

RUBY



COUNTRY

Ruby Trails

The Hatherleigh Trail

Ancient Oaks

The trail incorporates lines of veteran oaks typical of Ruby Country. These are of great value to roosting bats and a host of invertebrates. The diversity of lichens found on

the trees indicate the good air quality here. The trail also follows the Hatherleigh Lew which rises north west of Dartmoor and flows north to become one of the major tributaries of the River Torridge.

Front cover photo: Ruby Cattle, G. Saunders

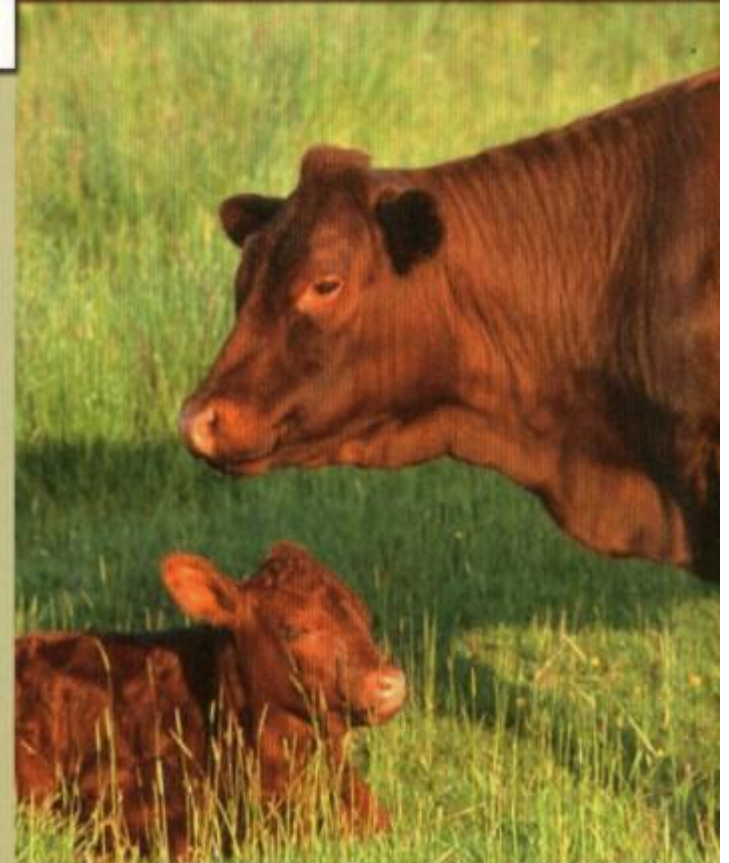
FACT FILE

Hatherleigh is served by a regular bus service between Plymouth and Barnstaple, which also connects to Tavistock, Okehampton, Torrington and Bideford. Traveline have timetable details 0870 6082608.

Grid Reference
SS 540 043

Walk Length
6.5 km/4 miles.
There are 13 stiles and the terrain is generally level, with the exception of one steady climb of 66 metres/200 feet.

Facilities
Hatherleigh has buses, shops, pubs and cafes.



www.therubycountry.com



The Walk



Hatherleigh is one of the two market towns in the area. Long-distance walkers may already be familiar with this small town since it is also on the Tarka Trail. Keep an eye out for the red Ruby Country waymarkers on the walk.

The town has an interesting and attractive variety of houses dating between the 16th and 19th centuries. During this time Hatherleigh prospered from its position on the main highway to link North and South Devon.

1 Start at the sheep sculpture next to the car park. This is also where the bus stops.

2 Walk down to Bridge Street and turn left.

3 Pass the George Inn and turn left at the town square, opposite the Post Office.

The George Inn is probably from the late medieval period. It is thought to have been the courthouse for the Abbots of Tavistock, who were lords of the manor until the 1500s. It later became an important coaching stage on the journey between Bideford and Exeter or Plymouth.

Note the ram and bull heads at the Square. These were set up to mark the impact of foot and mouth disease on the area in 2001.

4 Go through the Square into the churchyard.

The church was built in the late 1400s, although it probably had earlier origins. It has retained much of its medieval fabric and has an impressive interior. The shingled spire is a notable local landmark. In 1992 the spire came crashing down through the roof of the church. Several years of fundraising and rebuilding brought the church back into the condition you see it now. There are photographs in the church showing the damage caused.

The war memorial bears many characteristic West Devon surnames including Collacott, Cory, Fishleigh and Medland. These are all still names of local farms, reflecting the long stability of country life in the area.

5 Retrace your steps back to the Town Square. Turn sharply right, next to the 1828 National School [see the plaque on the wall]. Turn right next to the garage, then left to the livestock market, following the public footpath sign. At the market, keep to the right

until you reach the stile at the top edge.

Hatherleigh's livestock market is held on Tuesdays and is an important occasion for the local community and remains a key part of it's economy. Be sure to keep dogs on the lead through the market.

6 Cross the stile and turn left, where a second stile leads to a clear green lane. Continue ahead to an underpass beneath the Hatherleigh bypass and at the end of the narrow surfaced lane, cross another stile.

The path passes lines of veteran oaks, typical of Ruby Country. These are of value to roosting bats and a host of invertebrates. The diversity of lichens supported by the oaks is indicative of the good air quality here.

7 Enter a small pasture and head for the gate and stile opposite. Cross this next stile and bear right, keeping to the hedge bank.



These damp grasslands are typical of Ruby Country and form a valuable habitat for waders as well as small mammals and the barn owls that hunt them.

8 Continue to a double-decker stile. Cross this and continue ahead, parallel to the river and at the bottom edge of the field.

This is the River Lew. One of two Devon rivers of this name, the Hatherleigh Lew rises north west of Dartmoor and flows north to become one of the major tributaries of the River Torridge.

9 Keep to the path as it dips back alongside the river through a wooded strip. The path is quite narrow in places here.

The woodland is rich with many species of ground flora, including barren

strawberry and primrose, which are indicative of ancient woodlands.

10 Follow the path right to a kissing gate and on to an old railway embankment.

This railway was opened in 1925 and linked Torrington with Halwill Junction, but had a relatively short life. It provided a direct rail connection to Exeter and Plymouth via Halwill Junction and Okehampton as well as to Barnstaple and Bideford. Never very profitable, it closed in February 1965. Hatherleigh's station was to the right, along the line from here and some distance from the town.

OS maps for this walk:

Landranger: No.191 Okehampton and North Dartmoor [1:50,000 scale]

Explorer: No.113 Okehampton [1:25,000 scale]

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11 Go down the other side, through another railway kissing gate and diagonally across the field to the bridge in the far corner. Cross the stile to the lane, then turn left over the bridge.

This is Lewer Bridge. Look for the plaque in the left-hand parapet wall showing the building date of 1844.

12 Keep on the lane as it rises steadily.

Note the woodland being planted on the fields next to the lane. The relatively poor soils make forestry a good land use in parts of Ruby Country. In the woods on the right (now inaccessible to the public), is the site of the Old St. Mary's Holy Well, which was used for local baptisms.

13 As the lane levels off, look out for a sharp bend to the right, with a clear farm track over a cattle grid to the left, leading to Keyethern Farm. Turn left along the track.

The higher parts of the lane give atmospheric views over Ruby Country to Dartmoor.

The banks along the lane are rich in flora and give a stunning display in spring, making the climb more enjoyable!

14 Continue on the farm track as far as a deer fence and ladder stile. Do not cross but turn left just before the fence, over a small stile.

Farmed fallow deer will often be seen in the field beyond the fence. The farm track also gives further wide views to Dartmoor.

15 Follow the path along the field edge. Go through a gate into another field and continue ahead, sticking to the edge and crossing two more stiles in quick succession. Then continue along the edge of the next field to a gate at the far end.

Look out for the spire of Hatherleigh Church peeping over the trees ahead. This succession of fields is a typical example of the Ruby Country's largely unimproved grassland, valuable as wildlife habitat.

Farm goats at North Waterhouse Farm are reared to provide suckling milk for the farm calves rather than using powder milk.



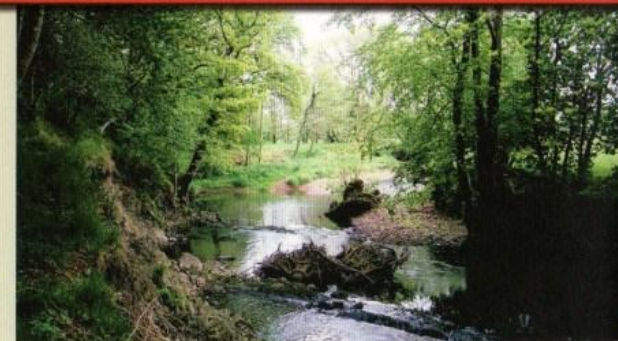
16 Go through the gate to a narrow green lane. Continue to a farm track then go through a metal gate ahead. Keep ahead on the track, pass the house on the left, and take the next track on the left. This leads into a field from which Hatherleigh is laid out before you.

17 Enter the field, bear right and head for the stile at the bottom far left corner. Cross the stile and turn left, walking immediately right along the field-edge. At the end of the field turn left through a gate, then right along the edge of the next field. Pass through two gateways and through a small field to a footbridge.

The bridge crosses Pulworthy Brook, a tributary of the River Lew which was passed near the start of the trail. The bridge is guarded by two unusual pull-apart stiles.

18 Go through the old railway gate. Head up into cottages.

Be sure to close the gate or there is a fine of £2! This is the same railway line crossed earlier.



19 Keep to the farm track between the buildings.

This is Waterhouse. The farmhouse dates to around 1500 with later additions, although records indicate a settlement here as early as the 1300s.

20 Bear right to the gate, then go left and left again. Cross the stile at the end of the bank into a field. Bear slightly right to cross a double stile on the far side, then head diagonally right across the next field to the opposite far corner. Hatherleigh is now close ahead.

21 Go through the gateway and stick next to the hedge through two gates to a track. Cross over cattle grids to pass

Hatherleigh Cricket Club and arrive at the Hatherleigh By-Pass.

The by-pass was completed in 1995 and has remedied the congestion problems in the previously traffic-clogged streets.

22 To return to your starting point of the sheep sculpture, cross the road past the bowling club entrance and turn left past the Bridge Inn, up Bridge Street.