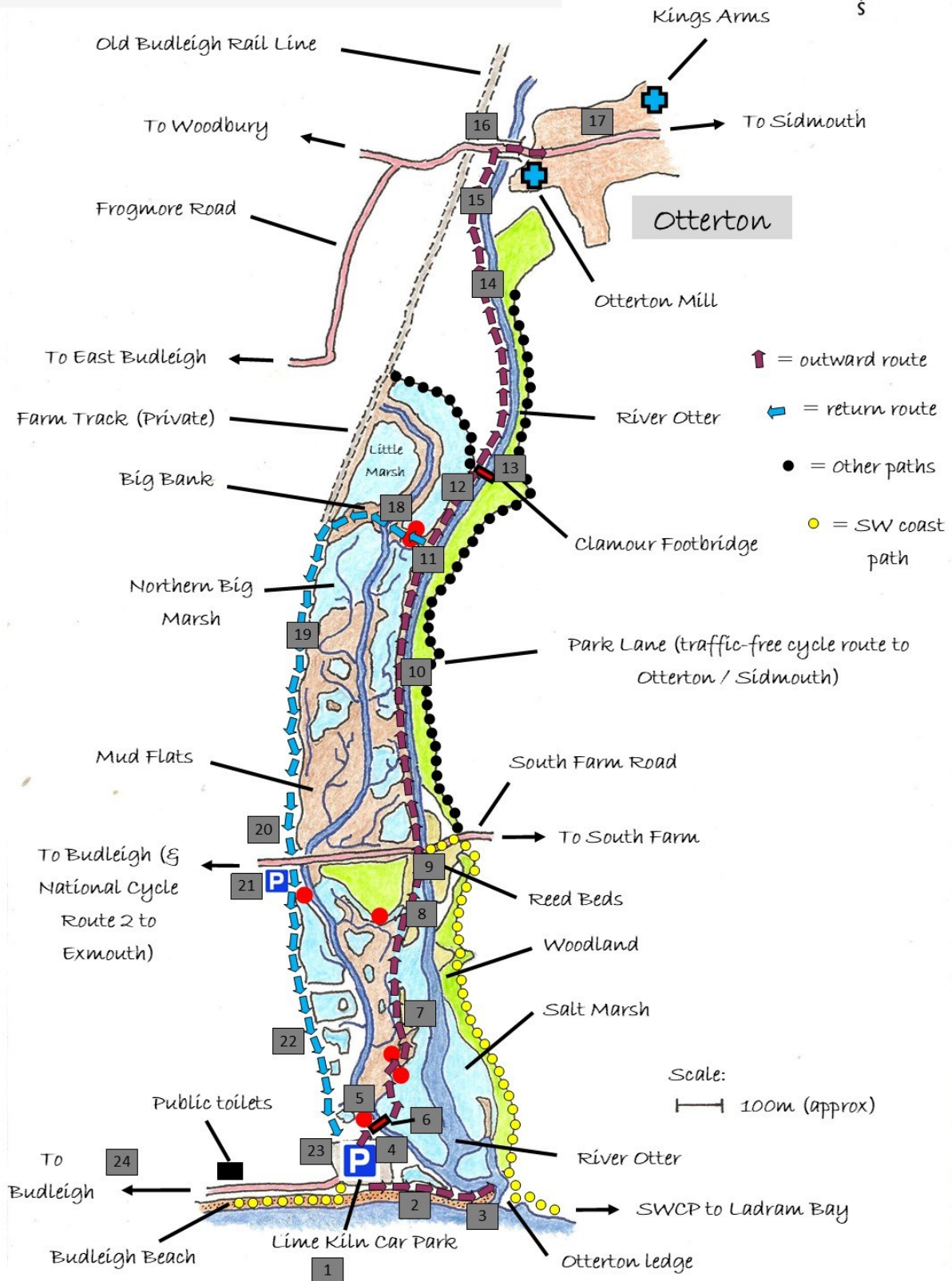


Lower Otter River, East Devon



Guided Walk of the Lower Otter Restoration Project

(1) The walk starts from the Lime Kiln car park on the eastern edge of the town of Budleigh Salterton (SY 072 820). From the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century, limestone (and coal) was landed on Devon beaches and burnt in kilns to produce lime to improve farmland. Evidence of the old kilns can still be seen by the car park entrance.



(2) Before setting out inland, it is worth turning left out of the car park while facing the sea to follow the beach head for a short distance to the mouth of the river Otter.

(3) A shingle ridge bar has grown due to littoral drift to almost block the journey of the river Otter to the sea. This process of natural growth began as long ago as the mid-1400s, with the bar being significantly enlarged in the great storms of 1824. Prior to this, small ships of up to 60 tons could pass up river. You can appreciate from here how close the lower Otter valley is to sea level, making it vulnerable to flooding. Across the river to the east, you can see the steep sandstone cliffs common to this stretch of coastline. The

South West Coast Path runs along the top of these cliffs towards Ladram Bay and then on to Sidmouth.

(4) Retrace your steps back to the car park, and pick up the footpath at its north (following the purple arrows on the map for the outward route).

(5) Before crossing the new footbridge, spend a little time at the first of seven wildlife viewing areas constructed as part of the project. Depending on the state of the tide, there are usually plenty of birds to see here, including redshank, egrets, curlew, dunlin, teal, wigeon, and ringed plover.



(6) Cross the new Elizabeth Bridge and begin to head northwards along the path, which is part of the South West Coast Path. On September 28th, 2023, the tide flowed under the bridge here and into the estuary for the first time in 200 years.

(7) The path provides excellent views of the channel of the river Otter with salt marsh to the right-hand side, and inter-tidal mud flats to the left. In the past, the river Otter meandered across the wide flood plain on its way to the sea while occasional flooding deposited layers of silt. Viewing areas are sited at intervals, allowing you to pause to study the varied birdlife of the area and spot the refuge islands that have been created in the mudflats. Views also open up to extensive areas of reed beds on the lower stretches of the river.

(8) Just before you reach South Farm Road, look for the former waste tip area to the south of the road which is now protected from future erosion and planted with native tree species.

(9) Another wildlife viewing area is found when you reach South Farm Road which crosses a 30 metre bridge raised above the flood plain and spanning the tidal creeks. The coast path branches off here to the right, and then turns back southwards to follow the far side of the river Otter back towards the

coastline, and then eastwards towards Ladram Bay and eventually Sidmouth. The route of National Cycle Path 2 (to Sidmouth) also extends away to the east along the road.



(10) As you move further away from the car park, the path gets quieter, and provides an excellent chance to view the birdlife on the inter-tidal mud flats and salt marsh.

(11) At Big Bank, there are more wildlife viewing areas. This 170-metre-long section of embankment has been lowered to allow the river Otter to reconnect with the historic flood plain. To the north of Big Bank, Budleigh Brook can be seen now rejoining the flood plain in a new meandering channel. An old concrete aqueduct has been

removed to allow access for fish and eels.

(12) The footpath splits at Little Bank, and we continue northwards along the riverside. Here, a 200 metre section of embankment has been lowered to field level to allow the Otter to reconnect with its flood plain. An alternative path crosses the estuary towards East Budleigh (the birthplace of Sir Walter Raleigh).

(13) Clamour Bridge is a footbridge that crosses the river here. It connects to the traffic-free cycle route of Park Lane which provides an alternative route to Otterton.

(14) The footpath continues northwards towards Otterton. On the opposite side of the estuary can be seen the line of the old Budleigh railway (1897-1967), now a private farm track. East Budleigh station was actually closer to Otterton, just past the bridge you will pass later. This stretch of the river Otter supports a breeding population of beavers (of unknown origin) since 2008. There are now up to 15 family groups of these largely nocturnal creatures, that can also be seen in early evening light between May and September. Kingfishers and dippers are also often seen along this part of the river.



(15) As you approach Otterton, look to the right to spot the unusually-shaped tower of the church.



(16) You soon reach the bridge carrying the road across the river. The channel of the river Otter disappears northwards, heading upstream to its source in the Blackdown Hills, some 27 miles (44 kilometres) away.

(17) Cross the bridge to explore the village of Otterton. First settled by the Saxons, the village now has a population of around 650. There are many quaint cob and thatch cottages, and the excellent Kings Arms pub. Otterton Mill is a working water mill with a restaurant and craft centre.

(18) Retrace your steps along the footpath until you return to Big Bank. The footpath leads here across to the western side of the valley. Note the central tidal creek that drains through the centre of the valley. There are signs on Big Bank warning of possible flooding here at particularly high tides.

(19) Head southwards now, with the estuary to your left-hand side. The footpath on this side of the

estuary has been resurfaced and raised above the level of flooding. The old embankments that used to protect the western side of the estuary here became unfit for purpose and have been breached. The lower Otter flood plain has now been restored to its full width increasing its natural capacity for flooding at high tide. High-tide bird sanctuaries can be seen amongst the mud flats.



(20) Just before you reach South Farm Road, you pass the new location for the Budleigh Cricket Club – relocated from the estuary as it suffered regular flooding.

(21) At South Farm Road there is a new car park with 46 spaces, and a wildlife viewing area.

(22) The last part of the path passes a number of properties on the eastern edge of Budleigh Salterton, many with fantastic garden summer houses offering excellent views of the estuary.

(23) When you return to Lime Kiln car park, you may wish to extend your walk by heading west to explore the town of Budleigh Salterton and some fascinating geology.

(24) Budleigh Walk Extension

If you want to explore a little further in this area, take a short stroll into the town of Budleigh Salterton. The name comes from salt pans (salterns) located at the mouth of the river Otter. Salt was extracted here from at least Domesday times. The town has a population of around 7,800 people, and boasts a range of independent shops and excellent tea rooms. The Fairlynch Museum dates back to 1811 and is worth a visit, packed with information about local history and geology. As you walk beside the long pebble beach towards the town, you will pass a sign pointing out the location of some interesting fossils that can be seen in the sandstone cliffs. These are groups of vertical, tube-like features called



rhizocretions. During the Triassic period around 235 million years ago, ancient plants grew here amongst the shifting streams of a desert river system. The roots of these thirsty plants burrowed down into the soft red sand of the desert, drawing on any water they could find. Minerals that were dissolved in the water grew in crystals around the roots and encased them. As time passed, the streams moved and the plants died, but the encased roots remained as fossil equivalents for us to examine.

If you walk to the north end of the beach you will arrive at West Cliff. Here, you can see the famous Budleigh Salterton pebble beds. Distinctive layers in the cliff face (some 25 to 30 metres thick in places) are packed with large rounded pebbles cemented together by sand. These pebbles started life 400 million years ago in Brittany and have since been transported in the Triassic period to their present position by large fast flowing rivers. Around the pebble beds are excellent examples of honeycomb weathering in the cliffs caused by wind and salt erosion.