



Cornwall's South East Corner

Fowey - Polruan Circular



There's something of a double-edged sword about this sort of work that was summed up for me the other day by an old man with a white beard who fairly cantered over to us while we were filming in the fields high above Polruan: «Please don't tell them where it is,» he said as we panned down onto the wild and wonderful Lantic Bay. «We don't want too many people discovering the place...»

I know exactly what he means, but this is such an exceptionally excellent walk I simply have to share it with someone. So why not do me and the bearded bloke a favour - if you enjoy this estuarine hike of deep oak woods, secret creeks and stunning coastal scenery as much as I did, just keep it to yourselves?

If you're getting there by car don't even bother trying to find a place in any of Fowey's more central car parks during the summer, but head straight for the overflow sited a few hundred yards from the Bodinnick Ferry.

It is this inelegant craft which takes you across to the first part of the walk. The small but powerful snub-nosed boat pushes the ferry across the river towards Bodinnick with its ancient inn and Daphne Du Maurier's old home, aptly named Ferryside.

Basic walk: from Fowey across the Bodinnick Ferry, climbing to Hall Walk which us south to Pont Pill, then over the hill past Lanteglos Church to Lantic Bay and west to lower ferry at Polruan. Back through the streets of Fowey.

Recommended map: OS Explorer 107 St Austell and Liskeard.

Distance and going: four miles, easy going.

From the decks of the ferry you can see that this is a port that works for a living rather than merely playing host to pleasure seekers. Fowey succeeds brilliantly in this regard by having its merchant quays stowed neatly round a bend in the river and from the ferry you can enjoy a close-up view of the big ships as they load the china clay.

The Old Ferry Inn would win no prizes in an original pub name contest, being both old and adjacent to a ferry, but it does look cosy and welcoming. However, you must postpone its delights until later and haul yourself up the steep little street until you see a signpost for 'Hall Walk' on your right.

This is a truly wonderful path which meanders along the top of the oak woods towards Polruan to the south. Every few yards there's yet another breathtaking view of the estuary far below, with Fowey busily going about its business on the other side.

You pass a war memorial and then, as the path swings east into Pont Pill there's another stone which commemorates the life of Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, the famous Cambridge Professor of English Literature who lived in a large Fowey house called The Haven for many years and who borrowed both the town's streets and its characters for his Cornish-based literary works.

Quiller-Couch's Cornish fiction includes books like 'Dead Man's Rock', 'The Splendid Spur', 'The Ship of Stars' and 'Troy Town', and all make for a spiffing good read.

Local writer Tim Heald told us all about Quiller Couch when we were filming here recently and mentioned that the old man would regularly row across to climb to this magnificent vantage point.

Next comes Pont Pill, a little known limb of the Fowey estuary that veers us east to the hamlet at the head of the creek. Here we seem to be in the heart of lonely Cornish countryside, despite being so close to Fowey and Polruan. It is difficult to imagine that dozens of sailing ships once traded up and down to this remote and peaceful place carrying coal, fertiliser, limestone and timber and taking away fresh local produce. Now nought but ducks are busy.

Now comes a climb, due south, up to the church of Lanteglos-by-Fowey, where we turn left along the quiet lane to reach the National Trust car park up on the Polruan-Lansallos road. Turning right along the newly-made roadside footpath, it's just a few hundred metres to the joyous footpath that takes us across a single field to join the coast path.

I say glorious because it is only a minute or two before you are enjoying some of the best views along this section of coast. Far below you will spy Great and Little Lantic Bay beaches, which are two of the finest quiet coves in the vicinity. And Lantic Bay in general, bordered by Pencarrow Head to the east and Blackbottle Rock to the west, seems to offer all that is best about the South Cornish coast.

We head west, rounding the aforementioned rock to continue along the quiet seaside of Polruan passing Washing Rocks before descending towards the mouth of the estuary, passing

the famous old Blockhouse, before entering the centre of the comely little port that sits opposite Fowey.

All that's left for us to do now is linger while awaiting the lower-ferry (foot passengers only) - perhaps enjoying a pint in the Lugger Inn - then, having crossed to the other side, it is just a matter of wending our way through Fowey's pleasant and busy streets back to the higher ferry where we began.