



Cornwall

Bude South

Global-warming is definitely with us if the 2006 autumn is anything to go by, but occasionally we do experience a drop in temperature. A plan to go hill walking suddenly seemed mad one blustery day last week, so by some quirk of fate we ended up in Bude.

Perhaps the logic went something like this: avoid the east wind and find a west-facing shore where it's bound to be warmer because of the vicinity of the sea, and where the hills will act like a big barrier to fend off that chilly blast. The north Cornish coast is ideal for such ventures - and Bude fits the bill best because, if you freeze on your walk, you can repair instantly to one of the many cafes or other warm hostleries.

We parked in the big car park adjacent to Bude's Tourist Information Centre where we picked up two leaflets - one outlining the Bude Town Trail, which we largely ignored - the other heralding the Pethericks Mill marshes scheme which includes a delightful little circular walk for those with only 20 minutes to spare.

We began this longer route by crossing the bridge and turning right along the canal-side towards the sea. I have written about the glorious Bude Canal before but, for those readers who are unaware of North Cornwall's answer to Suez, Panama and Corinth, here is a basic history of the waterway.

It was built early in the 1820's to carry calcium-rich sea sand to the farmers up in the Cornish and Devon hill-country where the soil was poor. It was a magnificent engineering feat and stretched nearly 35 miles from Bude to Launceston. Members of the Bude Canal Trust is particularly proud of the unique inclined planes which carried tub-boats up to 430 feet above sea level within just six miles of the coast.

Like most canals this one was put paid to by the coming of the railways, and it finally closed in 1891. But, thanks to those ocean-facing locks, the port of Bude remained in commercial use until the 1930's.

Anyone interested in learning more about the waterway can look at Bude Canal and Harbour Society's website on www.bude-canal.co.uk

We continue seawards, past the big new lock-gates, to the South West Coast Path.



Basic Hike: from Bude south along coast path to Upton, then inland to canal at Robb's Bridge and then north along the towpath.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 111 (Bude, Boscastle and Tintagel).

Distance and going: three-and-a-half miles - very easygoing.

You'll find it tucked away between some houses just south of the lock, where a gate introduces walkers to the great expanses of Compass Point and Efford Down beyond.

The Town Trail leaflet says: «These downs, with their springy turf and furze give the true feeling of Bude and the spirit of the North Cornish Coast. They have not changed for centuries - it was here that part of the Royalist Army under Sir Ralph Hopton camped on the eve of the Civil War Battle of Stratton on Tuesday May 1643.»

The first thing you'll see, perched on the end of the downs, is a strange little building known locally as The Pepperpot. It was built by a Sir Thomas Acland and it is said he modelled this attractive structure on the Temple of the Winds in Athens. Its eight sides indicate the points of the compass but are, alas, seven degrees out of true - thanks to the fact that the building was moved once to avoid being toppled over crumbling cliffs.

They'll probably have to move it again soon judging by the encroaching erosion - and that will give some bright spark a chance to put it back in alignment with the magnetic poles.

South we went, over the downs and along the cliff-tops until we reached the Widemouth Bay road. This is where we gave up our struggle with the wind and showers and turned down the lane that took us through the hamlet of Upton and landed us on the eastern bank of the canal near Rodd's Bridge. We had been intending to go onto a place called Salthouse on the coast, where a footpath cuts across the hill to meet the Atlantic Highway at the point where the canal ceased to be navigable - but we will have to do that section another day.

From Rodd's Bridge it was simply a case of walking north back to Bude along the towpath. It is a very pleasant stretch indeed - made all the merrier by the fact that we were able to turn right near town and cross the Peter Truscott footbridge. This took us on a meander around the Pethericks Mills wetland nature reserve.

Hundreds of birds were sauntering among reed beds doing their best to avoid the wind. We staggered back to the car park decreeing that the next time an east wind brings sharp chill showers we'll find a deep valley with a sheltered forest to walk in.