



Walks



Map



News



Soci

Walk - Hillsborough's Sleeping Elephant

1.4 miles (2.3 km)

📍 Hele Bay car park - EX34 9QZ → Hele Bay car park

📍 Moderate - Coast path and public footpath. Some rocky uneven, slippery and muddy patches.

A short but demanding walk around Ilfracombe's Hillsborough Nature Reserve, known locally as 'The Sleeping Elephant'. There are far-reaching views to Lundy Island in one direction and the South Wales coast in the other. Hillsborough also has a bird's-eye view of Ilfracombe, where Damien Hirst's 'Verity' watches over the harbour, along with a fourteenth century chapel and the Landmark Theatre (nicknamed 'Madonna's Bra'). There are Iron Age ramparts around the summit of the hill, and its variety of habitats encourages a wide range of wildlife, including peregrines and nesting seabirds. Children will love exploring the paths around the hill, and the beach at the bottom.

It is also good for dogs as it passes a beach and pubs where dogs are welcome. Have a look at our [Top Dog Walks on the South West Coast Path \(/top-dog/\)](#) for more dog friendly beaches and pubs.

🏠 [Family \(/walksdb/tags/family/\)](#) [Heritage \(/walksdb/tags/heritage/\)](#)

[Culture \(/walksdb/tags/culture/\)](#) [Autumn \(/walksdb/tags/autumn/\)](#)

[Dog Friendly Walks \(/walksdb/tags/dogfriendlywalks/\)](#)

🌙 Sleep

Chadfield Guest House, Ilfracombe >

Central Ilfracombe, spacious apartment, sleeps 2-4. Ideal for North Devon Coast path and AONB, historic harbour, beaches and High Street.
01271 866622



The Collingdale Guest House, Ilfracombe >

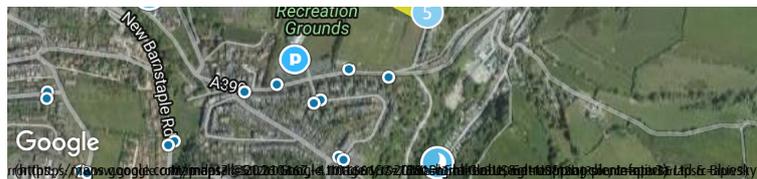
Award winning AA 4* B&B offering affordable quality accommodation. Situated on the Coast Path with miles of uninterrupted views across the harbour and Damien Hirst's sculpture 'Verity'



The Woodlands, Ilfracombe >

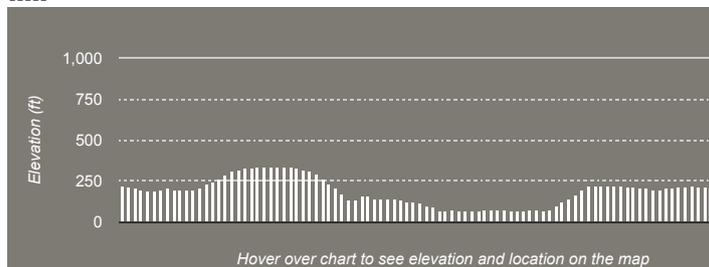
The Woodlands is a magnificent Victorian residence, sympathetically modernised to offer high quality guest accommodation. Ideally located a short stroll from the Coast Path
01271 863098





- ✓ Easy walks
- ✓ Moderate walks
- ✓ Challenging walks
- ✓ Eat & Drink
- ✓ Sleep
- ✓ Do
- ✓ Bus stop
- ✓ Photographs
- ✓ Car park
- ✓ Toilet
- ✓ Place of interest
- ✓ Route change

Interactive Elevation



Route Description

1 From Hele Bay car park walk down to the beach and pick up the South West Coast Path on your left, heading up the steps from the seafront. Follow the acorn waymarkers, ignoring the smaller paths heading tantalisingly through the trees to your left. The Coast Path zigzags up the hillside to a viewpoint looking out over the Bristol Channel.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Hele Bay was the landing point for ketches bringing coal to Ilfracombe's gas works. Vessels would tie up at the mooring post still visible on the beach at low tide and coal was transported up the beach in carts. Opened in 1905, the gas plant was a major employer until 1963, when it closed. Soon after this, as tourism took over from industry around the south west coast, permission was given for holiday parks to be built around Hele.

Hillsborough has been designated a Local Nature Reserve and a County Wildlife Site, in recognition of the wildlife supported by its varied habitats. This side of the hill is cloaked in secondary woodland (woodland that has grown since the seventeenth century), and the main tree here is the sycamore. Thought to have been introduced to Britain from Europe in Tudor times, sycamores are salt-tolerant and survive well in exposed conditions. In spring the ground beneath is carpeted in bluebells, dog violets and primroses.

The pathways around the hill were laid out early in the nineteenth century and Hillsborough is one of England's earliest sites of nature conservation. It was bought by Ilfracombe Urban District Council at the end of the century to protect it from development.

In Victorian times the hill was sometimes used as an army practice site. On this side there are the remains of a gun battery from 1914. The battery had two guns positioned on semi-circular concrete emplacements with iron tracks, installed towards the end of the nineteenth century and manned by 14th Devon Artillery Volunteers.

[Print OS \(Ordnance Survey\) M](#)

[Dogs on the coastpath >](#)

[Report a problem >](#)

[Safety advice >](#)

Share this page:

Local maps and publications

> A-Z 1:25,000 map book: North Devon & Somerset
<http://shop.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/p/405.htm>

Nearby Walks

Easy walks

(3 wal

Today the battery itself is eroding into the sea, and one emplacement has fallen on to the rocks below, with the other teetering on the cliff edge. A small brick structure with limestone floor and capping nearby is thought to have been a magazine associated with the battery. However, some historians believe that it may have been a limekiln, where limestone was burnt with coal to make lime, others have a theory is that it was a beacon.

The rocks below the first viewpoint are known as Beacon Point, and it is said that there was also once a lighthouse here. The only indication of either on the 1809 Ordnance Survey map was a metal post, thought to be the site of the original beacon and left in place to warn shipping of the rocks.

On this part of the coast, the South West Coast Path is joined by the Tarka Trail, a 180-mile figure-of-eight walking and cycling trail through the northern part of Devon. The route is based on the travels of Tarka the Otter in Henry Williamson's 1927 novel of the same title. Williamson lived and worked in nearby Georgeham.

2 *From the viewpoint carry on uphill above the rocks.*

In summer the cliffs are rowdy with seabirds nesting on the ledges. Oystercatchers call among the hunched black shapes of shags and cormorants can be seen on the rocks below. Buzzards wheel overhead, and you may be treated to the high-speed dive of a peregrine after prey, or the rapid flutter of a kestrel's wings.

Detour to the next viewpoint for more spectacular views, this time past the high cliffs rising ahead of you to the harbour and hills of Ilfracombe.

Historically, Ilfracombe was a fishing village, but its safe natural harbour later made it an important local naval port, and several offshore skirmishes against the French were reported during this time. When the railway arrived in 1874, it became a fashionable Victorian seaside resort, with paddle steamers visiting from Bristol and South Wales.

As you head on up, you pass the tiny cove of Rapparee, a ladies' bathing beach in Victorian days. Here lies the remains of the transport ship The London which in 1796 was wrecked whilst trying to reach Ilfracombe Harbour. Two centuries later when bones were exposed after the sea breached the wall at the back of the beach, a worldwide controversy erupted over the identity of these bodies buried beneath the cliffs after the shipwreck. As well as its cargo of gold and silver, the vessel is said to have been carrying prisoners of war from the West Indies during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1997 an international row broke out over the identity of those who died, whom some believed to have been African slaves.

3 *Approaching the summit, again ignore the paths to the left to carry on along the Coast Path as it rises and falls around the ancient earthworks of an Iron Age promontory fort before it descends steeply to the tree-fringed grassland above Ilfracombe's swimming pool.*

Here the habitat is maritime grassland, and in summer it is vivid with wildflowers. Species flourishing here include the freckled white flowers of sea campion, the bright yellow heads of the creeping kidney vetch plant and the tufted pink globes of thrift.

Moderate walks

(4 wal

Challenging walks

(3 wal

Current Conditions

18°

Partly cloudy skies

Wind 22 mph S



Tomorrow

14° - 19°

Cloudy skies

Wind 23 mph S



Next day

14° - 19°

Patchy rain possible

Wind 24 mph WSW



Hillsborough has been in use since prehistoric times. Its name is derived from Hele's Barrow. A burial chamber from the Bronze Age, some 4000 years ago, was discovered by archaeologists in the 1930s. The double ramparts of an Iron Age promontory fort on its summit, dating from sometime between 330BC and AD50, have recently been exposed after undergrowth was cleared away. It is thought that there was a round house on the side of the fort, and a cavity cut into it may have been a cist or earth house, similar to a Cornish 'fogou'.

From the top of Hillsborough, 136m (447ft) above sea level, there are tremendous views over Ilfracombe. On the far side of the harbour, Damien Hirst's 'Verity' sculpture is on loan to the town, and the artist has a gallery and a restaurant on the quayside beyond. The twin towers of the Landmark Theatre, known locally as 'Madonna's Bra', were constructed in 1997, on the site of the old Ilfracombe Hotel (see the [Ilfracombe Town Trail \(/walksdb/119/\)](/walksdb/119/)). The Landmark was built to replace the crumbling Victorian Pavilion Theatre, which once stood beneath Capstone Hill, (on the right), whose zigzag paths were built in the 1840s by unemployed labourers. On Lantern Hill, to the left of Capstone, St Nicholas Chapel was built around 1300, and a light burnt here to warn sailors of the rocks.

- 4 *At the junction of paths by the hedge above the swimming pool, leave the Coast Path to turn onto the footpath on your left. Follow this path around the back of the hill.*

To your right, the rolling green hills are typical of the Exmoor coastline. A little further east, the sandstone hogsback cliffs are the highest in England (see the [Hangman Hills Walk \(/walksdb/259/\)](/walksdb/259/)).

- 5 *Carry on along the path as it curves left to head back towards Hele, with glimpses of the cove through the trees. Bear right at every junction to return to the path above Hele Bay. From here you can retrace your steps to the car park.*

Nearby refreshments

There is a cafe at the start & end of the walk and many cafes, pubs and restaurants in Ilfracombe.

Near to the start/end of the walk in Ilfracombe the Ship & Pilot and Hele Billy's Bar are recommended by users of www.doggiepubs.org.uk (<http://www.doggiepubs.org.uk>) as serving good food and being dog-friendly.

Public transport

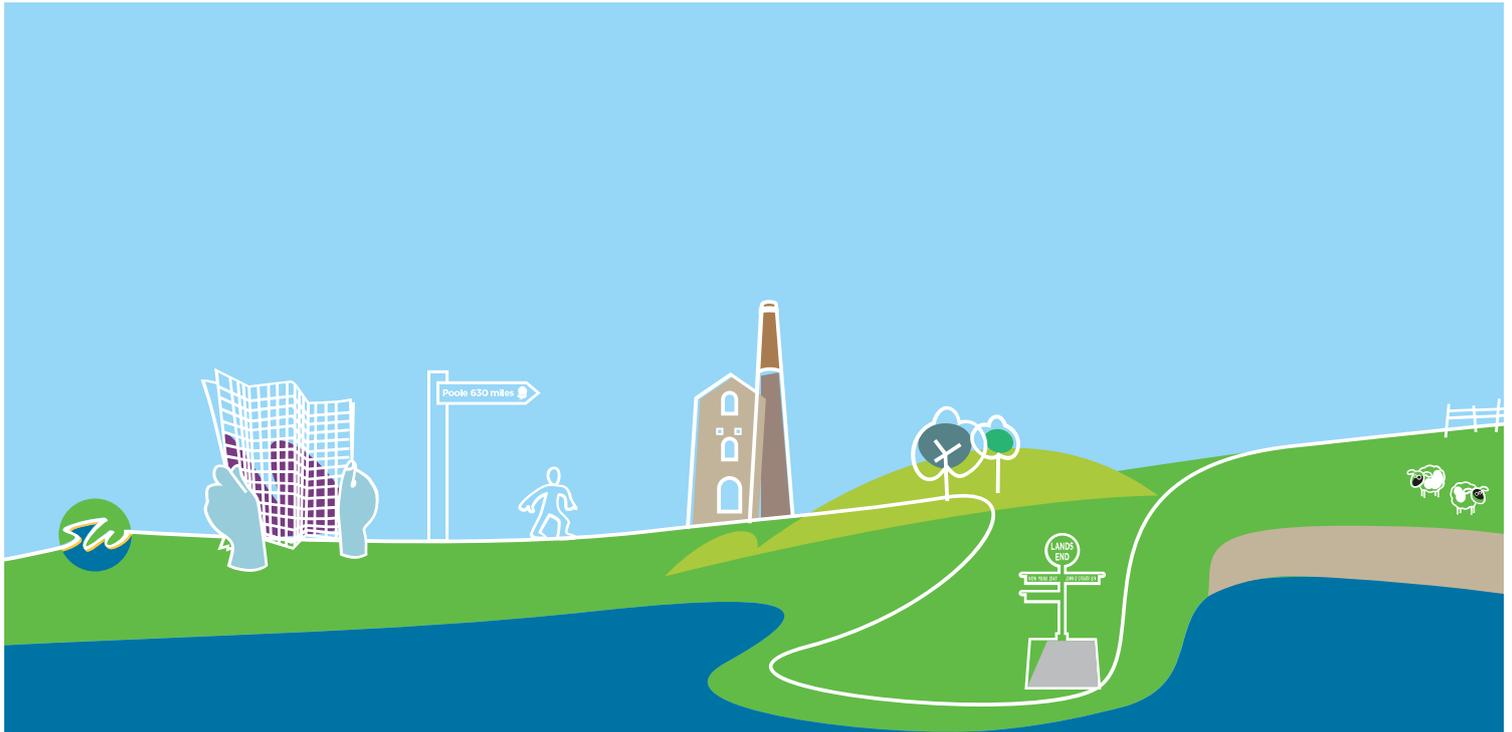
Bus service 3 and 3a from Ilfracombe and Barnstaple stops on Hillsborough Road 100 metres downhill from walk start point.

For timetable information, zoom in on the interactive map and click on the bus stops, visit Traveline (<http://www.travelinesw.com>) or phone 0871 200 22 33.

Parking

Hillsborough Car Park, Hillsborough Road, Ilfracombe (pay and display)

Postcode for Sat Navs: EX34 9QQ.



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department->

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural
Development. Europe investing in rural areas
for-environment-food-rural-affairs)



(<https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/ccf>)

(<http://www.southwestwater.co.uk/>)



SOUTH WEST WATER



(/about-coast-path/international-appala

trail/)

NATIONAL TRAIL



(/other-nat

© The South West Coast Path 2016

Terms & conditions (/terms-and-conditions,
Contact us (/love-the-coast-path/about-us/contact-us,



(<http://www.facebook.com/southwestcoastpath>)



(<http://twitter.com/swcoastpath>)



(<http://www.pinterest.com/swcoastpathteam>)



(<http://www.flickr.com/photos/southwestcoastpath/collections/721576255966637>)