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Hope Cove to Bantham

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Pay and display car park at Hope Cove (Outer Hope) (SX 676402)
Ordnance Survey map	OL20 South Devon – Brixham to Newton Ferrers.
Distance	6.8 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This walk from Hope Cove to Bantham follows the well marked coast path as it circles around Thurlstone golf course to Bantham. It passes the water meadows and sand dunes at South Milton Sands and South Milton Ley, both of which are important nature reserves. The latter has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest, used as a roost by migrating swallows and by starlings in winter. Little egrets and stonechats (and others) may also be seen not to mention the elusive otter – if you are exceptionally lucky!

The walk passes the unusual Thurlstone Rock with its arch and affords good views across to Burgh Island with its art deco hotel. As you turn the corner at the mouth of the River Avon, you may well be entertained by surfers who come here, sometimes in large numbers, to enjoy the waves.

Hope Cove where the walk starts is most easily reached by turning west off the A381 at Malborough and on leaving the village, forking right to Outer Hope. The other part of the village is Inner Hope but the two are not directly connected by road, though there is a footpath. The walk starts at the pay and display car park at Outer Hope.

Before starting the walk, it is worth a wander around the village and its little harbour and especially through to Inner Hope where there is a picturesque group of thatched cottages.

There are refreshment opportunities en route in pubs at Thurlstone and Bantham plus a popular beach café at South Milton Sands and toilets. There are also various benches along the way where you can enjoy a packed lunch whilst taking in the nice views. There are public toilets also at Bantham in the car park.

This is an easy walk overall hence the green traffic light symbols. However there is a short steep climb up a field shortly after Bantham, guaranteed to make you puff a little!

Start: Exit the car park (SX 676402) and turn right. As the road bends right, the coast path, indicated by the acorn sign, goes straight ahead and a public footpath fingerpost indicates “Bantham 4 miles”.

After a few yards, take the steps on the left and climb to the Hope Cove viewpoint where there is an information board. On a clear day you can see (with binoculars) the Eddystone Lighthouse and the stump of Smeaton’s Tower alongside (Smeaton’s

Tower is now erected on Plymouth Hoe). I am usually sceptical about such promised sightings but on the day I did this walk the murky outline of the lighthouse was visible as evidenced by the rather poor quality telephoto shot alongside this text. A dotted line on the information board shows you which way to look.

Continue along the cliff tops and as you begin to get views of Thurlstone Rock, the path descends slightly turns inland briefly (SX 676411). On reaching a road, turn left following the fingerpost for "Thurlstone 1¼ miles".

The tarmac road peters out to a broad gravel track at the National Trust property of South Milton Sands where there are managed water meadows on the right. An information board by the café gives further information.

Just beyond the café are public toilets. Turn left here to continue following the coast path. It leads to a long narrow footbridge at South Milton Lea Nature Reserve. At its far end, another information board tells you about the Reserve.

On reaching a tarmac lane through a kissing gate, turn left and follow the lane for 100 yards or so before branching off left at a right hand bend. After going across a car park, go left to follow tarmac path. This briefly becomes a metalled lane before the coast path turns left across the dunes to the obvious route across the cliffs. You are now on Thurlstone Golf Club territory and, not least for your own safety, you should stick to the footpath. You will pass a public footpath marker post for Leas Foot Sand.

Continue to follow the coast path passing through a kissing gate on to the Evans Estate where a public footpath fingerpost indicates "Coast Path to Ferry". Follow its direction, though we are not taking the ferry.

Here (SX 664437) there is the option to take the short diversionary route around the little peninsular which juts out into the River Avon estuary, adding about half a mile to the walk route. This starts off along sand dunes and is worth the excursion for a look at Jenkins Quay and its pretty thatched boathouse and the view across the water of the River Avon to Bantham.

If the tide is low, you can see the sandbar causeway across to Burgh Island and its attractive art deco hotel. To get to the island, you have to go via Bigbury at the other side of the estuary. There is a ferry across but it is very limited in operation and I have excluded its use on this walk.

Whether you go via the peninsular or not, (ignoring the track down to the ferry, other than to see the view) arrive at and pass through the estate gates. Walk along the main street of the village and at the Sloop Inn (SX 670437), turn right to follow the footpath along its left hand side.

Cross a stile and turn immediately left. Follow the left boundary of this field as it curves round to a stile by a gate. Cross it and the path zig-zags right then left and is then clearly visible up the steep hill, bearing slightly left through the hedge (ignore

the stile on the left immediately after passing the gap in the hedge). There are good views here back to the estuary and Burgh Island.

The path crosses a broad track between two large stone gateposts and continues straight ahead. Ignore the footpath on the right into the golf course. There is a footpath marker for Thurlstone straight ahead which is your route.

The flat topped spire of Thurlstone's 12th Century Church comes into view, on top of which a firepan once served as a lighthouse. Follow the path to the church and turn right at a broad stony track behind the church. At a rough cobbled track by the war memorial, turn left. At the road, our route turns right but before proceeding further, you might like to turn left for a look at Thurlstone Village with its attractive thatched cottages and pub.

Stay on the road passing Thurlstone Golf Club car park and at its far end, cross a stile on the right (SX 674424) and follow the obvious route back to the coast path where you turn left to retrace your steps to Hope Cove.

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