



South Cornwall

Fowey West

Here's a useful little hike for anyone who finds themselves with an hour or two to spare in beautiful Fowey, on Cornwall's south coast. It is a resort rich in just about everything you could wish for, including walks. There's the Hall Walk option, so beloved of Sir Arthur Quiller Couch who did much to make the town famous, and then there's the Polruan to Lantic Bay Circular, returning via Pont Pill.

Both are fantastic and both require ferry crossings so that you can gain the east bank of the River Fowey – but here's a handy ramble that requires nothing save for an hour-and-a-quarter of free time and a desire to be away from crowded streets.

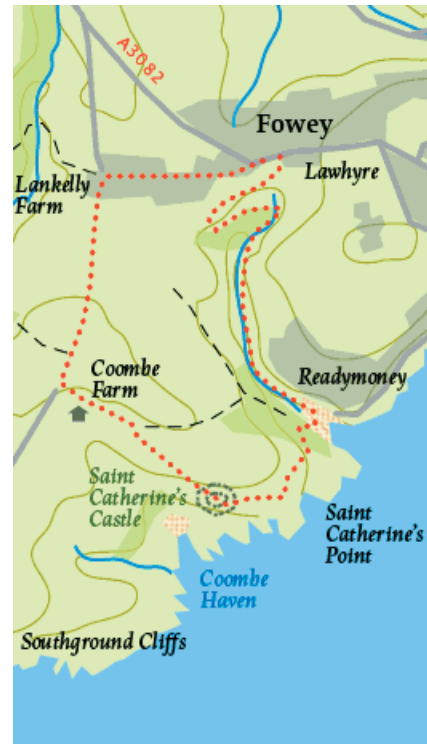
We parked in the town's main car park high above the central Fowey, but those wishing to enjoy the walk without squeezing through the town's narrow but charming streets could go straight to the car park above Readymoney Cove.

For this is the first place of note on the hike. Not that we actually go down to the beach on the way out of town, but turn right up a leafy lane a few yards short of the tiny strand. The lane has the look of once having been a paved road, but now the tarmac has a carpet of moss and leaves so guess traffic is not allowed here anymore.

It proceeds due north, up the side of a valley on the outskirts of town. Eventually the lane crosses a bridge, which looks as if it might have had something to do with a railway - but most certainly did not - and shortly after this you will spy a stile crossing the fence on your left.

A footpath passes around the bottom of the six-foot tall jungle of hemp plants (which was what was growing there the day I visited) to sooner or later arrive at the small lane that will take you down to Combe Farm. To reach this National Trust property it necessary to turn left at the end of the lane, and walk the few hundred yards to the place where you will see a Trust's car park.

Passing this, the lane now continues south as an unpaved track and soon we find ourselves out in fields and are slowly but surely introduced to views of the sea. The path does a few right-angle turns around the edge of fields and then, suddenly, treats walkers to a view of the deep valley that terminates in the beautiful cove known as Polridmouth - pronounced Pridmouth.



Basic hike: from Fowey towards river mouth and then inland from Readymoney Cove passing around the back of Coombe Farm before returning to the coast at Polridmouth. Then back along the coast path.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey 107 – St Austell and Liskeard.

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

Our track takes us directly down into Polridmouth where a lake hovers elegantly above the shoreline looking all calm and still compared to the tormented sea beyond. It's all part of the Menabilly Estate which has been in the ownership of the Rasleigh family for 400 years. The big house itself is north of this picturesque valley and will, as every reader will know, forever be associated with Daphne du Maurier as the main inspiration for Manderley in her novel Rebecca.

The place certainly has the brooding feel to it that anyone who has read the book will recognise. I first visited when doing the neighbouring walk out to Gribben Head.

The area has another claim to fame. It was the original setting for a short story called *The Birds* – later to be the subject of Alfred Hitchcock's famous thriller – though the great man's studios insisted that the movie should be set on the coast of northern California.

Last time I was here, I turned west and walked up to the Daymark on the top of Gribben Head – this time we climb east out of Polridmouth and cross along the top of Lankelly Cliff. Now there's half a mile of up-and-downs past Southground Cliffs to eventually drop into the tiny cove at Coombe Hawne. This lies directly under Coombe Farm and you get the impression that the whole set up would have made an ideal location for the smugglers of yore.

And it was indeed a case of brandy galore. Or perhaps, many cases. Even as late as the mid-1800's they were bringing in large amounts of contraband here – no less than 400 gallons of the strong stuff were recovered by Fowey Customs in 1845.

Now the path begins its final stretch along the coast back to town and walkers are treated to tremendous views of the cliffs that stretch beyond Polruan, past Pencarrow Head to the headlands on the other side of Lantivet Bay. At last we reach the hill above St Catherine's Castle – built in 1542 by Thomas Treffry, of Place – the massive house that dominates Fowey.

It overlooks Readymoney Cove – a mercenary sounding place that you might think had something to do with smugglers bartering their wares for cash on the nail. The name actually comes from the old Cornish 'redeman' – thought to mean 'pebbly ford'.

From the cove it's a simple, though often busy, walk back through the bustling streets of Fowey.