

WALKING IN CORNWALL

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40 COAST, COUNTRY AND MOORLAND WALKS

by Graham Uney

CICERONE

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Front cover: Exploring the granite outcrops on Showery Tor (Walk 6) (photo: Olivia Abbott)

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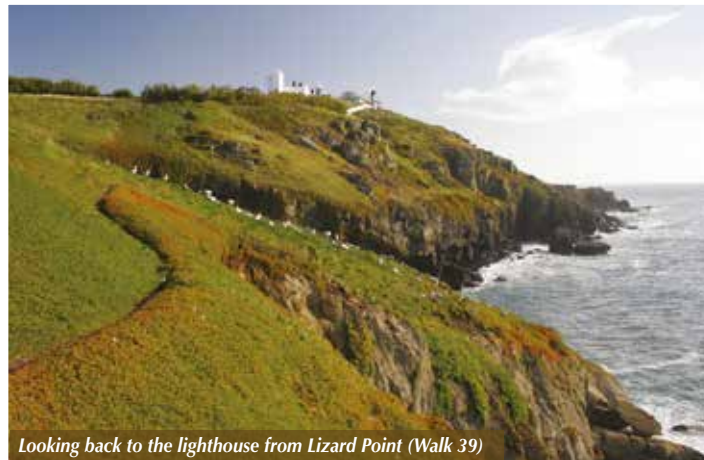
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Bodmin Moor (Walks 1–7) is a real paradise for walkers who love to explore wild country



INTRODUCTION



Looking back to the lighthouse from Lizard Point (Walk 39)

The county of Cornwall is home to both the British mainland's most southwesterly point at Lands's End, and most southerly at Lizard Point. The county stretches into the Atlantic Ocean for almost 130km from its boundary with Devon, which largely follows the River Tamar, rising not far from the north coast then flowing south to reach the sea at Plymouth. Cornwall is thus almost an island, surrounded by the Celtic Sea to the north and west, the English Channel to the south, and the Tamar to the east. The Cornish display a fierce sense of independence; the name 'Kernow' ('Cornwall' in the Cornish language) is seen regularly, town and village

signs appear in English and Cornish, and the black-and-white county flag is very much in evidence. Many will only know Cornwall as a holiday destination, but this is a land steeped in history and tradition with a fascinating industrial heritage.

Walking is the best way to see the county. Many places in Cornwall are only accessible on foot, and the routes described here will take you to the very best places for spectacular scenery, wildlife, prehistory, industrial archaeology, and just for relaxing and getting away from the hustle and bustle of life further east.

Being largely surrounded by water – apart from the land border

with Devon – many of the walks are coastal. There are routes to stunning headlands, to some of the most important industrial sites of a long-ago age, and to some of the top places to see wildlife. Cornwall's coast is remarkably varied: the north and west coasts tend to be more rugged than the south, which is home to the sheltered wooded valleys and broad estuaries of rivers such as the Fowey, Fal and Helford.

But this guide is not all about the coast. Cornwall is also blessed in that at its heart lies one of the most exciting and scenic upland areas in England: Bodmin Moor. Here you will find wild, remote-feeling hills, many of them topped by weirdly shaped granite tors, as well as ancient settlements, burial cairns, and hill forts.

The walking in Cornwall can be surprisingly strenuous, considering that the highest hill in the whole county – Brown Willy – is only 420m above sea level. Many of the routes on Bodmin Moor lead over wild, boggy, pathless terrain; while – as anyone who's ever spent time walking around much of the UK coastline will tell you – any route along a cliff top is likely to involve a fair amount of up and down.

The 40 walks described in this book provide options suitable for all tastes and levels of ability. There are lots of short walks for Sunday strolls, and a fair few longer routes for those who want to head out for more than just a couple of hours. There is also

the opportunity for the serious walker to combine some routes for a more challenging day out (Walks 5 and 7, and 9 and 10). Note that Walks 1–7, on Bodmin Moor, are only suitable for those competent in the use of map and compass.

GEOLOGY

When most people think about which rocks make up Cornwall they immediately picture the huge granite tors that characterise many of the hilltops on Bodmin Moor. This granite sheet forms the backbone of the whole county and is by far the most important, and most obvious, rock type in Cornwall. It was formed when continental plates collided during the Late Paleozoic era 300 million years ago as part of the Cornubian batholith (the great mass of granite that intrudes throughout the southwest peninsula).

Much of the rest of the county is made up of slates from the Devonian period, but there are also outcroppings of sandstones and shales in the northeast from the Carboniferous age. The obvious exception is the peculiar rock of the Lizard peninsula. This is serpentine – a rare section of the oceanic crust which has been thrust to the surface. The only other place in the UK where serpentine is found is as far from the Lizard as it is possible to get – the island of Unst, on the northern tip of the Shetland Islands!

Since the great earth-building process, Cornwall's coastline has

Superb granite tors are a major feature of Bodmin Moor



been subjected to enormous and regular pressure from the Atlantic waves, driven onshore by the prevailing southwesterly winds. This battering has created an impressive coastline, perfect for any walking adventure. The whole array of coastal cliff formations can be seen, including zawns (small steep-sided channels), stacks, arches, caves and blowholes (where the force of the sea has caused the roof of a sea cave to collapse).

HISTORY

There is much we do not know about Cornwall's early people, but it is thought that the original settlers were probably closely linked to Neolithic peoples from Spain, Portugal and northwest France, who arrived around

3000bc. These people are credited with building the great megalithic dolmens (tombs) found in Cornwall, such as Chûn Quoit in Penwith (Walk 25). Around 2500bc the Beaker people, skilled in metalworking, reached Britain and Cornwall, and thus began the Bronze Age. A huge number of menhirs (standing stones), stone circles, barrows (burial mounds) and hut circles from this period can still be seen around Cornwall today, and many are visited on routes described in this book.

The huge tin reserves of both Cornwall and neighbouring Devon began to be exploited by man in the Bronze Age, and by about 1600bc tin from the southwest peninsula was being exported all around Europe. Since the Bronze Age, too, better tools



Chûn Castle (an Iron Age hill fort) stands on the highest part of Chûn Downs (Walk 25)

facilitated the clearing of woodland, encouraging a more settled agricultural existence.

By the start of the Iron Age, in about 750BC, the building of hill forts was common throughout Britain, and there are still many remains of these early structures around Cornwall today (Walks 14, 25 and 32). At around this time the Celts began to spread across Britain from the Continent – the language they spoke, known as Common Brittonic, evolved into several distinct tongues, including Cornish.

The Roman Conquest of Britain began in AD43, and although Cornwall was felt to be rather remote from the Roman centre of power in the southeast of the country, the road system was extended into the county. Roman milestones have been found in Cornwall: two near St Michael's

Mount, two more at Tintagel, and another on Carn Brea near Redruth. Only three major Roman sites have been located in Cornwall: a fort at Calstock, another at Restormel Castle at Lostwithiel, and a third near Nanstallon.

Individual archaeological sites are detailed in the route descriptions, and there are many more to be found. Take time to study the OS map: if something appears in an antiquated font, it'll be an ancient site of some sort, and is probably well worth visiting.

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

You can't travel very far in Cornwall without seeing evidence of mining: the chimneys of abandoned 19th-century engine houses are visible all over the county, and some sites are thought to have been worked

since the Early Bronze Age (around 2150BC). Copper and tin were the most common metals that were mined, although arsenic, silver, zinc and other metals have also been extracted commercially over the years. There are now no mines in operation in Cornwall – the last one, at South Crofty, closed in 1998 (attempts to reopen it earlier this century have so far been unsuccessful).

In Cornwall the miner goes by the local name 'Cousin Jack', (or at least the many Cornish miners who found their way overseas became known by that name). No one really knows where it originated, but some think it is because the miners were always asking for a job for their cousin Jack back home – Jack being the most popular Christian name in Cornwall at the time. There's a great song titled 'Cousin Jack' by the modern-day popular folk duo Show of Hands, who hail from Devon. The chorus goes:

Where there's a mine or a hole in the ground.

That's where I'm heading for, that's where I'm bound.

Look for me under the lode, or inside a vein.

Where the copper and clay, where the arsenic and tin,

Run in your blood they get under your skin.

I'm leaving the county behind, and I'm not coming back.

So follow me down Cousin Jack.

It is said that wherever there was a mine, anywhere in the world, a Cornishman would be working it.

WILDLIFE

Quite apart from the superb walking, for many people the main reason to visit this fabulous county is to see its amazing wildlife. The very first time I made the journey south into Cornwall I stopped the car late in the afternoon at the Levant Mines and walked down to the clifftop. A pair of choughs clacked by on the wind, and a male peregrine sat on top of the mine's chimney, glowering down at me. A great first impression!

So why all this fuss about choughs? This red-billed and red-legged member of the crow family was once common around the coasts of Britain, but by the turn of the 19th century there were only about 300

A young shelduck, recently hatched on the Hayle Estuary (Walk 20)



pairs left, mainly in western Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man. The coastal grazing pastures where choughs like to feed had by and large been ploughed for arable land, and this is thought to have been one of the determining factors in the birds' decline.

The Cornish choughs fared a little better than those from the rest of England, with a few pairs continuing to nest on the seacliffs around the county. The last nesting pair was recorded in 1952, long after the bird had vanished from all other English counties. As the species became all the more rare, it became a prize target for egg collectors and trophy hunters, which only exacerbated the problem.

Then, in 2001, four wild choughs were seen in west Cornwall. Three stayed over the winter, and many people desperately hoped they would return to breed. By mid-April it was clear that two of the birds had built a nest and the female was on eggs – the first breeding choughs in England for 50 years! They can now be seen in a few coastal areas of the county, and their numbers are slowly increasing, so keep an eye out for these wonderful birds when you're on the cliff-top walks in this book.

Birds can be seen everywhere in the county, from the great range of seabirds around the cliffs to the waders and wildfowl spotted on river estuaries.

Cornwall is also a hotspot for birds on migration. Being at the end of the southwest peninsula the county

acts as a funnel, drawing birds along its length as they move south in the autumn, or return in the spring. Many of Cornwall's headlands are the first (or last) stopping point for birds on migration, and at the right times of year (spring and autumn), you could catch sight of all kinds of rarities.

The coastal waters too are rich in sea life, and any walk along a cliff-top or beach might give you great views of common and grey seals. In the summer basking sharks may be seen too.

The county's location at the southern tip of Britain, benefiting from the warming influences of the Gulf Stream, means Cornwall has a very special flora. On the moors look for Cornish Heath (*Erica vagans*), while gorse, heather, ferns, mosses and liverworts can be found in the wetter part such as on boggy ground on Bodmin Moor. In particularly sheltered coastal locations the almost sub-tropical conditions enable palm trees to flourish, along with good showings of the ice plant (*Mesembryanthemum*): see Walk 39 for a wonderful display.

Grey seal at Porth Nanven (Walk 28)



CORNISH LANGUAGE

The Cornish language derived from the original tongue spoken by the Celtic people in the Iron Age. The mother language is known today as Common Brittonic or Old Brittonic. This ancient language evolved as the Celts moved through Britain and Western Europe and settled in different areas. By the 6th century it had split into a number of distinct variations, now known as the Brittonic languages: Cornish, Welsh, Cumbric and Breton.

Cornish, or Kernowek, has undergone something of a revival in recent times, and is considered to be a strong and important part of Cornish identity. It has recently been recognised as a minority language, and is protected as such by European Charter. In 2010 Unesco announced that its former classification of the language as 'extinct' was 'no longer accurate'.

CORNISH FARE

Ask anyone to name one product that's distinctly Cornish, and I bet the vast majority would say 'cream'. So, what's so special about Cornish cream? It is made by heating full-cream cow's milk indirectly with steam, and then leaving it in shallow pans to cool slowly. As it cools the cream rises to the surface and forms 'clots', giving us our much-loved clotted cream. In 1998 the term 'Cornish clotted cream' became a Protected Designation of Origin by European Union Directive. The milk used has to have been produced in

Cornwall, and the fat content has to be a minimum of 55 per cent.

There is a much disagreement between Cornishmen and Devonians about which county clotted cream originated in, and which county makes the best. On your way to Cornwall why not stop and enjoy a Devon tea, then have a Cornish one, and make your own mind up?

Few people get away with a visit to Cornwall without sampling a pasty. It is thought that the Cornish pasty can be traced back to about AD1300. The early pasties were eaten by the poorer people and were filled with potato, swede and onion. Meat was a later addition. By the 18th century the pasty was the staple diet of farmworkers and miners all over Cornwall.

GETTING THERE

Most people will drive into Cornwall, but it is also possible to get there by air, sea, train or coach.

By air

Cornwall has its own regional airport at Newquay. Flybe (tel: 0871 700 2000, www.flybe.com) operates services from Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh, London Gatwick, Manchester, Newcastle and Southend; easyJet (tel: 0843 104 5000, www.easyjet.com) flies from Liverpool only. German Wings (tel: 0906 294 1918, www.germanwings.com) has one flight a week from Dusseldorf (summer only).

WALK 1

The Hurlers and the Cheeseewing

Start/finish	Car park on the west side of Minions village (SX 259 710)
Distance	4½ miles/7.25km
Total ascent	525ft/160m
Time	2–3hrs
Terrain	Rough moorland; some boggy ground and gentle scrambling; good navigation skills essential
Map	OS Explorer 109 Bodmin Moor
Nearest town	Liskeard

This has always been one of my favourite walks on Bodmin Moor. The short stroll to the stone circles of The Hurlers is popular with tourists, but once you head away from there to the gorgeously eroded tor known as the Cheeseewing, and westwards over the wild moors, you will often have the whole place to yourself.

The walk starts from the west side of the village of **Minions**. Start by heading across the moor to the north-west on the well-worn track then, after 200m, branch out northwards towards **The Hurlers**.

The standing stones of **The Hurlers** are not large, but the three separate circles arranged in a line across the moor form a unique grouping not

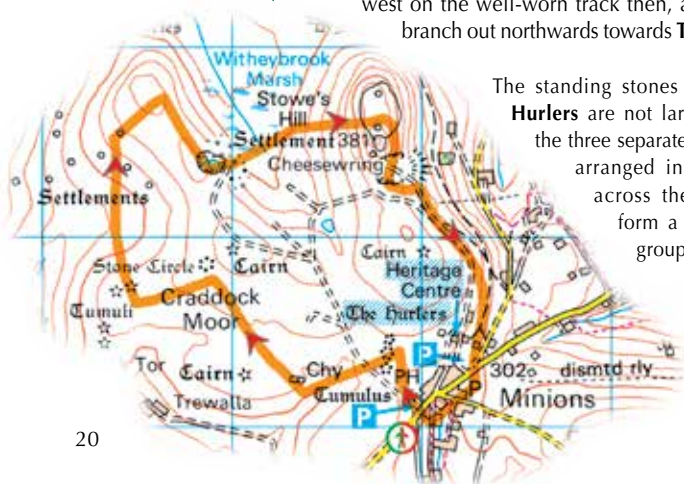
found anywhere else in England. Local legend has it that the stones are the petrified remains of men who dared to play hurling on a Sunday.

Head west over pathless ground, aiming for an abandoned mine chimney on **Craddock Moor**. The route now takes you through some wild country as you head north-west to another stone circle. Walk across a broad ridge to explore old burial mounds above Siblyback Lake, then pick up a faint sheep track that takes you north towards the ancient field systems and settlements overlooking the buildings at Siblyback (SX 243 724).

This whole of Craddock Moor is richly blessed with signs of **Bronze Age man**. There are many burial cairns dotted around the hill, as well as an embanked avenue, a stone row consisting of 50 stones, and of course The Hurlers.

Climb gently to the northeast to reach the top of a ridge at spot height 334m. You can see that you are standing on a broad ridge running away southeast, and our walk takes us along this to the lip of an old granite quarry. Take a compass bearing to the east to cross **Witheybrook Marsh** alongside a field boundary, then continue eastwards up the (thankfully less boggy) slopes of **Stowe's Hill**. The summit is dominated by Stowe's Pound, a possible late Neolithic enclosure, and the granite tor known as **the Cheeseewing**.

The Cheeseewing is a strange pile of granite blocks, which appear to have been balanced very carefully one atop another. The rock formation is entirely natural and towers above Cheeseewing Quarry, from where the high-grade granite was taken for building parts of The Embankment and Tower Bridge in London. Today the quarry is a rock-climbing venue.



The Cheeseewing



Head to the entrance to the quarry, at its southeast corner; from here you can follow the track that was once the railway line. This goes south to a junction where you should go straight ahead, staying on the track as it bears right and passing the remains of the **South Phoenix Mine** before coming out at the road just east of Minions. Turn right along the road and walk through the village back to your car.

WALK 2

Twelve Men's Moor and Trewortha Village

Start/finish	Park sensibly on the roadside of the dead end lane running northwest along the west bank of the River Lynher from the hamlet of Berriowbridge (SX 259 761)
Distance	4 miles/6.5km
Total ascent	790ft/240m
Time	3hrs
Terrain	Pathless wild moorland, often boggy; good navigation skills essential
Map	OS Explorer 109 Bodmin Moor
Nearest town	Launceston

This walk will take you into some pretty remote country, traversing three hills around the ancient settlements of Trewortha.

Start by following a public bridleway northwards from the parking place, immediately entering open access land. Cross the first field along

