

Berry Head to Sharkham Point

3 miles (5 km) One-way | linear | Grades 2 to 3

Coastal footpath

Starting Point: Berry Head Information Centre

This walk provides a complete exploration of the coastline of St. Mary's Bay, the southern neighbour of Torbay, with much to offer regarding local bird life, its flora and fauna, and views over the ever-changing sea.

It is worth starting with a look at the southern Napoleonic fort that lies immediately behind the car park. Of special interest within the fort, completed in 1805, is the architecture of the magazine which can be found close by the gateway.

The route then takes the path along the edge of the dry moat, out to the cliff edge and then turns to follow the coastline in a southerly direction. Standing offshore are Cod Rock and Mew Stone. This is only one of many Mew Stones that can be found around the shores of Devon and Cornwall. Inhabited by herring and black backed gulls, as well as cormorants, it is the familiar

'mewing' of the gulls that has provided an identity for these outcrops.

The footpath provides an ideal viewing platform for studying the contorted strata of the limestone cliffs, often stained red by traces of iron. Having passed Durl Head, St. Mary's Bay becomes very much more apparent. It was in these waters in 1815 that Napoleon Bonaparte was transferred from a warship called The Bellerophon to The Northumberland to begin his journey into exile on the island of St. Helena.

The route of the path now becomes very irregular due to the unstable nature of the mudstone rocks that give their name to the beach below. After a somewhat erratic section, the path climbs up on to the more stable Sharkham Head.

Although hard to appreciate the fact today, this promontory was heavily mined for iron ore during Victorian times, the ore being

loaded directly into ships and taken round to the smelters of Swansea for processing.

From Sharkham Point the view provided just adds to a collection of worthwhile moments. To the

north, the plateau surface of the bastion of Berry Head, juts out into Lyme Bay, whilst to the south, the undulating coastline of the South Hams curves away towards the mouth of the Dart and the Port of Dartmouth.

