



South Devon

Coleton Fishacre

Coleton Fishacre, perched on the South Devon coast, is one of the man's best attempts at emulating paradise in the West Country. It was a rich man's country bolthole but now it is open to all as part of the region's National Trust holdings.

The coastal area south of Brixham is rich in walking opportunities - this one is based on the big house that once belonged to Rupert and Lady Dorothy D'Oyly Carte (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame).

Why Fishacre? I'm afraid I have no idea and would welcome an answer to the puzzle. The fishy acre in question lies hundreds of feet above Pudcombe Cove, and so would seem to have had little to do with seafood.

I began my walk with a tour around the fantastic house and grounds, then extended my stroll west along the coast to Froward Point and the famous Daymark.

But first the house. It was designed in 1925 for Rupert and Lady Dorothy D' Oyly Carte (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) and reflects the Arts and Crafts tradition. It boasts strangely modern interiors - the whole time I was inside, I couldn't help but recall the splendid home occupied by either the evil villain of Richard Hannay's 39 Steps or perhaps some place frequented by Bertie Wooster.

Indeed, Coleton Fishacre seems to typify both Hannay's world, and the world of Jeeves, which is hardly surprising seeing that such literature was contemporary with this sort of architecture.

I'm told the terraces and walled Rill Garden beside the house provide a formal introduction to the wilder garden below.

The garden seems to fall away from the more open views around the house, descending through an increasingly jungle-like vegetation where you'll find dark groves of bamboo and all sorts of other exotics lurking by the stream.

At the bottom, there's a gate which opens onto the coast path. Suddenly you are above Pudcombe Cove, which really was doing its best to emulate the Cote d'Azur the day I was there. Huge Corsican pines give the place a definite Mediterranean air.

Turning to my right I climbed through the trees and then followed the path south west past Kelly's Cove and Old Mill Bay, to swing due west around Outer Froward Point and enter the scrub woods near Inner Froward Point. During this last section



Getting there: Car parks on hill above Coleton Fishacre are easy to find by following signs south of B3205.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Outdoor Leisure Map 20 is ideal companion.

Distance & Going - four miles - steep in places.

More information: National Trust Dartmouth office tel: 01803 752466.

there are fantastic views of the Mew Stone and its companions, the Shag Stone and Shooter Rock.

The Mew Stone is by far the largest of these rocky islets and it is covered by roosting birds and guano. Like all big seabird colonies, this one seems to emanate a strange, uneasy, melancholy sound that squawks across the water from the distant crags.

There's a large cormorant colony out there and grey seals are often to be seen lolling about on the lower rocks.

At Froward Point there's a clutter of Second World War buildings that were all part of a gun emplacement designed to protect the Dart. The gunners apparently had a peaceful time of it admiring the views and never having to fire either of the large six inch ex-Naval guns.

The National Trust is committed to conserving and restoring the buildings: «As they are of regional and national importance due to the survival of this almost complete site.»

The bleak concrete buildings at Froward Point do not have the elegant beauty of Coleton Fishacre, but they act as a grim and important reminder of this nation's stand against evil.

Now we walk up the track inland and immediately come across a most extraordinary structure. The 80-foot high Daymark stands proudly in its field and has a lofty elegance all of its own. The hollow, stone construction, built in 1864 as a navigational aid for shipping, stands on eight angled columns, and is a high profile monolith that really does cut quite a dash.

The track takes us to the lane where we turn right to stroll half-a-mile back to the Coleton Fishacre car park. Along here we are treated to a great panorama of South Devon - ever rising to the crags of Dartmoor - and you get the feeling that this really is the county's forgotten corner, tucked away beyond Torbay and the Dart.