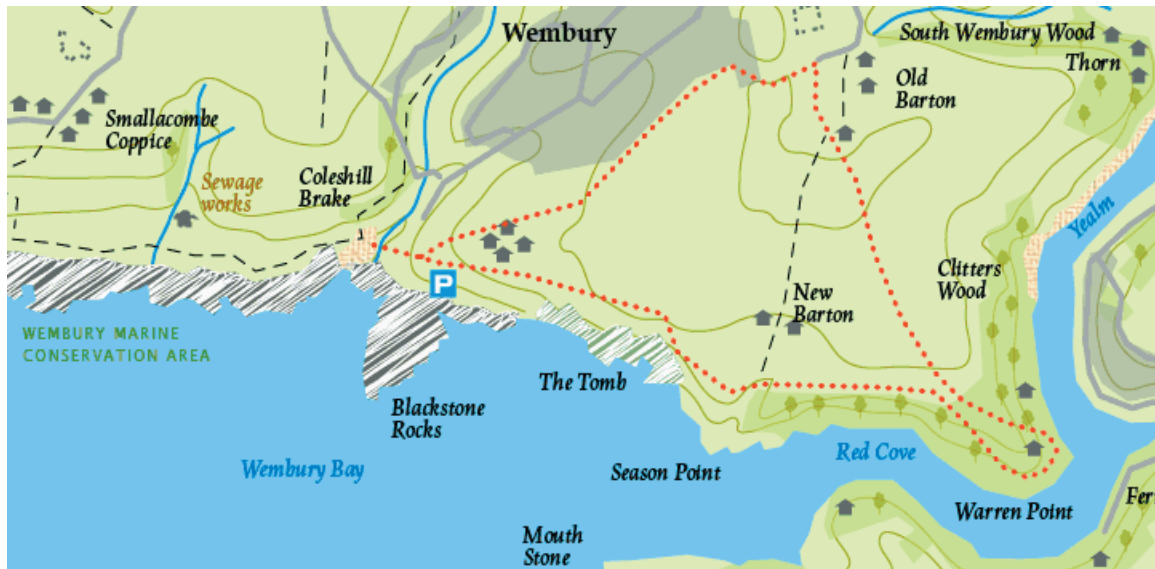




## Devon's South Hams

### Wembury



Not long ago the National Trust raised a large amount of money to purchase one of the most important parts of the South Devon coast and save it from «inappropriate development».

It was the MOD base at Wembury Point which was up for grabs, and the trust secured the property through its appeal. The area guards the eastern side of Plymouth Sound in the heart of the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and looks out over Wembury Bay.

The site also includes Great Mewstone island – hugely important for its nesting seabirds. The mainland side of the estate consists of 56 hectares that have been closed to the public since 1940 when it was acquired by the Ministry of Defence, later to become the naval gunnery training school, HMS Cambridge.

Within a few minutes of leaving your car down at the village's seaside car park, you find it hard to believe that you're not much more than a seagull's wing-beat of Plymouth.

The writer SH Burton came down this way in the 1950's to research his book *The South Devon Coast*, and he penned: «Some of our factories and power stations are lovely to look at, but our houses seem calculated to sicken the beholder and stupefy the dweller.»

Some of the village's residential development leaves a bit to be desired when it comes to architectural prowess. The good

*Basic hike: From Wembury Beach east to Warren Point above the mouth of the Yealm, and then inland to the edge of the village and back to the beach via public footpaths.*

*Recommended Map: Ordnance Survey Outdoor Leisure Map 20. Distance and going: Just over three miles – easy going but obviously popular if the muddy sections are anything to go by.*

*There is plenty of good walking to be enjoyed down Wembury way, and*

thing about it though is that, for the most part, the place is tucked away. It's valley slopes down to the sea and, in doing so, leaves the bungalow developments behind.

Wembury Beach is dominated by two things. A church, and an island. The church sits on a shelf a 100 foot or so above the waves and is, no doubt, one of those wonderful old temples where the wrath of God speaks louder than the sermon on occasions when the wind is up. Somewhere in the churchyard there is a stone erected in memory of a long lost ferryman. «Henry Kembil – died Nov 25 1725. ? 'Tis over with your friend - MIND THAT».

Not far off shore there's the Great Mew Stone. I note from the map that there is a landing place on the Mew Stone, and I look forward to stepping ashore over there one day when I eventually get around to doing a Western Morning News series about islands – but in the meantime I shall have to content myself with the idea that this particular islet was once inhabited.

Who could possibly want to live on such a postage stamp of a place, you may ask? The answer is simple: it was a fellow called Sam Wakeham and his long suffering wife. Mr Wakeham was employed by Squire Calmady to look after the island's rabbits. Somewhere on the rock you can still see the remains of their cottage. Anyway, Sam must have got the distinct impression that life and opportunity was passing him by because he took to smuggling in an attempt boost his meagre income.

The coast path climbs past the church and on upwards in a westerly direction, past a couple of houses and into a large, wild area called High Cliffs – now owned by the National Trust.

Continuing westwards we pass a place which the map calls The Tomb (it's down on the beach, but goodness knows whose tomb it is) and rounds Season Point. This is where you realise that the big headland you've been walking towards will have to be left for another day. Between you and it is the narrow mouth of the River Yealm.

A Noss Mayo fisherman once told me it was the most secretive of all the region's estuaries, and now I believe him. Thanks to the Mew Stone - situated directly to the west - and the great shoulder of Gara Point itself rising to the south, I should think the narrow entrance is almost impossible to register from the sea.

Anyway, the coast path introduces you to the inlet and, as you trudge east, so you can see how the river twists and turns inland. The main bulk of the estuary, and the twin villages of Newton Ferrers and Noss Mayo are so hidden from the sea you can imagine marauding Vikings and Danes sailing right on by.

At a lonely cottage there's a track that heads inland and we must take it – but not before walking out to the end of wooded Warren Point where I was treated to a marvellous vista of the river's biggest curve. Far below, in Yealm Pool, you can see the boats swinging on their moorings, you can look up three

quarters the length of Newton Creek and you can see the main body of the river Yealm as it descends from Yealmpton.

As far as picnic spots go, the little seat on the top of Warren Point must be in a Westcountry top ten. But I had no time to stop and stare, instead I turned on my heels and headed for the track that took me north towards Wembury House.

Close to this big pile a footpath leaves the lane and crosses a field to the left. Go right across the middle of this field – do not continue to the north along the other right of way. On the far side of the paddock another footpath slinks past a farmyard and disappears down a narrow alley by a hedge.

Next comes a few hundred yards of walled back gardens – hedge on one side, head-high fencing on the other – but soon enough we issue out onto the fields and enjoy sea-views as we descend eastward back to Wembury Beach. It's the sort of walk a Plymothian could do in a lunch-break – three miles of pure joy most of which will provide you with sensational coastal scenery.