



Devon's South Hams

Hope Cove to Salcombe



At Hope Cove you have Outer Hope and Inner Hope and at the latter there are a number of ancient cottages looking suitably quaint - the place was once famed for its crabs, but there probably aren't many pots-men living here today.

The coast path climbs out of Inner Hope to pass through a small stand of trees on its way out to Bolt Tail. The great headland affords as good a panorama as any cape in the Westcountry. The whole of Bigbury Bay lies before you - but you can see far, far beyond Burgh Island, past the Great Mew Stone, west again beyond the Plymouth ferries to-ing and fro-ing from France and Spain - and on again until that other great headland, The Dodman, seals the horizon with its barren flanks.

The writer S.H. Burton, in his book *South Devon Coast*, mentions a place called Ramillies somewhere hereabouts. Mr Burton explains that it's all to do with a boat of that name being wrecked here in the hurricane of February 15th, 1790.

"Her captain mistook Bolt Tail for Rame Head and thought he was being driven into the Sound," writes Mr Burton. "When the mistake was realised they let go their anchor and, by cutting away all the masts, managed to ride safely until evening. Then the violence of the wind increased and the cable parted. A midshipman and 25 of the crew made a perilous leap from the stern to the rocks that fringe Ramillies Hole, a narrow cleft. They were saved, but the rest, 708 in all, perished."

The remains of an ancient fort lie low and cold on Bolt Tail and we spent a while pondering whether or not the people

Basic hike: from Hope Cove to Salcombe.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL20 South Devon.

Distance and going: seven miles, mostly very easy-going.

who built it lived here or merely used the place in emergencies.

Heading south east, the coast path forgets to do its usual trick of emulating a roller coaster and adheres, instead, to the level confines of the high downs. The National Trust has celebrated this unusually flat bit by installing a wheelchair-friendly path so that the less-abled can enjoy the stunning sea views.

Eventually though, the path is hurled into the abyss. The abyss in question being the valley behind Soar Mill Cove, guarded by the craggy reaches of Cathole Point. It is all very wild and untamed - the cove itself is an absolute jewel.

Now one of the walk's few stiff climbs begins. The map shows that the coast path ascends to the rear of the higher cliffs, but over the years walkers seem to have developed a new route which takes the more exciting seaside option around the base of the rocks and then up to the area known as The Warren.

Eventually you reach the highlands near the hamlet of Middle Soar. This area was once dominated by a World War II aerodrome.

Passing the fantastic dry-stone walls that are a feature of this landscape, we strolled beyond Off Cove to begin the gentle ascent to Bolt Head. If the tail was magnificent then the head of the bolt is even more handsome.

The military watch-keepers who kept a look-out here during the war had one of the finest billets anywhere along England's threatened coast. Their watchtower was until recently perched amidst the high rocks as a reminder of those dark days, but I'm told it has now been demolished because the structure had 'concrete cancer'.

Next you make the breathtaking turn in Starehole Bay where you can admire the awe-inspiring scenery that is the introduction to Salcombe Harbour. Years ago some local landowner had a path cut through these dramatic rocks, which is why we're able to enjoy this truly stunning scene.