

Further information

Maps
OS Explorer 1:25000 sheet 115 (Exeter and Sidmouth).
The 1:50000 OS Landranger sheet 192 is also useful but not detailed enough for navigation without the notes below on hand.

Ottery St Mary Tourist Information Centre 01404 813864

An audio version of this walk, and further information is available from www.coleridge memorial.org.uk (see QR code below)



Introduction

The walk detailed here describes a circular route in the Otter Valley. If you are walking the East Devon Way, you can use the route to make a detour up to Ottery St Mary.

Also included are two shorter excursions from Ottery St Mary to significant Coleridge locations. The first is to the place where, at the age of seven, he hid all night after a fight with his brother, causing a great stir in the entire town. The second is to Pixies' Parlour - the place which inspired his *Songs of the Pixies* and where he 'anointed' his 'Faery Queen'. This walk is along the Coleridge Link in any case. (See also Pixies' Parlour information below).

The nine mile (14.5Km) route described begins at St Saviour's Bridge in Ottery St Mary, goes south and eastwards to White Cross at the top of East Hill, then

west to the river Otter at Harford, then returns northwards to Ottery along the western bank of the river. The walk is generally easy going but requires proper footwear, especially in the winter months when the paths can be muddy or waterlogged in places. The eastern leg of the Link is just over 2.8 miles long (4.5Km) and rises 620 feet between Pixies' Parlour and White Cross (where the route joins the East Devon Way). The views from here are more than worth the climb, however. The East Devon Way going westward drops down 650 feet in the 2.5 miles (4Km) to the river at Harford. The walk back to Ottery St. Mary rises only about 30 feet along the 3.5 miles (5.5Km) return path. The round trip is just under 9 miles (14.5Km).

Most waymarkers are tagged with the Coleridge Link Logo. The East Devon Way leg is marked by purple arrows and/or the Foxglove logo.

published by Coleridge Memorial Project © 2011
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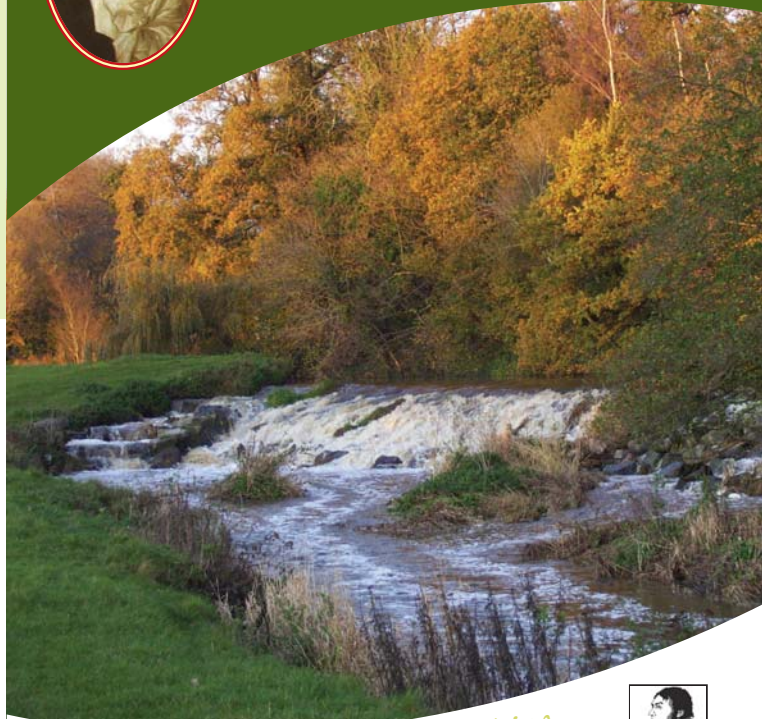
photos: Chris Wakefield, Peter Beasley. Map base - Google Maps.



Devon

Coleridge Link

Explore the countryside familiar to the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge on this waymarked nine mile walking route in the beautiful Otter Valley. Discover the sources of his poetic inspiration for *Songs of the Pixies* and *Sonnet to the River Otter*.



www.coleridge memorial.org.uk/walking



Excursion one - Coleridge's Big Night Out

This short excursion takes you to the place where Coleridge, aged seven, spent an October night out by the river after a row with his brother. The story comes from Coleridge himself in an autobiographical letter to his friend Tom Poole in 1797:

'Dear Poole,

I had asked my mother one evening to cut my cheese *entire*, so that I might toast it: this was no easy matter as it was a *crumbly* cheese. My mother, however did it. I went to the garden for something or other, and in the meantime my brother Frank, *minced* my cheese - 'to disappoint the favorite'. I returned, saw the exploit, and in an agony of passion flew at Frank - he pretended to have been seriously hurt by my blow, flung himself on the ground, and there lay with outstretched limbs - I hung over him moaning & in a great fright - he leaped up, & with a horse-laugh gave me a severe blow in the face. I seized a knife, and was running at him, when my Mother came in & took me by the arm - I expected a flogging - & struggling from her I ran away, to a hill at the bottom of which the Otter flows - about one mile from Ottery. There I stayed; my rage died away; but my obstinacy vanquished my fears - & taking out a little shilling book which had, at the end, morning & evening prayers, I very devoutly repeated them thinking at the same time with inward & gloomy satisfaction, how miserably my Mother must be!

I distinctly remember my feelings when I saw a Mr Vaughan pass over the Bridge, at about a furlong's distance - and how I watched the Calves in the fields beyond the river. It grew dark - & I fell asleep - it was towards the latter end of October - & it proved a dreadful stormy night - I felt the cold in my sleep, and dreamt that I was pulling the blanket over me, & actually pulled over me a dry thorn bush, which lay on the hill - in my sleep I had rolled from the top of the hill to within three yards of the River, which flowed by the unfenced edge of the bottom. I awoke several times, and finding myself

wet & stiff, and cold, closed my eyes again that I might forget it. In the mean time my Mother waited about half an hour, expecting my return, when the *Sulks* had evaporated - I not returning, she sent into the Church-yard, & round the town - not found! - Several men & all the boys were sent to ramble about & seek me - in vain! My Mother was almost distracted - and at ten o'clock at night I was *cry'd* by the crier in Ottery, and in two villages near it - with a reward offered for me. - No one went to bed - indeed, I believe, half the town were up all one night! To return to myself - About five in the morning or a little after, I was broad awake; and attempted to get up & walk - but I could not move - I saw the Shepherds & Workmen at a distance - & cried but so faintly, that it was impossible to hear me 30 yards off and there I might have lain & died - for I was now almost given over, the ponds & even the river near which I was lying, having been dragged. - But by good luck Sir Stafford Northcote, who had been out all night, resolved to make one other trial, and came so near that he heard my crying - He carried me in his arms, for near a quarter of a mile; when we met my father & Sir Stafford's servants. - I remember, & never shall forget, my father's face as he looked upon me while I lay in the servant's arms - so calm, and the tears stealing down his face: for I was the child of his old age.'

To find this spot, walk out of town from the Poetry Stones northwest along the minor road past the long stay car park. After a quarter mile, just past the small bridge over the mill leat, turn right off the road through the stile and follow the path with the leat now on your right. After 200 yards cross the footbridge on your right and walk to the left following the river just beyond the weir. You are now within a few yards of where a seven year old Coleridge spent a cold and windy October night in 1779.



Excursion two - Pixies' Parlour & the Songs of the Pixies

Coleridge's poem *Songs of the Pixies* was inspired by a day out with a small group of young ladies to the Pixies' Parlour.

To find it, follow stages 1 to 3 on the route guide for Coleridge Link overleaf. The poem is introduced by Coleridge as follows:

The Pixies, in the superstition of Devonshire, are a race of beings invisibly small, and harmless or friendly to man. At a small distance from a village in that county, half-way up a wood-covered hill, is an excavation called the Pixies' Parlour. The roots of old trees form its ceiling; and on its sides are innumerable cyphers, among which the author discovered his own cypher and those of his brothers, cut by the hand of their childhood. At the foot of the hill flows the river Otter. To this place the Author, during the summer months of the year 1793, conducted a party of young ladies; one of whom, of stature elegantly small, and of complexion colourless yet clear, was proclaimed the 'Faery Queen'.

The poem begins with a welcome to the walkers...

*Whom the untaught Shepherds call
Pixies in their madrigal,
Fancy's children, here we dwell:
Welcome, Ladies! to our cell.
Here the wren of softest note
Builds its nest and warbles well;
Here the blackbird strains his throat;
Welcome, Ladies! to our cell.*

He explains that the pixies hide in the cave to avoid the daylight, then notes the graffiti scrawled in the walls of the cave - which remains a feature of the cave today.

Coleridge - *A youthful Bard, 'unknown to Fame', was quite taken by one of the young ladies - he 'Wooes the Queen of Solemn Thought', - this is Elizabeth Boufflower, who eventually married the town surgeon Thomas Davy, and lived for most of her life in Raleigh House in Mill Street, Ottery St Mary. The river Otter is once again a central icon in the poem...*

*Then with quaint music hymn the parting gleam
By lonely Otter's sleep-persuading stream;
Or where his wave with loud unquiet song
Dashed o'er the rocky channel froths along;
Or where, his silver waters smoothed to rest,
The tall tree's shadow sleeps upon his breast.*

and Coleridge makes his play by proclaiming Elizabeth a Faery Queen, and paying her some elegant compliments...

*Unboastful Maid! though now the Lily pale
Transparent grace thy beauties meek;
Yet ere again along the impurpling vale,
The purpling vale and elfin-haunted grove,
Young Zephyr his fresh flowers profusely throws,
We'll tinge with livelier hues thy cheek;
And, haply, from the nectar-breathing Rose
Extract a Blush for Love!*

The Pixies' Parlour you find today is little changed since Coleridge and his young ladies appeared there in 1793. It retains its magic, and often you will find signs of a modern response by the young who still attend the court of the pixies.



Coleridge Link

Route guide and context notes



St. Saviour's Bridge

1 St Saviour's Bridge (SY093951)

Built originally by Bishop Grandisson in the mid 14th century, this is the latest of several bridges at or very near this point on the river Otter. Most have been swept away in periodic flooding. The most recent bridge was built in 1851 and widened in 1992 (see the wall plaque on the western parapet). Its name derives from a chapel next to the bridge, dedicated in 1355, built probably on the eastern bank. The chapel was a stopping point for the religious processions which were a regular feature of town life in the middle ages. It was demolished in the 1540s.

Head 200 yards south to the Millennium Bridge.

2 Millennium Bridge

Built to commemorate the new millennium in 2000.

Cross the bridge and turn right to the waymarker on top of the flood bank. Follow the path to the next footbridge over a back run of the river. Cross the bridge and turn right up to the gate and waymarker on the skyline. Follow the path along the cliff edge above the river and take the next path-gate on your right. Follow the path down through the woods to Pixies' Parlour.

3 Pixies' Parlour (SY095944)

This tiny cave in the soft sandstone cliffs that border the floodplain at this point is now a hallowed monument to Coleridge's youthful poetic spirit. In the summer of 1793, on a rare visit back home to Ottery, he took a small party of young ladies on a stroll to Pixies' Parlour. His recollection of the day was spun into a poem - *Songs of the Pixies* (see separate panel for more information). The *Songs*... are on the Coleridge memorial website www.coleridge-memorial.org.uk/

Continue past Pixies' Parlour to the gate in the fence. Follow the hedge on your left to the field gate, then bear left and upwards along the wide track towards the lake on your left.

4 Knightstone Lake (SY098943)

This is an artificial lake probably constructed in the medieval period to supply freshwater fish to Knightstone Manor. Continue along the track to the road (B3177) which you cross (blind corners straddle this crossing point - if in a large group, please cross one or two at a time - do not crocodile across the road). Bear left along the lane signed to Knightstone Manor. 150 yards on the right at the waymarker is a sharp right turn back up into a field. You may continue into the field, or take a 10 minute detour to Knightstone Manor

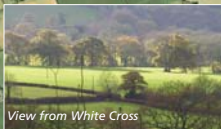
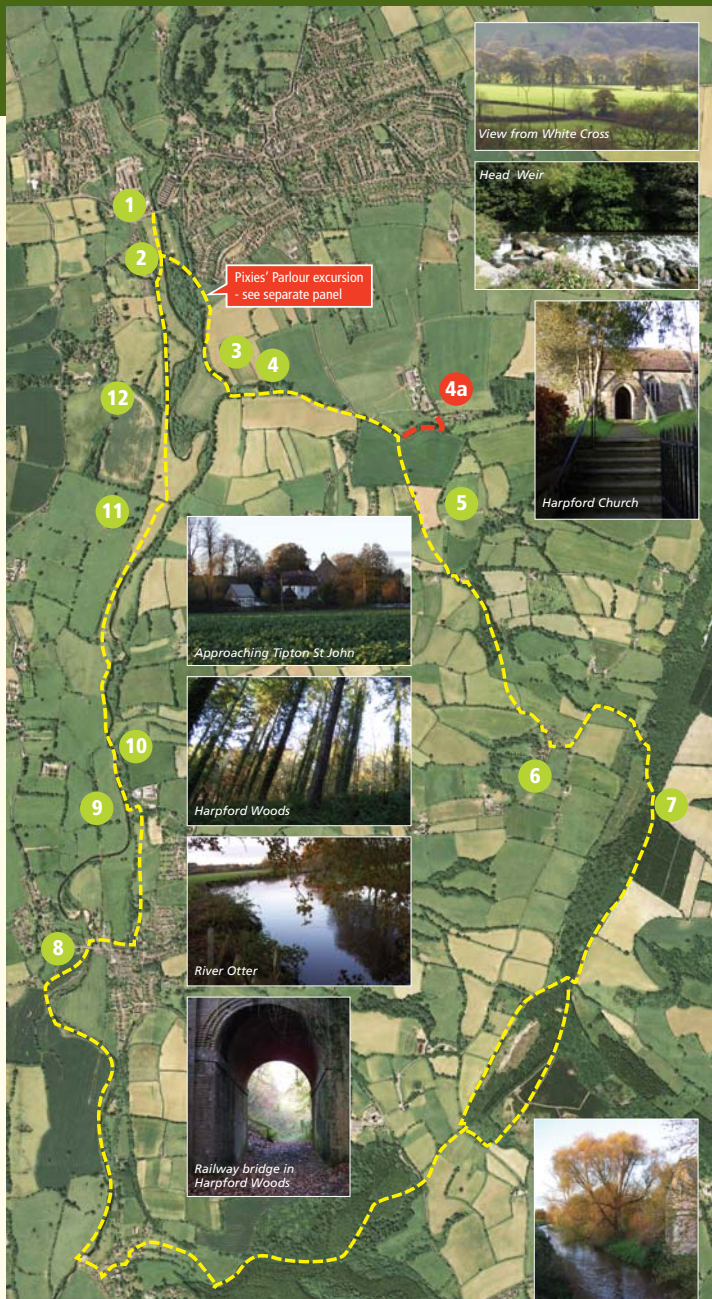
4a Knightstone Manor detour

A short detour is required if you want to have a brief look at this ancient Ottery house. It is NOT open to the public and is in private occupation although it can be glimpsed through the gates from the public right-of-way running back towards Ottery St Mary at SY107942. Knightstone is a sub-manor of Ottery St Mary that dates from the early Norman period first recorded in 1284. In its long and eventful history it has been much changed, the modern house dating mainly from rebuilding during the 16th and 17th centuries, but retaining its medieval foundations. It was owned at one time by Lady Cicely Grey, Marchioness of Dorset, who was a benefactor of St Mary's Church, and who paid for the construction of the Dorset aisle, completed in 1520 just before such piety was brought into question during the Reformation. Return to the waymarker and field entrance where you started the detour.

When you reach the top of the bank into the field, stand facing the solitary oak tree in the middle of the field to the south. The path is not always well defined here if the field is under crops, but it runs in a direct line to the fingerpost and stile on the opposite side (see photo, right). Past the stile, keep the hedge on your immediate right. At 10 o'clock on your left is a striking conical hill, variously called Round Ball Hill, Tit Hill or the Wiggaton Hump.

5 The Wiggaton Hump (SY107936)

The unusually symmetrical conical form of this hill has prompted much speculation about its historic significance. At least one notable local historian working in the 1930s declared it a potential burial monument for a famous British prince after a local battle with Anglo Saxon invaders. This may not fit with modern ideas of landscape history and archaeology, but the hump remains beguiling - there are suggestions of earthworks in the vicinity, and the lie of the land on and around it poses questions about its past use possibly as a ritual site in common with similar shaped 'Ball' hills at other locations close to the East Hill ridge. No final answer has emerged to date and the hill retains its secrets. There is no right of way over the top of the hump.



View from White Cross



Head Weir



Harford Church



Approaching Tipton St John



Harford Woods



River Otter



Railway bridge in Harford Woods



Tipton Mill Weir



The path away from Knightstone



Pixies' Parlour



Round Ball Hill, Wiggaton



View from White Cross



Tipton Mill

7 White Cross (SY115924)

From here the views over East and Mid Devon offer a spectacular panoramic sweep from Dartmoor to Exmoor, both over 30 miles distant (48km). The bank below the carpark is a perfect picnic spot if the weather is amenable!

From White Cross leave the view behind you and take the wide track leading out of the car parking area into the wood (waymarked East Devon Way - purple arrow). Follow the path to Hollow Head Cross (SY112915) where a deep gully on your right leads to another spectacular view over the Otter Valley. The path now leaves the East Devon Way briefly. Turn left at the end of the deep gully and head downwards and southwards. Pass behind Fire Beacon Cottage (SY109914) and head along the contour to the minor road, (admiring the views to your right) On reaching the road, turn left for 50 yards then sharp right down the steps to the stile and waymarkers where you join the East Devon Way again.

Follow the hedge on your right (which is the Ottery parish boundary) down to the next field, then on down to the gate slightly to your left. Cross the B3177 with care at SY105906 and head off into the woods opposite following the purple waymarkers. The path begins in thick conifer plantation but soon drops down and enters a broadleaf wood. You will find remains of the old railway line from Ottery to Sidmouth along the course of this walk.

Join the road (Knapps Lane) at SY02903 and head downhill for 100 yards then left 50 yards and right at the church, passing the rather grand vicarage below the church. After another 100 yards turn right at the finger post and head towards the river at Harford Bridge (SY089903).

You leave the East Devon Way at this point and head north on the west bank of the river Otter. The path is well marked and easy going all the way, if a little muddy in wet weather.

8 Tipton St John

After about a mile you will reach Tipton St John, a small village huddled around the river crossing here, called the 'southernmost ford' in a charter of 1061. The bridge and the 'St John' part of the name came much later. Tipton has a keen sense of its own worth and has kept its school and central pub - the Golden Lion. There is little of architectural interest in Tipton save for Hayne Farm - a substantial establishment dating from the late medieval period.

Turn right at the road and walk over the bridge to the Golden Lion, continuing on the left of the road to the finger post pointing left 50 yds past the Village Shop. After 400 yards, at the Mill, cross the bridge over the river.

9 Tipton Mill (SY092923)

The mill here is also of medieval origin. Parts of it appear to be Tudor in origin with many later additions and alterations. The building, although gloriously untidy, is still in private ownership although a number of public rights of way cross the property. The remains of the last waterwheel are visible on the north side of the building and can be seen as you continue north along the west bank of the river. A little further up the river you can see a new green energy installation - an Archimedes screw turbine which supplies electricity to the Mill.

10 Tipton Mill Weir (SY091925)

Another 200 yards up the river is the weir built to power the watermill. This is a massive work of engineering, requiring some new banking on the riverside and installation of many tons of heavy rocks. Although the head of water is now put to work again producing green energy, the rush and twist of the river over-running the huge stone dam is diverting enough in its own right to suggest a pause for contemplation here.

Turn north again and begin the long, level walk along the floodplain towards Ottery.

In many of the fields you cross there are hollows and ditches carved by the river as it has moved around over time. The river Otter shifts its course quite rapidly as it traverses the parish, and the old river courses can be found crossing and recrossing the floodplain in dozens of places.

11 Salston Manor

As you approach Ottery, you will see in the distance on your left the Salston Manor Hotel (SY090943). Now closed, this was formerly the residence of William Hart Coleridge, a great nephew of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, bishop of Barbados and the Leeward Islands. Most of it was built by the Bishop himself, who died in 1849. The west wing is earlier, restored after a fire (a house on this site appears on a map of 1765). The east extension is late 19th century.

12 The Railway Line

As you approach Ottery, the path again joins the old Sidmouth branch line. This is a recent re-alignment of the footpath due to the rapid erosion of the western river bank (an example of the river changing its course as mentioned earlier). The railway arrived in Ottery in 1874 with a branch from Tipton St John to Budleigh Salterton added in 1897. It closed in 1967.

Before the railway track terminates, the path turns sharp right by a large culvert (SY093947) and heads towards the river which it follows back to the Millennium Bridge and St Saviours Bridge.

6 Waxway (SY111926)

Waxway and Blacklake Farms are both very old. They appear in records dating back to the 13th century but their names suggest an Anglo Saxon origin. They are built with the long axis down the slope to permit draining of the animal waste from the byre inside the house also occupied by the farmer and his family. The track on which you approach Waxway is also very old - one of hundreds of ancient roads and green lanes found all over Devon. The track is metalled with packed stone, still apparent in the centre but worn away in the cart and tractor ruts. These served the farms and hamlets that have been around here for at least a thousand years.

When you reach the road next to Waxway House, go left up the hill to the junction then left again for about 250 yards to the first right turn (SY113928) heading up to the top of East Hill. The final half mile is a steep climb rising 250 feet up the minor road leading to White Cross.