



Royal
Geographical
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A dynamic coastline

A self-guided walk around Westward Ho! in North Devon



Walk along a stunning section of the North Devon coast
Discover how coastal landforms were created by different processes
Explore a purpose-built Victorian seaside resort
Find out how the area's geology, ecology and heritage is protected

www.discoveringbritain.org

the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks



Created in collaboration with



**NORTH DEVON
COAST**
Areas of Outstanding
Natural Beauty



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Cover image: View from Kipling Tors, Dave Edcombe © North Devon AONB

A dynamic coastline

Explore the spectacular North Devon coast around Westward Ho!

Beach, cliffs, spit, salt marsh, rocky foreshore, sand dunes. This short section of the North Devon coast exhibits the key characteristics of the seaside.

Some of the coastal landforms here are particularly spectacular including a two-mile long pebble ridge, a five-mile long wave-cut platform and a beach raised ten metres above current sea levels. Find out how and when they were created.



This is also a dynamic coast. The landforms are shifting and evolving. They are affected by winter storms and high tides, the longer-term sea level change, and by human activities.



This walk passes through the Victorian seaside resort of Westward Ho! Its founders took advantage of the coastal setting including the expansive beach, cliff top walks and bathing pools.

But from its inception to the present day the resort has faced a constant battle against the changing coastline. See buildings moved away from the seafront and a wall designed to protect the resort.

It is not surprising that this area has numerous designations for its scientific importance, ecological significance and scenic beauty. Find out why this coastal landscape is being preserved and protected.

The pebble ridge (top) and sunken forest (bottom), Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Route map



Stopping points

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Start | Top of pebble ridge | 10. | Cliff top above Mermaid's Pool |
| 2. | Top of pebble ridge | 11. | Cliff top above Mermaid's Pool |
| 3. | Beach | 12. | South West Coast Path loop |
| 4. | Slipway | 13. | Cliff top path |
| 5. | Seafront, beside green space | 14. | Kipling Tors coastguard lookout |
| 6. | Seafront, in front of Horizon View | 15. | Kipling Tors ridge path, third bench |
| 7. | Seafront, overlooking Rock Pool | 16. | Kipling Tors ridge path, fifth bench |
| 8. | The Pier House | 17. | Kipling Tors woods |
| 9. | Field beyond Seafeld House | 18. | Ocean Park, Atlantic Way |
| | | Finish | Seafront, beside green space |

Practical information

Location	Westward Ho!, North Devon, Southwest England
Start point	Pebble ridge (beach just north of Westward Ho!)
Finish point	Seafront, Golf Links Road
Getting there	Car – Westward Ho! is close to Bideford and just a mile off the main A39 road which runs across North Devon.

Directions and recommended parking place

Leave the A39 at the roundabout which leads to Bideford one way and Appledore, Northam and Westward Ho! in the other. Follow the A386 (Heywood Road) which becomes the B3236 (Lakenham Hill then Atlantic Way) after about half a mile. Ignore various right turnings to Appledore and Northam town centre.

About $\frac{3}{4}$ mile after the Welcome to Westward Ho! sign you will enter a one-way system around the town centre. Follow Atlantic Way then turn right down Youngaton Road. At the next junction go straight across into Golf Links Road. The main car park is on the right (charges apply).

There are several pedestrian exits to the car park. You can use any of them to return to Golf Links Road. Make your way to the beach and onto the pebble ridge.

Train – The nearest railway station is Barnstaple 10 miles away. It is served by trains from Exeter St Davids that run once an hour. This is the scenic Tarka Line. Transfer from Barnstaple railway station to Westward Ho! by bus (see below).

Bus – Buses run regularly from Ilfracombe via Barnstaple and Bideford to Westward Ho! Use www.journeydevon.info to plan your journey.

Directions from bus stop to walk start point

Alight at the stop in the centre of the town on Golf Links Road. From the bus stop go a short way down Golf Links Road to the seafront. Follow the promenade round to the beach and make your way onto the pebble ridge.

Bicycle – National Cycle Route 27 (The Tarka Trail) runs through Bideford a couple of miles to the southeast.

Walk distance	3 ½ miles
Level	Moderate – No major hills involved with the exception of a steep ascent and descent off Kipling Tors
Terrain	The walk starts on the pebble ridge where the stones can be slippery and move underfoot. Most of the remainder of the route is on pavements, surfaced and unsurfaced footpaths. Much of the route (Stop 4 to 13) follows the South West Coast Path; look out for the acorn symbol and yellow arrows.
Conditions	Outside the town there is little shelter from sun, wind or rain. Take suitable protective clothing and footwear.
Dangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep off the beach when there is a heavy swell, a high tide or storm conditions. - Extreme care should be taken near the cliff edge. Avoid walking there in heavy rain and high winds. - If you go onto the beach or foreshore take great care. Avoid exploration directly below the cliffs and be aware of incoming tides.
Suitable for	<p>Families – There is plenty for families to explore and enjoy but take great care of young children on the pebble ridge, on the foreshore and near the cliff edge.</p> <p>Wheelchairs and pushchairs – The seafront section from the seafront promenade along the old railway line (Stops 4 to 13) is suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs. For further details see http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/uploads/1/5/4/4/15448192/westward_ho_easy_access.pdf</p> <p>Dogs – Dogs are not allowed on most of the beach between May and September; keep dogs under close control on the seafront promenade which can be busy and near the cliff edge where there are sheer drops without fencing; many of the restaurants and pubs welcome dogs.</p>
Public toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Car park by slipway (Stop 4) - Golf Links Road by bus stop (near Stop 5 and finish point) - Seafield car park (between Stop 8 and Stop 9)

Refreshments

- The Pebbleridge Café serves snacks and ice creams (start point).
- There are several cafes, fast-food outlets and ice cream vendors around the slipway (Stop 4).
- There is usually an ice cream van on the seafront (Stop 5 and finish point).
- There are several cafes, a fish and chip shop and a small supermarket on Golf Links Road (near Stop 5 and finish point).
- The Pier House is an upmarket bistro (Stop 8).
- The Village Inn on Youngaton Road serves traditional homemade pub food (between Stop 18 and Stop 19).

Places to visit

North Devon AONB – Find out about other parts of the coast that you can explore on foot or by bike; includes family-friendly activities.
www.explorethecoast.org

Northam Burrows Country Park – The Country Park includes dunes, grassland, salt marsh and the pebble ridge. The small visitor centre (open from the end of May to early September) gives more information about the history, geology and wildlife of the area.
www.torridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=461

Bideford Railway Heritage Centre – This small museum at the old station includes displays about the Bideford, Westward Ho! and Appledore Railway.
www.bidefordrailway.co.uk

Shipwreck and Smuggling Museum – A small museum at Hartland Quay, the site of an ancient and historic port, positioned precariously amongst spectacular coastal scenery.
www.hartlandquayhotel.com/shipwreck-museum

Places to stay

The Village Inn, Youngaton Road, Westward Ho!
www.villageinndevo.co.uk

Manorville Youth Hostel, Fosketh Hill, Westward Ho!
www.yha.org.uk/hostel/westward-ho

Tourist information

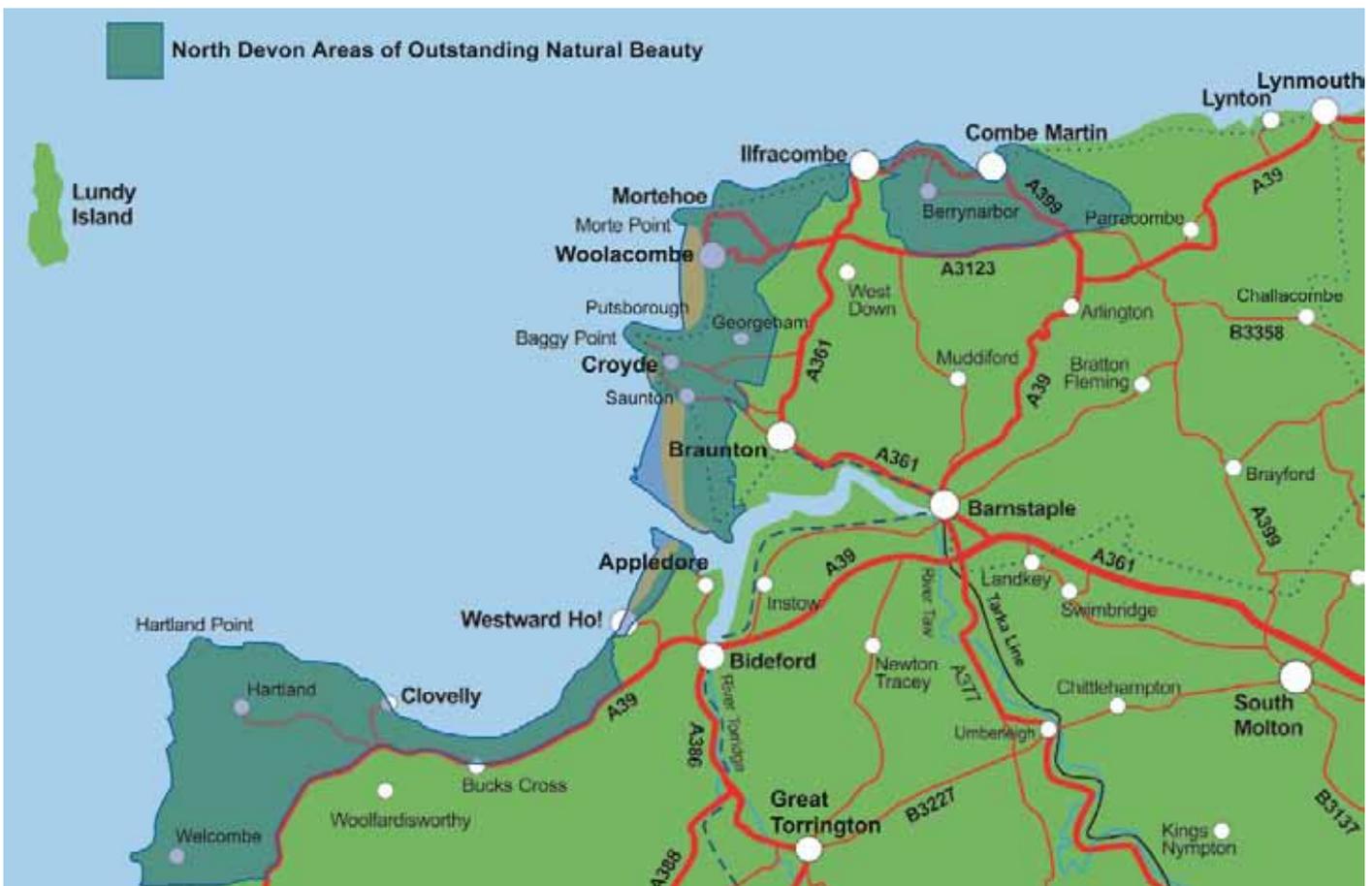
Bideford Tourist Information Centre
Burton Art Gallery & Museum, Kingsley Road, Bideford EX39 2QQ
Tel: 01237 477676 or 01237 421853
Email: bidefordtic@torridge.gov.uk
www.visitdevon.co.uk/areas-to-visit/north-devon
www.northdevon.com

1. Welcome to the North Devon coast

Top of pebble ridge

Welcome to the North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The AONB stretches from Marsland Mouth on the Cornish border up to Combe Martin on the boundary of Exmoor National Park.

It includes a diversity of coastal landscapes from sheer cliffs and surfing beaches, razor-like reefs and extensive sand dunes, holiday resorts and fishing hamlets.



The North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty stretch along the coast
© North Devon AONB

This is Barnstaple and Bideford Bay which lies about half way along the length of the North Devon Coast AONB. Looking out to sea, the furthest headland that you can see to the left is Hartland Point and to the extreme right is Baggy Point.

Two miles to the north along the pebble ridge is the estuary of the Rivers Taw and Torridge which flow through Barnstaple and Bideford respectively. Twelve miles out to sea you can see Lundy Island, famous for its puffins. Look on the map to better appreciate your position.

On this walk we will be exploring the coastline either side of the seaside settlement of Westward Ho! to discover the processes that have shaped the landscape.

We will see a dynamic coastline with some spectacular landforms and find out how it has changed. We will find out how humans have made use of this landscape but also how ongoing coastal change has influenced or limited their activities. And we will discover how this unique landscape, its wildlife and heritage is protected.



Pebbleridge at high tide
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

This walk was created by Dave Edgcombe who is a Project Officer with the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Throughout his career he has had responsibility for both the coast and countryside in this area.



Raised beach at Seafeld
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Dave: “I was born and brought up in Bideford and have lived and worked in North Devon all of my life.”

“The North Devon Coast was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1960, the same year that I was born.”

“I am proud to be involved in its conservation and protection, as well as having opportunities to explain its natural and heritage features to visitors.”

Directions 1

Remain on the pebble ridge. Do take care as the stones can be slippery and can also move underfoot.

2. A pile of pebbles

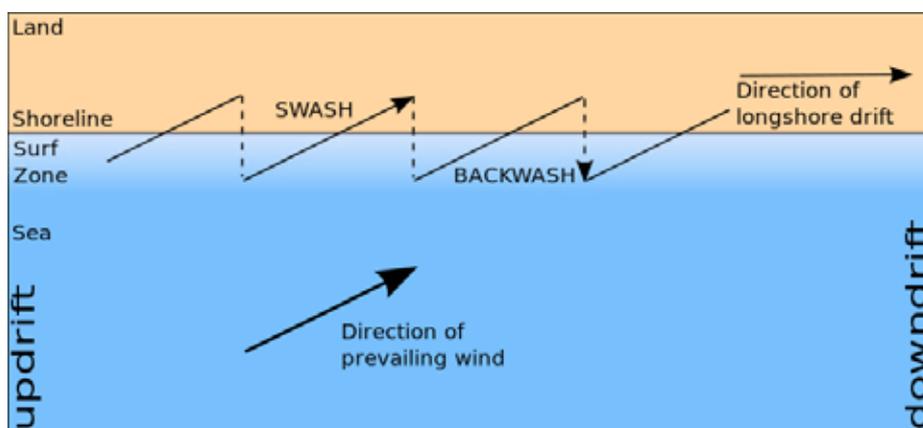
Top of pebble ridge

We start our appreciation of some of the spectacular features along the North Devon coast with the pebble ridge beneath your feet. Here we're almost at the southern end; it stretches two miles north from here to the Taw-Torridge estuary. Have a look at the map to understand its orientation and shape.



Full length of pebble ridge from Kipling Tors
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Although the pebble ridge has been in existence for hundreds of years it is geologically still quite young. Its creation is thought to have been triggered by a tsunami in 1607. The pebbles originate further along the coast to the west of here. They have been steadily transported around the bay due to the predominant direction of the waves, a process known as 'long shore drift'. Over time this material has accumulated into a two-mile long embankment known as a 'spit'.



The process of longshore drift
Yefi, Wikimedia (CCL)

It is also a dynamic landform; in other words it is continually moving and changing shape as fresh material is transported along the coastline by the waves.

The changes can be quite rapid during high tides and winter storms. On average, the ridge is moving one metre inland every year.

Although the continual movement of pebbles along the spit is a natural process, humans have interfered with this process. There is a traditional practice called 'potwalloping' which dates back to the 1800s. Local people ventured down to the beach to throw back pebbles that had fallen from the ridge during the winter months.



Potwalloping
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

The development of Westward Ho!, especially in terms of the seawalls and buildings along the cliff edge, has affected the natural supply of pebbles being transported westwards along the bay. A major concern is that without a constant supply of new pebbles, the ridge might breach at the southern (this) end which would flood the land behind and damage property. For many years heavy machinery was used to move pebbles back along the ridge and artificially-recharge the supply. Nowadays the attitude to managing the ridge has changed and it is only repaired when there is a breach or threat of a breach.

Intervening in natural coastal processes is controversial here as elsewhere around the coast of Britain. What do you think: should the pebble ridge be allowed to change naturally or should we maintain the current shape and line, particularly in view of potential sea level rise?



A breach at the southern end of the pebble ridge after winter storms (January 2014)
Pebbles have filled the play area with its pirate ship (left) and sea water has flooded the flat land behind the ridge (right)
© Tara Sanders

Directions 2

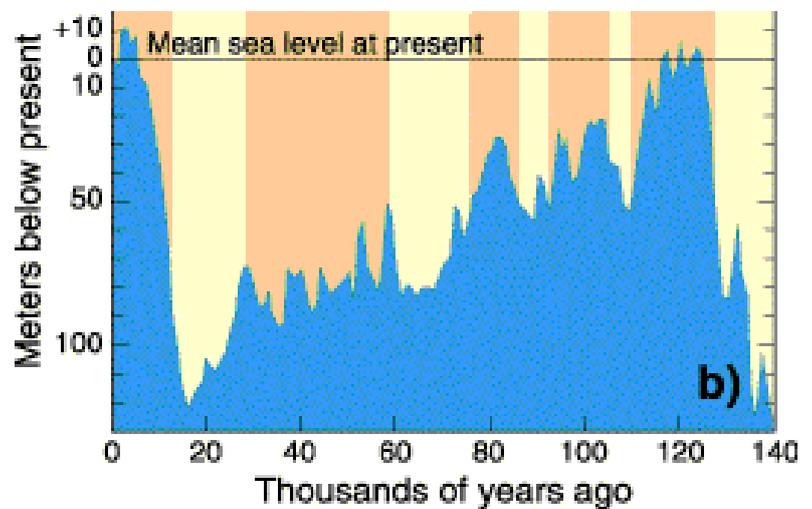
If the tide is out, go onto the beach. Look for an area about 100 metres from the bottom of the pebble ridge that is distinct from the surrounding sand. It may resemble a lumpy raised platform and be a grey colour in contrast to the light brown of the surrounding sand. If the tide is in and you cannot go onto the beach, go along the top of the ridge to the slipway.

3. Dry cliffs and a wet forest

Beach

We frequently hear about potential sea level rising in relation to the process of global warming but it is important to recognise that changes in the sea level have gone on throughout geological history as the earth goes through cycles of cooler and warmer periods.

During cooler periods, known as Ice Ages, some of the water from the oceans becomes ice and this causes sea level to fall. During warmer times ice gaps and glaciers melt and the water is released back into the oceans causing sea level to rise again.



Global sea level change during the last 140,000 years
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

From here we can see two types of evidence of such sea level changes in the past.

First stand with your back to the sea and look landwards to see evidence of higher sea levels. Just over half a kilometre away is a ridge which is wooded in places. This higher ground was once the line of cliffs along this coast about 125,000 years ago before the last Ice Age. You can see that it is much further inland than the coastline today. If sea levels do rise again the coastline may return to those cliffs although this is not likely to happen in our lifetimes.



The old cliff line shows up well from the air as the escarpment is mostly wooded
© Ordnance Survey

Second, if it is low tide, look around the beach for evidence of lower sea levels.

Look for a patch which is a dark brown-black colour, quite in contrast to the light brown of the surrounding sand. This is a deposit of peat and clay.

Sometimes, after winter storms when sand has been scoured away by the sea, you can see the remains of wooden tree trunks, twigs and other bits of wood among the dark material.



Peat and clay deposits
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

These are the remains of a woodland that stood here in Mesolithic times about 6,000 years ago. Preserved in the peat and clay is evidence of our Stone Age ancestors: the remains of a midden (a rubbish dump) were found which included bits of bone, seashell and the remains of ancient flint tools.



Peat and clay deposits including woody remains (right) exposed at low tide
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Directions 3

Go across the beach towards the slipway. At the slipway go up the ramp and turn immediately right. Stand on the sea wall above the slipway and look back along the beach.

4. Amphibious landing

Slipway

Today you may see children paddling or building sandcastles but the scene here has not always been so calm.

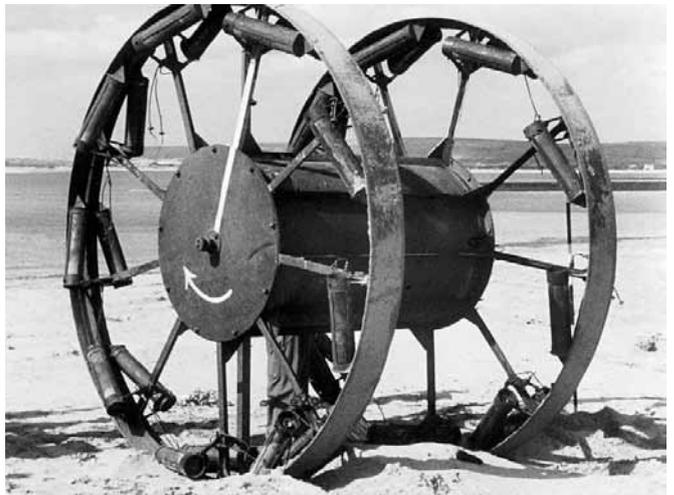
During the Second World War a lot of military training and testing took place here, specifically preparations for D-Day.

In fact the whole North Devon Coast from Morte Point to Westward Ho! was used by the British and Americans as the landscape closely resembled what was to be found on the Normandy beaches.

Westward Ho! was used primarily for testing 'funnies', a type of modified tank that would be suitable in the invasion of Normandy.

This beach was also the test site for The Great Panjandrum, one of a number of highly experimental projects developed by the Directorate of Miscellaneous Weapons Development (DMWD) in the final years of the war.

The panjandrum was a massive, rocket-propelled, explosive-laden cart capable of penetrating the concrete defences that made up part of the Atlantic Wall, the coastal fortifications built by Nazi Germany along the western coast of Europe and Scandinavia.



The Great Panjandrum on Westward Ho! beach
Imperial War Museum (CCL)



Trials of the Great Panjandrum at Westward Ho! (1943)
Lt Louis Klemantaski RN (CCL)

A prototype constructed in East London was transported by night to Westward Ho! but plenty of holidaymakers witnessed the test so the weapon was hardly a secret.

The trials were not a success and the project was scrapped over safety concerns.

However, it has been claimed that the entire project was a hoax devised to convince the Germans that plans were being developed to attack the heavily fortified defences surrounding the Pas-de-Calais rather than the less-defended Normandy coastline.

Military testing continues to this day. At nearby Instow on the other side of the River Taw is Arromanches Camp, a military installation operated by the Royal Marines.

The geographical conditions of the tidal estuary are ideal for using amphibious vehicles. Drivers of landing craft are trained to negotiate the most demanding beach conditions, especially through surf onto a shallow gradient beach.

Meanwhile, the Amphibious Beach Unit trains personnel in beach reconnaissance, assessing vehicle mobility over beaches and recovery operations.



Royal Marines landing craft at Instow
Nilfanion, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



The sandbanks and mudflats of the Taw and Torridge Estuary are a perfect training ground for amphibious vehicles
Philip Halling, Geograph (CCL)

Directions 4

Go along the seafront promenade with the sea on your right. There is a short stretch of pavement alongside Golf Links Road. Stop on the next stretch of promenade which is adjacent to an open green space.

5. Novel origins

Seafront, beside green space

Before we discover how the town of Westward Ho! has been shaped by coastal processes, we need to find out when and why it was established.

In 1797 the famous English watercolour artist, Thomas Girtin, painted a watercolour of this area. It captured a physical landscape of cliffs and coast not dissimilar from today but the main difference was there was no settlement of any kind.



Estuary on the River Taw by Thomas Girtin (c.1797)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Until the 1860s the settlement here in the bay comprised just one farm and a few scattered cottages. It owes its subsequent development and name to the writer, Charles Kingsley.

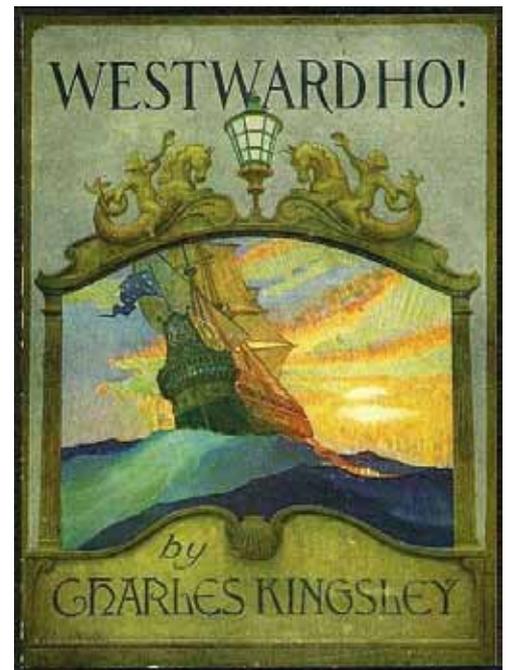


Charles Kingsley
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

In 1855 Kingsley was staying in nearby Bideford and wrote an historical novel called Westward Ho!

It was about a young man from North Devon who sets sail to the Caribbean with Francis Drake where they battle with the Spanish.

In 1863 a company was formed by local entrepreneurs with the express purpose of creating a seaside resort in the area described in Kingsley's book.



Cover of Westward Ho! (1920)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

And what better name than the title of the book itself? Thus Westward Ho! was born, the only settlement in the British Isles with an exclamation mark after its name.

Like other seaside settlements along the North Devon coast such as Woolacombe and Ilfracombe it became a bustling seaside resort which capitalised upon the wonderful natural landscape.

Later we will find out more about the Northam Burrows Hotel and Villas Company that developed the resort and see some of the grand buildings dating back to this era.

The heyday of Westward Ho! was the 1950s and 1960s when it was an extremely prosperous resort attracting thousands of visitors every year.



Postcard of Westward Ho! (1880s-1890s)
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

Ease and low-cost of overseas travel brought a period of decline to the North Devon resorts and seaside towns across Britain. But, as you will see, Westward Ho! remains popular for seaside and recreational activities today. New buildings are beginning to appear and there are signs that Westward Ho! is returning to its glory days.



Left: Westward Ho! from the beach (1880s-1890s)
Right: Modern apartment blocks such as Horizon View suggest that the resort is thriving again
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group / Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Directions 5

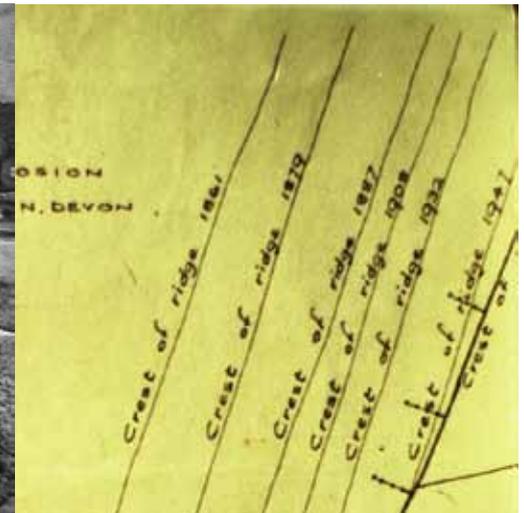
Continue a short distance along the seafront promenade. Stop by the first large apartment block (Horizon View) and look over the seawall.

6. An unnatural barrier

Seafront, in front of Horizon View

When building of the new resort began in the late 1860s little thought was given to natural coastal processes. But between 1860 and the early 1900s the southern end of the pebble ridge and the coastline here moved inland by as much as 150 metres.

In 1875 the Union Club was constructed beyond the current seawall, only to be hastily dismantled and rebuilt on Atlantic Way in 1879. Another building called Lower Lodge suffered a similar fate at around the same time.

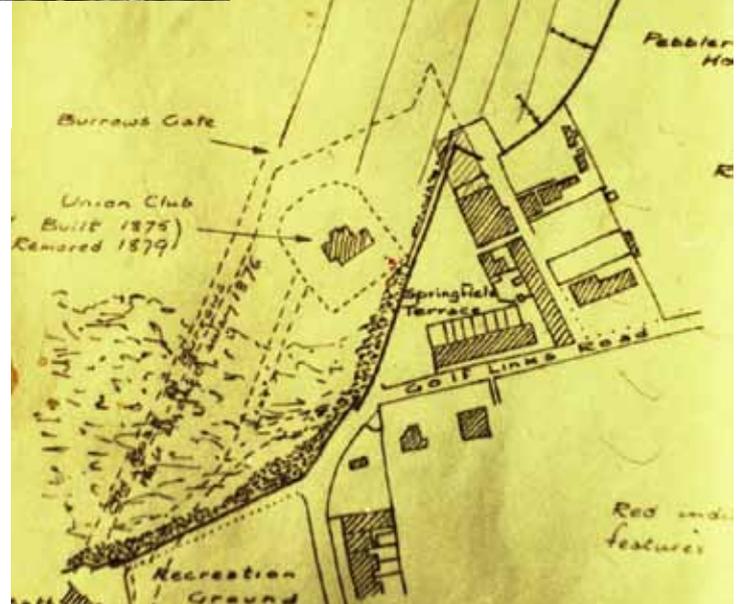


The earliest known photograph of Westward Ho! (1868/9) showing the Union Club situated behind the pebble ridge
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

The famous Bath Hotel (on the site of Horizon View apartments), which was built in 1866 as a bathing establishment primarily for ladies, was also at risk from the retreating coastline.



The Bath Hotel
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group



Recession of the pebble ridge 1861-present (heavy line) including the original position of the Union Club
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

By the 1920s it was recognised that a seawall was needed to prevent further erosion of Westward Ho! The work was undertaken between 1928 and 1931 to construct the current seawall.

The seawall serves a dual purpose: as well as protecting the main part of Westward Ho! from the sea, it serves as a lovely place for strolling and admiring the view. This promenade added to the popularity of Westward Ho! as a desirable resort.



Seafront before and after the seawall was built
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group / Dave Edcombe © North Devon AONB



Large boulders protect the concrete seawall
Dave Edcombe © North Devon AONB

The wall itself is under continual attack from waves and tides. While the naturally-sloping pebble ridge can absorb the waves, the impact on the vertical concrete wall is more intense and the wall needs regular maintenance.

Look back towards the slipway and you will see large boulders which have been deliberately placed against the seawall in order to absorb and deflect some of the waves and protect the seawall from the worst excesses of the sea.

Directions 6

Continue for a short distance along the promenade. Before reaching the next modern apartment block, look over the seawall onto the rocky foreshore for a seawater swimming pool.

7. The Uses of Sea Water

Seafront, overlooking Rock Pool

The growth in popularity of sea bathing developed from the perceived health benefits of mineral springs, such as those in Spa in Belgium and Bath in England.

In 1753 Dr Charles Russel published 'The Uses of Sea Water' which recommended the use of sea water for healing various diseases.

This was followed in 1769 with William Buchan's book 'Domestic Medicine' which also advocated the practice.

Winter was considered to be the best time to go sea bathing!

With Buchan's recommendations people suddenly flocked to the coast. Thus by the end of the eighteenth century sea bathing had become highly fashionable and many seaside resorts sprang up along the English coast such as Brighton and Bournemouth.

The proliferation of rail travel in the mid-nineteenth century made it possible for large numbers of people to visit the coast. Seaside towns and resorts promoted the purported health benefits of sea water and resort towns such as Westward Ho! grew enormously.



'Mermaids at Brighton' by William Heath (c.1829)
which depicts women sea-bathing with bathing machines
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



Left: Tents pitched on the pebble ridge and bathing machines in the distance (c. 1900s)
Right: Children playing in the sand (c. 1930s)
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

Here you can see the Rock Pool, a tidal swimming pool blasted out of the rock in the early days of the resort. It appears on the first Ordnance Survey map of 1880. It is naturally filled by the incoming tide and is still used today.



The Rock Pool c. 1940s (left) and today (right)
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group / Dave Edcombe © North Devon AONB

There was another swimming pool along the seafront from here where the next modern apartment block (Nassau Court) stands. It was called the Nassau Baths and built in 1875 for the United Services College, a boarding school here in Westward Ho! for the sons of military officers.

The pool was also blasted out of the rocks, which to some extent explains why the site juts out from the seawall.

The pool was 130 feet long and eight feet deep and was filled with sea water from a steam engine at the rate of 700 gallons a minute.

It later became the Westward Ho! Bathing Lido and remained in existence until the late 1990s.



Nassau Baths (c. 1950s)
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

Directions 7

Continue along the seafront. At the new apartment block of Nassau Court (where the old swimming baths were) the coast path goes around the inland side of the building. When you reach Pier House go through the car park on the lower side of the building and stop on the path on the other side.

8. Handsome and commodious

The Pier House

The Pier House is now an upmarket bar and restaurant but the original part of the building was Merley House, one of the earliest houses in Westward Ho!

Built in 1885, it was a classic Victorian villa, a style seen across other new seaside resorts in North Devon as well as Europe and the Black Sea.

As the name of the restaurant indicates, this was also the site of the pier.



Westward Ho! pier under construction (1870)
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

The middle and late Victorian period was the heyday for piers and most resorts had at least one. They generally served a dual purpose of being a berthing place for pleasure boats and a place for leisure and entertainment.

Work began in 1870 on a 600 feet (over 180 metres) long pier which would provide “a handsome and commodious promenade and landing pier, available for embarking and disembarking of passengers and goods from the Steam Boats etc, in the Bay and thus preventing delays arising from the tidal bar harbour”.



Remains of the old pier
Dave Edcombe
© North Devon AONB

Although it was unfinished, boats began using it in 1871 but the sea had other ideas. Within a year parts of it had washed away then severe winter storms in 1880 led to further collapse.

It was eventually dismantled and no replacement ever built. If the tide is quite low you may be able to see some iron posts sticking up out of the water which is all that remains of the structure.

Directions 8

From The Pier House continue along the coast path past a row of beach huts. The next major building is Seafield House (built in 1885) adjacent to which are some public toilets. Here the coast path passes between Seafield House and the car park and continues across an open green area. Keep to the seaward edge of the field. Go past the first set of benches and continue along the cliff top. Look for a gap in the hedgerow which reveals the crumbling cliffs and a view to the sea below.

9. Slopes and slumps

Field beyond Seafield House

This pleasant meadow is backed by a steep slope and we have stopped here to see some more clues to the cycles of sea level change. This very steep slope was once the natural cliff line about 125,000 years ago. As we discovered earlier, during warmer periods global sea levels were much higher than today.



The grassy cliff-top field backed by a steep slope is evidence of past climate change
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Where we are standing was the beach at the base of the cliffs. If you look carefully over the cliff edge you may spot a layer of pebbles – similar to the pebbles we saw on the beach earlier – which are remnants of the old beach.



Layer of pebbles in the exposed cliff are a remnant of the old beach
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

As the earth entered the last big Ice Age sea level fell again leaving these cliffs and beach high and dry. This is a landform known as a 'raised beach'.



The old cliff line and raised beach are better appreciated from the air
© Peter Keene, Thematic Trails

Although ice sheets did not reach as far south as the North Devon coast Kipling Tors would have experienced an arctic-like climate. During these 'periglacial' conditions the soil and surface rock repeatedly froze and thawed. The freeze-thaw cycles caused the rock to fragment into a layer of angular stones and small debris.



Slumping of the once-vertical cliff due to solifluction
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

During periods of thaw, the saturated mush of soil and loose stones slid down over the more permanently frozen layers below under the force of gravity, a process known as 'solifluction'.

This had the effect of creating the straight angular slope that you see today rather than the near-vertical cliffs that were originally here.

The sloping field where we are standing is the deposit of debris that slumped down the slope. Since it comprises loose material it is geologically weak thus susceptible to erosion.

Directions 9

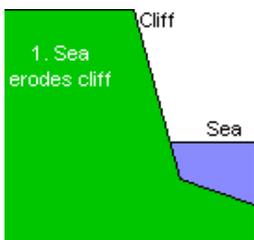
Continue along the bottom of the field to the end where a slight incline takes you up onto a surfaced track. Turn right and follow the track. On the left is a small quarry, one of several in the area that provided building stone for the development of the town. Stop almost opposite where there is a fenced section of cliff.

10. From cave to platform

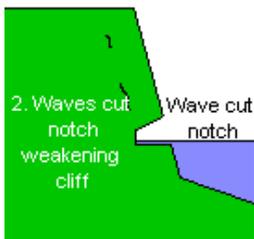
Cliff top above Mermaid's Pool

Look over the cliff and, unless it is high tide, you will see a wide and flat rocky foreshore between the base of the cliffs and the sea.

On average it is about 100 metres wide and stretches along this section of coastline from the end of the pebble ridge where we stopped earlier for about five miles.



Look at a map or an aerial image to better appreciate its shape and size. This is a landform known as a 'wave cut platform'.



As the name indicates wave cut platforms are created by the erosive power of waves. They particularly occur where cliffs are composed of relatively soft rock. At first sea waves hit the cliff face and their repetitive force chips away at the cliff creating a 'wave cut notch' between the high and low water marks. Over time this enlarges into a cave. Eventually the cave becomes so large that the overhanging rock above cannot hold and it collapses.



Material from the cliff collapse is broken down by the ongoing motion of waves and tides and some of it is washed out to sea. Thus the cliff line moves landwards (or 'retreats').



Formation of a wave cut platform
Steinsky, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The extent of the wave cut platform revealed from the air
© Ordnance Survey

The rock that was below the zone of wave action, in effect the floor of the cave, remains as a rocky plateau known as a wave cut platform.

Directions 10

Remain in the same place.

11. From horizontal to vertical

Cliff top above Mermaid's Pool

You should be able to see that the rocks of the wave cut platform below appear to run in rows with a series of parallel ridges and grooves.

These rock formations are actually evidence of some more dramatic geological history in this area. In fact they are so significant that this foreshore has been designated a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Three hundred million years ago, we would have been standing within a large freshwater lake. Sand and muds were carried into this lake by rivers and deposited on the bottom.



Parallel grooves in the wave cut platform at Mermaid's Pool
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Over time more and more sediment was deposited on top and the material at the bottom was compressed and hardened into rock.

Subsequent movement of the earth's crust has folded and cracked these layers. In some cases this deformation was so extreme that layers that formerly lay horizontally are now vertical.



Upended rocks visible on the cliff edge
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Further stresses from within the earth's crust have caused additional faults and cracks making some of the layers move so that they do not always line up along the beach.



The fault (dotted line) and slippage of rock strata
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

It is only through the creation of the wave cut platform that this interesting cross section of bare rock has been revealed.

The rows of rocks that you can see are upended layers of sandstone and mudstone.

The harder sandstones look pale grey and have less seaweed cover on them than the mudstones.



Clear contrast between sandstones (pale grey) and mudstones (dark grey)
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

The flat expanse of the wave cut platform with its rocky grooves is covered and uncovered by the daily tides. If it is low tide you should be able to see a small pool know as Mermaid's Pool. Rock pools like these provide a haven for marine life.



Beadlet anemones, whelks, limpets and jellyfish in a rock pool
Martyn Gorman, Geograph (CCL)

Some creatures attach themselves to seaweed and rocks – including those with shell-like bodies such as barnacles, limpets and dog whelks, as well as types of anemones such as beadlet (red) and snake-lock (green).

More mobile species include crabs, prawns, jellyfish and many species of small fish.

Historically, local people would have come down onto the rocky foreshore to collect crabs and prawns to eat, as well as seaweed.

Directions 11

Continue along the path. There are several places where you can stop and look over the cliff to the sea and appreciate the wave cut platform if the tide is low. After about 700 metres look for a small path on the right that leads walkers off the main surfaced path. There is a South West Coast Path sign (acorn and yellow arrow) but this is sometimes obscured by vegetation. This path is a short loop that re-joins the main path after about 200 metres. Stop on this cliff-top path.

12. Striding out

South West Coast Path loop

This short diversion off the main path has a claim to fame. In 1978 this was where the South West Coast Path was officially opened.

In 1949 the government passed the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which affected the management of the countryside.

Legislation contained within the Act led to the identification and designation of Long Distance Public Footpaths, now known as National Trails.



Views westward from the South West Coast Path
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB



SWCP waymarker
Dave Edgcombe
© North Devon AONB

The South West Coast Path was first designated in 1961 and opened here in 1978.

It is Britain's longest National Trail at 630 miles (1,000 kilometres) long stretching from Minehead in Somerset to Poole Harbour in Dorset. Along the way it passes some spectacular coastal scenery.

The 15 National Trails in the country are managed by the local Highways Authority and organisations such as the National Trust which receive a grant from central government via Natural England to assist in maintenance and improvement.

The South West Coast Path is one of the major income earners for the Southwest of England. In 2012 the route attracted over 8½ million visitors (excluding dog walkers) who spent £460 million in the local economy supporting nearly 10,000 jobs.

Directions 12

Continue along the cliff-top path. Where it rejoins the main path you may like to stop for a rest at the benches. When you are ready, go along the main surfaced path back towards Westward Ho! Stop after about 500 metres on a straight section of path where you can see ahead to where the path passes through a notch in the cliff.

13. Rail route

Cliff top cutting

So far we have been finding out about the dramatic natural forces that have shaped the coastal landscape but ahead of us is a manmade landform.

Can you see where the slope of the cliff is interrupted by a V-shape? This is an old railway cutting. In fact much of our route since leaving Westward Ho! has followed the old railway line.

As we have already discovered, the expansion of the railway network played a significant role in the development of seaside resorts around Britain during the Victorian era.



Old railway line and cutting
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

The railway came relatively late to Westward Ho! and the town was not connected to the national railway network despite being standard gauge. The Bideford, Westward Ho! and Appledore Railway Company (BWH&AR) was established in 1896 with the first part of the line opened in 1901 and the extension to Appledore in 1908.



Route of the BWH&AR shown in yellow
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Look at a map and you will see that the railway did not take the shortest route from Bideford to Westward Ho! That would have necessitated a steep ascent and descent over the old cliffs which stretch from Cornborough to Appledore. Instead the railway line took a more logical route across the peninsula.

After travelling along Bideford Quay the line made its way up the Kenwith Valley. When it reached Cornborough Cliffs it curved northwards where this cutting took the line through the end of the ridgeline. Presumably the friable nature of the rock here meant that a cutting was cheaper to build and easier to maintain than a tunnel.

From here the line went along the cliff top and made a gentle descent down into Westward Ho!

The main station was located just behind the new apartment block of Horizon View that we passed earlier; you may have noticed the remains of one of the railway bridges there.

From Westward Ho! the line then went over the fields close to Northam Burrows to the small port of Appledore.



Westward Ho! railway station (c. 1910)
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

In total the line was seven miles long with 11 stations and halts along the way.

The various stops allowed visitors to alight and enjoy the bracing air along the coast or bathe in the sea. For example, there was a halt with a wooden platform at Cornborough Cliffs close to here which encouraged visitors to walk along the cliffs.



BWH&AR locomotive and carriage on Bideford quay (1905)
Mr Dicker, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

While scenic, the coastal route was precarious. During winter storms, trains had to slow to little more than walking pace for safety.

Sadly the railway never really paid its way and closed in 1917.

Today you can see that coastal erosion is eating away at the cliff edge. Had the railway remained operational significant engineering works would have been required to protect the line.



The scenic railway went right along the cliff-top
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Directions 13

Continue along the path. After going through the old railway cutting and past the old quarry, look for a turning on the right which marks the entrance to the National Trust Property at Kipling Tors. As you begin the ascent keep to the right and ignore all left hand turnings. Stop when you reach the coastguard lookout building.

14. From wreck to rescue

Kipling Tors coastguard lookout

In December 1909 a steamer sank off Clovelly a little further around the bay with the loss of 20 lives. Locals believed that this could have been prevented had a reliable coast watch system been in operation.

In response a group of Bideford Volunteers launched an association to build and develop a series of lookouts along the coast and this coastguard hut was one of them. In 1911 it was handed over to the official coastguard agency.



Extensive views from the coastguard lookout
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

When the coastguard agency was first set up in the early nineteenth-century, its task was actually not to save lives but to help prevent smuggling and the evasion of import duties and tax.



Today HM Coastguard works in collaboration with the RNLI to rescue those in danger at sea
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Helping to save lives came later as a result of some treacherous deeds relating to ancient laws. If a ship was wrecked and there were no survivors, salvagers could claim the right to the property. Thus there were some cases of deliberately enticing ships onto coastal rocks and the killing of survivors in order to take the bounty.

In response the coastguard agency took responsibility of helping to save lives on wrecked ships, hence its revised role today in safety and rescue in partnership with the RNLI.

Directions 14

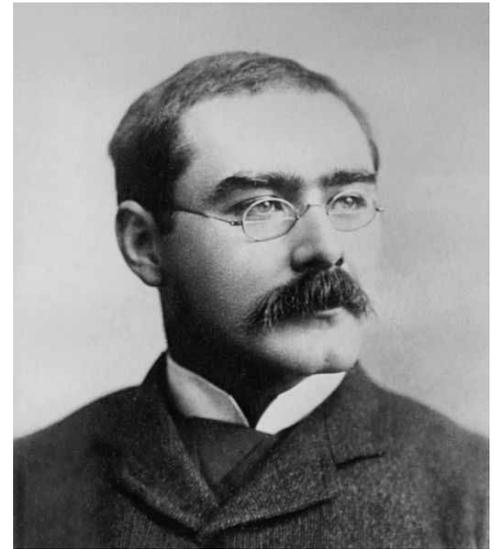
Take time to appreciate the stunning views of Barnstaple and Bideford Bay. You can see Westward Ho! and many of the coastal features that we have found out about so far. A toposcope will help to identify various landmarks both near and further afield.

When you are ready, retrace your steps back down the path and take the first turning on the right. This goes along the higher ridge path of Kipling Tors. Stop at the third bench which is directly above Seafeld House and the car park.

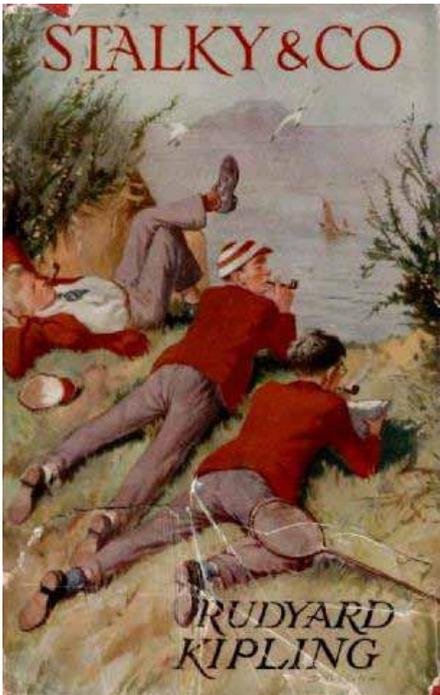
15. Protected beauty

Kipling Tors ridge path, third bench

This long narrow hillside is known as Kipling Tors. It is named after Rudyard Kipling, another nineteenth-century novelist with links to Westward Ho!



Rudyard Kipling (c.1899)
Library of Congress,
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



Cover of 'Stalky & Co' (1957 edition)
showing the school boys relaxing
on the cliff-top

Kipling went to United Services College, the public school that we heard about earlier.

He and his friends used to come up here and smoke cigars and pipes and read books together.

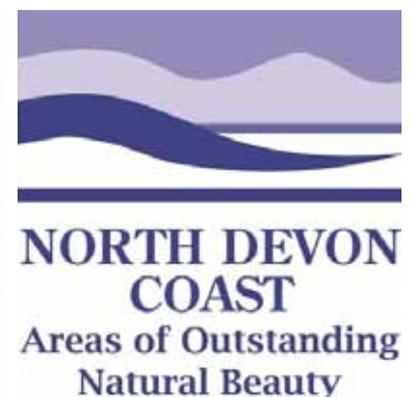
He wrote 'Stalky and Co', a semi-autobiographical novel about his schooldays here.

In 1938 Kipling Tors was presented by the Rudyard Kipling Memorial Fund to the National Trust. The National Trust still own and manage the site today. In fact they are significant landowners along the North Devon coast ensuring that much of our valuable coastline is protected and managed appropriately.

Another means of protecting landscapes is to designate them. We heard at the beginning of the walk that this is part of the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of an area which includes its landscape, wildlife and heritage.

This provides protection under planning laws although, unlike National Parks, AONBs do not undertake a statutory planning function.



Various bodies are responsible for managing the landscape
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

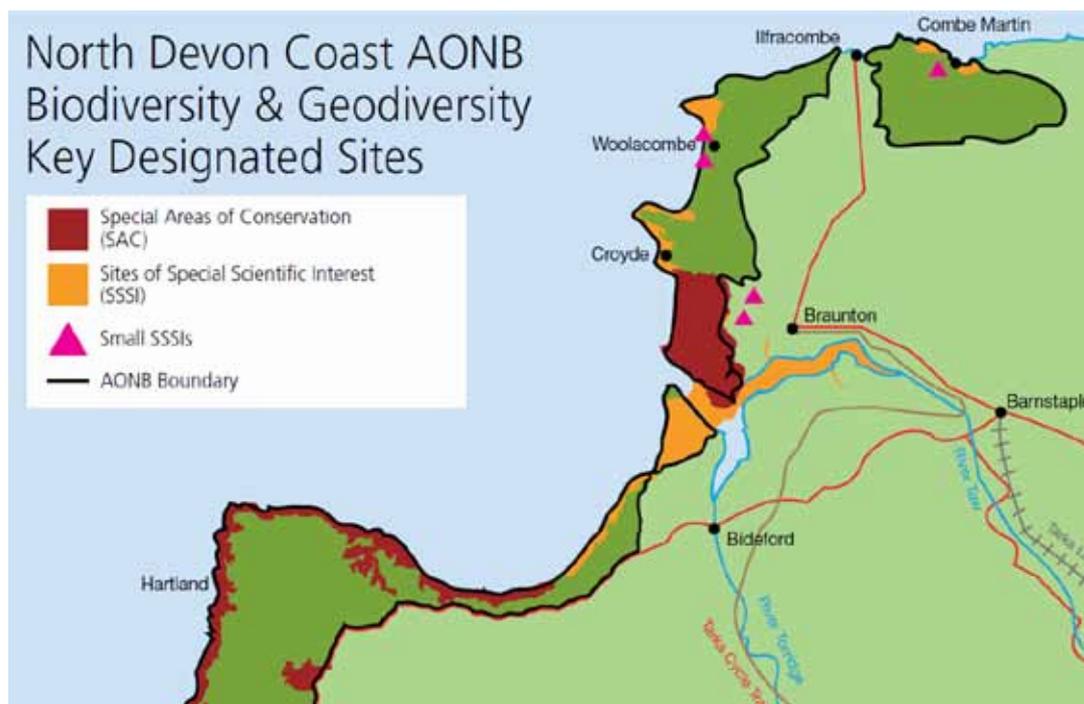
The North Devon AONB was designated in 1960, the first AONB in Devon. The 171 square kilometres of coastal land was selected because it possessed some of the finest coastal scenery in the country.

We have already heard about the rocky foreshore which is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest. In addition, the areas adjacent to the mouth of the Taw and Torridge Estuary are both designated as SSSIs.

Braunton Burrows on the north side of the estuary has one of the largest and best sand dune systems in the country. It is also a Special Area of Conservation and forms the core area of the North Devon Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO designation which was granted in 2003.

Northam Burrows on the south side of the estuary has been designated as a SSSI for its rare habitats and the pebble ridge. In addition, in 1991 the area was also defined as a part of the Hartland Heritage Coast which was designed to conserve, enhance and promote areas of undeveloped coastline.

In Britain we are very fortunate to have a system and structure which recognises and protects the best of our natural landscapes.



Key designated sites of ecological and geological importance along the North Devon coast
From North Devon AONB Management Plan 2014-19

Directions 15

Continue on the path along the ridge. Stop at the second bench which is directly above the modern apartment block of Nassau Court.

16. From common land to country park

Kipling Tors ridge path, fifth bench

From here you can look along the pebble ridge and see the vast expanse of flat land behind it known as Northam Burrows. Our walk started at the southern end of Northam Burrows but this elevated viewpoint helps us to appreciate its dimensions and characteristics.

The 600 acre site comprises coastal grassland, sand dunes and salt marsh which provide important habitats for wildlife, birds and insects.

Historical records show that the manor of Northam was given to the Abbey of St Stephen in Caen by William the Conqueror.



Part of the pebble ridge and Northam Burrows
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

For centuries Northam Burrows was common land. To qualify for the rights to cultivate this land, or 'Rights of Common', local people had to prove that they had a fire for heating rather than for food. These 'pot boilers' (or potwallopers as they became known) helped the Lord of the Manor to maintain the land, hence their association with maintaining the pebble ridge as mentioned earlier.

Over the last 150 years the usage of Northam Burrows has changed although none of the changes have involved building as the risk of the pebble ridge being breached by a winter storm and flooding the land behind is still very real. Instead they have largely focused on recreation and conservation.

As a part of the development of Westward Ho!, a golf course was created in 1864. It is the oldest links (sand) course in the country and still very much a part of the Burrows landscape today. As we heard earlier, the beach and Burrows were used for military training during the Second World War.

In the 1970s the site became a country park. The management of an area as a country park offers the public access to areas of open countryside where they have opportunities for recreation, health and education. They are usually managed by local authorities, in this case Torridge District Council. The Open Access status of the Burrows today is a contemporary reflection of its status as common land many centuries ago.

Directions 16

Continue along the path which soon starts to drop down into woodland. At the first major crossroads of paths go straight across and follow the zig-zag path down into a wooded valley. Stop on the zig-zag path in the woodland.

17. From grassland to woodland

Kipling Tors woods

As we discovered earlier, Kipling Tors is the old cliff line from the days when the sea level was much higher. We've just walked along a section of this hillside and, although we've now entered a little valley, look on the map and you will see that the ridge with its steep slope on the seaward side continues another kilometre to the east.

Old photographs show that when Westward Ho! was being built most of this escarpment was open land rather than wooded, and probably grazed by sheep.



Sycamore tree in Kipling Tors woods
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

As the town developed the grazing on the hillsides ceased (as 'marginal land' it was probably uneconomic to farm) but the steepest parts of the slope were not suitable for building either so they were left. In such circumstances where land is left without interference the vegetation goes through a 'natural succession' back to its original state.

Here that transition led from grazed grassland to scrubland (in the form of bracken, gorse and blackthorn) then to woodland. The first section of Kipling Tors that we walked along from the coastguard lookout represents this intermediate succession stage while the woodland here is the latter stage. The term for woodlands that have regrown on abandoned or neglected ground is called 'secondary woodland'.

Most of the trees here are sycamore, recognisable by their large green leaves, similar to the Canadian Maple Leaf (as seen on the Canadian flag). Sycamore was introduced to this country in the 1600s and, although it is not native, it is one of our commonest trees. It is particularly salt tolerant so thrives in coastal locations like these where the sea breezes carry salt in the air. It also grows extremely fast in comparison to the oak trees which are the native species around here. Unfortunately, from a biodiversity point of view, it is a poor tree. Its large leaves cast dense shade preventing other native tree species getting established and in comparison to say oak it supports a much smaller range of insects.

Directions 17

At the bottom of the steep valley is a t-junction of paths. Turn right and follow the footpath. This eventually joins a small track and then soon meets the bend in a road (Stanwell Hill). Turn left and go round the bend. Cross over the junction with Merley Road and stop in front of the four red-brick apartment blocks called Ocean Park.

18. The Company, the Captain and Charles Ocean Park, Atlantic Way

Ocean Park stands on the site of the original Westward Ho! Hotel built in 1865 as the flagship building of the Northam Burrows Hotel and Villas Company.

The leading figure in the Company was Captain George Molesworth. He had served a short time in the Navy (hence the title), married into money and retired to Westward Ho! at the age of 33.

He was a larger-than-life character and the main driving force behind the early and most impressive developments in Westward Ho! You will see some of these as you continue exploring the residential streets of the town.



Captain George Molesworth
Courtesy of Richard Fletcher



The Royal Hotel (early 1900s)
Courtesy of Westward Ho! History Group

The purpose-built hotel here was built in a gothic Victorian style, boasted 33 bedrooms as well as smoking, reading and billiard rooms. It had a tennis court, croquet lawn and a swimming pool on the seafront.

After being patronised by Edward, the Prince of Wales, in 1867 it was soon renamed The Royal Hotel.

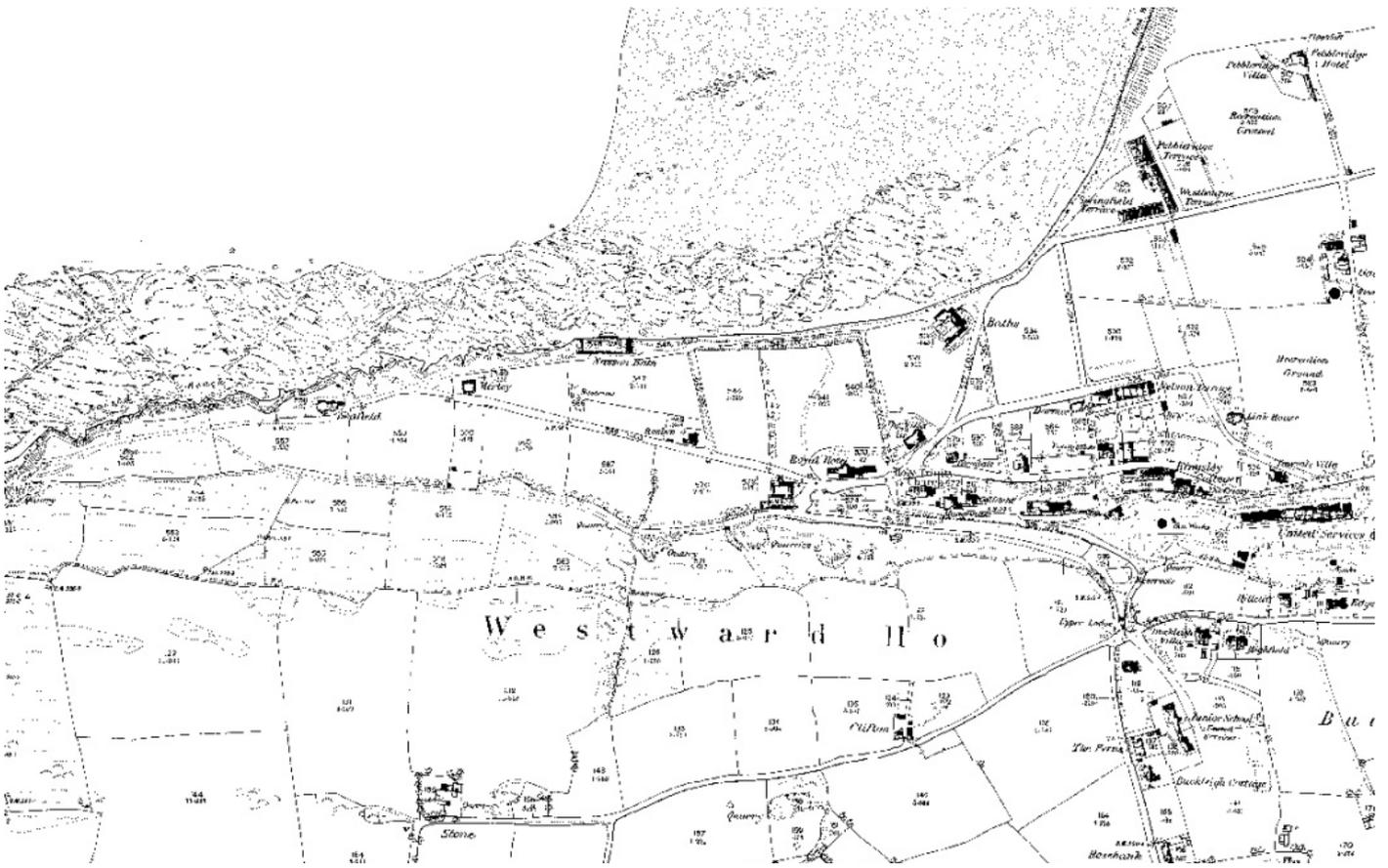
An adjacent annex called The Villa (the next building along the road after the four blocks of Ocean Park) was built to house the servants of those that came to stay.

Between Ocean View and the sea is a 'holiday village' with rows of simple chalets for visitors (we walked along the lower side of it earlier and saw it from above on Kipling Tors). There are several of these holiday villages and caravan parks for visitors on a lower budget.

In contrast new modern apartment blocks such as Ocean Park here, as well as Horizon View and Nassau Court that we passed earlier, reveal a new phase of development and building in the town.



Chalets of one of the holiday villages
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB



Top: Ordnance Survey map of 1880 showing the early building of Westward Ho!
Bottom: Satellite image from 2010 showing the holiday villages and modern developments

Apparently Captain Molesworth and Charles Kingsley were once friends but after Kingsley saw the developments at Westward Ho! he accused Molesworth of ruining the place and the two never spoke to one another again! You might wonder what the two men would think of the resort today.



The old and new of Westward Ho!
Clockwise from top left: Seafield House, Kingsley Court (formerly Torr ridge House), Ocean Park, Horizon View
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Directions 18

Walk along Atlantic Way past the four blocks of Ocean View. At the far end, below the church, the road forks. Take the right fork (Atlantic Way). Along this stretch look out on the left for the arched doorway of the old Union Club which was hastily relocated here in 1879 when the sea was encroaching on its original premises. Also look up to the right at the grand terraces, many of which were Molesworth's developments.

Take the first left (Youngaton Road) which takes you straight downhill. On the right is The Village Inn, originally Youngaton Farm, which was one of the only buildings in Westward Ho! prior to its development as a seaside resort. At the crossroads with Nelson Road go straight ahead into Golf Links Road which takes you back to the seafront. Stop by the seawall at the bottom.

19. Coast of change

Seafront, beside green space

Here we are back at the seafront with expansive views across the bay. On this walk we have seen some spectacular coastal landforms and found out about the processes that have created them: from the pebble spit to the steep cliffs to the wave cut platform.

We have also seen evidence of changes in sea level: the fossil cliffs and raised beach showed where the coastline stood when sea levels were higher than the present day, while the sunken forest presented evidence of a period when sea levels were lower.



View across the bay to Nassau Court and Seafield House shows the wave cut platform, raised beach and old cliff line
Neville Stanikk © North Devon AONB

The forces of nature are relatively slow in human terms but it is vital to recognise that these processes are ongoing and the coastal landscape is not static. The ongoing waves and tides erode the cliffs, winter storms shift the pebble ridge, while salt-tolerant trees are recolonising the old cliffs.

The beauty of this coastal spot led to the development of a holiday resort in the 1860s. But since the beginning, the buildings and infrastructure that humans built here has been at risk from the sea. Early hotels too close to the shore were demolished and moved backwards, the pier was swept away and the seawall was built to protect land and property.



The coast path along the old railway line offers stunning views
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

Climate scientists predict an increase in the frequency of winter storms as well as a rise in average sea level over coming decades so it remains to be seen how the resort adapts to environmental changes in the future.

The beauty of this coast, as well as its scientific significance and its special habitats, have led to a range of designations to protect and manage it: from the AONB and SSSIs to Heritage Coast and Country Park. Fortunately for us, the protective measures do not restrict public access so we can enjoy walking and other recreational activities along this stunning coastline.

Further information

Visit Devon – North Devon

www.visitdevon.co.uk/areas-to-visit/north-devon

Visit North Devon and Exmoor

www.northdevon.com

Explore the Coast

www.explorethecoast.org

North Devon Biosphere

www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk

Devon's Rocks: a geological guide

www.devon.gov.uk/index/environmentplanning/natural_environment/geology/geology-guide.htm

National Trust - Bideford Bay and Hartland

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bideford-bay-and-hartland/visitor-information

South West Coast Path National Trail

www.southwestcoastpath.com

Westward Ho! History Group

www.westwardhohistory.co.uk

Westward Ho! Pier

www.piers.org.uk/pierpages/NPSwestwardho.html

Panjandrum

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panjandrum

Bideford, Westward Ho! and Appledore Railway

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bideford,_Westward_Ho!_and_Appledore_Railway

Stalky & Co

www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_stalky&co.htm

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

North Devon AONB for their collaboration and for permission to use their images

Dave Edgcombe for creating the walk, providing photographs and the audio commentary

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Caroline Millar for editing the audio files



Footprint designating the South West Coast Path
Dave Edgcombe © North Devon AONB

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Explore the coastal resort of Ilfracombe

<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/south-west-england/ilfracombe.html>



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<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/south-west-england/hartland.html>



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<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/south-west-england/babbacombe.html>



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<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/south-east-england/rye-and-winchelsea.html>





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