

**Location & Access:**

Blackchurch Rock is located 2.5 kilometres to the west of the village of Clovelly in north Devon. The walk starts in the National Trust car park at Brownsham (SS 284 259) reached by turning off the B3248 road between Clovelly and Hartland. A regular bus service (service 319) runs from Barnstaple to Bideford to Hartland .



Blackchurch Rock—photo: Paul Berry

**Key Geography:** Stunning section of the South West Coast Path that includes a visit to Blackchurch Rock, a 'starch' – a combination of a 'stack' and an 'arch'.

**Description:**

This short circular walk starts at the National Trust car park at Brownsham, which is reached by turning off the B3248 road between Clovelly and Hartland. After leaving the car park entrance, the route begins by turning left down the access road to Lower Brownsham Farm, before turning right down a broad track signed to Mouth Mills. Stay on this path that takes you through Brownsham Woods until eventually meeting a track junction marked by a public bridleway fingerpost. The left track here would take you directly to Mouth Mill, but the circular route demands that you continue on the right hand track that crosses the stream.

After about 100 metres, turn right onto a rocky track that emerges from the woods at a field gate. Continue straight ahead along the field edge to another gate, and then head diagonally uphill towards a lonely metal gate isolated in the middle of the field. Continue uphill until you reach a track and a gate at the top. From here, you can look back to catch a glimpse of the sea beyond Mouth Mill which will be reached later in the walk. Continue along the track, which will take you past Clovelly Court Farm. The track becomes tarmac at this point, and takes you towards Clovelly Court House. Turn right opposite the estate office and pass through the ornamental entrance gates. Check out the interesting inscription on the cottage next to the gates as you pass through.

Turn left outside the gates and continue the route downhill along the road pavement until you reach a small car park. From here, you could carry straight on to visit the village of Clovelly before turning back onto the coast path. If you prefer, you can turn left at the car park and pass through some wooden gates signed 'Coast Path'. A well-trodden path *(continued overleaf)*

**Curiosity Questions:**

- # Part of this walking route follows the South West Coast Path. How long is this footpath in total?
- # Limestone was shipped from South Wales to feed the lime kilns along this stretch of coast. What other product was imported here from South Wales?
- # At Windbury Hill (on the alternative return route) there is an Iron Age fortress. What were the years of the Iron Age?

**Further information:** <https://www.walkingbritain.co.uk/walk-1719-description>  
<https://getoutside.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/local/blackchurch-rock-torridge>

**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

leads through woodland with occasional glimpses of the high cliffs and sea below. The path passes a couple of ornamental shelters, and it's worth stopping at the second one, the 'Angel Wings', to admire the carved figures in the roof eaves. Both shelters were built in the early 19th century by the owner of Clovelly Court to enjoy views over the bay.

The path continues through woodland, and a signed extension to a viewpoint is worth taking. There has been some recent cliff collapse by the path here, so it may be closed if it has become too dangerous. If the viewpoint is accessible, it offers a great aerial perspective of Blackchurch Rock on the pebble beach below.

Retrace your steps to the main path, and continue the descent to Mouth Mill, where a stream runs over a boulder beach into the sea. To the right of the beach is the imposing formation of Blackchurch Rock, and if you have timed your visit with low tide, you can walk around the rock and get a view from all sides. Blackchurch Rock is a stack that has been separated from the cliffline by sea erosion. It is an example of an advanced stage in the marine erosion of a syncline, with beds of shale and sandstone highly tilted with the strike face fronting the ocean. Wave action has isolated part of the limb of the syncline by working along weaker bedding planes, and has attacked the less resistant layers of mudstone, opening up two 'windows' or arches within the stack. The layers of sediments were once lying flat, but have been contorted into giant upfolds by earth movements that took place during the Variscan mountain-building period around 300 million years ago. These layers were later inclined or overturned before being refolded into a series of much smaller folds. The lines of folding are clearly visible in Blackchurch Rock itself, while the cliffs behind show near vertical layers of sediment.

Across the sea, you should have a good view of Lundy Island – unless it is obscured by haze or low cloud. Lundy is much younger than the rocks of the coastline you are standing on, the remains of volcanic actions that took place a mere 50 to 60 million years ago. With the help of binoculars, you should be able to pick out the Old Light on the top of the island, and the quarry cottages on the facing slopes of the island, about a third of the way along.

When you are ready, leave the beach with the stream on your left, and follow the path that takes you past the ruined buildings of the mill and the old lime kilns that used to burn limestone brought across the sea from South Wales. This was then used to sweeten the acidic soils of north Devon. Continue on the woodland path, which will eventually take you back to your start point. Alternatively, after 200 metres, take a sharp right turn at a fingerpost leading to the coast path. There are excellent views to enjoy here towards Windbury Head, before a path leaves the coast path and crosses a couple of fields before entering Breckland Wood. At a junction, follow the sign to Brownsham, and the path will return you to your start point in the car park.

*(continued overleaf)*

**Answers to Curiosity Questions:**

# Part of this walking route follows the South West Coast Path. How long is this footpath in total? (630 miles)

# Limestone was shipped from South Wales to feed the lime kilns along this stretch of coast. What other product was imported here from South Wales? (Coal—or culm)

# At Windbury Hill (on the alternative return route) there is an Iron Age fortress. What were the years of the Iron Age? (800 BC to 43 AD)

