



West Cornwall

Loe Pool



Basic Walk: from Porthleven south-east along coast to Loe Bar and inland to circumnavigate Loe Pool.

Recommended Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 103 - The Lizard.

Distance and going: seven miles, easy level going.

Here's a walk by the sea that will take you around the largest inland stretch of water in Cornwall. Everything about Loe Pool is enigmatic and at certain times of day the place can take on an altogether mysterious air.

The walk from the harbour town of Porthleven, followed by the circumnavigation of the lake is a seven mile wonder. The scenic route has a brooding demeanour that should inspire a romantic and whimsical mood even in the most jaded of souls. Loe Pool can boast the excitement of the unexpected, and apart from three or four houses you'll see nothing but coast, lake and countryside.

Indeed the National Trust describes its property at Loe Pool as: «One of Cornwall's glorious surprises.»

The most interesting entry point to Loe Pool is from the fishing village of Porthleven, a mile-and-a-half north along the coast. At the south-eastern extremity of the port, the coast path climbs a few feet up from a small car park and then proceeds along the low cliff-tops.

Loe Pool comes as something of a surprise - the cliffs give way to lake. You will find yourself standing next to a lodge house and, some 50 feet or so below to the south-east, you'll

see how the beach gravel has formed itself into a massive low dam that separates Loe Pool from the sea.

The Bar is recognised as a site of outstanding historical, geomorphical and conservation interest. No one really knows when it was formed - legend has it that the ghost of one Jan Tregeagle dropped a bag of sand across what was the mouth of the River Cober. Victorian writers thought the river was blocked in the 13th century and believe - wrongly - that Helston was a busy port. But it seems likely that the Bar has its origins much further back in time. As ice began to melt after the last Ice Age, sea levels began to rise and push huge deposits of eroded materials back towards the land.

But other factors are believed to have helped form the Bar - longshore drift and winter storms to name but two. Certainly the coastal currents and the pounding waves help to deposit new material on the Bar.

From the Bar we begin our stroll around the five-and-a-half mile shore of the lake. Its surrounding land was the largest single property ever to come into the ownership of the National Trust in Cornwall, being the gift of Lt Cdr J.P. Rogers in 1974.

A wide, well-laid, estate-drive takes the walker inland up the western shore of the Pool and eventually enters the coombe that plays host to the central demesne of the Penrose Estate. The grand house sits across lawns and meadows under a bank of impressive trees - walkers are asked to respect the privacy of its occupants by keeping to the footpaths.

Around Penrose Park we walk to enter Succamore Grove. This takes us to Helston Lodge with its picturesque boathouse and, soon after, there's a bird-hide in which we can huddle and watch the wildfowl that teem upon the rich waters. Widgeon, teal, mallard, shoveler, pochard, tufted duck and coot appear in greatest numbers, but you may well see rarer species haunting this Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Shortly after the hide, the open waters give way to Loe Marsh - the great silted area where trees grow out of the mud in a way that is reminiscent of a mangrove swamp. It would be impossible to cross, but a wooden boardwalk has been laid by the Trust across this singular terrain. After a few minutes we find ourselves high and dry on the other side, having crossed the Cober near the old mine buildings at Lower Nansloe.

Now we turn right, down the lane, and are directed into open fields which take us back to the lakeside and to Degibna Wood. This is the largest stand of trees in the estate and, within its confines, numerous paths thread here and there. I recommend sticking by the lakeside as best you can - there are excellent views and you may witness the extraordinary sight of some 100 or more cormorants roosting in one of the enormous trees by the water's edge.

Next we round the point that introduces us to Carminowe Creek - which can come as a bit of surprise to the more weary of walkers. Just when you think you're getting back to Loe Bar, you are swept around to the left and forced to walk an extra mile to the old site of Carminowe Mill - and a mile back down

the other side. Never mind, it's all most picturesque and in the gloaming the lake takes on an altogether mysterious light.

Somehow you can imagine why so many people believe this to be the place where Sir Bedivere cast away Excalibur, the sword of the dying King Arthur. Tennyson, in his *Morte d' Arthur*, describes it thus: «On one side lay the ocean and on one lay a great water.»

That's Loe Pool in a nutshell, and you can mull upon this legendary image as you trudge back along the coast path to your car at Porthleven.