RUBY COUNTRY

Ruby Trails
The Petrockstowe Trail

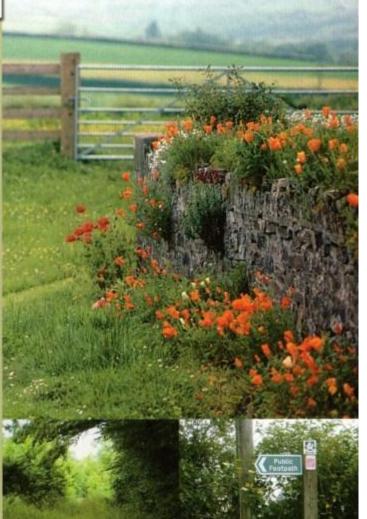## Beautiful views

This is a pretty walk, taking in a mixture of traditional Devon pasture, cropland and woodland. There are also some stunning views over the typical Ruby Country landscape towards Dartmoor.

Inside spread photo: Haymaking, G. Saunders

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The Walk

Petrockstowe is a small village in the north east of Ruby Country. The name means 'holy place of St Petrock' to whom the church is dedicated. The church originated in the 14th century, but only the original tower exists today, the rest having been rebuilt in the 19th century. The church holds two brass tablets to commemorate Sir Henry Rolle, his wife Margaret and their ten sons and eight daughters. The church holds many highlights including decorated organ pipes and 15th century stained glass windows.

The old school was built in the 19th century for £700 by local squire, Lord Clinton. Petrockstowe was once connected to the larger towns by it's railway line. Trains no longer run but the line forms part of the Tarka Trail (the long distance cycle track to Bideford).

The walk does a circuit to the west of the village, taking in a mixture of pasture, cropland and woodland and offering good views of typical Ruby Country landscape. Most of the walk takes place on lanes with only two short sections across fields. Skylarks are seen over nearly all of the arable fields and almost certainly breed in the area.

Look out for the red Ruby Country waymarkers.

1 To begin the trail, take the footpath opposite the village hall, up the track. The path takes you along the top of two fields. Then go through the metal gate and along the bottom of the next two fields before reaching a stile. Once over the stile turn immediately right and head up to the next stile leading onto a lane. Turn left here.

The hedge bank flora is rich with a diverse range of plants such as dog's mercury, black spleenwort, greater stitchwort, ground ivy, common toadflax and wood sage. The high numbers of woody species suggests that some of these hedges are ancient. They also support a great deal of wildlife and are important for dormice and birds because of the abundance of seeds and fruit.

2 Stay on the lane for some time until you reach the junction. Walk across, and cross the stile into a wooded track.

The broadleaved woodland here is ecologically interesting. It is part of the larger area of Hartleigh Wood, which is listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory. Studying the ground flora shows a variety of ancient woodland species. The fields bordering the broad-leaved woodland along the stream may be important for field voles, barn owls and deer.

3 Once through the short stretch of woodland, climb over the stile into the lane and turn left. Continue straight on at the junction, heading down the lane.

4 Walk along the lane until you reach Hartleigh Barton Farm, there, take the stile across the next two fields where you'll reach the top end of the village above the church and Inn.

This part of the trail is through a pastoral landscape with views to extensive woodland areas ahead and to the left – typical scenery for Ruby Country.

Winter stubble left over from the crops provides valuable feeding ground for skylarks and other farmland species such as grey partridge and linnets. These birds may flock together to feed on the split grain, seeds and insects within the stubble.

The Laurels Inn or The White Hart as it was first known, has had many other uses since starting life as a coaching house on the main route from Launceston to Lynton. It has been a magistrate's court, a home for fallen women of the parish, a lodging house, coffee tavern and a private house. It re-opened as a public house in the mid 1970s.