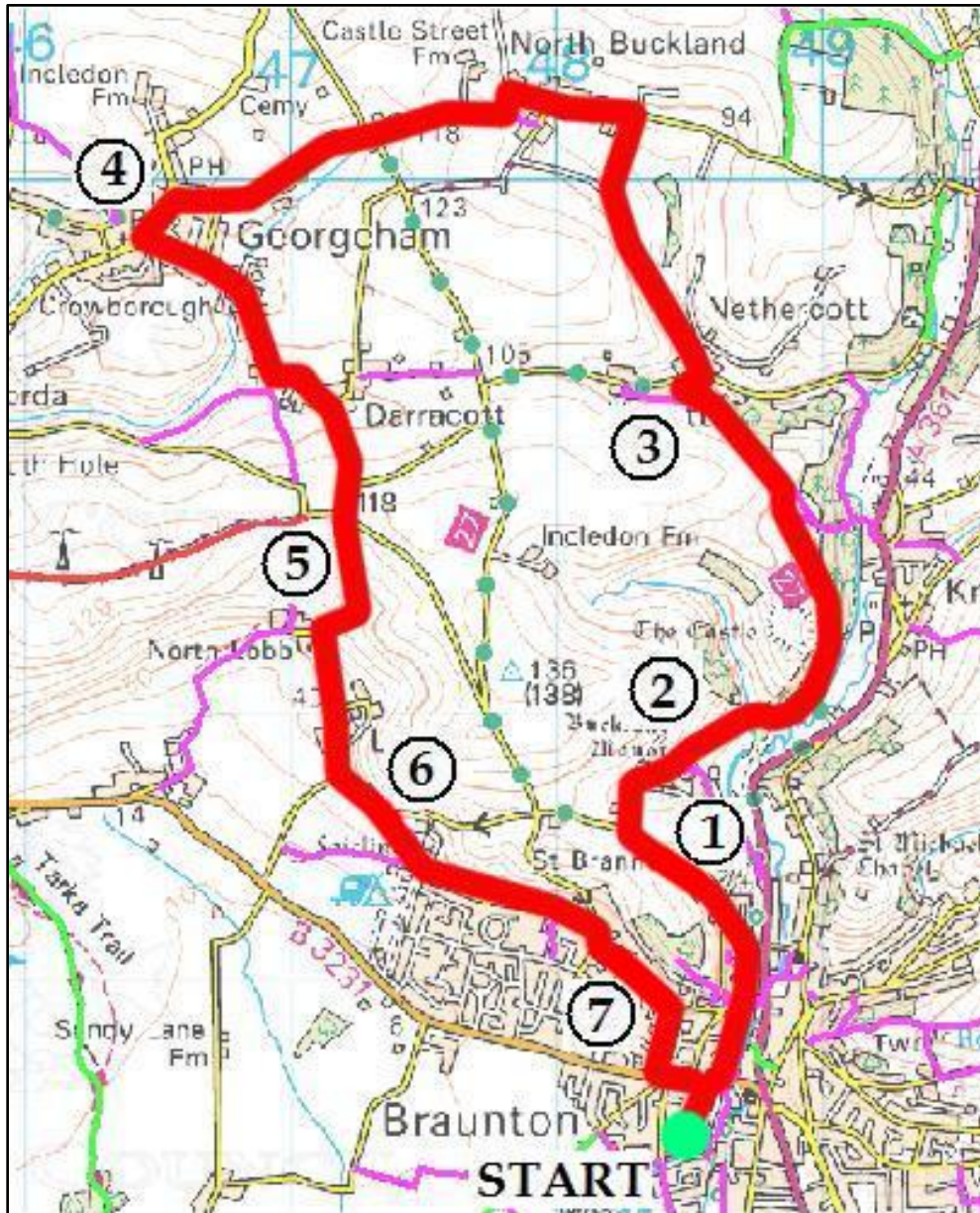


▶ Georgeham Trail

This walk of approximately 4.5 miles (7.5km) starts from Caen Street Car Park in the centre of Braunton and proceeds around West Hill to Nethercott and North Buckland before turning west to Georgeham; returning in a circular route through Lobb. Passing through open countryside, farmland and villages, some parts of the walk involve country lanes, so beware of traffic. It is a beautiful walk at any time of the year, but is muddy in places year-round, so wear suitable walking boots or wellies.



Route Map



This walk starts and finishes at Caen Street Car Park in the centre of Braunton village. It is located just off the B3231, which leads towards Saunton. Within the car park, Braunton Museum and Braunton Countryside Centre can be found – both of which are worth a visit before or after your walk.

Georgeham Trail

Starting at Caen Street Car Park, leave the car park by the main exit beside the Museum and cross the main road (Caen Street) to pick up the footpath ahead, which follows the route of the old railway line. This in itself is a pleasant walk, alongside the River Caen. At the far end of the footpath, turn left onto the road and then bear right up the hill. You might notice the old signal box, which once stood at Georgeham Gates railway crossing here, though it is now located in a private garden on the opposite side of the road. Heading uphill, you will soon pass the entrance to St Brannoc's Catholic Church on your right (opposite the end of Frog Lane), but keep going up the hill until you reach Buckland Cross. There is an impressive stone pillar on the right hand side here with a sign 'Buckland Barton' and a footpath sign beside it. Turn off and follow the track down to Barton Manor.

STOP 1

Buckland Manor is a fine collection of old stone buildings, some of which incorporate quite elaborate design features, particularly for farm buildings.

Buckland Manor was one of several such manors, which originated in Norman times. The three main manors in Braunton were those of Dean, Abbots and Gorges – each of which elected their own Ale Taster, Pound Keeper, Reeve, Beadle, Constable, Gate Keeper and Town Crier. Buckland, on the northern fringe of Braunton, was the home of the Incedon-Webbers. The Incedon branch of the family was awarded lands at Croyde and Putsborough, along with the foreshore of Croyde, in 1160. Other manor

houses in the vicinity, of similar stature, were at Beer Charter, Incedon, Saunton, Lobb, Fairlinch, Ash and Luscott. Most of these houses retain considerable evidence of their ancient status.

At the far end of the farm complex, take the left-hand (straight on) option, when you reach the 3-way sign. This takes you into Challowell Lane. It was probably a metalled or green lane at one time but is now rather more akin to a rutted mud lane. However the surroundings are delightful and by the time North Buckland is reached the mud will have become quite familiar. Keep to the lane until you reach a bridge, which joins the path on your right hand side.

STOP 2

This bridge used to go over the line of the Barnstaple to Ilfracombe Railway. Built in 1874 by the London and South Western Railway (LSWR), it was an extension of a rail network that stretched right back to Waterloo Station in London. In 1926 the line acquired mainline status and at its height, just before the Second World War, an incredible 24 passenger trains travelled in both directions on their way to and from the seaside resort of Ilfracombe. Even right up to closure in 1970 it was still possible to catch a train direct from London to Braunton.

Braunton Station was located where the Caen Street car park now stands. It was a very busy station, for in addition to the regular passenger and freight traffic, the station was used as a holding area for the banker and pilot engines, which were used to assist the heavier trains to ascend and descend the steep gradients on the line to Ilfracombe.

As the sign here suggests, we now join cycleway no 27, so beware of flying mountain bikes spattered in mud. Continue in the original direction and a little further on, past the bridge, take the left-hand track at a Y junction. The track continues on and becomes Castle Lane by name (though not much different by nature). It takes its name from some very ancient earthworks on the top of the hill to your left, where a fortified encampment once existed.

It is quite a pull to the top of the hill but the occasional field gateway provides a pleasant stopping point. Ignore the footpath signs to right and to left as you begin to drop down into Nethercott. On reaching Nethercott, at the junction with the road, go right and immediately left into the hamlet. Look for the track indicated by the footpath sign, which is just past the first house on the left.

STOP 3

The word "nether" is derived from the Old English "neothera" and means "lower" or "furthest". Apart from being retained in place-names, this word has dropped out of use, except in special contexts such as "the nether regions". It has echoes in the words "beneath" and "nest" (i.e. a place where a bird may lower itself). The second part "cote" (or its variations) meant something equivalent to "dwelling". This pretty hamlet, lying among the hills north of Braunton, could easily have derived its name thus.

Proceed along the footpath and at the end of this short length of track, go through the metal gate immediately beside Moorlane Cottage. Meet the track, which has a stream running alongside (it

may have flooded the path in places). As the path rises so the waters recede and eventually another gate leads into a field. Follow the hedge up the hill and enjoy the extensive views of the open countryside. About two thirds of the way up, bear right to a double stile in the hedge. Cross straight over the field to another stile. The path beyond is heavy with brambles, so take care here, before finding another stile – after which turn right. Follow the track around to the right, tackling another stile and descending the gentle slope, through the avenue of hedgerow trees. This is Adwell Lane, and will be rather damp at foot of the slope. Press on, up the gentle incline that follows, until you reach the road.

At the junction with the road, turn left and keep to the road for the next 1.6 km (almost a mile). You will pass a turning to the left, which leads into some farm buildings, but continue as the road meanders uphill, into North Buckland.

Continue to follow the road, in the original direction. You will pass Castlestreet Farm on your right and a crossroads at Byecross Pool but keep straight on towards Georgeham. Eventually, you will pass Byecross House on your left and the end of Longland Lane, which joins from the left. Keep ahead and descend what has now become Rock Hill. At the bottom of the hill, the welcome sight of the Rock Inn appears on your right. This makes an excellent resting point, but for those carrying picnics continue for another minute or so. Pass the Rock Inn and turn left at the junction, then cross the road to find St George's Church.

STOP 4

The churchyard offers walkers the opportunity to sit in peaceful surroundings, but like so many of these old parish churches, St Georges also has many interesting features. Apparently, the parish records date back to 1538, making them some of the oldest in the country. Other sources tell us that 'In the churchyard are buried Simon Gould and his wife Julia, who died in March, 1817, each in the 101st year of their age, and having been married upwards of 75 years.' In addition, Henry Williamson of Tarka the Otter fame is buried here. Williamson rented a cottage next to the church, which he named Skirr Cottage after the calls of barn owls living in a space under the thatch. It was here that he began his writing life and he walked day and night on the cliffs and beaches at Baggy Point, Putsborough Sands, Braunton Burrows, and the high moors that are drained by the rivers Taw and Torridge. Altogether well worth spending a few minutes to look around.

Georgeham is the name of the village and its surrounding parish, which extends westward to Croyde Bay and Morte Bay. The National Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland of 1868 described the scenery in this neighbourhood as 'diversified and of great beauty'. Interestingly enough, the village was simply called Ham in the Domesday Book, although it's parish church was dedicated to St George.

Pressing on then, a few yards down the road from the church turn left, opposite the Post Office, on to Newberry Road. Follow the road out to Crowborough; it is narrow and traffic may be a minor problem here, so please take care. Ignore the footpath sign on your right as you descend the hill, leaving Georgeham behind. Keep to the road as it climbs again, going ahead

at Orchardon Cross and beyond, until you reach Lobbthorn Stile. Here, a road joins from the right but continue for a few yards and look to your right-hand side for a footpath. As you descend the hill, there is a marvellous view of the countryside.

STOP 5

The view from this track is extensive. The faraway headland is Hartland Point and from there, moving left along the coast, you may be able to make out the villages of Clovelly and Westward Ho! The water before them is the Taw Torridge Estuary, where the two rivers pour their united waters into Bideford Bay or, more poetically, 'hand in hand with mutual affection, they slip into the sea'.

Closer and to the right, where the land meets the sea, are the sand dunes of Braunton Burrows. The Burrows form the centre of the country's first newly designated Biosphere Reserve – a world class designation that puts it alongside Ayer's Rock, the Danube Delta and Yellowstone National Park.



Behind the dunes lies Braunton Great Field, one of the largest remaining examples of Anglo-Saxon open strip field systems in the country. The pretty patchwork is easily recognisable. The land before you is considered to be some of the most fertile in the country.

Follow the track down the hill, around the right-hand bend and all the way to the end. The road you now meet leads to North Lobb Farm on your right, but turn left here and follow the road into the village of Lobb. Bear right mid-way through the village and go on to follow the lane as it meanders through the houses, passing Tom's Hill on your left. Eventually you will pass the end of a road that is sign-posted to Saunton, but continue for another 75 yards or so until you reach a footpath on the right, which drops below but alongside the road. Follow this footpath, over a stile beside a gate and into a field, which lies immediately below Fairlinch House.

STOP 6

A poem is fitting at this point – written for the North Devon Magazine, containing The Cave and Lundy Review, in 1824, it contains the following verses:

*For see how fairly on our right
The Terrace green expands
And Fairlinch, from her windows bright
Looks o'er her sloping lands.
'Twere long to tell since we have seen
On window-pane that golden sheen-
Tis long since last so bright a green
To leftward marked the Marshland turf,
And sunbeams glanced from dykes between,
Or silvered yonder cloud of surf,
Where Taw and Torridge, blending, roar,
Of tides released and free,
Roll past the pool of Appledore,
Beyond the lamps of Braunton shore,
To mingle with the sea.*

The marshland to which the poem refers is that of Braunton Marshes, which borders the far side of the farmland where it meets the Estuary. The 'lamps of Braunton shore' is a reference to the

lighthouse that used to stand near the southernmost tip of Braunton Burrows, near the mouth of the Estuary.

Walk diagonally across the field – aiming for the telegraph pole, under which you will find another stile. This deposits you on to Fairlinch Lane. Turn left and follow the lane, as it skirts the edge of a housing estate, which is known as Lobb Fields. Where Fairlinch Lane ends at a T junction go right and then immediately left to enter Willoway Lane. Keep to this road now, which eventually descends steeply down Rock Hill.

STOP 7

To your left, West Hill Lane rises steeply. If you were to follow this road and the footpath beyond, it would lead you to Braunton Beacon. The Beacon was part of a system of invasion warnings in use since Roman times, although in the days of shipping not so very long ago, sailors wives used to keep watch from the Beacon for their husbands vessels. Shipping was extremely important to Braunton's success and indeed the village was largely built upon the profits of sailors, most of whom were master mariners.

Continue down the hill and bear right at the foot of it, where the road turns into North Street, and follow to the end of the road. As you walk, you will pass many former farmhouses, such as 'Gordons', 'Staddons' and 'Brindle'. A forge also stood behind Brindle Farm. It is well known that in Braunton, even as recently as the last century, Braunton men were either farmers or sailors.

At the end of the road, where it emerges onto the Saunton / Croyde road beside the White Lion pub, turn left. Carefully cross the road and, just

past the shopping precinct on the right, look for the entrance to Caen Street Car Park on your left – thus completing the circle.

We hope you have enjoyed this walk and that it has inspired you to find out more about this part of the North Devon Coast Areas Outstanding Natural Beauty. For more information please visit www.explorebraunton.org or go to Braunton Countryside Centre or Braunton Museum.

Adapted from a walk first published by Tony Chapman (Walking to Good Purpose) and edited by Katie James for the Explore Braunton project – funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Devon Renaissance, North Devon AONB and Devon County Council.

The Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people



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