NORTH DEVON COAST
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

North Devon Coast

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Cultural Trails

4 self-guided walks in the North Devon AONB

View from Worthygate Woods, Bucks Mills

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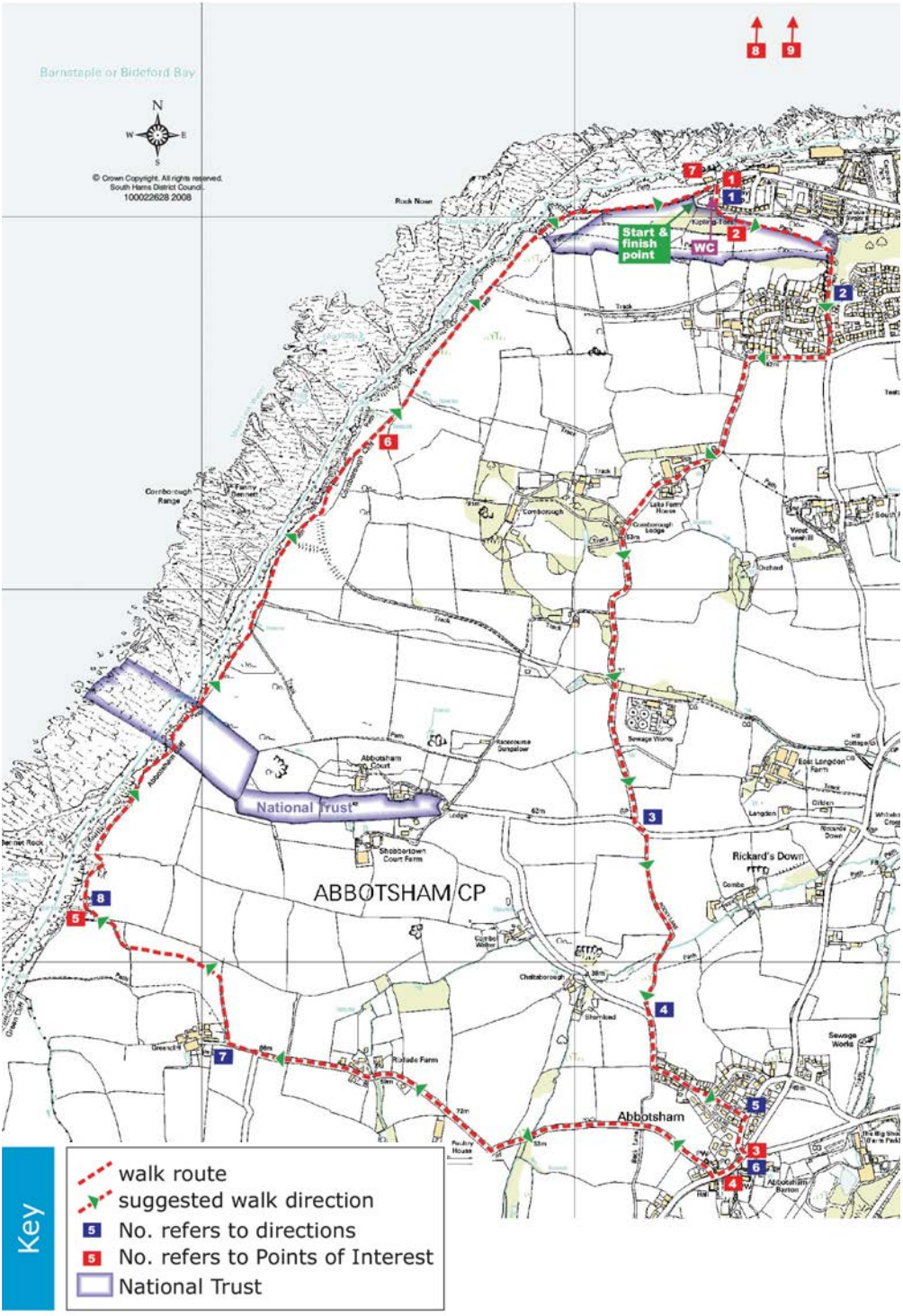
Abbotsham & Westward Ho!

Start/Finish: Kipling Tors car park, Westward Ho!

- **Distance:** 5.5 miles (9km) **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Easy to moderate
- **Terrain:** Quiet country lanes, public footpath, green lane, and coast path. Fairly even going underfoot, with a few wet or muddy patches in damp weather
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** None
- **Accessibility:** A shorter Access for All route follows part of this walk along the coast path from Westward Ho!
- **Public transport:** Bus service 21 to Westward Ho! From Barnstaple and Bideford. For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or www.traveline.info
- **Toilets:** Public toilets by Kipling Tors car park
- **Parking:** Kipling Tors car park. Free
- **Other Facilities:** Public payphone by church in Abbotsham Post office and small village stores in Abbotsham
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Bideford Tourist Information Centre 01237 477676
- **OS map:** Explorer 139 Grid ref: SS 423291
- **Countryside Code:** When walking in the AONB always follow the Countryside Code, which is dedicated to helping members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside



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Trade and Settlement

In the Early Stone Age Devon was sparsely populated by nomadic hunter-gatherers. Much has changed since then. The land has been permanently lived in through the later Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age; seen Roman invasion, Anglo-Saxon settlement, Viking raiders and Norman Conquest. These have all left their mark on the landscape, from Prehistoric barrows and Iron Age hillforts to Norman castles but, the land has remained settled and farmed to the present day.

Through this succession of influence and beyond, the Devon we see today has taken shape. Villages, hamlets, and farms have evolved. Towns have grown up, and centres of trade and power have developed, faded, and shifted. This rural county has always had agriculture at its heart but other industries have also made their mark.

Men have long burrowed deep into the Devon earth to extract valuable tin, copper, silver, lead, and arsenic. Boat-building, lime burning, cloth making, and the woollen trade all helped bring affluence. Devon's stream sides are dotted with the old mills that were once used to grind grain, or produce paper and textiles.

Lastly, we cannot forget the contribution made by Devon's 'free traders', the smugglers of old. Meanwhile, Devon's coast has always provided the county with a portal to the wide world. For centuries, galleons, schooners, clippers and cutters have plied their trades in and out of the county's ports. There is even persuasive evidence that tin was being traded with visiting Phoenician and Greek galleys in the Bronze Age.

Today's Devon is home to three quarters of a million people and has roots sunk deep into a long and fascinating history.

Bideford Bay. Photo by Andrew Wheatley

Directions

1. At entrance to car park follow the public footpath up through the holiday park **(1)**. At top of holiday park take gate straight ahead and follow footpath left **(2)**. Ignore all right and left turns.

Mermaid's Pool, Westward Ho!

2. At the top, cross at path junction to continue along path between housing. Turn right at the road. Ignore right turn into Highcliffe Park, and follow lane straight on. Lane drops into valley and climbs again.

3. At T-junction at top of rise, turn left signed 'Abbotsham 3/4', then take the green lane 40m on the right.

4. Bear left at the road, and continue into Abbotsham.

5. At T-junction in the village turn right opposite Vicarage Close. Turn right at next junction **(3,4)** up B3236, signed for Clovelly and Bude. Turn right again after 100m up lane signed for Greencliff.

6. After 600m turn right, signed for Greencliff.

7. At a sharp left hand bend after a further 700m, go straight on down Greencliff Farm drive, signed 'to Public Footpath'. After 100m, turn right through gate onto public footpath. Follow footpath down through plantation of young trees.

8. At the fingerpost, turn right over footbridge onto Coast Path, signed 'Westward Ho! 2.m'. (Just after footbridge, there is optional detour to left down to old lime kiln **(5)**. Retrace your steps back to coast path, and turn left). Follow coast path along the cliffs (6,7,8,9) back to the car park.

Lime Kiln at Greencliff

Points of Interest

1. Westward Ho! is the only settlement in England named after a book. Charles Kingsley's novel of the same name, published in 1855, was set in the area. Before long, property speculators formed a company to exploit the location's newfound fame, and construction began on a purpose built-holiday resort.

2. Early in the walk, your route skirts the left shoulder of Kipling Tors. The hill is owned by the National Trust and was named after the author Rudyard Kipling, who attended school in Westward Ho!, at the United Services College. This tough institution was dedicated to turning boys into army officers fit to serve the British Empire. Kipling later wrote a fictionalised account of his time at the school, titled 'Stalky & Co'. Amongst his other books were The Jungle Book and Just So Stories.

3. Back in the 12th century, the Abbotsham area was known as 'Hama'. When the village and church came into the ownership of the abbey at Tavistock, the name Abbotsham was born. Remarkably, this small agricultural village, whose population has never climbed much above 400, at one time had its own railway station. The parish church of St Helen was originally built by the Normans, and was rebuilt in the 13th century. Strong evidence of early human inhabitation has been found around Abbotsham. Signs of flint tool production from the Stone Age and Bronze Age have been uncovered here. A possible Neolithic long barrow, or burial mound, has also been discovered close to the village.

Abbotsham Cliffs from Cornborough

4. Abbotsham parish was also once the scene of a great battle. Odun, the Earl of Devon, slew the famous Viking chief Hubba at nearby Kenwith Castle, along with up to 1200 of his warriors. The Danish warlord is supposed to have been buried at the aptly named 'Bloody Corner' at nearby Northam.

5. The round ruin with the low arch above the beach at Greencliff is an old lime kiln. Limestone, brought by boat from South Wales, was loaded into the kiln from the top, interspersed with layers of coal. Burnt slowly, it produced powdered white lime for fertilizer and it was also used in limewash paint and lime mortar. It seems that the kiln was sited in this lonely spot to take advantage of a low grade coal found in the cliffs near here. The lime boats trading along North Devon's coast commonly carried

additional secret cargoes. They would meet foreign vessels out in the channel, to load up with illicit 'duty free' goods like brandy and tobacco. Under cover of the legitimate lime trade, the contraband was then smuggled ashore, to be transported inland and sold on by so called 'free traders'.

Cornborough Cliffs. Photo by Andrew Wheatley

6. This last section of the walk follows the route of an old railway which connected Bideford, Westward Ho!, and Appledore. The line had a difficult birth, involving several attempts to get construction going over a 30 year period, and a short life. Once built it lasted only 16 years, closing in 1917, but it must have made for a beautiful and spectacular train ride in its time.

7. Although the settlement you see today is entirely modern, human beings were at Westward Ho! long ago. Stone Age remains have been discovered beneath the sands here, amid the remnants of an ancient forest. These finds include a midden of bones, shells and other evidence of foods eaten by our distant ancestors.

8. Along the back of the beach runs a two mile pebble ridge made up of large sandstone cobbles, created by longshore drift from rocks eroded along the western cliffs. In an annual effort known as 'potwalloping', locals used to move many tons of slumped stones back up to the top of the ridge. This labour was carried out to help hold back the sea, protecting the grazing on the Burrows behind.

9. Behind the ridge, the delicate ecology of Northam Burrows demands special protection. A rare mixture of salt marsh, sand dunes, and unimproved grassland, it is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and forms part of the Buffer Zone of North Devon's Biosphere Reserve, which is based around Braunton Burrows, a much larger dune system north of the Taw and Torridge Estuary.

Old Railway Line, Cornborough