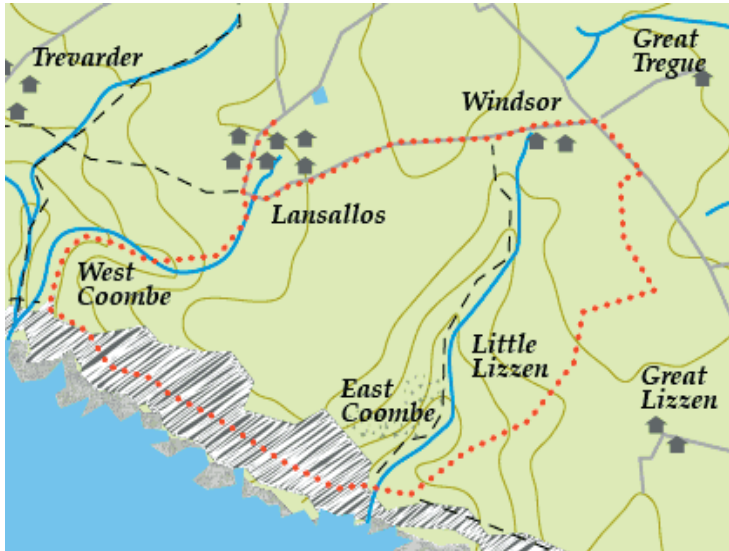




Cornwall

Lansallos east



Basic hike: from the hamlet of Lansallos (halfway between Polperro and Polruan) down ancient packhorse trail to take the coast path east to East Coombe. Then inland up to the lane and back to the hamlet.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 107.

Distance and going: two and a half miles.

Every now and again you discover a place so wonderful, you are loath to share it with anyone, even the kind readers of this column. That's what I said exactly a year ago when I discovered the delights of Lansallos. But, inevitably, I spilled the beautiful beans back then, and I'm about to do the same again.

Having fallen in love with Lansallos I couldn't resist making a detour to return there the other day. Not much has changed, which is what I like about the place. The church still dominates all, the surf still booms in the cove far, far below, and one or two coastal hikers stroll about the place feeling lucky they bothered to walk to such a hidden gem.

There are many fine hikes to be enjoyed around this National Trust owned property halfway between Polperro and Polruan. In fact, the area has some of the finest coastal walking in the region.

The Trust has put in several car parks around the area so you can take your choice, but we stopped at the car park in the actual hamlet of Lansallos.

The ancient pathway that runs down to the cove from Lansallos has recently been resurfaced because of heavy rains that turned the old path into a Boscastle-like torrent. The surface was scoured into any number of ruts and pits and was just

about unwalkable - but the NT has spent much time and effort revamping the entire length.

But the job was well worthwhile because - as the organisation's own leaflet puts it - the path: «Is one of the most beautiful approaches to the coast anywhere in Cornwall.»

Reaching the bottom of the valley I recalled a paragraph about the place, written by Brian Le Messurier: «A water mill formerly stood where the Reed Water tumbles to the beach. It is related that the miller's wife refused to open the door to succour a half-drowned man. When he was found dead outside in the morning his ghost drove the hard-hearted couple away, and the mill was not occupied again.»

Last time I was at Lansallos Cove it was packed with folk enjoying the hot sunshine. This year it was a bit different. Only one family inhabited the lovely little beach, and they were soon packing their things when it began to rain.

As they went up the ancient cutting between the rocks with its old wheel-marks grooved into the solid shale, I heard the dad say: «This was an old smuggling cove. They'd bring carts down here to collect the brandy.»

Nice thought, but slightly inaccurate. The cutting was made so that local farmers could bring their carts down to the beach to collect sand and seaweed. However, plenty of smuggling did go on here.

Here's a report from the Royal Cornwall Gazette, dated April 1825: «During the last week the coast between Polperro and Fowey has been kept in a state of disorder as a consequence of a quantity of smuggled liquor found on the shore.

«It has been particularly annoying to the agents of Wheal Howell Mine, the miners having been in a continual state of drunkenness. On Wednesday last the whole of the men had assembled, and by stratagem succeeded in getting underground where they concealed part of a keg of brandy, and drank to usual intoxication - so much so that it was with extreme difficulty that several of them were brought to the grass.»

Nice phrase that - brought to the grass. It means brought to the surface. Where they were met by nice, understanding, bosses. Well, not exactly: they sacked the befuddled workers and set about finding which miscreant brought the barrel into the mine. I'm glad to say they failed to find him.

On our last visit to the area we enjoyed an extensive walk west to Pencarrow Head - this time we turned east along the coast path and made my way along Lansallos Cliff towards East Combe. Because of time constraints we contended ourselves with a dandy little two-and-a-half mile circular route that incorporates the permissive path that takes walkers up the rather lengthy steep coombe to a place called Windsor.

The route allows for a pleasant bit of coastal walking, plus you get a few lungfuls of air puffing your way up East Combe to the lane at the top. Having reached this, it's merely a matter of turning left and making your way back to Lansallos.

Even in our rush, the hamlet retained its peculiar charm. I don't mind telling you - this is coastal Cornwall at its best.