

**Location & Access:**

Unique dry valley running parallel to the coastline, one kilometre to the west of the town of Lynton in north Devon. Lynton can be accessed via the A39 road from Barnstaple (via Blackmore Gate) to the west, and the A39 road from Minehead to the east. Regular bus services run to and from Lynton from Minehead, Porlock, Combe Martin, Ilfracombe, Woolacombe, and Barnstaple. Information available from 'Traveline': 0871 200 2233. Toilets are located in Lynton and in the Valley of the Rocks. Car parking is available in the centre of Lynton (opposite the Town Hall). There are also car parks in Lynmouth and in the Valley of the Rocks.



Castle Rock - Wikimedia Commons

**Key Geography:** Stunning section of the South West Coast Path that includes a periglacial dry valley, coastal sandstone tors, and high hog's back cliffs.

**Description:**

1. This circular walk totals 5 miles in length, although the shorter version reduces the length to 3 miles. It starts and finishes at the grade two listed Lynton cliff railway station. This unique water-powered funicular railway was opened in 1890, and was built to connect the harbour of Lynmouth with the cliff-top town of Lynton. Before the railway was constructed, packhorses and donkeys were used to haul goods up to the town. It is the only fully water-powered railway in Britain, and one of just three examples in the world.

To begin your journey, leave Lynton's cliff railway station, and follow the track to the town's main street. Turn left here, passing the Valley of Rocks Hotel before reaching the church dedicated to St Mary the Virgin. The church tower dates back to the 13th Century, but most of the rest of the building is of Victorian age. According to local legend, the church was first sited on the Barnstaple road, but disapproving pixies spirited building materials away every night, until the frustrated builders gave in and built it here instead.

2. At the church, turn left down North Walk Hill. At the bottom of the hill, you will cross a bridge over the cliff railway line, and from here there are great views over the town of Lynmouth, and along the coast to the Foreland Point Lighthouse. You then join the South West Coast Path (also part of the Tarka Trail), which follows North Walk towards the Valley of the Rocks.

3. Continue along North Walk, passing a number of guest houses before the road eventually turns into a path. You will pass through a wooden gate, and it is important to make sure it is closed after passing through in order to stop the feral goats wandering into the town.

*(continued overleaf)*

**Curiosity Questions:**

# # In 1797, two famous English writers visited the Valley of the Rocks and wrote a prose tale called 'The Wanderings of Cain'. Can you name them? # What is the gradient of the cliff railway? # Lynmouth is perhaps best known for the Great Flood Disaster caused by the Lyn rivers. In what year did this take place? # Lynton was once the terminus for a narrow-gauge railway that connected to which other north Devon town?

**Further information:** [www.alltrails.com/explore/trail/england/devon/valley-of-rocks-and-lynton](http://www.alltrails.com/explore/trail/england/devon/valley-of-rocks-and-lynton)  
[www.discoveringbritain.org/activities/south-west-england/viewpoints/valley-of-rocks.html](http://www.discoveringbritain.org/activities/south-west-england/viewpoints/valley-of-rocks.html)  
[www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/walksdb/247/#](http://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/walksdb/247/#)

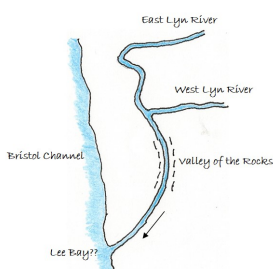
**Reviewer:** Paul Berry B Ed (hons) M Sc FRGS  
 Former Assistant Vice Principal and Head of Geography at South Molton Community College with 35 years of classroom experience.  
 Now an Iceland Field Studies Tutor with Rayburn Tours.  
 Blog: [www.devongeography.wordpress.com](http://www.devongeography.wordpress.com) Twitter: @unicorn4275

The 11th Century Domesday Book recorded 75 goats in the Manor of Lynton, and a herd continued to roam in this valley until the middle of the 19th Century. However, the goats were often responsible for head-butting valuable sheep off the steep cliffs, so they were culled. Later in the early 20th century, it was realised that the goats provided a useful service by maintaining control on the scrub vegetation in the valley and keeping the rock faces clear, so a replacement herd of goats was introduced. By the mid 1960s, the goats had perished due to severe weather conditions, but in 1976 the current herd of hardy Northumberland goats was introduced. Numbers have increased dramatically since then, reaching at one time to over one hundred individuals. The goat herd is a controversial topic amongst local residents, some believing them to now be an important part of the valley landscape, while others have tired of the damage to town gardens and support a regular cull.

4. After around half an hour's walking, look for the craggy tor called 'Rugged Jack' to the left of the path. The local sandstone is riddled with joints and bedding planes, and rain, frost and wind has enlarged these lines of weakness to create the mystical shapes of the rock tors found in the Valley of the Rocks. The shapes of these tors are exposed by the removal downslope of surrounding less resistant material. Local legend claims that long in the distant past, some Druids were having a wild party here at Rugged Jack one Sunday. Then suddenly, the Devil appeared amongst them and turned them all to stone.

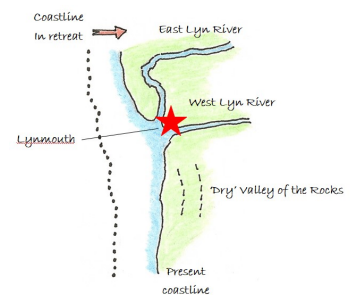
Continuing onwards, the towering crags of Castle Rock tor will come into view ahead of you, resembling a high fortress looking out over the hog's back cliffs across the waves of the Bristol Channel. You have now entered the heart of the 'Valley of the Rocks'.

This deep valley was cut by the flow of a river over thousands of years, but today the valley has been left completely 'dry' - in other words, lacking any surface drainage.

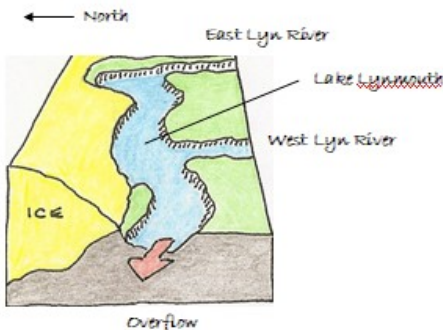


So, what happened here to the river that cut the valley? There are two different theories that might reveal the answer.

Firstly, around 125,000 years ago, it could have been the case that the East Lyn river originally flowed westwards here, parallel to the sea, before joining it near Lee Bay. On its journey, the river would have carved out the steep-sided valley of the Rocks (see left). At this time, the coastline would have extended further north, but years of erosion caused the cliffs to retreat inland. As the cliffs



retreated, the ridge of land between the river and the sea became narrower. Eventually, it became easier for the river to simply flow over the cliffs and down to the sea at Lynmouth rather than continue to flow westwards through the Valley of the Rocks (see above right).



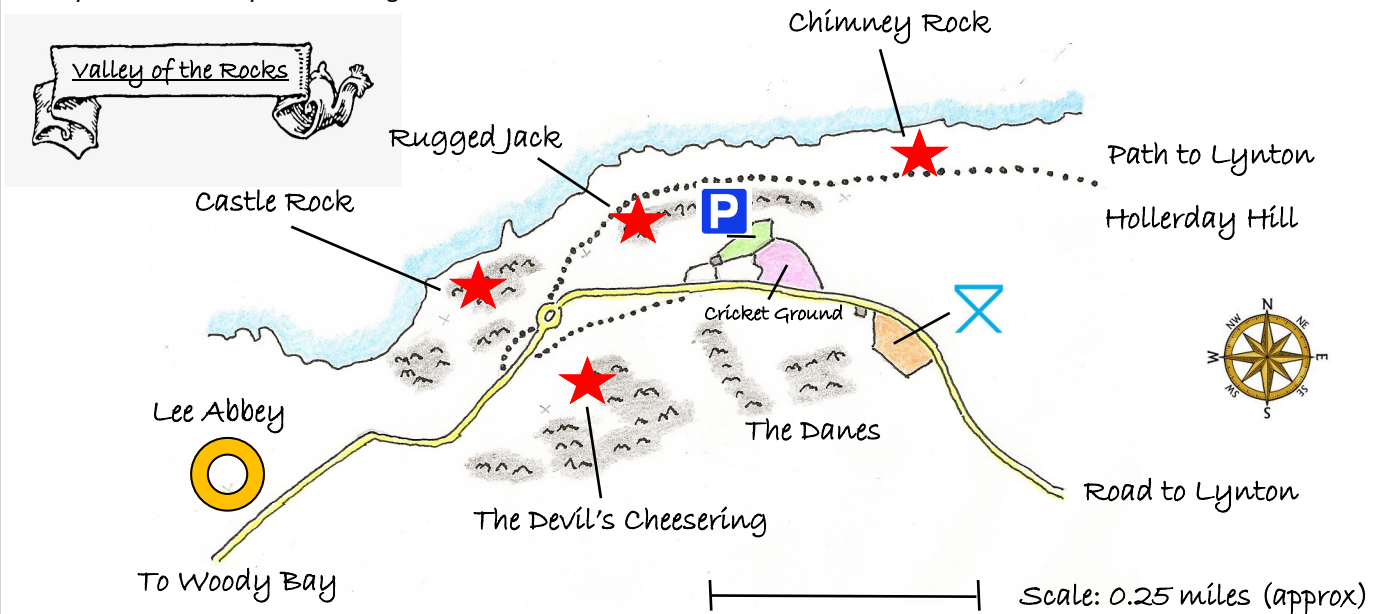
The second theory has a connection to ice. This valley was located at the southern end of a vast ice sheet that pressed against the Exmoor cliffs in the penultimate cold period of the Ice Age between 120,000 and 200,000 years ago. Once the ice arrived it blocked the path of the Lyn rivers causing them to overflow and create a lake. The lake eventually overflowed and the waters ran west (aided by meltwater) to carve a new channel – the Valley of the Rocks. Years later, when the ice retreated, the river returned to its original course, and the Valley of the Rocks drained to be left dry.

The footpath eventually connects to the road that runs through the valley. As you reach the road, look to the right and try to identify the shape of the 'White Lady', formed by cracks and fissures amongst the boulders of Castle Rock. On the opposite side of the valley to Castle Rock is the rocky area known as 'The Danes' that includes the feature called 'The Devil's Cheese Ring' – home to the white witch Mother Meldrum (the White Lady herself), a

(continued overleaf)

character from R D Blackmore's famous novel 'Lorna Doone'.

5. It is possible to shorten the walk from here, and return to Lynton. If so desired, turn left on the road, and stride out past some car parks, a picnic area and a toilet block. There is also a café alongside the road if you are in need of refreshment. Continue past one of the most picturesque cricket grounds in the country to find a path leading off to the left and signed to Lynton and Lynmouth via North Walk. This will lead you back to the coastal path whereupon you can retrace your steps back to Lynton. Alternatively, for a shorter but less scenic walk, you can follow the road back directly to the town.
6. To complete the longer circular route, turn right at the road to follow a combination of path and road (still the South West Coast Path) westwards to the impressive Gothic mansion buildings of Lee Abbey. An old manor house once stood on this site, occupied by the Wichehalse family from 1628 to 1713, initially because plague threatened their Barnstaple home. The present 'Abbey', a mansion of no ecclesiastic origins, was built in 1850 for a private owner, but later became a hotel. It is now home to a vibrant international Christian community, and a venue for retreats, conferences and holidays.
7. When you reach the Abbey, turn off the road on a track to the left that leads via some switchback bends through Six Acre Wood. It eventually passes through Six Acre Farm, and then on to form a junction with Lydiate Lane.
8. Turn left into Lydiate Lane, immediately passing a caravan and camping site. Continue along this peaceful country lane back into the town of Lynton. There are plenty of independent shops and cafes here to enjoy before you end your walk.
9. Work your way through the streets of Lynton to the Town Hall which also houses a tourist information centre. On the left of the façade is a bust of local businessman Sir George Newnes who funded the cliff railway. Head from here back to the cliff railway station where your walk began.



**Answers to Curiosity Questions:**

- # In 1797, two famous English writers visited the Valley of the Rocks and wrote a prose tale called 'The Wanderings of Cain'. Can you name them? (*Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth*)
- # What is the gradient of the cliff railway? (57%)
- # Lynmouth is perhaps best known for the Great Flood Disaster caused by the Lyn rivers. In what year did this take place? (August 15th, 1952)
- # Lynton was once the terminus for a narrow-gauge railway that connected to which other north Devon town? (Barnstaple)

