Teign Heritage Centre, 29 French Street
 3. Sea wall beside St Michael's Church
 4. Sea wall steps after the Yacht Club
 5. Sprey Point, seaward side
 6. Sprey Point, above broken breakwater

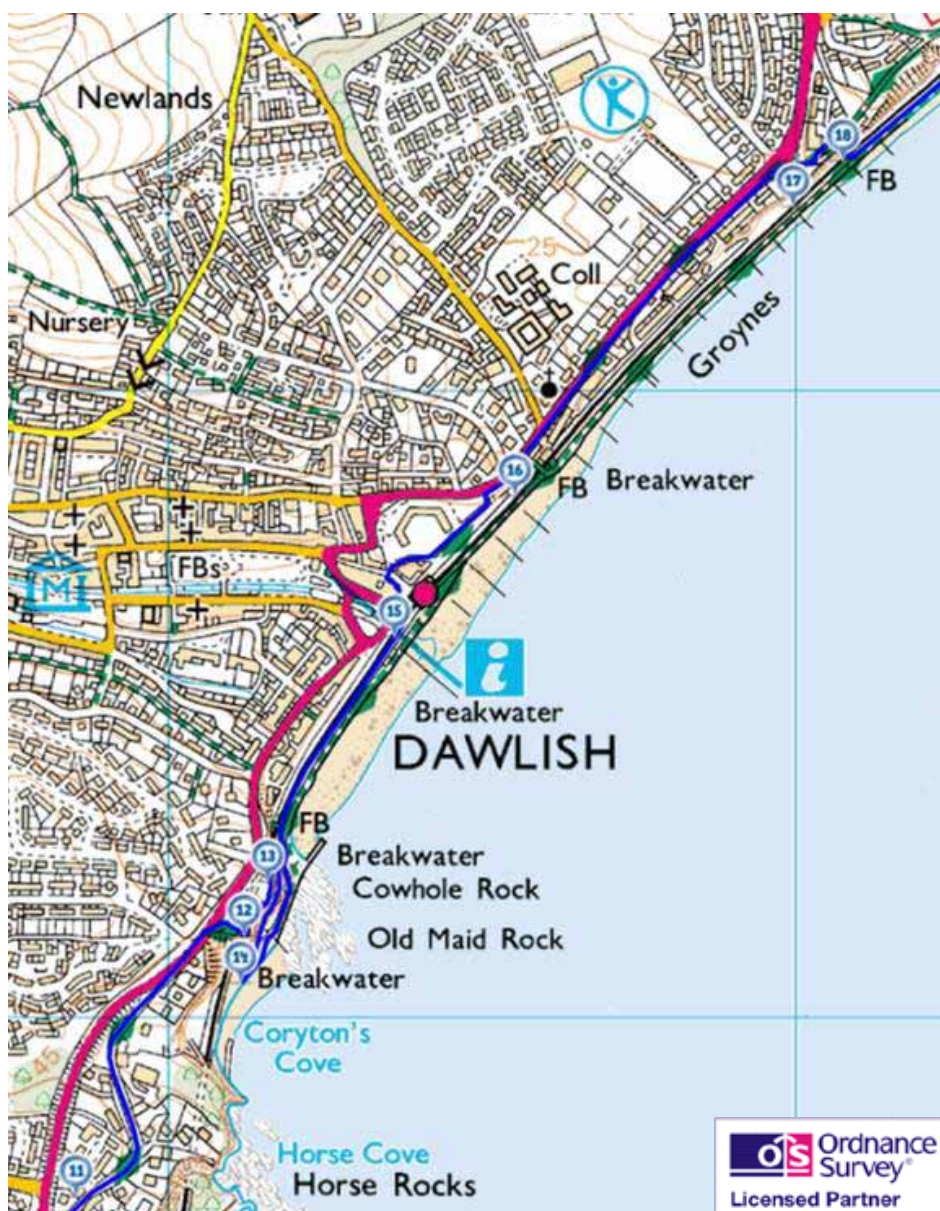
Detail of the second part of the route



Stopping points

- 7. Sea wall in front of Parson's Tunnel
- 8. Sunnylands, 29 Teignmouth Road
- 9. Bench over the Smugglers Inn Valley
- 10. Above West Brook waterfall
- 11. The Toll House, Old Teignmouth
- 12. Road Lea Mount Park, viewpoint over Coryton's Cove
- 13. Lea Mount Park, viewpoint over Dawlish
- 14. Coryton's Cove

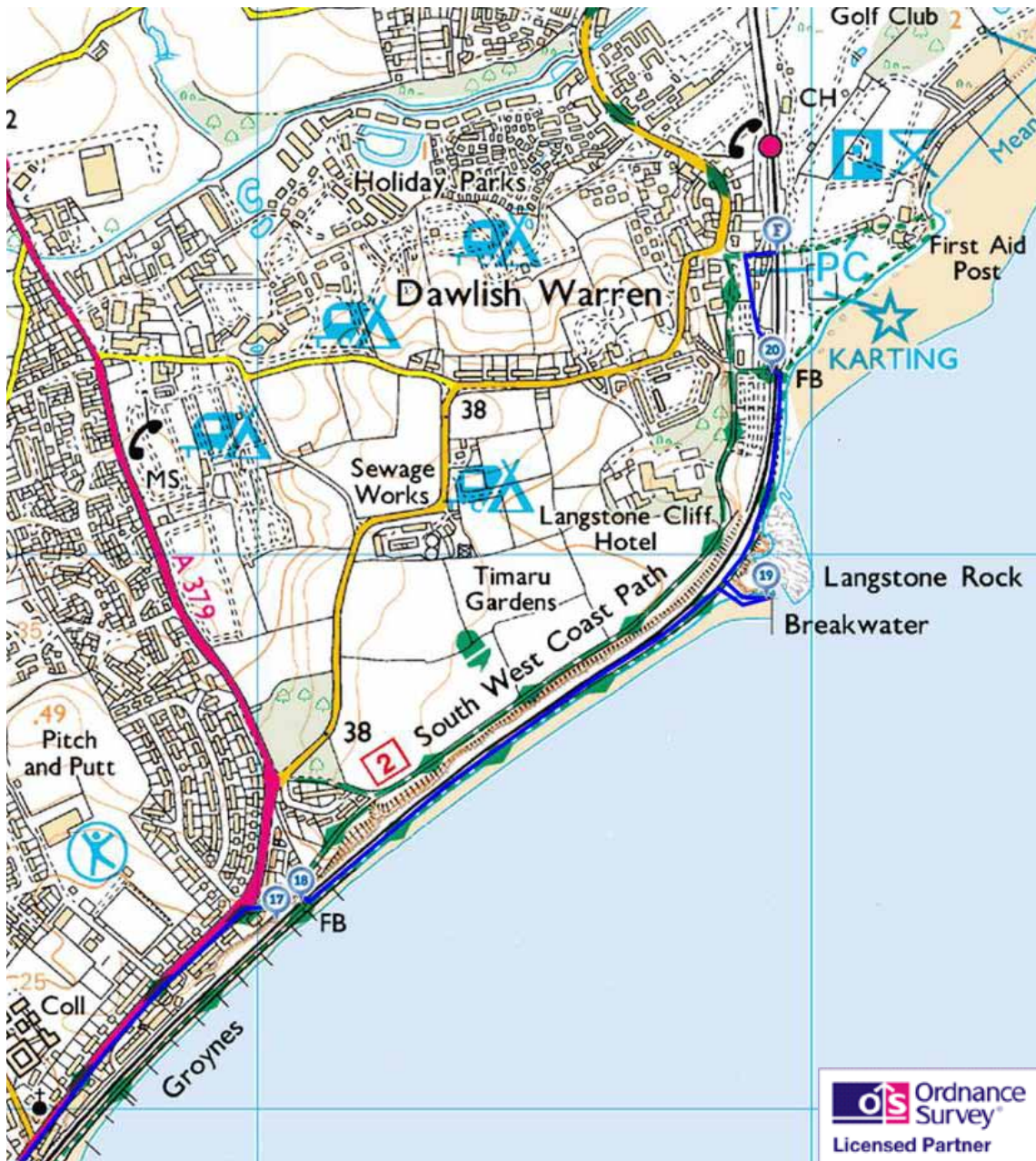
Detail of the third part of the route



Stopping points

- 12.** Lea Mount Park, viewpoint over Coryton Cove
- 13.** Lea Mount Park, viewpoint over Dawlish
- 14.** Coryton Cove
- 15.** At the end of the King's Walk in front of the Colonnade Viaduct
- 16.** A view of the long platforms at Dawlish station
- 17.** The second footbridge after Dawlish station

Detail of the final part of the route



Stopping points

- 18.** Footbridge over railway line
- 19.** Langstone Rock
- 20.** Footbridge over railway line between Red Rocks Café and Dawlish Warren station

Finish. Dawlish Warren station

Directions

These directions are for use with the South Devon Railway walk audio commentary. Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

1. Welcome to South Devon Teignmouth railway station

Directions 1

From the station cross the road near the roundabout and go past the anchor to Teign Heritage Centre. Find the old Teignmouth to Dawlish toll road milestone outside the Heritage Centre. Stop there and listen to Track 2.

2. The Great Marsh Teign Heritage Centre, 29 French Street

Directions 2

From the Teign Heritage Centre walk along Dawlish Street towards the church with a tower. Go through the church gate and follow the path around the right hand side of the church. Leave the churchyard by the other gate. Cross the road and go up the ramp on to the seawall. Stop by the information board and listen to Track 2.

3. Natural or manmade protection Seawall beside St Michael's Church

Directions 3

Walk along the seawall with the sea on your right past the Lido, East Cliff Café, Yacht Club and toilets. At the end of the elevated platform is a set of 5 steps with grey pillars either side. Stop by the steps and listen to Track 4.

4. Two contrasting rocks Seawall steps, after the Yacht Club

Directions 4

Continue along the seawall with the sea on your right. Look up at the red breccia cliffs on the left for engineering attempts to strengthen them. After a short distance you reach an area jutting out into the sea called Sprey Point. Walk around to the seaward side and listen to Track 5.

5. An unlikely place for a railway

Sprey Point, seaward side

Directions 5

Walk around the seaward side of Sprey Point. Stop when you are above a broken breakwater and listen to Track 5.

6. The breakwater broken

Sprey Point, above broken breakwater

Directions 6

Continue along the seawall with the sea on your right. Watch out for the extensive work to stabilise the 2014 landslips about halfway along the sea wall towards the railway tunnel. Look especially for the monitoring devices on the slopes for tracking future movement. Shortly before the railway tunnel the footpath descends some steps to go under the railway. Stop at the top of these steps and listen to Track 7.

7. Building the tunnels

Seawall in front of Parson's Tunnel

Directions 7

Go down the steps and through the tunnel. Take care as it can be slippery. Go past the toilets and walk up Smugglers Lane. When you reach the main road (A379) cross over with care and turn right along the opposite pavement. When you reach the bus stop, look at the house opposite called Sunnylands and listen to Track 8.

8. Smugglers tales

Sunnylands, 29 Teignmouth Road

Directions 8

Continue up the pavement alongside the main road and cross over in a safe place. Take the first right into Windward Lane. Shortly after going sharply upwards and around to the right, take the footpath on the left signposted Coast Path. Follow the path between hedges. Where the hedgerow on the left finishes you can see the Smugglers Inn below. Just over the brow of the hill is a bench. Stop here and listen to Track 9.

Note: The next section of the coastal path is steep so if you want to avoid this continue walking on the main road for about half a mile past the Smugglers Inn. At the brow of the hill turn right into Old Teignmouth Road. Stop outside the first house on the left, called The Toll House, and resume the walk at Stop 11.

9. Crumbling cliffs

Bench overlooking the Smuggler's Inn Valley

Directions 9

Continue along the footpath as it descends and turns sharply to the left. It is steep in places and can be slippery if wet. On the descent you can glimpse the entrance of the Clerk railway tunnel. At the bottom cross the West Brook. Go up the steps on the other side and stop at the top. Look back to where the stream is and listen to Track 10.

10. Ice, frost and a waterfall

Above West Brook waterfall

Directions 10

Continue along the footpath as it climbs and then flattens. At the end go up the steps to the main road. Turn right and keep to the right along the Old Teignmouth Road rather than the main road. Stop by the first building on the left, the Toll House. Listen to Track 11.

11. A new road

The Toll House, Old Teignmouth Road

Directions 11

Continue along the Old Teignmouth Road noting the names of the houses on the right such as The Cliffs. After descending the road narrows and then becomes a footpath taking you back to the main road. Follow the pavement for a short distance then take the footpath on the right signposted Coast Path which cuts through red breccia rocks. In the park at the top follow the path to the right. Stop at the corner with a view over the cliff and listen to Track 12.

12. Headlands and bays

Lea Mount Park, viewpoint over Coryton Cove

Directions 12

From the viewpoint follow the path around the edge of the park on the cliff side. Pass a shelter on the left. Stop in front of the second shelter at the viewpoint looking down over Dawlish and listen to Track 13.

13. Obstructing the view

Lea Mount Park, viewpoint over Dawlish

Directions 13

From the viewpoint follow the path downwards which doubles back down the cliff. At the first bend where there is a shelter go right down the steps below the cliffs. Follow this path as it descends to the promenade. Turn right and go down the ramp onto the beach. Stop in the middle of the beach and listen to Track 14.

Note: The path down from Lea Mount to Coryton Cove is steep. If you would like to avoid it take the path from the viewpoint which leads to the main road. Turn right and walk down the road. When you reach the arches that go under the railway to the promenade go under and resume the walk at Stop 15.

14. The Gentlemen's Bathing Place

Coryton Cove

Directions 14

Retrace your steps from the beach up the ramp. Stay on the lower level past the beach huts. Go through the gap between the cliff and an old sea stack. There are toilets here in Boat Cove that are open all year round. Note the entrance to Kennaway tunnel on the left. Follow the walkway with the railway line on your left and the sea on your right. This is the walkway known as the King's Walk that was mentioned at the last stop. Stop when you reach three pedestrian archways that go under the railway line and listen to Track 15.

Note: If the tide is very high and crashing over the sea wall you may need to use the footbridge by the entrance to Kennaway tunnel and walk along Marine Parade on the other side of the tracks. Continue to the end of the raised King's Walk and follow it to the Colonnade Tunnel.

15. The Ladies' Bathing Place

At the end of the King's Walk in front of the Colonnade Viaduct

Directions 15

Go under Colonnade Viaduct. (**Note:** for a shorter walk you can return to Teignmouth from here - turn right to the station or left for the bus stop) To continue the walk turn right to the station entrance. Cross the road into Richmond Place. About 50 metres past the Brunel Court flats you will see a turreted archway in the stone wall. Go through it and up the steps. Continue around the grounds of the Lanherne flats to another stone gateway onto the main Dawlish road. Turn right then turn into a track signed Coastguard Cottages. Follow this until you get a clear view back to Dawlish Station and the two inshore construction platforms. Listen to Track 16.

16. A well-used line

A view of the long platforms at Dawlish station

Directions 16

Return to the main road and turn right. Continue for about 400 metres. As the main road begins to bear to the left opposite Henty Avenue you will pass two white houses on the right. Follow the path between the house called 'The Lookout' and a small electricity sub-station for the Rockstone Hotel. The path leads between stone walls to a junction. Ignore the left path signed 'Coastal Path' - instead take the right path which leads onto a railway footbridge. Stop in the middle of the bridge. Listen here to Track 17.

17. The atmospheric railway

The second footbridge after Dawlish station

Directions 17

Now go down to the seawall and turn left under the footbridge. Stop immediately after passing under the footbridge. Look at the red cliffs on the opposite side of the railway line and listen to Track 18.

Note: If the tide is very high and walking along the sea wall is dangerous you can use this footbridge. Follow the Coast Path along the cliff edge as far as the next footbridge between Langstone Rock and Dawlish station where you can resume the walk at Stop 20.

18. An ancient desert

Footbridge over the railway line

Directions 18

Continue along the seawall until you reach a headland on the right known as Langstone Rock. If the tide is out go down on to the beach and around the rock towards the breakwater. Around the far side is an arch. Stop there and listen to Track 19. If it is not safe to go on to the beach remain on the seawall.

19. The power of the sea

Langstone Rock

Directions 19

If you went on to the beach return to the seawall. Continue along the path between railway and Langstone Rock. Just past the Red Rock Café you can stop to look behind it at the large blowhole eroded in the rock by the sea behind the café. Also note the massive pieces of rock beside the path that are protecting the railway from the waves. Go on to the next footbridge over the railway and listen to Track 20.

20. The end of the line or not?

Footbridge over railway line between Red Rocks Café and Dawlish Warren station

Directions 20

Dawlish Warren station is just 200 metres further on. You can get there on either side of the railway line, either past the amusement park on the seaward side or through the car park on the landward side.

21. The continuing debate

Dawlish Warren station

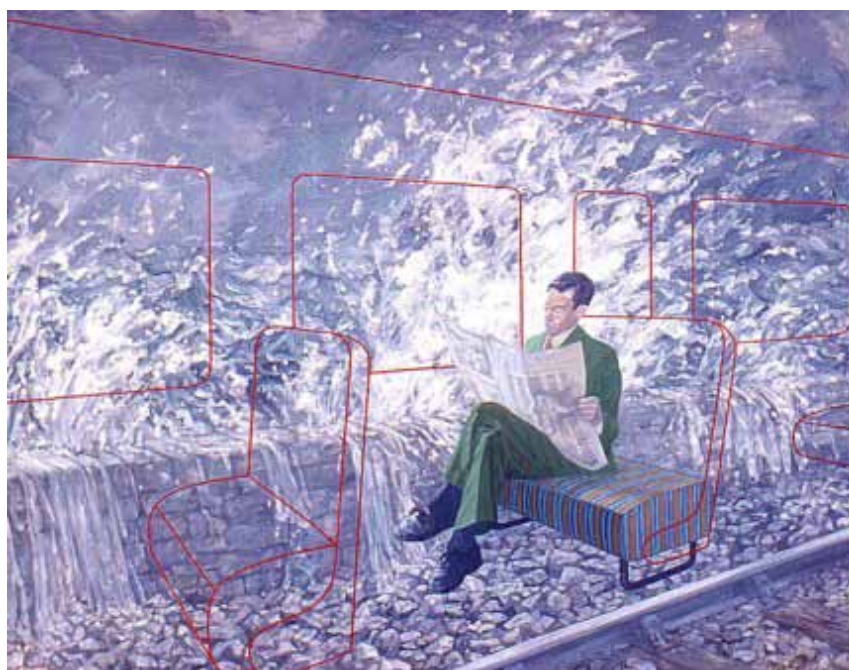
Directions 21

There are four trains an hour during peak times back to Teignmouth or on to Exeter. Alternatively you can catch the bus from the landward side of the station. Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve is also worth a visit; just follow signs for the Warren and visitor centre.

Credits

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'Teignmouth-Dawlish Line (The invisible train)' (1992)
by Daniel Davidson
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