



Walk 0. Ilfracombe and Lee Bay.

- 9.1 miles, ascents and descents of 500 metres. 3 hours 40 minutes continuous walking, allow 5-5½ hours.

Terrain: A mix of roads, tracks, and paths, some potentially muddy.

Access: Start at Ilfracombe Quay, next to the Verity statue (SS 526 479, EX34 9EQ). Between March and the end of October parking here is expensive, so you may prefer to park off the A399 on the other side of the harbour (Larkstone car park, SS 527 476, EX34 9NU, £, or the Hillsborough swimming pool car park directly off the A399, £). Ilfracombe can be reached by bus from Barnstaple (21 daily and 301 Monday to Saturday), Combe Martin (301) and Woolacombe/Mortehoe (31, Monday to Saturday).

Maps: Croydecycle 06 Ilfracombe and Berrynarbor or OS Explorer 139 Barnstaple and Ilfracombe.

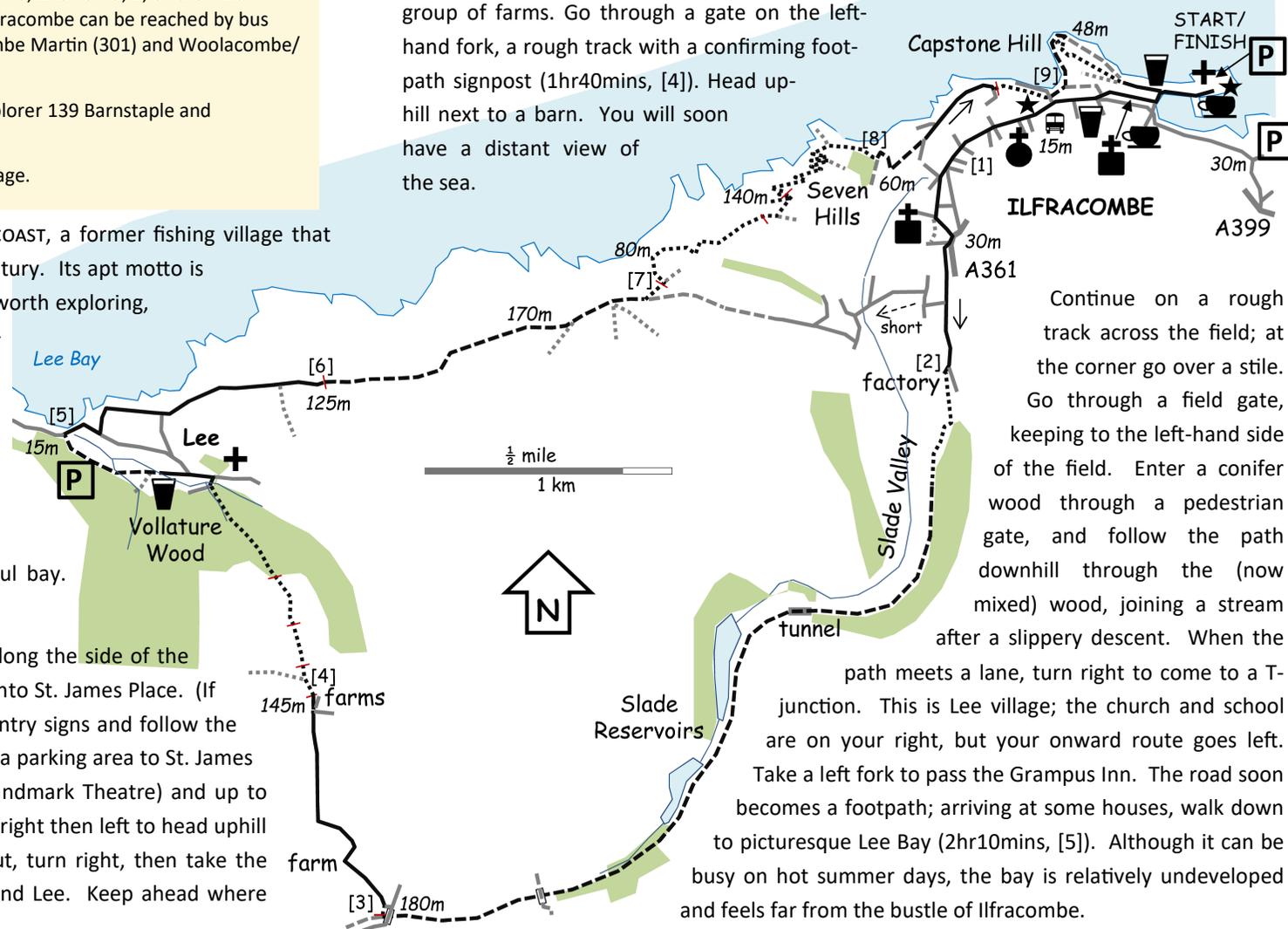
Refreshments: Plenty of choice in Ilfracombe, pub in Lee village.

ILFRACOMBE IS THE LARGEST TOWN ON THE NORTH DEVON COAST, a former fishing village that developed into a holiday resort during the nineteenth century. Its apt motto is 'curious coastal charm'. The harbour area in particular is worth exploring, set among steep-sided hills and with some interesting features including the St. Nicholas chapel on a hill above the quay, an aquarium with themed tanks from hill stream down to the open sea, and since 2012 Damien Hirst's 20-metre high statue, Verity. This walk explores Ilfracombe and the Slade Valley, following the route of the old Ilfracombe to Barnstaple railway line before cutting through fields and woods to Lee and its delightful bay. The final section on the coast path is suitably scenic.

Starting from the quayside car park in Ilfracombe, walk along the side of the harbour, follow the road left then turn immediately right into St. James Place. (If you have parked above the harbour, go through the no entry signs and follow the road downhill alongside the harbour; continue ahead past a parking area to St. James Place). Follow the road past the 'cooling towers' (the Landmark Theatre) and up to some traffic lights (14mins, [1]). Go straight on, then bear right then left to head uphill to a church. Turn left and descend to a mini-roundabout, turn right, then take the right fork (Station Road) signposted to Slade Reservoirs and Lee. Keep ahead where

the road bends right and walk uphill to a large modern factory (30mins, [2]). Join a path alongside its left-hand fence. This foot- and cycle path soon becomes the line of the old railway to Barnstaple (the factory is on the site of the station); you will follow it for over two miles. In just over 20 minutes go through a short tunnel, then the first of the two Slade reservoirs soon appears on your right. There may be the sound of shooting ahead: there is a clay pigeon ground to the left of the path. After the end of the second reservoir, pass a concrete hut and, a little later, go under a bridge. In under ten minutes come to another bridge, and immediately beyond it go through a gate on the right. Follow a narrow path to a road junction (1hr30mins, [3]), turning left.

Turn left again on a surfaced lane with signs for several farms. After several bends arrive at a group of farms. Go through a gate on the left-hand fork, a rough track with a confirming foot-path signpost (1hr40mins, [4]). Head uphill next to a barn. You will soon have a distant view of the sea.



Continue on a rough track across the field; at the corner go over a stile. Go through a field gate, keeping to the left-hand side of the field. Enter a conifer wood through a pedestrian gate, and follow the path downhill through the (now mixed) wood, joining a stream after a slippery descent. When the path meets a lane, turn right to come to a T-junction. This is Lee village; the church and school are on your right, but your onward route goes left. Take a left fork to pass the Grampus Inn. The road soon becomes a footpath; arriving at some houses, walk down to picturesque Lee Bay (2hr10mins, [5]). Although it can be busy on hot summer days, the bay is relatively undeveloped and feels far from the bustle of Ilfracombe.

Turn right on the road and start heading uphill. Soon turn left on a narrow lane signposted 'coast path'. This heads steeply uphill, gradually easing off. At a pair of isolated houses ('Blue Mushroom') go through the gate ahead to continue on the coast path, now a rough track (2hr30mins, [6]). The official path keeps alongside the right-hand field edge, but you can wander anywhere between here and the cliffs. There are good views first back along the coast and to Lundy, then over Seven Hills and Ilfracombe. Come to a pair of gates on your right, and follow the path as it drops between banks; go down a fairly steep (and potentially slippery) section, then turn left on the signposted coast path, climbing to a wooden gate and turning sharply left (2hr55mins, [7]). When the path turns inland and gives way to grass, follow it straight ahead to an (initially hidden) National Trust marker post, then through a gap in a wall. Head up to a stile, and continue uphill to a seat; to the left is a mini-turret, with a toposcope indicating landmarks on the far side of the Bristol Channel.

At the seat turn right and start heading down the far side of the hill, then turn left through a gate. The path appears to double back on itself, but it soon zigzags down the hill. Ignore a right turn to the National Trust car park; continue zigzagging, then level out to approach Ilfracombe. Soon after some steps come to a path junction and turn left on the coast path towards the town centre. Next turn right on an unmade residential road, which soon swings around to the left (3hr20mins, [8]). Keep left at a hard road. This takes you above the coast; look out for the Tunnels Beach below on the left. When the road bends sharply right, go through a metal pedestrian gate on the left, into a small garden. Keep left, then head down steps to the 'cooling towers'. You are nearly back at the start, but there is one more coastal detour before finishing. Walk down to the main road, turn left, and then left again alongside a promenade beneath cliffs (3hr35mins, [9]). As you round the headland turn right to follow a zigzag path; turning always upwards, arrive at the top of Capstone Hill. Little Kate (and her poignant story) provides a contrast with Verity. Leave the hill by heading across the grass towards the harbour; join a hard path then continue ahead on the road, where Henry Williamson (author of *Tarka the Otter*) lived for the latter part of his life. Keep left past the Sandpiper Inn to arrive back at the quay.

Short walk: Ilfracombe and the Seven Hills (● 4.1 miles, ascents and descents of 250m). Follow the main walk into Station Road, then take the first right, Richmond Road. At a T-junction turn right, then left into Broad Park Avenue. Take the first left, Langleigh Park, then turn right into Langleigh Lane. Ignore a road coming in from the right. The road becomes a track. When it bends left, continue ahead alongside a bank for two minutes or so, then turn right through a gate to rejoin the main walk at the 2hr55min point ([7]).

Walk 0A includes an alternative linear route from Mortehoe to Ilfracombe via Lee Bay.

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