

Walk No. 8 - The Middle Dart Valley

For the wetter conditions of winter, this walk uses surfaced paths and lanes between Totnes and Dartington. It features one of Devon's most historic towns, a rebuilt medieval hall, classic 20th Century architecture and a craft centre.

For enthusiastic long-distance walkers, the Dart Valley Trail is a waymarked route linking Totnes and Dartmouth. The walk described here gives the possibility of adding this middle part of the Dart Valley to the Dart Valley Trail.

N.B. Dogs are not permitted on part of this walk.

Fact File

The walk starts and finishes in Totnes. The town is served by numerous bus routes, including services to and from Exeter (X64) and Torquay and Plymouth (X80). Dartington is also served by bus routes. For up to date travel information simply call the Traveline on 0870 608 2 608.

Totnes is also on the national rail network and has direct links to Exeter, Plymouth, Cornwall and main stations to London Paddington, Bristol, the Midlands and North of England. Details are available from National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950.

Totnes may also be reached by using the private steam line from Buckfastleigh. For timetable information call the South Devon Railway on 01364 642338.

There is ample car parking in Totnes.

Walk length: 8 km/5 miles. One gentle climb : no stiles

O.S. Maps:

Explorer (1 : 25,000) No. 110 Torquay and Dawlish or No. OL20 South Devon.

Landranger(1 : 50,000) No. 202 Torbay and South Dartmoor

Facilities: Totnes (all facilities); Dartington Hall (pub); Shinnars Bridge (refreshments, toilets).

Note that the lanes and paths of the Dartington Hall Estate are private and are not rights of way, although access is allowed by the Estate.

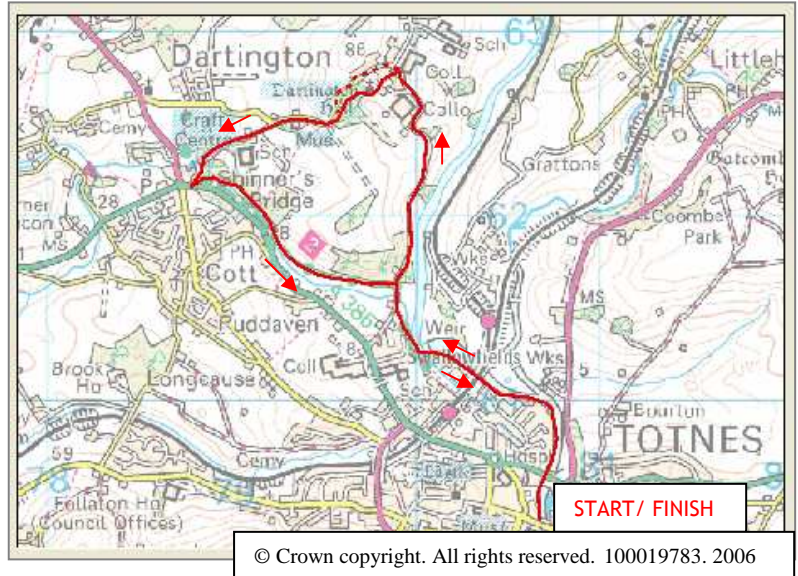
The Walk

**Start in Totnes at the bottom of Fore Street, near the bridge over the River Dart.
Walk to the bridge.**

The bridge dates to 1828 and marks the lowest bridging point on the River Dart. On the opposite bank is Totnes' ancient suburb of Bridgetown, once a separate borough in its own right.

Immediately before the bridge, go down the steps on the left to the riverside walk path. A short way along the river, keep to the riverside path to pass underneath the Brutus Bridge.

This bridge was built in 1982 to carry the Totnes Relief Road. The Brutus after whom it is named is a mythical figure said to have given his name to Britain; the Brutus Stone in the High Street may commemorate the town's meeting place in Anglo-Saxon times.



Keep to the riverside path until it passes under a railway bridge.

The railway bridge carries the main line from London and the north to Plymouth and Cornwall. The right fork here crosses the river to Totnes Riverside station, the terminus of the South Devon Railway.

To continue on the walk, fork left here along the riverside. A little further on, the path moves away from the river next to a creamery. Just past the creamery cross a leat, then turn right on the far side.

The leat is part of the historic drainage system which used to supply power to the old riverside industries in Totnes as well as help drain the marshland.

The path soon returns to the riverside, the weir across the Dart here marking the tidal limit of the river. The path then leads to a road by a gate and a lodge, one of the original entrance points to the estate of Dartington Hall.

The lodge dates to the 1860's. For a while it is said to have been inhabited by Sean O'Casey, the Irish playwright, who came here in 1938 so that his children could attend Dartington Hall School.

Go through the gates and follow the road ahead.

The road crosses ancient marshland at the confluence of the Dart and its tributary Bidwell Brook, now managed as a conservation area. The road, the original approach drive for Dartington Hall, climbs steadily, soon offering attractive views over the middle Dart Valley to the right.

Near the top of the hill look out for the main hall gatehouse, opposite the car park. Go through the gatehouse into the courtyard.

N.B. Dogs are not permitted in the courtyard or the gardens beyond. It is possible to continue along the road to pick up the route at the far end of the gardens.

Dartington Hall dates to the late 14th Century, with 16th, 17th and 18th Century alterations. It had fallen into a virtual ruin when taken over in 1925 by Leonard Elmhirst and his American wife Dorothy Whitney Straight. It became the centre of an experiment in rural regeneration, including farms, woodlands, craft education, a College of Arts, school and International Music Festivals and Summer Schools.

The view in the courtyard is a superb testimony both to the original medieval architecture and to the work of the Elmhirsts in its sensitive restoration, resulting in one of the most spectacular survivals of such architecture in England.

Walk through the courtyard and leave by the gate at the far end on the left. Turn right on the path next to the White Hart bar then down the steps to the right into the formal gardens.

The re-establishment of the gardens was undertaken pre-war by the American designer Beatrix Ferrand and post-war by Percy Cane.

Follow the path next to the stepped lawn (the original tiltyard) and at the end go up the steps and turn left. Turn almost immediately right, up more steps, next to the swan fountain and bear left at the top. Continue on this path until it leaves the gardens.

At the road, turn left and follow downhill past the rather startlingly coloured High Cross House.

This house was built in 1932, designed by the American architect W. Lescaze, and is said to be one of the first in the country in what was known as the International Modern Style.

Keep going downhill, with Dartmoor now visible on the skyline ahead, to a fork. Keep left here and follow the pedestrians only lane past sports fields and on to a wooden gate.

Through the gate is the campus of the Dartington Cider Press Centre. It is well worth browsing the glass, pottery, local food, crafts, books and toys all available here. There are also refreshments and toilets.

To continue on the walk turn left downhill after the gate and cross a cattle grid. Turn left just before the main road, alongside a stream. In a short way the path passes some lime kilns.

These date to the early 19th Century; the lime burnt would be used to fertilise the soil.

The path soon enters some woodland. Follow the main, lower path alongside the stream. The path then crosses the stream, actually a mill leat, then passes the mill with its working waterwheel.

The mill dates to 1931 and was a textile mill established as part of the Dartington Hall experiment. It was built on the site of an older mill.

Re-cross the leat and follow the main path alongside the fence. At the next fork keep left, on the gravel path. This pleasant, easy walk follows the woodland edge next to flood meadows to return to the Dartington Hall Drive. From here, the walk retraces its steps back to Totnes.

Turn right along the drive then turn left along the path just after the lodge. Follow this path then cross the leat on the left by the weir and follow the path ahead and left of the creamery. Continue on the riverside path back to Totnes Bridge.

Further Information

Information on the Dart Valley Trail and other walking routes in Devon is available from www.discoverdevon.com and the Discover Devon Holiday Line 0870 608 5531 - quote DP42 for a Dart Valley Trail Information Leaflet (£3.50 inc. p&p), or DP311 for Discover Devon Walking - A complete guide to walking trails in Devon (free publications). They can also be ordered from Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Rd, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW quoting references above.