



Cornwall

Crackington Haven

Wild goats, an outside chance of spotting Cornwall's feathered emblem, a rare Mediterranean ant, an even rarer butterfly, stooping peregrines and a host of lost memories. All these things and more are on offer in a particularly wild section of the Cornish coast. Crackington Haven is in the 'Must-See' section of Cornwall's unique and impressive inventory of coastal glory.

The choughs are back - Cornwall's national bird has returned to the county after a long absence and experts are hoping it the species might enlarge its present toehold down at the end of the Lizard peninsula.

If the chough expands its rocky kingdom, then the environs around this walk on the North Cornish coast would provide a perfect habitat for the cliff dwelling bird.

As for wild goats, well they're all part of a land management strategy put in place by the National Trust - which owns much of the coastline around here - and the Crocker family of Trevigue Farm.

"They brought 18 of the wild goats down from the Valley of the Rocks near Lynton," I was once told by the Trust's Countryside Manager for North Cornwall, Simon Ford. "And they are doing a marvellous job of grazing the cliffs around Cambeak and Strangles"

Simon went on to tell me about the importance of this grazing, but first let me put my hike-hungry readers onto the right track. Crackington Haven is an majestic indentation halfway along the savage and often perpendicular coast between Boscastle and Bude.

There's a pub and a shop or two, and a car park down by the beach, and the place is worth going to even if you have no intention of taking a step along the cliffs. Talking of cliffs, Crackington is dominated by one. The mighty face stretches from the inner shore out to Pencannow Point - and a most airy and vertigo inducing walk the coast path makes in its direction.

Not that we're not going that way this time around, but heading west around tiny Bray's Point and on to the vast and vertical headland of Cambeak, before turning south along the coast to the bay called Strangles, and from there inland past Trevigue to return via the woody depths of the Ludon Valley.



Basic Hike: from Crackington Haven south-west along coast path to Strangles and inland to return via Ludon Valley.

Recommended Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 111.

Distance and going: five miles, steep in one or two places, can be very muddy in valley.

Don't expect anything other than the South West Coast Path's usual tricks. In other words it goes up and it goes down like a roller-coaster and introduces you to a couple of precipices along the way.

It's a stiff climb out of Crackington but you eventually reach the wilderness area around the headland at Cambeak. This is a particularly important area as far as environmentalists are concerned. The secret of successful coastal management along these lonesome marches seems to lie in grazing. Stop the chewing and the shady stuff grows up. And that is no good at all for - among other things - the rare Mediterranean ants that used to live here.

These rare ants were the key to the happiness and the contentment of the Large Blue. This noble butterfly became extinct in our islands in 1979 - partly, it's thought, because of the under-grazing-shadiness problem. The ants didn't like the gloom, and the butterflies - or at least their larvae - were reliant upon the ants.

Luckily the Large Blue survived in a wild part of Finland and now there are moves to re-introduce the species to properly grazed sections of the British coast. Once again, the locations are secret - but one day the rugged downs above these cliffs may rejoice in the fluttering of blue wings.

Between Cambeak and Strangles there is a most tortured piece of ground. Like a very old person it is profoundly wrinkled and about to fall off the twig. Literally, this is a part of Cornwall consigned to oblivion.

"Actually it is internationally important for its geology," said Simon, who went on to talk about different beds and layers of this rock and that, which get lubricated by water and slip and slide.

Regardless of all this it is a fascinating and somehow rewarding landscape to cross - especially when you learn that the deep fissures play home to all sorts of rare bats.

Just before Strangles there is a beach called Little Strand and I seem to remember that this is - or was - a nudist beach. When I was walking here recently no nude bodies were in evidence, but I did see a peregrine which stooped at what looked to be well over 100 m.p.h. It shot within feet of us and you could hear the hiss of its wings.

High above Strangles you may spot a fence covered in shoes. These were victims of the infamous Boscastle flood disaster (the shoes I mean, not their owners). It is believed they were washed out of a flooded shop by the small tidal wave that came down the valley that wet day. Boscastle is just down the coast and, for some unknown reason, walkers have taken to finding the shoes and hanging them up on the fence. The national trust warden tells me he's never actually seen a matching pair as yet.

At this point you have the choice of continuing with the walking route or taking the wearying but worthwhile opportunity to walk down to one of the peninsula's finest and least spoilt beaches. A small path will take you all the way down, but it is

a big climb back up – and, be warned, it does get a little vertiginous down at the bottom so anyone scared of heights would be advised not to go.

As for the inland route back to Crackington – a track heads inland and joins the lane near Trevigue Farm and from there a footpath descends steeply towards the wooded depths of the Ludon Valley. Just above the trees it swings north and crosses two fields before plunging into the deep oak woods that run all the way to Crackington. This is as fine a circular hike as you'll find anywhere on the Cornish coast.