

## Kingston

A wild and rugged coastline



A hugely rewarding coast and estuary walk with peerless views from some of the most dramatic cliffs in the area. It ends with a huge vista of South Devon, and the welcoming sight of Kingston village snuggled amongst the fields.

**Start:** | St James the Less church , Kingston  
TQ7 4QE

**Distance:** | 5.5 miles

**Difficulty:** | Strenuous. 6 stiles (3 can be bypassed);  
1 flight of steps; 3 steep ascents;  
1 step descent.

**Terrain:** | Fairly even underfoot. Footpaths and  
bridleway, with mud in wet weather;  
coastal footpath; surfaced road.

**Parking:** | Limited on roadside by Church  
or pub TQ7 4QE. Alternatively, on lane at  
Wonwell (grid ref. SX 620477) and join  
route there.

**OS map:** | Explorer OL20

**Grid Ref:** | SX 635 478

**Public transport:** | Very limited service,  
See [www.travelinesw.com](http://www.travelinesw.com)

**Refreshments:** | In Kingston

**Toilets:** | Nearest public toilets Bigbury-on-Sea  
Car Park, or Brownston St, Modbury.

This walk is available in the following formats from  
[www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walks](http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walks)



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### KEY

--- Main route

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## Directions

- 1 Follow road from church past Dolphin pub. Take the next right, and then turn left in front of Rock Cottage.
- 2 Follow lane, which becomes public bridleway along track.
- 3 When you come to a gate go straight on signed 'Permissive Footpath Westcombe Beach ½m'.
- 4 At Westcombe Beach turn right and follow coast path which climbs steeply. Continue on the Coast Path along cliffs.
- 5 In time the path curves round into the mouth of the Erme estuary. Where the path drops down to Wonwell Beach you can, if the tide is out, follow the foreshore around to where the old slipway leads you back up to the road.
- 6 Otherwise, continue along the Coast Path until you drop down steps to the lane end at Wonwell.
- 7 From lane end follow road up for 70m then turn right up public footpath into woods signed 'Kingston 1 ¼m'.
- 8 Where you leave the woods, follow path along top field edges then follow fingerposts across more fields to the road. Turn right. Turn left at crossroads, then at Wonwell Gate cross to return to the church.

## Further interest

### Heritage

Kingston Parish Church of St James the Less dates from the early 14th century. Most churches had their traditional four bells recast into five or six lighter ones during the 1600s. Kingston, though, persevered with its grand old originals, one of which was cast in 1430 and has been ringing ever since.

At Westcombe Beach stand the ruins of a stable that once housed the horses which drew carriages full of the well-to-do down to the beach. There was a private tea house here, owned by the Flete Estate. Guests entertained here at beach parties included members of the royal family.



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At the top of the climb above Westcombe Beach you reach Hoist Point. Its name recalls the efforts farmers used to make in hauling seaweed up from the beach below to fertilise the fields.

In Elizabethan times the promontory of Beacon Point was chosen as the site for one of the beacons to warn of the approach of the Spanish Armada. In response to the threat, a local militia was recruited from all able bodied men between 16 and 60. These would-be soldiers were given some basic training in combat and kept a lookout for enemy ships 24 hours a day.

From the deck of a ship at sea, the Erme estuary looks a safe and inviting shelter in a storm. In the middle of the estuary mouth though, sit Mary's Rocks, hidden from view at all but low tide. On the bottom are clustered the wrecks of 14 ships which have foundered on these deadly jags of rock. The earliest known victim of Mary's Rocks was one of the oldest wrecks to be found in Britain – a Bronze Age tin- trading vessel. 42 rough ingots of tin, made by pouring molten tin into earth moulds, have been found on the seabed here. They were almost certainly mined on Dartmoor, and there is strong evidence that Bantham, just along the coast to the east, was an international tin trading centre in prehistoric times.

Along the foreshore at Wonwell stands a now ivy-clad chimney which is where fishermen used to boil their crabs and lobsters. There are also several ruined cottages. One of these used to be painted white to aid shipping. It housed the local pilot, who would guide boats through the maze of shifting sandbanks to the lime kilns and wool factories upriver.

# South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walks

## Landscape

Looking east along the coast from the cliffs, you can see Burgh Island, just off the shore from Bigbury. The island has been variously a centre of Christian worship, of smuggling, of pilchard fishing, and of entertainment at the extremely fashionable art deco hotel first built there in 1929.

Beyond Burgh Island you should be able to make out the sheltered settlement of Hope Cove, which lies in the shadow of the far promontory of Bolt Tail, site of an Iron Age hillfort.

To the west the coastline curves away, just concealing the mouth of the River Yealm, and the pretty villages of Newton Ferrers and Noss Mayo which nestle in its estuary.

## Wildlife

The clifftop grassland by the coast path makes for good butterfly watching country. Look out for Orange Tip, which has white wings with orange tips. The regal - looking black, red and white Red Admiral is another likely sight, along with the Peacock. Despite its tiny body size, the peacock butterfly manages to hibernate through the winter, and is often out and about quite early in the spring. It has large colourful eye spots on its reddish upper and lower wings.

Oystercatchers gather to feed and chatter at Westcombe Beach. They are striking wading birds with black and white plumage, orange bills, red eyes, and a shrill piping 'kleep' call. The cliff tops are often patrolled by Ravens. Jet black, with long fingered wings and a thick beak, the raven is the world's largest crow. It has a dry and rattly, hollow-sounding 'crronk' call. Ravens sometime perform remarkable aerobatics in which they flip themselves upside

down during flight. The prince of these cliffs is the Peregrine Falcon, the fastest animal on the planet. It is a sleek grey bird of prey, with black and white barring on its underside, but you are most likely to see it as a dark silhouette against the sky or cliffs.

Lichens grow on the cliff rock, on the sycamore trees at Wonwell, and even amongst the grass on the cliff tops above Westcombe Beach. Their presence is a sign of good clean air. Lichens are actually an alliance of a fungus and an alga, behaving and looking like a single organism. Some species form crusts or fleshy little clusters of leaves. Others hang in bushy growths, or develop tiny stalked cups. The woods at Wonwell are carpeted in Bluebells and Wild Garlic in the spring, along with Primroses and the bright yellow petals and heart-shaped leaves of Lesser Celandine. Dog's Mercury also flowers here in spring. It has pointed oval leaves like spearheads, and green tassels of flowers on stalks. Butcher's Broom is a spiky shrub that grows in these woods. Its sharp little leaves and striking red berries grow on stiff vertical stems that stand between knee- and waist height. Its presence is often a sign of ancient woodland, so it may be that trees have grown here continuously for many centuries.

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## Working in partnership



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Europe investing in rural areas has supported Explore South Devon to promote circular walks within the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.