

Location & Access:

Hartland Quay is located in a remote corner of north Devon, accessible from Bideford via the A39 road (Atlantic Highway).

The B3248 road connects to Hartland village, and there are signs to Hartland Quay from there.

Parking is at the (free) upper car park (SS 223 247), or the lower car park by the hotel if using the bar (SS 222 247), or at East Titchberry car park (SS 244 270).



Warren Beach —photo: Paul Berry

Key Geography: High rocky cliffs, wave erosion, sea arch, caves, folding and faulting, unique geology, lighthouse, Lundy Island, and the South West Coast Path.

Description: This cliff top walk can follow a circular route from one of the car parks indicated (8 miles / 13 km), or with the use of two vehicles can be a shorter one-way walking journey (4 miles). It is a moderate to difficult walk, with some steep climbs and descents. The path runs close to sheer cliffs in places, so vertigo sufferers be wary.



'Rebecca' boat —photo: Paul Berry

The route begins in the upper car park at Hartland Quay, and before setting off, it is worth pausing for a moment to look at the boat used in the film 'Rebecca', a 2020 thriller starring Lily James, Kristen Scott Thomas, Keeley Hawes, and Armie Hammer, based on the 1938 novel by Daphne Du Maurier. Hartland Quay has been used as a location for a number of other films, including 'Treasure Island' and 'Solomon Kane'.

Either at the beginning or end of your walk, a visit to Hartland Quay is highly recommended. There is some fascinating coastal scenery and geology to study here, all easily accessible from Warren Beach at the end of the slipway. This has been well-documented in another section on this site titled "Hartland Quay" and is found in the 'Places to Visit' section.

You might also find time to call into the excellent small museum opposite the bar entrance, packed with exhibits and information about the history of this stretch of coastline, telling stories of smugglers and shipwrecks.

To begin our walk along the coastline to the Hartland Point Lighthouse, pick up the South West Coast Path, signed opposite the upper car park entrance. The path starts with steep climb to Rocket House. The wrecking of the SS Uppingham in 1890, with eight lives lost, stimulated a need to use this building to store a wagon and *(continued overleaf)*

Curiosity Questions:

- # Lundy Island is visible from Hartland Point. How long is the island from north to south?
- # Part of this walking route follows the South West Coast Path. How long is this footpath in total?
- # Nearby Hartland Abbey is the stately home of which family?
- # How many lighthouses are there on Lundy Island?

Further information:

- # <https://wordpress.com/post/devongeography.wordpress.com/8830>
- # www.hartlandpeninsula.co.uk

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the life-saving equipment belonging to the Hartland Life Saving Apparatus Company. Rocket apparatus designed by Cornishman Henry Trengrouse used a musket ball or small cannon ball to fire a double line and pulley out to a ship in trouble. The line was then tied to a mast and a breeches buoy harness was used to haul sailors one at a time to the safety of the shore. Rocket life-saving apparatus continued to be used around the country until the 1980s, when helicopter rescue made it redundant.

Turn left in front of the house, and follow the path that turns north across a field above the stunning geology of Warren Cliffs. This area gets its name as artificial warrens were in the past constructed here in the soft earth to farm rabbits, an important part of the rural economy until its decline in the late nineteenth century. Interestingly, when rabbits were first brought to this country by the Normans, they were quite delicate creatures, hardly able to dig their own burrows. They have since evolved into rather more robust mammals.



'Pleasure House' folly —photo: Paul Berry

The path leads to a folly, possibly originally built in the sixteenth century as a warrener's house, although it is also sometimes claimed that it was a lookout for spotting pirates off the coast. The structure was re-modelled in the eighteenth century and named the 'pleasure house', used as a picnic refreshment stop for the owners of Hartland Abbey and their guests while out on carriage drives around the estate. The high arches may have been designed to permit carriages inside the walls.



Broad Beach —photo: Paul Berry

The path continues past Warren Beach to reach the next bay, Broad Beach. Here, we can see how the rocky shore has the same structure as the cliffs, but can be viewed in plan instead of as a section. We also have a good view here inland, where we can see a flat plateau stretching far into the distance, where the vertical beds of rock have been planed off by sub-aerial erosion.

The path next reaches the headland of Dyer's Lookout. Follow the coast path here along the cliff top and down into the valley of the Abbey River, the longest in the parish, rising close to an Iron Age hill fort near Clovelly. Sheltered combs like this are typical of this stretch of coastline. The long profile of the Abbey River has been truncated by cliff retreat caused by marine erosion. In some cases, the valley is so deeply incised in its lower course that the river ends in a waterfall to reach sea level at the beach. We will see other examples of this further on in the walk.



Vertical beds at Dyer's Lookout —photo: Paul Berry

There are three key stages in the evolution of such a feature:

Firstly, the valley is incised into the coastal plateau;

Secondly, the valley is partially infilled with 'head' material created due to solifluction in the peri-glacial conditions that existed at the end of the last (Devensian) glaciation, some 18,000 years ago;

Thirdly, the river cuts (unpaired) terraces in the head material, which is 15 metres thick in places. The river sometimes cuts a small gorge as it reaches the beach as a coastal 'hanging valley'.

The path crosses the river at a footbridge close to the cottage that is all that remains today of the

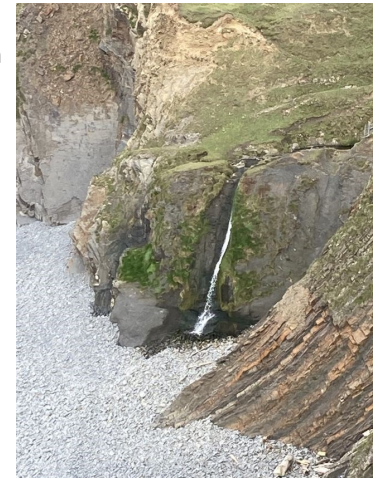
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original buildings of Blackpool Mill, owned by Hartland Abbey. In past days, all who worked the lands of the Lord of the Manor were obliged to mill their grain at his mills, so this building could have been the Abbey's way of gaining some control of the milling process and avoiding use of the local lord's mills. It was originally served by a leat that tapped water from the river further upstream. The cottage featured in a film version of Rosamunde Pilcher's 'The Shell Seekers' starring Vanessa Redgrave, and was also used in a recent BBC production of the 'Night Manager'. The building also appeared as Barton Cottage in the BBC version of 'Sense and Sensibility' – the cottage that Mrs Dashwood moved into with her three daughters on the death of her husband. Today, the cottage forms an exclusive holiday home.

Turn left at the fingerpost behind the cottage at Blackpool Mill, and head towards the beach to see stacks of sedimentary rocks folded into a near-vertical position. Bear right to climb steeply up a long flight of steps to Berry Cliff. The ascent offers spectacular views (at low tide) of the ribbed rock strata running out into the sea, the cause of numerous shipwrecks when submerged beneath the sea. This vista was described by Mark Wallington in his book '500 Mile Walkies':

"I'd never seen cliffs like these before. The bedding planes were folded over each other, twisted and squashed, some were sliced clean and square as a cake, others were sharp as a broken bottle"

As you descend into the next valley, you can see the waterfall where Blegberry Water tumbles down onto the pebbles of Blegberry Beach below. As you cross the stream, you can see how it has cut a deep gully in the rock strata before the waterfall. An old path runs away from the beach, used by donkeys to transport sand inland for farmers to use to lighten the heavy clay soils. In the past, this beach has also been an important source of seaweed.



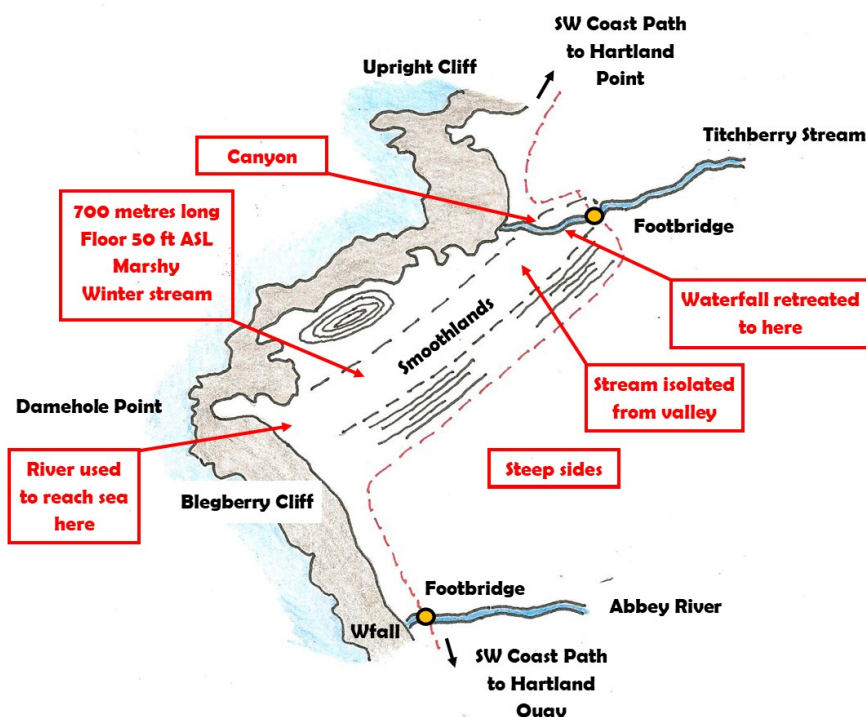
Waterfall at Blegberry Beach
— photo: Paul Berry

The path now rises again to Blegberry Cliffs, offering an excellent view to the south towards Sharpnose Head near Morwenstow. Beyond this, is the cliffline of Cornwall, and on a clear day, it may be possible to see Tintagel Head. The

promontory jutting out into sea below us now is Damehole Point, where the sandstone beds stand at 90 degrees giving the headland its slab-sided form. The jagged offshore teeth of rock at this location have claimed at least three ships in the past. The 1887 schooner 'Star of Peace' was wrecked here, and a year later, it was joined by a ship laden with 1300 tons of iron ore. Fortunately, the crews of both boats made it to safety in their lifeboats.

The coast path continues onwards towards Gull Rock, and bears right to take you through the Smoothlands Valley.

Smoothlands is another classiccombe common to this part of the coast - a flat, streamless valley (continued overleaf)





Smoothlands valley —photo: Paul Berry

cut off at the north and south ends by the sea. It marks the truncated lower course of Titchberry Water, which now tumbles down the cliffs as a waterfall.

Cross the stream and then bear left past the caravan before climbing the heights of Upright Cliff. Passing Blagdon Cliff, great views are offered towards the steep slopes of Hartland Point and the lighthouse.

Hartland Point is the most extreme north west point in Devon, marking the junction of the Bristol Channel and the Atlantic Ocean, and there are many treacherous currents here. With a tidal range of eight metres within Bideford Bay, the tidal race around Hartland Point is considerable. Tense Rocks, the submerged reef just off the coast at the lighthouse, have been the cause of many shipwrecks. The Romans referred to the point as the ‘promontory of Hercules’ because of the fierce winds and currents experienced here.

Simon Armitage describes the conditions experienced here in his book, ‘Walking Away’:

“The weather can be exceptionally punishing on this exposed elbow of Devon, here where Atlantic depressions come barreling into the cliffs and where storm fronts that have worked themselves into a frenzy after thousands of unimpeded miles finally unleash their tantrums above the bare land”

Mark Wallington describes this stretch of coastline in his book ‘500 Mile Walkies’:

“Now the sea grew agitated, the wind began to gust and the landscape lost all its finesse. You could feel Hartland Point long before you could see it. On the map the promontory is a right angle, a corner where all the

elements meet. In reality, they collide and the friction is frightening. The currents writhe in a vortex of grey water; the monstrous cliffs appear contorted under their own pressure and the waves hit them like trains. It’s not a particularly attractive place, there’s nothing subtle about it, it just looks mean.”

As you progress towards Hartland Point, you will come across a memorial stone by the coast path dedicated to the Glenart Castle steamship. This vessel had been requisitioned as a hospital ship during the First World War, and was sailing from Newport in Wales to Brest in France to pick up wounded soldiers. Germany claimed it was carrying arms, and it was hit by a U Boat torpedo in the early hours of February 26th, 1918. Twenty miles west-north-west from this memorial, the Glenart Castle sank in just eight minutes. Around thirty on board were saved, but 162 died, including eight nurses. This was not the only ship sunk during the war by German submarines in this area.

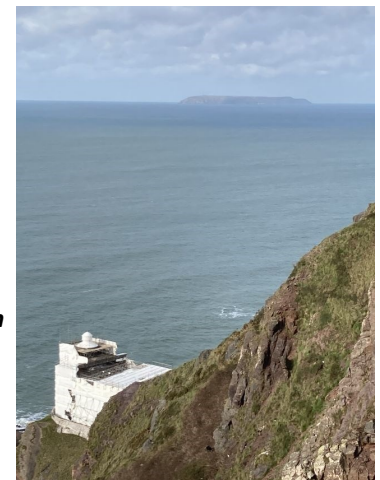
The automated Hartland Point Lighthouse is run by Trinity House, although access is currently prohibited, as the property has recently been purchased by a developer. The lighthouse is a Grade II listed building, built in 1874. It was once manned by four keepers, who lived with their families in homes since demolished to make

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Monument to Glenart Castle

—photo: Paul Berry



Hartland Point lighthouse with Lundy

Island in the distance —

photo: Paul Berry

way for the helipad. The light was decommissioned in 2012 and replaced with a lighted LED beacon in front of the lighthouse tower. It stands 20.5m above high water, and flashes six times every fifteen seconds – visible across the sea for eight nautical miles. Since its construction, constant wave action has threatened to undermine the lighthouse. The thick sea wall built 1925 to protect it can be seen to right of lighthouse as viewed from the cliff top.

When you reach the coastguard lookout (at 95 metres above sea level), walk around the side of the lookout fence to find a viewpoint providing a great panorama of the lighthouse and the quay below. At the base of the cliffs are the scattered remains of the MS Johanna, a Panamanian flagged Dutch coaster wrecked in gales here on December 31st, 1982. She was carrying wheat from the Netherlands to Cardiff when she was driven aground less quarter mile from the lighthouse. Four crewmen were rescued by a helicopter from RAF Chivenor, and three others were taken off by the Clovelly Lifeboat. The wreck initially attracted a number of curious visitors, and by 1983, the body of the ship had split into two. The sea has gradually broken up the remains of the wreckage, leaving very little visible today.



Barley Bay and radar station — photo: Paul Berry

If it is a clear day, away in the distance you can pick out the outline of the granite mass of Lundy Island which stands eleven miles offshore. The island was the eighteenth-century home to Thomas Benson, one time MP for Barnstaple, and a notorious Devon smuggler. After gaining a contract to convey convicts to America, Benson cunningly took them only as far as Lundy, where he kept them to work as slaves for his smuggling operations, which including a tobacco processing plant. His nefarious schemes only came to light when fourteen convicts managed to escape. In order to pay the fines that followed, Benson loaded a ship with expensive linen and pewter, and landed these expensive goods at Lundy before scuttling the ship and claiming the insurance. Sadly, for the smuggler, crew members ratted on him to the authorities. The unfortunate ship's captain was hanged, but Benson managed to escaped to Portugal, where he built up a successful trading business.

After returning to the path, some steps drop down to the entrance to the lighthouse. The path now runs along a coastline that faces northwards, and you soon pass Barley Bay, with its impressive rock folds and recent landslips. The path passes a finger post for the South West Coast path, indicating the distances to Minehead to the east (106 miles) and Poole, at the end of the footpath in the opposite direction (524 miles). It then skirts the edge of a car park below the Lundy helipad, before climbing Titchberry Cliff and looping around the mushroom-shaped radar station. This houses the 'Watchman' radar system, assisting air traffic control of military and civilian aircraft. Just below is the site of an older radar station which dates back to World War Two. In 1941, Hartland Point was a naval VHF intercept station for the 'Y' service, which was a feeder service for the 'Enigma' code-breaking operation at Bletchley Park. Subsequently, it became a 'Chain Home Low' radar station - a booster station linked to the main local station on Northam Burrows, which helped plot surface shipping and low flying aircraft. In the 1950s, existing chain home sites became Cold War monitoring station.

The path continues eastwards to Shipload Bay, and eventually you can turn right to join a lane that leads to the car park at the delightful fifteenth century East Titchberry Farm. From here, you can either retrace your steps along the coast path to Hartland Quay, or follow the inland route (includes sections of green lanes and roads) to make it a circular walk.

To complete the inland return route, turn right out of the car park at East Titchberry and follow the road to West Titchberry Farm. Continue to a 'T' junction, where you turn left to Blagdon Farm. Follow the track that crosses a stream before continuing along a green lane to a road. Turn right here and head to Blegberry Farm, built in 1627 by a staunch supporter of Charles I named William Atkin. He was not popular in the area, being a collector of 'ship money', the hated tax levied on coastal communities to fund the navy. When Civil War broke out, Atkin had his farmhouse fortified,

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and the thick walls he built around the end of the farmhouse still stand today. An observation platform and loop holes left in the stonework for firing muskets can still be seen today.. The name of the farm comes from a nearby prehistoric hill fort called 'Black Bury' – now toppled into sea but thought to be located somewhere close to Hartland Point.

Turn left after the farmhouse onto a grassy track, and then bear left onto a green lane to walk downhill to a road. Join the road to pass Berry Farm, and then a footpath leading off to the left that would take you to Hartland Abbey, which became an Augustin monastery shortly after it was built in the twelfth century. Religious life came to an end 400 years later when it became the last monastery in England to be deconsecrated during Henry VIII dissolution of monasteries in 1539. The property and associated land was granted to the King's favourite butler, William Abbot, and it has since been passed on through different generations of local gentry. The main house was extensively rebuilt in 1779, and little of the original abbey remains except for part of the cloisters and some doorways incorporated into the present building.

The road continues steeply downhill to a bridge over the Abbey River, and after crossing this, rises again steeply up the other side of the valley to the village of Stoke. Enter the churchyard of St Nectan's church, known as the 'Cathedral of North Devon.' This is believed to be the highest church tower in the county, visible from many parts of parish and also from far out to sea - making it an important aid to shipping for centuries. The exterior of the church boasts several interesting gargoyles, and inside, can be found a decorated wagon roof and long finely carved rood screen. The church was built in the fourteenth century on the site of St Nectan's early hermitage, and replaced the original church built here in 1050 by Gytha (mother of King Harold, and owner of manor of Hartland at that time), as a thanksgiving for her husband being saved from a shipwreck.

St Nectan was one of twenty-four missionary offspring of the fifth century King Brychan of Brycheiniog, said to have lived here at Stoke after having sailed from Wales to follow life of a hermit. The Saint established a hermitage in this remote and densely wooded valley, and the well used for drinking water can be seen just a short distance the road. St Nectan died in 510 AD, after pursuing robbers who had stolen two cows that had been given to him by a local swineherd in return for helping him recover his lost pigs. St Nectan tried to convert the thieves to Christianity, but had head hacked off! It is said he then picked up his own head and carried it back to Stoke where he finally laid it down before he expired. Foxgloves are said to grow wherever his blood was spilled.

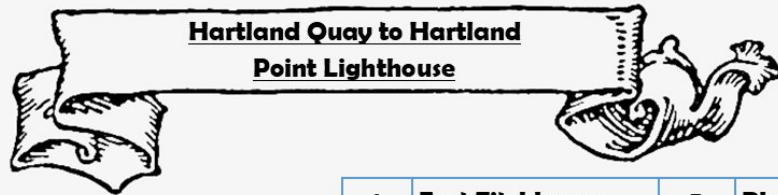
Follow the path on the left-hand side of the church, and fork right beyond the tower to cross a stile to exit the churchyard. Pick up a public footpath in front of the old coastguard cottages, and follow the footpath close to the houses to avoid walking on the road. The footpath continues in a field and runs parallel to the road. When you reach Rocket House, take the path to the left and follow it steeply downhill back to the upper car park at Hartland Quay.



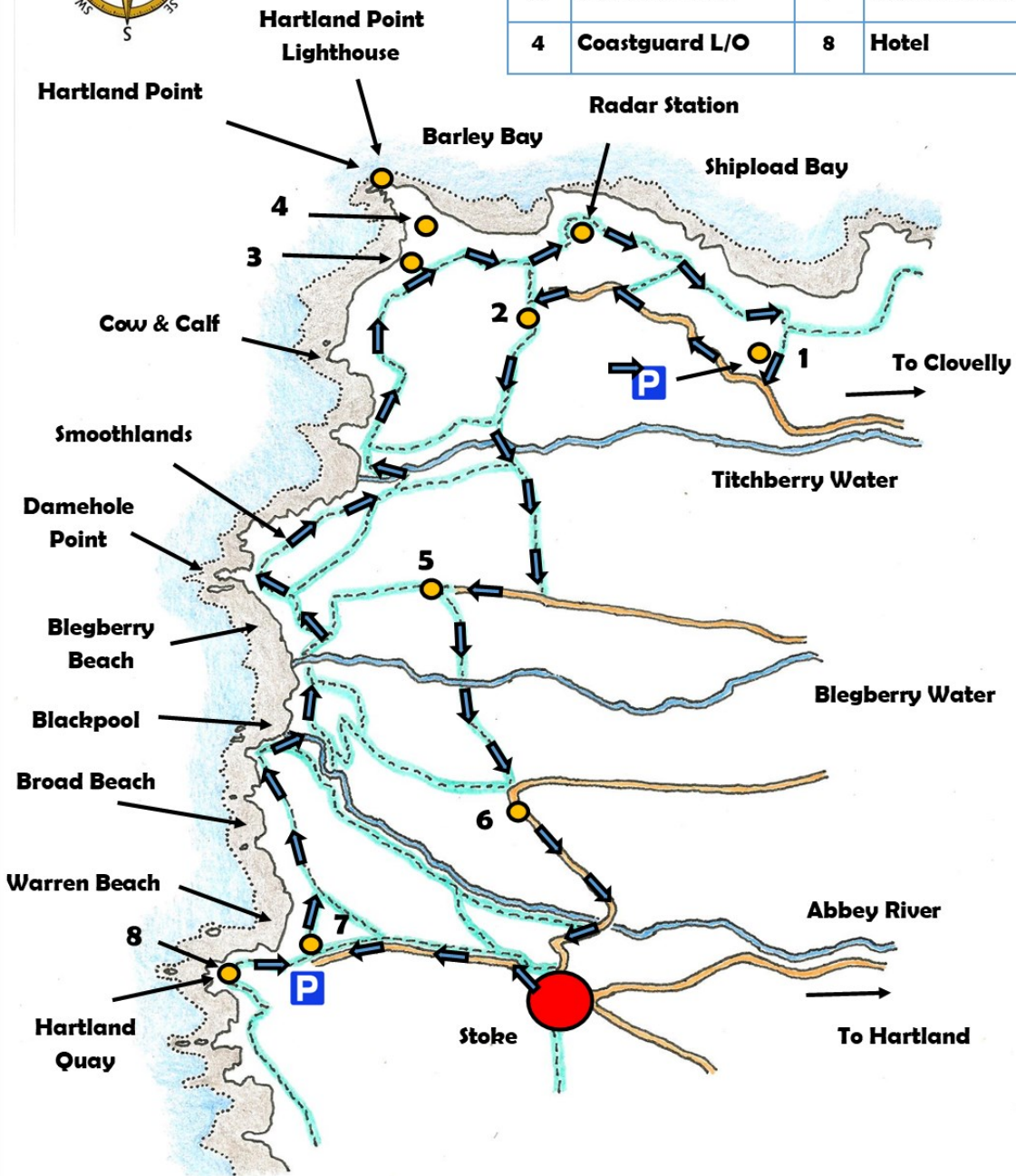
Tunnel Rock —photo: Paul Berry

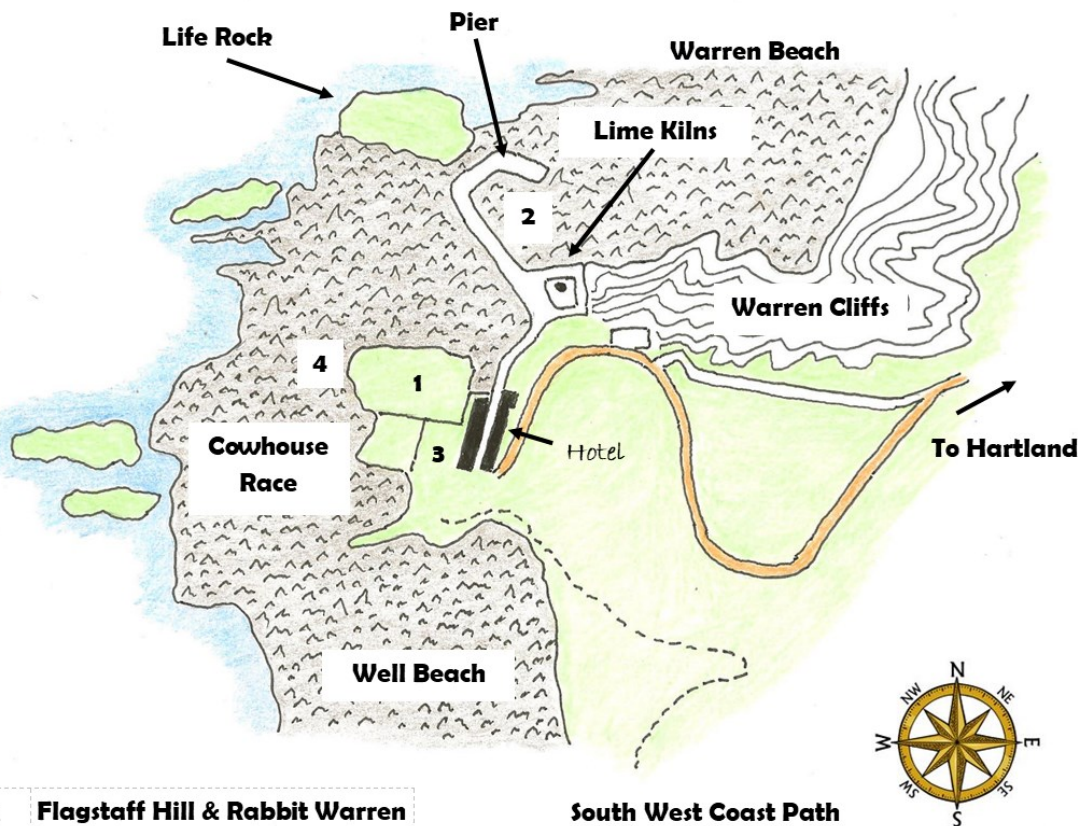
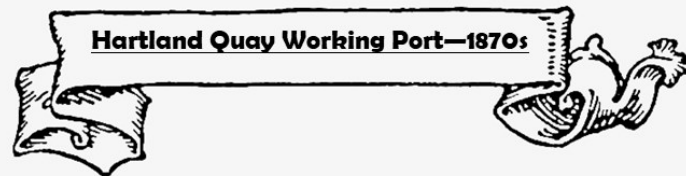
You could end your visit with a stroll to Hartland Quay, and the link near the beginning of this article will take you to a document giving a detailed account of what you can see there. Try to find time to visit the Wreckers' Retreat Bar next to the hotel. There are some really good local guides and books for sale here, and a map on the wall showing all of the shipwrecks that have been recorded in this area. The bar also displays relic from the 'Green Ranger', a ship wrecked at Hartland in 1962. The seven-man crew was safely rescued.

If you enjoyed this walk, you might like to follow the route along the coast path south of Hartland Quay, to Spekes Mill Mouth. It is described in detail elsewhere on this site.



1	East Titchberry	5	Blegberry
2	West Titchberry	6	Berry
3	Glenart Castle	7	Rocket House
4	Coastguard L/O	8	Hotel





1	Flagstaff Hill & Rabbit Warren
2	Quay Pool
3	Coastguard Cottages
4	'Landlord's Leap'

Answers to Curiosity Questions:

- # Lundy Island is visible from Hartland Quay. How long is the island from north to south? (3 miles)
- # Part of this walking route follows the South West Coast Path. How long is this footpath in total? (630 miles)
- # Nearby Hartland Abbey is the stately home of which family? (The Stucley family)
- # How many lighthouses are there on Lundy Island? (Three—North Light, South Light, and now defunct Old Light)