

Tunnels for ladies and men, whilst Raparee beach to the east of town was reserved for ladies. Ilfracombe's fame spread as a charming seaside resort.

The town now expanded. Elegant terraced buildings spread up the hillside from the front and many hotels sprang up. Visitors poured in from paddle



steamers which began to ply the channel. In 1906 over 160,000 passengers disembarked. 1874 saw the arrival of the railway which opened the resort to the whole country. By the 1930s as many as 50 mainline expresses would arrive on a summer Saturday, visitors coming from all strata of society.

As elsewhere, after WW2 rail travel declined to be replaced by the car. The line to Ilfracombe closed in 1970. Before long foreign holidays gripped the imagination and became affordable to most, with a consequent decline in UK holidaymaking.



In recent years Ilfracombe has adapted, by catering for different types of visitor including many from abroad, and by offering short breaks spanning the whole year. The town occupies a uniquely attractive coastal setting with fine countryside on its doorstep. The many attractions of North Devon lie within easy reach.

Ilfracombe



A Brief History

The Ilfracombe area has been inhabited since the Iron Age when Celts established a hill fort on Hillsborough, the large hill to the east of the town. The Domesday survey notes the town's name as a derivative from Anglo-Saxon meaning 'Valley of the sons of Alfred'. The town developed as two distinct communities, a farming settlement centred on the parish church, and one based on fishing and maritime activity exploiting the natural harbour. In 1208 the town provided King John with men and ships to invade Ireland, and again for King Henry III in 1246. The first recorded incumbent of the church was Oliver de Tracy in 1272. St Nicholas's chapel on Lantern Hill was built circa 1361 and is the oldest working lighthouse in England.

Throughout the years the town continued to provide men and ships for various wars, The port grew in importance in the 18th and 19th centuries based on shipbuilding, fishing and services to other channel ports and to Ireland. The first lifeboat station was commissioned in 1828. The formation of the Ilfracombe Sea Bathing Co. in 1823 established the town as a holiday resort with access to the Tunnels beaches being worked by Welsh miners. Originally segregated bathing saw separate tidal pools at the

ilfracombe
curious coastal charm

Town Trail

2 From the Landmark up through town, down to the harbour and back.



The working side of the harbour

This leaflet is one of a set of three describing walks starting from Ilfracombe Tourist Information Centre at the Landmark on the seafront. Allow an hour or more.

Walking directions and historical notes

Your detailed walking directions are in boxes (see **1** below). Other text tells you about what's to see. Start at the Tourist Information Centre.



1 From the Tourist Information Centre head half right to the imposing **Emmanuel Church**. Go up the road on its left. At the top go through the **Market Arch** to the High Street.



Emmanuel Church

Emmanuel Church

was built in 1898. Its front room called Space has been converted to a theatre for local amateur dramatic society 'The Studio'.

Further up the road the building on the right is being rebuilt as a Premier Inn. It was formerly the town pannier market, so named after the baskets in which traders would bring their wares. It was granted a charter by Edward III in C14. In 1901 it became the Alexander Theatre, played among many others by Peter Sellers.



Just before entering the Market Arch, note the alley leading off left, The Lanes Ceramic and Mosaic trail (see Trail 1).

On reaching **High Street** through the **Market Arch**, glance back. Now a gym, the building above housed the Town Health Board which became the Town Council in 1863. Later it became the Assembly Rooms.

2 On reaching the High Street, cross over and turn left. Walk to the next street. Here glance up to the imposing terrace of **Oxford Grove** (below). Continue past Oxford Grove. Take the next small lane on the right, **Cow Lane**, up to the **Community Gardens**.



Oxford Grove

Cow Green Community Gardens are the oldest of a trio of community-leased gardens developed, cared for and maintained by volunteers. Feel free to explore the garden's nooks and crannies.



Community Gardens

3 Continue up to the top where the lane bends right and reaches **Oxford Grove** again. Turn left and note views to the right across the playground to the **Torrs Hills** (National Trust). Almost immediately turn left again. At the next minor cross roads, turn left and descend to the start of **Montpelier Terrace** (below). Turn right to walk along the terrace.

Montpelier Terrace built in 1830 illustrates many fine architectural details in the Georgian style. Formerly each house had its own coach house attached to the rear. The meadow in front has been preserved since the terrace was constructed and on occasion now is used to graze sheep.



Montpelier Terrace

4 At the end of **Montpelier Terrace** turn left in front of Castle Hill Garage to descend to a main road. Just before crossing look across to the houses opposite (**Coronation Terrace**). Turn right along the main road and, after 100 yards, keep left to pass below the frontage of **Lantern Court**.

Coronation Terrace named after the coronation of George IV was built in 1828. The middle section contained public assembly rooms with ballroom, billiards and reading room, an early visitor attraction. The Wembly Hotel lies on the site of the Masonic Temple, destroyed by fire in 1888.



The **Scarlet Pimpernel** garage was built in 1919. The garage then operated a fleet of open-topped excursion coaches under the same name.

On the site of the **Lantern Court** retirement apartments, the **Cliffe Hydro Hotel** was founded in 1905 to offer hydrotherapy and electric bath treatments. It was built by enlarging Quayfield House, the home of Sir Bouchier Wrey.

5 Just past the apartments take the steps down left into **St James Park**. Continue with panoramic views over the harbour, Verity and the coast, zigzagging down the left hand side of the park to join an alley. Go left down this path.



M S Oldenburg and Hillsborough

The **M S Oldenburg** is berthed, waiting for its next crossing to the island of **Lundy**. On the other side, the iron age hill fort of **Hillsborough** stands guard, its silhouette often likened to a sleeping elephant.

6 At the bottom of the path, observe the **Manor House** (on your left) now renamed The Admirals House. Then take the ramp sharp right which leads down to the quay side in the **working part of the harbour** where large fishing boats land their catches.



Manor House

The **Manor House** was built in 1720 by Sir Bouchier Wrey, the owner of the harbour and Lord of the Manor, the wings being added later probably in Victorian times. It remained in the family until 1879. The building is in red brick with fluted terracotta keystones, a brick dentil cornice and parapet. Being built into the hillside, it is only one room deep.

Numerous trawlers unload their catches in the **working part of the harbour**. Until the harbour-side road and car park were built in the mid 20th century, this was also the site of ship's chandlers and boat building yards.



Trawlers waiting for the tide

Fishing has long been important to the town. A number of large trawlers, like the orange ones above, work the Bristol Channel from Ilfracombe, plus a number of smaller vessels. In its heyday, the fishing fleet was numbered in hundreds. Most trawlers are owned by the company that runs the fish shop a little further along the quay, the landed catches going mostly to Bideford for auction. The smaller trawler takes scallops. Another sort of fishing is for lobsters and crabs, long lines of pots typically being laid off the isle of Lundy, where a no-take zone 'leaks' prime creatures into the adjoining waters. Line fishing trips are available to visitors, from the other side of the harbour.

7 Turn left along the quayside and head past the fish shop and cafe to the **lifeboat building**. Take the alley to its right. Just before entering the alley look right to see the bay windows of **Trafalgar House**, a Georgian House behind a wall. Once through the alley start to ascend **Fore Street**, straight ahead.



Lifeboat Station, home to the RNLI, a volunteer organisation, operates a full sea-going lifeboat, the 'The Barry and Peggy High Foundation', and an inflatable inshore craft. Opened in 1996, this station replaces the one sited on the other side of the harbour which is now the aquarium. The old station was founded

in 1850, rebuilt in 1893. The lifeboats had to dragged by hand, later tractor, from the old station to the slipway. For full information feel free to enter the station and make enquiries if it is open.



Trafalgar House

Trafalgar House, pleasantly sited by the harbour beach, is a re-creation of a former home of the customs officer. In the 19th century it was the Holy RC church for the town "Our Lady of the Sea" and lately before the recent renovation a timber yard.

8 Going up Fore Street (which leads very pleasantly back to the High Street) note the **Prince of Wales** and **George & Dragon** pubs on the left. After just 100 yds turn half right along a walkway, **Albert Court**. This leads past a very secluded group of old cottages to a road. Turn right to the promenade. You will then see the towers of the Landmark centre to your left, where the tour ends.



Fore Street

Fore Street The two pubs on the left both date from the 14th century; inside the Prince of Wales (which is the oldest building in Ilfracombe) you can still see the well that served the harbour — if entering please duck as the ceiling is very low! The George and Dragon, Ilfracombe's oldest pub, has retained its frontage and much of the interior.

Albert Court is a quiet secluded spot whose cottages have been spared the modernisation that the '50s brought to parts of the town. One was named Ropemakers Cottage, referring to the time when Ropery Road (see map) was site of this industry.

On leaving Albert Court the town flour mill, now demolished, was sited opposite and the road, known as Mill Head, was the water leat.



Albert Court

Turn right down Mill Head towards the promenade, emerging with Ropery Road on your right. You will now be able to see the distinctive shape of the **Landmark Centre** on your left. The picture below shows the view in the 1920s with the **Victoria Pavilion**, opened in 1888 as an all-weather haven, on the right, and the **Ilfracombe Hotel** whose site is now occupied by the Landmark. This iconic hotel opened in 1867, ceased trading in the 1940s, and after various uses was demolished in 1976. On the skyline lies the former **Granville Hotel**, recently converted into luxury apartments.

The buildings to your left had the **Gaiety Theatre** at their left end, the one with the conical turret. Look for the row of Victorian decorative tiles on the wall further right above the balcony which portray the Signs of the Zodiac, the Elements, the Seven Ages of Man, and twelve of Aesop's fables.

Approaching the Landmark, look out for the mosaic areas in the lawn, a memento of **Jonathan Edward's world-record triple jump**.

