



Cornwall

Nare Head to Portloe

Creating a circular route out of a coastal walk can be a challenge, but here's a fine example of the genre. It begins at Nare Head, the great National Trust-owned sentinel of a headland that guards the western end of Veryan Bay, in South Cornwall.

A car park is situated at the inland end of this south-facing cape, and once you've parked you can decide whether to walk to the end of the headland straightaway or leave it to the end of the hike. I recommend the latter option because you are rewarded for your labours by some of the finest coastal vistas in the Westcountry.

For some reason I prefer to begin my circular coastal walks by doing the inland section first. On this hike the inland-first option will take you north past the farm at Pennare Wallas and up the lane to the place where a footpath sets off on the right towards Caragloose Farm. Past the homestead, this leads north across fields until you reach a place called Camels. Just east of this, another footpath descends over the fields to a location marked on the map as Sunny Corner - this being the inland portion of Portloe. The fishing village was made famous a few years ago as the location for the television series *Wild West*, starring Dawn French, but its picturesque harbour and streets have a wonderfully timeless feel about them despite the attentions of TV.

Perhaps because of the myriad tiny lanes you have to negotiate to reach Portloe, the village has avoided the development that has ruined so many Cornish fishing coves.

There used to be a lifeboat station at Portloe. At first launching the boat was a ludicrously difficult operation which required her to be hauled down the hill, then swivelled around and let down the steep slope onto the beach. Once, during a practice session, she ran out of control and crashed into a shop. A new lifeboat house was then built up against the cliff on the shoreline.

But it was all much ado about nothing. In the 17 short years Portloe had a lifeboat, it was not once called upon to make a rescue. This probably had something to do with the fact that the harbour is horribly difficult to get in and out of in storms that come any point of the compass with south in it.

We leave the village as we climb south a steep hill called the Jacka. It's quite a haul up to the higher ramparts of Manare Point, which we round to enter a big bay, the southern end of which is called Parc Caragloose Cove. Way up, on the clifftops,



Basic walk: from the National Trust car park at Nare Head, inland via lanes and footpaths to reach Portloe, returning along the South West Coast Path.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 105 - Falmouth and Mevagissy. Distance and going: six miles - some arduous ups and downs.

Getting there: the A 3078 is the main road that leads south through the Roseland Peninsula to St Mawes. Takes signs to Veryan, then follow sign to Portloe turning right at the crossroads where Nare Head is sign-posted.

there's a large house - a sort of late Victorian villa - which must have some of the finest sea views in the West Country. It's owned by the National Trust and the tenants do Bed and Breakfast. It was also the main location for the TV series *The Camomile Lawn*.

The path now does a good deal of zig-zagging down the near-vertical heath to more or less meet the sea at a place called *The Straythe*. And, before you know it, you're on your way up again - zig-zagging up around *Blouth Point*.

This section of coast is remarkable for the great diversity of habitats including species-rich unimproved grassland and open communities, rock exposures, remnant scrub-invaded heath, water drips and flushes, and rich foreshores. It is also an important site for coastal lichens and several very rare invertebrates have been recorded. Farmland birds thrive on the mixed farmland and peregrines can be seen patrolling the cliffs.

Now we're skirting *Kiberick Cove* and soon we come to a curious field. Curious because it seems to have detached itself from its inland friends in a bid to make for the sea. It is a field that appears to have sunk some 30 or more feet - which is exactly what happened in a sort of gigantic, but not far-reaching, landslip that occurred in ancient times. The field introduces us to the beginning of *Nare Head*.

If you look at a map you'll see this south-pointing promontory stretches some way out into the sea. To walk to its end - which is the picturesque point of this hike - you must simply follow the coast path past *Lemoria Rock* and *Rosen Cliff*, and after a few minutes you will gain the very cape.

On the way the track passes the ventilators of an underground Royal Observer Corps station, used during the cold war as a listening post. The nearby grassy bump conceals a World War Two bunker that was earthed-over after the war. The large grassy field immediately behind the headland was a World War Two Starfish site - a decoy for Falmouth, complete with mock buildings and streetlights designed to attract German bombs.

Once there you can admire the guano covered cliffs of *Gull Rock* - an important seabird colony - as well as the vast coastal vistas past *Portscatho* to the south and watch the gannets dive hither and thither in the bluest of blue seas. By the way, the view across *Gerrans Bay* takes in *Carne* and *Pendower* beaches and *Treluggan cliff* - all protected by the Trust.