

Tunnels for ladies and for 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

3 Go by the Tunnels beach to the parish church. Return by High Street.



Runnymede Gardens

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.

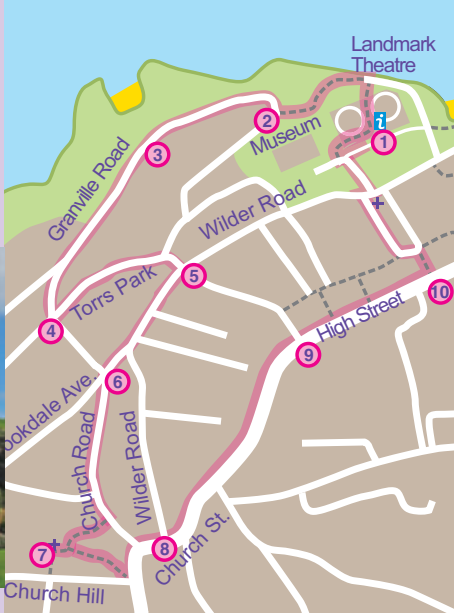
Walking directions and historical notes

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** Out of the Tourist Information Centre go right until you can see the **museum**. Turn right to take the path that leads up between the large cones of the Landmark to the coast path with its view of **Wildersmouth Beach** and **Capstone Hill** above. Ascend the coast path to the former **Granville Hotel** on the skyline.

A treasure trove of curiosities and memorabilia awaits in the **Ilfracombe Museum**, housed in what was the laundry of the Ilfracombe Hotel, on whose site the Landmark Theatre now stands. Its exhibits portray the life of early tourists and Ilfracombe's cultural and maritime heritage, with some quirky displays like Ilfracombe's fires. A vast collection of natural history items from round the world will fascinate young and old.



South West Coast Path national trail, look out for the acorn signs marking its route. This trail provides a superb 630 mile trek from Minehead in Somerset via Land's End to Poole Harbour in Dorset.



Former Granville Hotel

The **Granville Hotel** was converted to apartments in 2009.

The **Tunnels Beaches** are reached by a tunnel from beside the **Bath House** on the town side of the cliff which we shall see later. The main tunnel and the one whose entrance can be seen in the photo, were

- 2** On reaching the road by the **Granville** turn right. After 250m you come to a modernist building on the left. There look over the sea wall to the **Tunnels Beaches**.

Walking up through the gardens following a short stretch of the



Tunnels beaches

excavated by Welsh miners in the 1830s. Also constructed at the time were two bathing pools formed by tidal barriers, one for gentlemen and one for ladies, this latter still functions and can be seen on the upper right side of the photo.

- 3** Continue along the road, to Torrs Walk Avenue which is the start of the path up to **The Torrs** and also being the point where the coast path leaves our route. Continue to the bottom of Granville Road. Look for an information board and blue ceramic signs along the way.

The walk up **The Torrs** has been popular since Victorian times and indeed the paths were constructed then by the same Welsh miners who dug the Tunnels. Views over the channel and along the coast are magnificent. An extensive tract of open access National Trust land surrounds the coast path as it makes its way to the small village of Lee.



- 4** From Granville Road go sharp left down to the **Bath House** and, a little further on the left, **Runnymede House**.



The Bath House

The Bath House, a replica of the Athenian Treasury at Delphi, once housed sea baths. The entrance to the Tunnels Beaches lies to the right. Besides the beaches, noted for the varied sea life in their many rock pools, the area on the sea side has been developed for functions and many weddings are held here, couples and guests being attracted from far and wide.



Runnymede House

Runnymede House lies to the right of the Bath House, an example of the fine villas built in the 19th century in the Gothic Revival style. George Eliot stayed here in 1856.

5 Return to the traffic lights and turn right along the main road. Continue past the supermarket, and cross over half left to **St Michael's (Watersmeet)**. Pass this house to its right, and ascend Church Road. Note **Brookdale Lodge** at its start on the right.

Note the **Bastille** on the left just before the supermarket. This housed the town police station from 1926 when it moved from Fore Street (Trail 1) and later became a pub. The main road, Wilder Road, follows the line of the two Wilder Brooks that flow into the sea at Wildersmouth beach by the Landmark Centre. Now covered over, they drain the valleys to the south of Ilfracombe.



St Michael's

The Victorian extravaganza that is **St Michael's (Watersmeet)** has been variously a doctor's home, a guesthouse, a residential home, and now a private house, a history repeated many times in the town.

Brookdale Lodge was designed by W M Robbins in the 'Arts and Crafts' style in 1881. The coach and car parks facing the house were formerly the gardens of neighbouring grand houses. This particular area was known as 'Bloody Meadow' from a skirmish in the Civil War in 1644 when the Cavaliers attacked Parliamentary Ilfracombe.



Brookdale Lodge

6 Take Church Road to its top to Georgian **Russell House** on the left. As you start to descend take the path on the right, past the **Trinity Rooms** on your left to the **Parish Church**. Continue ahead then round to the right to reach the main door.

Trinity Rooms were once the 16th century Church House. They became the town poor house in 1737 and were rebuilt as a school (later a club) in 1862.



Trinity Rooms

In **Holy Trinity Church** the list of incumbents dates from 1263. Yet the founding of the church as a building is best taken as 1321 when significant enlargement took place. Do allow time to examine the interior which holds much of interest. Note particularly the panelled ceiling of the nave and the many stained glass windows.



Holy Trinity Church

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Coming out of the main door of the church, turn left and then fork right to take a path then steps down to Church Hill, and the main road below. Cross this and follow it past the traffic light into town. It then becomes Church Street. At the traffic lights note the imposing **Alpha House**.



Alpha House

Alpha House was built in 1880 by W M Robbins who designed much of Church Street and High Street, along which you will now be walking. Alpha House was originally an hotel but, like so many of Ilfracombe's grand buildings, has been converted to apartments. The block of flats opposite Alpha House was built on the site of a former filling station.

8

Take the road to the right of Alpha House, which is **Church Street**. Continue on this straight ahead up to the Coop supermarket where **High Street** starts. Go on past the filling station on the right to the next traffic lights.

Northcote Buildings



To enjoy the buildings on **Church Street** and **High Street** to their best advantage it pays to lift your gaze above the often much modified shop fronts to the largely unaltered facades above. The numerous dates incorporated into these testify to their period of construction, namely the 1880s to early 1900s.

Flemish gables



First to look at on Church Street are the **Northcote Buildings** (see bottom left) by W M Robbins in 1880, showing an imaginative use of brickwork. Just before the Co-op, admire the ornate frontage shown above, although sadly the central Flemish gable has been replaced. Look for the headless lions which remain. Flemish gables feature on

Lantern Centre



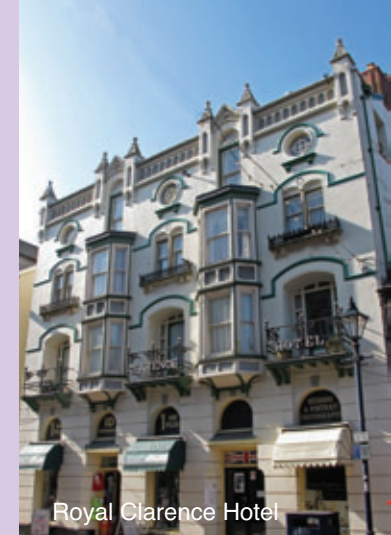
many buildings along High Street, though none reach the level of ornament of these. Scrutinising the building frontages as we go, we come to the **Lantern Centre** on the left. Built in 1728, this was formerly the United Reform Church. It has since been transformed into a building for public use, with cafe, and function rooms.

Just before the traffic lights on the left lies the **Ilfracombe Centre** with the Town Council offices and meeting rooms.

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From the traffic lights continue ahead along **High Street** until you reach the cinema on the right, housed near the building topped by the clock tower. Here turn left through arches into **Market Place**.

Architectural interest continues, notably in the **Royal Mail** building on the left with its four Flemish gables. Next see the former **Royal Clarence Hotel** boasting a most ornamental frontage built in 1886. It is said to get its name from the visit by the Duchess of Clarence in 1827. The ironwork was made by the Saracen Foundry in Glasgow.



Royal Clarence Hotel



Baptist Church

Almost opposite, the Baptist Church was built in 1891 to a design by W H Gould, another of Ilfracombe's prolific architects. A worthwhile detour now takes the steps just beyond the Baptist church. At their top a little to the left is the entrance to **Adelaide Terrace**, one of the finest of Ilfracombe's Victorian terraces.

10

From Market Place immediately turn right along **The Lanes** mosaic trail, but then take the third alley left. This leads in a curve down to **Wildersmouth Beach** and the **Landmark**.



Capstone Hill overlooks Wildersmouth Beach