

Location & Access:

Hartland Quay is located in a remote corner of north Devon coast, 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).



Warren Beach —photo: Paul Berry

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

Description:

This circular route of around 4 miles (6 km) follows the cliff top, and then incorporates some quiet lanes and farm tracks. It is a gentle walk, with just a few steep gradients, but the coast path section runs close to sheer cliffs in places, so vertigo sufferers be wary.

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 document on this site titled "Hartland Quay" 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.

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'.



'Rebecca' boat —photo: Paul Berry

To begin our walk along the coastline, look for the South West Coast Path sign at the far south end of the car park. The path leads from here along the cliff top southwards to Marsland Mouth **(continued overleaf)**

Curiosity Questions:

- # Lundy Island is visible from the Hartland coast. 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/8911>
- # www.hartlandpeninsula.co.uk

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Well Beach —photo: Paul Berry

and then on to Cornwall - one of finest cliff walks in Britain. Describing Hartland parish in his book 'Devon' (1954), WG Hoskins said:

"It contains the most impressive cliff scenery in England and Wales, above all the iron coast from Hartland Point southwards, with its coastal waterfalls. The seascapes are superb, for there is no land between this coast and America."



Approaching St Catherine's Tor —photo: Paul Berry

This area's prevailing south-westerly winds produce a high wave energy environment to attack this west-facing stretch of coast. Undercutting leads to collapse of the vertical cliffs, and debris is rapidly removed from the base of the vertical cliffs leaving them open to further wave erosion. Jagged sandstone ridges and reefs interspersed by deep gullies are produced in the rocks on the foreshore due to differential erosion of the more resistant sandstones and less-resistant mudstones.

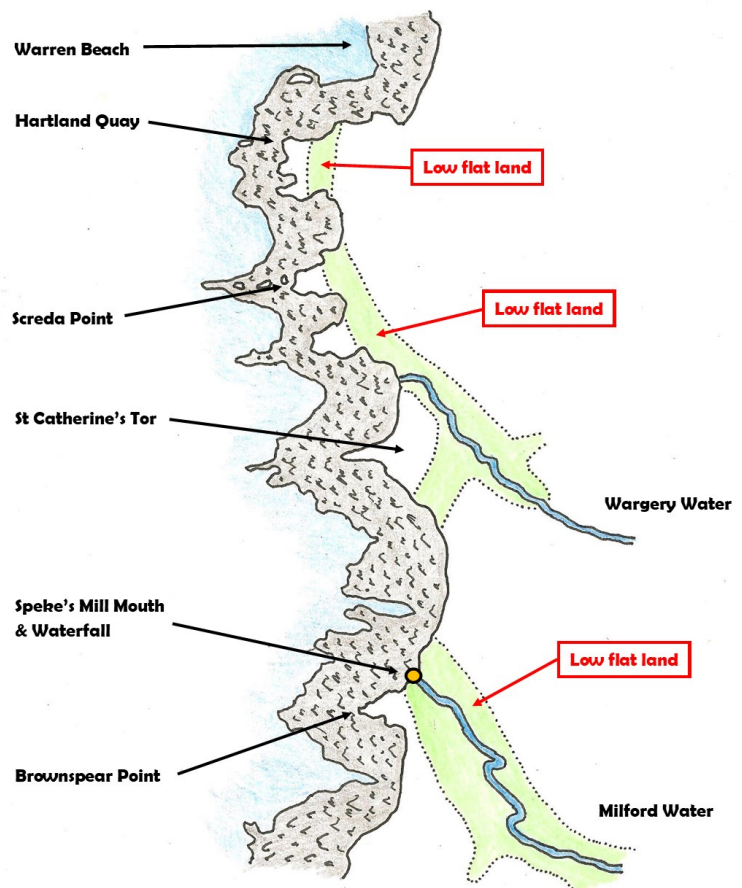
As you set out on the path, there is a stunning view looking down over the wide, flat wave-cut platform of Well Beach. The folded rocks in the cliffs here are also impressive.

The path leads around the headland of Screda Point to Hartland Quay, and then reaches Wargery Water. The long profile of this stream once continued northwards, but has since been truncated by sea action.

A valley once ran along the coastline in this area from Speke's Mill through St Catherine's Tor, and Screda Point, and eventually on to Hartland Quay (see map below). It is possible to trace the line of the landward wall of this valley as well as a part of the seaward side in the shape of the grassy, flat-topped headlands at Screda Point and Hartland Quay. At one time the valley stream would have run out onto Warren Beach.

The path runs behind the peak of the conical St Catherine's Tor, surrounded by the gentle surface representing the former flood plain and course of Milford Water. It is believed that a Roman Villa or a chapel (part of monastery at Hartland Abbey) once stood on the summit of the tor (84 metres above sea level), but these have since collapsed into sea along with much of tor itself.

The path continues by a stream, which Monks from Hartland Abbey once dammed to create a pond to use as a swannery. Keen landscape detectives may be able to spot the thick earthen stone-faced walls and banks that mark the site of the medieval dam. Cross the stream via the small wooden bridge or by using the stepping



(continued overleaf)



St Catherine's Tor —photo: Paul Berry

stones, and follow the South West Coast Path marker left across a field to a gate. Pass through the gate, and ignoring paths heading inland, turn right to follow a path that descends steeply to Speke's Mill Mouth.

Here, Milford Water tumbles from the sea-dissected valley (truncated at 48 metres above sea level) in a series of four spectacular waterfalls. It is a popular attraction for visitors, as predicted by EA Newell Arber in 1911:

"Undoubtedly, when the existence of this fall becomes better known it will be an object of pilgrimage."

This is a structurally-controlled group of waterfalls, where the course of the water is directed by the angle of various beds of rock. The fifty-four feet first



Speke's Mill Mouth waterfall —photo: Paul Berry

(upper) waterfall is the highest and most impressive, tumbling down a near vertical bed of resistant sandstone, the eastern limb of a tightly folded syncline. The stream then turns at right angles, and is guided southwards along the axis of a downfold, before breaking through the western limb of a fold and tumbling in several smaller falls across an anticline towards beach.

Nearby, a footpath disappears over the cliff on zig-zag descent to the beach below. This was once used by pack donkeys to ferry sand from the beach to 'sand lews' (open storage pens) on the valley floor at the top of cliffs. It was then graded and loaded onto carts for farmers to use to improve soil quality. The low earthwork remains of the lews can be identified on the north side of the Milford valley near the top of the first waterfall.

After Speke's Mill Mouth, the path forks. Leave the South West Coast Path here to continue along the cliffs, while you bear left to follow a public footpath along a wide stony track. At a footbridge, (where the path can also be taken back to the coast), a path to the right leads to Milford village as a short route extension. – turn right for Milford village or stay on the track.



Childspit Bay —photo: Paul Berry

Continuing on the stony track, keep the river on your right-hand side. The route runs through a lightly ***(continued overleaf)***

wooded area and then passes the cottages of 'Appletrees', 'Bramble' and 'Bracken Cottage' before reaching a road. It is possible to take a short detour here and turn right to visit Docton Mill Gardens and tearoom. Here, eight acres of gardens have been created around the original mill stream, including a bog garden, perennial borders, an orchard and natural woodland.

Alternatively, follow the road to the left and continue to the crossroads at Lymesbridge. Facing you will be Watersmeet Cottage, with a date stone above one of the windows recording 1587. Turn left here, and climb steeply along the road, passing the entrance to Trellick on the left, before reaching the four-crossways at Kernstone Cross. Follow the sign straight on to Stoke and Hartland, and then follow the track to Wargery Farm. Just before the farm buildings, a path descends steeply to a river and then climbs again until it reaches a lane. You will pass a camp site on the left before reaching the village of Stoke.



Watersmeet Cottage — photo: Paul Berry

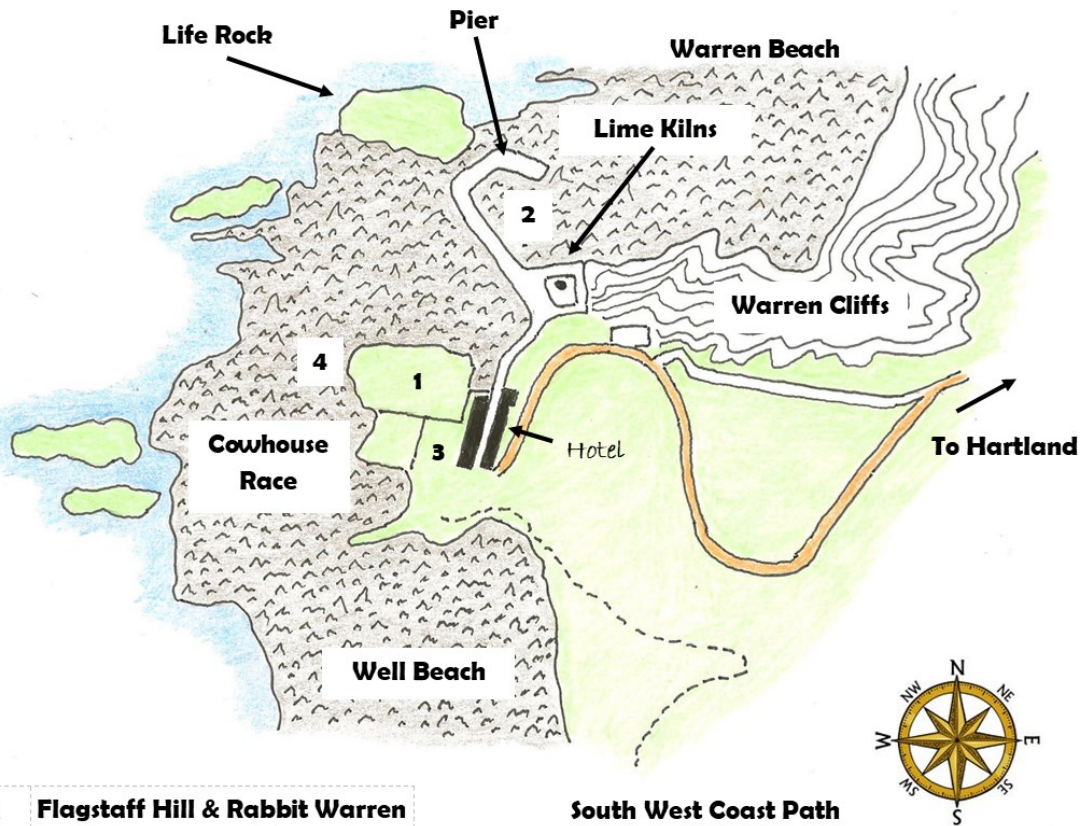
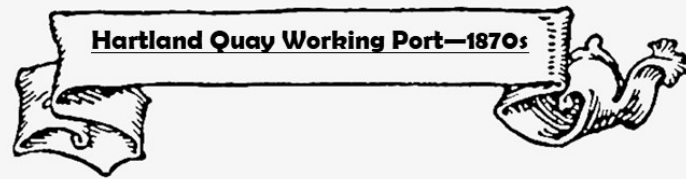
On entering Stoke, turn left and follow the road signposted to Hartland Quay. Continue to St Nectan's church. Known as the 'Cathedral of North Devon', it is believed to have the highest church tower in the county, visible from many parts of parish and also from far out to sea - making it an important 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.

Just past the church, 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 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 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. When you reach Rocket House, take the path to the left and follow it steeply downhill back to the upper car park.

You could end your visit with a stroll to Hartland Quay, and the link near the beginning of this article will take you to another blog on this site 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 north of Hartland Quay, to Hartland Point Lighthouse. It is described in detail elsewhere on this site.



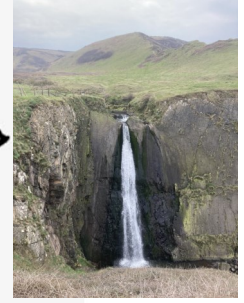
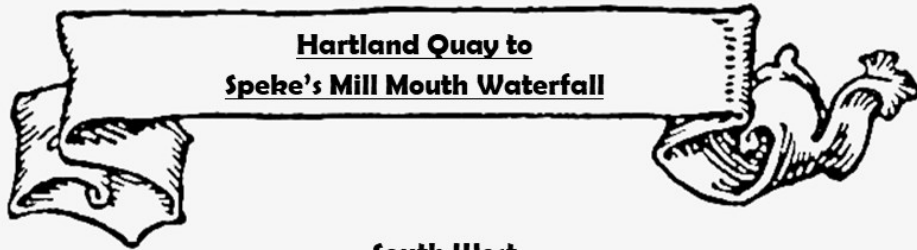
1	Flagstaff Hill & Rabbit Warren
2	Quay Pool
3	Coastguard Cottages
4	'Landlord's Leap'

Answers to Curiosity Questions:

- # Lundy Island is visible from the Hartland coast. 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)



Upper waterfall — photo: Paul Berry



Upper waterfall — photo: Paul Berry

