

**Location & Access:**

Buses travel several times a day on the A39 between Barnstaple and Lynton, alight north of Parracombe (2 miles away). For timetable information, visit Traveline or phone 0871 200 22 33.

Cycle route 51 runs nearby.

Parking - The National Trust Car Park and The Hunters Inn. Postcode for sat navs: EX31 4PY.



*Heddon's Mouth—photo: Paul Berry*

**Key Geography:** Stunning section of the South West Coast Path that includes a visit to a sheltered pebble beach at Heddon's Mouth. Ice Age scree slopes. Footpaths link to other areas of the Exmoor National Park.

**Description:**

This is a very short circular walk of 2.2 miles along a flat, well-surfaced path that is also accessible for all-terrain wheelchair vehicles. 'Tramper' mobility scooters can be hired (booked in advance) from the National Trust shop by the car park. This walk has the advantage of a nice pub at the end that serves a decent pint of beer. If you want a bit more exercise, you can extend the walk along the south west coast path to Woody Bay, making a total journey of around 5 and a half miles.

Next to the National Trust car park is the National Trust shop (grid ref SS655480), where the walk begins. Public toilets are available here.

Turn right as you exit the shop, and walk down the road towards the Hunter's Inn. Keeping the Inn to your right, pick up the signed path to Heddon's Mouth. The path takes you through ancient woodland with the river Heddon running alongside you to the left.

The path reaches a stone bridge, but do not cross the river here – stay on the east side all the way to Heddon's Mouth. As the valley opens out on its approach to the sea, you get some great views of giant scree slopes cladding the steep sides of the valley. These were created during the last Ice Age when the summer thawing of the top layer of permafrost resulted in a slow flow of loose rock and soil down the steep slopes of the valley sides.

As you approach the coast, cross a small wooden bridge signed 'access to the beach' rather than continue straight on to a point where you would need to take your shoes and socks off to cross the river.

*(continued overleaf)*

**Curiosity Questions:**

- # The footpath through the valley is surrounded by sessile oaks. How are these trees different from English oak trees?
- # 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?
- # The Devonian sandstone cliffs either side of the beach are some of the highest in England. How old are they?
- # The Heddon valley is home to one of the UK's rarest butterflies. What is its name?

**Further information:**

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/heddon-valley](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/heddon-valley)

[www.uksouthwest.net/devon/heddons-mouth/](http://www.uksouthwest.net/devon/heddons-mouth/)

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At the head of the beach, you will pass a 19th Century lime kiln, restored by the National Trust in 1982. Limestone and coal were brought across the Bristol Channel from South Wales and burnt in the kiln to make the lime needed to counteract the acidity of the local soil.

The towering cliffs at either side of Heddon's Mouth are some of the highest in England - made from Devonian sandstone formed around 400 million years ago. The mouth of the valley opens out into a boulder, pebble and shingle beach, with curious seals often around in the bay, checking out the visitors.

The Exmoor coastline here is of great geological importance, especially at Hollowbrook, just a little way to the east of the dramatic cliffs to your right as you approach the beach where there is a visible boundary between the Lynton Beds and the Hangman Sandstone Group. These cliffs mark the southern shoreline of the Old Red Sandstone continent.

The remoteness of the beach made it a favourite haunt of smugglers in the past, and there are stories too of Nazi U-boats putting into the bay here during World War II for supplies of fresh water.

You can retrace your steps back up the valley, this time with the river on your left hand side. The path meets up with the stone bridge, where you can cross back to the original path to complete your walk back to the National Trust shop and car park, enjoying the different vistas seen from this direction.

The nearby Hunter's Inn provides excellent refreshments, and has a large beer garden. The Heddon Valley was a popular tourist location in Victorian times, and, spotting a commercial proposition, a family by the name of Berry (not related to me as far as I know) started serving beer from the kitchen of their thatched cottage at the start of the valley. Unfortunately, the cottage burnt down in 1895, but was replaced with the building now known as Hunter's Inn, which has quenched many a thirst itself since that time. The inn owned a lot of the land around the valley before selling it to the National Trust, and at one time it was one of the largest employers in the area. More details of this dog-friendly hostelry can be found in the 'Place to Eat' section of the web site.

*(continued overleaf)*

**Answers to Curiosity Questions:**

# The footpath through the valley is surrounded by sessile oaks. How are these trees different from English oak trees? *(They have stalkless acorns and the leaves have longer stalks)* # 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)*

# The Devonian sandstone cliffs either side of the beach are some of the highest in England. How old are they? *(400 million years)* # The Heddon valley is home to one of the UK's rarest butterflies. What is its name? *(High brown fritillary)*

