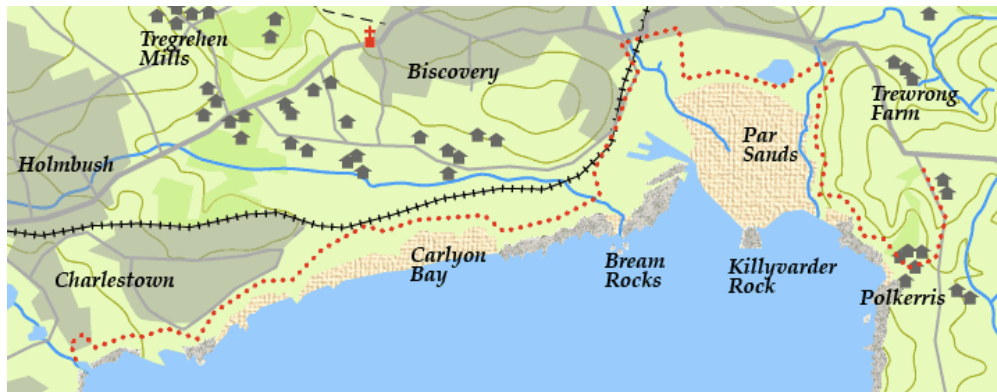




## Mid & SE Cornwall

### Charlestown to Polkerris



Here's a walk that is open to improvement perhaps more than any other in the county of Cornwall and such enhancement could soon happen - when the giant Carlyon Bay project is finally sorted and now that Par Docks looks set to become a good deal less industrialised.

Parts of the route include some of the least desirable bits of the Westcountry coast, but I enjoyed the adventure nonetheless and look forward to seeing pedestrian access to this part of St Austell Bay greatly improved in the future.

It goes without saying that as a walks writer for the WMN you have the pick of the bunch to choose from, but occasionally it's acceptable if not strangely refreshing to explore places that are not world-beaters from a scenic point of view.

But while this walk steps firmly into that lacklustre category, it does boast more interest than a hundred more panoramic alternatives.

We started at Charlestown, and you don't get much more interesting than the old china clay port located at the heart of St Austell Bay. It's home of the square-riggers and a thousand celluloid images of all things nautical. Here are the nation's seafaring yesterdays set prettily in a Cornish nutshell - where the world of Poldark becomes a living reality.

Charlestown is where the literary works of Patrick O'Brian and C.S. Forrester come alive in the rigging, where the romance of du Maurier and the swashbuckle of Stevenson are as likely to set sail today as they were in centuries gone by.

Much of this celebrity is down to the operations of a company called Square Sail which owns the harbour and three massive old sailing boats which are often to be seen moored

*Basic walk: from Charlestown to Polkerris along the South West Coast Path, catching the First Bus 25 service back.*

*Recommended map: OS Explorer 107 St Austell – Liskeard.*

*Distance and going: total of six miles easy going, though there is an unfortunate bit along the road.*

within its narrow confines - the Kaskelot, Pheonix and Earl of Pembroke. If you are lucky you'll find at least one of these magnificent vessels on location.

But our job is to find the coast path that heads east out of the port and up over the clifftop hill past Appletree and Landrion Points. Just inland you'll spy the villa-strewn community that dominates this annex of St Austell – and soon you'll see the beachside development otherwise known as Carlyon Bay.

Oh dear. It's all a bit of a mess at the moment. Or to put it in the words of Liz Woollard, area representative of the South West Coast Path Association (SWCPA), "a bit of a building site."

So much has been written about the development in this newspaper I'll skip the arguments here, save to say I know folk from both lobbies: those who say the whole debacle was a bit of a storm in a teacup and those who claim the development to be an over-large ruination of an otherwise unspoilt bit of coast.

Normally I don't mind sticking my neck out, but I usually do it in the opinion columns of the paper and not here on the walks page – so let's trudge on to unlovely Par and its harbour.

For that's the next bit of the stroll, after we've traversed alongside the golf course above the low cliffs past Fisherman's Point. Just inland of Bream Rocks the coast path is forced inland at Spit Point to avoid the big china clay works that dominate this real working port.

But for how much longer will it be a real working port? That is the question that interests the coastal walker because the powers-that-be now have a fantastic opportunity to do the biggest and best jewel in the Westcountry's crown a tremendous service.

The WMN has reported how Par is to be reduced in importance in the great china clay scheme of things, which provides a one-off opportunity for the coast path to be realigned. At present it leaves the seaside for one of its longest inland sections, which takes walkers alongside a busy road and through the village of Par.

With a bit of imagination (and a footbridge) the path could be realigned to run through the old docks and across the Par Stream to reach the low, caravan-dominated, flatlands towards Polmear.

"No one knows what's going to happen to the land at the moment - it will probably go to something like housing," says Liz Woollard. "But yes, there could be an opportunity here - they (Cornwall County Council) are doing it on the other side near the caravan park where there will soon be a realignment, so they should do it on the harbour side too.

"We (the SWCPA) have always had that sort of line in mind," she added. "It's not impossible – in fact one of the things I like about working for the Association is that we've seen impossible things happen before - and it's so brilliant that we can improve things for the path."

The realignment of the path to take it towards Par Sands would be one of the greatest improvements left to be done along the entire, heavenly, Cornish section of the coast path - so we walkers can only hope it is done sooner rather than later.

I was forced to take the roadside route through Par to Polmear where I was at last able to leave the noise and regain the quiet coast path south en-route to Polkerris. There's a pub at this most pleasant and little visited Cornish cove, which is where we partook of refreshment before walking south along the shore a few hundred metres and taking the path up hill to the Menabilly lane.

Turning left we headed north along this quiet thoroughfare to regain the main Fowey road at the top of Polmear Hill, just in time to flag down the Number 25 First Bus which took us to the bit of St Austell closest to the Charlestown road, leaving us with a short half mile trudge back to our car.