

# Walks in the Tamar Valley

## Gnatham & the River Tavy

from Bere Ferrers Station with an optional extension to Lopwell Dam

A gentle exploration of the picturesque village of Bere Ferrers and the creek at Gnatham on the west bank of the Tavy estuary, with a there-and-back extension to Lopwell Dam.



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### Elevation Profile



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<b>Start/finish Distance</b>	Bere Ferrers Station SX 452635, PL20 7JR 3 miles (4.8km); with extension to Lopwell Dam 5 miles (8km)
<b>Time</b>	1½ hours; with extension to Lopwell Dam 2½ hours
<b>Terrain</b>	Field paths and quiet lanes; steady ascent/descent on Lopwell Dam extension (areas of bare rock, slippery in wet); damp underfoot at Gnatham
<b>Toilets</b>	Behind The Olde Plough Inn, Bere Ferrers
<b>Difficulty Rating</b>	Easy; Lopwell Dam extension moderate

<b>Public Transport</b>	Rail services Tamar Valley Line to/from Gunnislake and Plymouth; bus services to/from Bere Alston and Tavistock
<b>Dogs</b>	Under control at all times; on leads at the Coach House
<b>Map</b>	OS Explorer 108 Lower Tamar Valley & Plymouth; OS Landranger 201 Plymouth & Launceston
<b>Note</b>	Parking at the station is reserved for rail users. If arriving by car, park sensibly where Fore Street widens (in the village) and pick up the route on Point 5.

Step back in time on this gentle amble around the peaceful village of Bere Ferrers, located on the east side of the Bere peninsula. Spotting the village's location on the map informs the origins of the first element of its name: 'Bere' is a Celtic word, meaning peninsula or spit of land. 'Ferrers' comes from the Ferrers family, Lords of the Manor in the time of Henry II (reigned 1154–1189). Allow time to have a proper look at St Andrew's Church, which dates from the 13th century; the east window contains some of the earliest stained glass to be found in Devon.

## The Route

**1 SX 452635** From the station – on the main line between Plymouth and London Waterloo from 1890 until the 1960s (the branch line to Gunnislake was retained as the Tamar Valley Line) – head down the access road. On reaching Station Road turn right; within a few paces, at a public footpath sign, turn sharp left on a drive leading to four properties. Another footpath sign directs you straight on at the entrance to the Coach House: follow the drive through the beautiful woodland garden (dogs on leads). At the house bear left across the lawn, clipping the end of a beech hedge, to find a small gate in the hedge.

Follow the wire-fenced footpath right then left across a big pasture field. At the bottom turn left to find a gate onto the lane. Turn right for 50 yards.

**2 SX 454639** Turn left over a ladder stile at a public footpath sign. Once in the field keep ahead through a gate and cross a stream, then head uphill to cross a stile at the top corner of woodland on the right. Follow the narrow path along the top edge of the wood. Cross another stile; the permissive path bears left, then runs along a bank between fields. At the end pass an open-fronted shed, then walk along a tree-lined track. Bear left at the end, then turn right – note 'John's Orchard' on the left – to drop past the entrance to Shutcombe Farm, where daffodils were grown commercially in

the 1800s and early 1900s. Follow the farm drive to meet Hensbury Lane on a bend.

**3 SX 459637** Turn left, signed to Hallowell – the name may derive from an early 'holy well' in the locality – and Gnatham, and walk gently uphill, soon enjoying lovely views across the Tavy to Blaxton Wood over occasional field gates. Pass a lane to Hole and keep straight on; the lane descends, joining the Tamar Coast-to-Coast Way (TCCW), and crosses a stream (about 75 yards before the stream the TCCW heads sharp right – if you find the creekside path at Gnatham on Point 4 too wet, return to this point and follow the TCCW to Bere Ferrers). Follow the lane uphill to meet a junction with a dead end lane on the first bend.

**4 SX 465641** EXTENSION TO LOPWELL DAM Continue along the lane, ascending steadily. The gradient eases a little alongside a lovely run of oak and hawthorn. Opposite a big barn turn right down a track signed to Lopwell Dam. Descend through beautiful Whittacliffe Wood to reach the dam – it's fun to cross over on the narrow walkway (impassable for two hours either side of high tide). Lopwell Dam – constructed in 1953 to boost Plymouth's water supplies – is a tranquil spot today, at the tidal and navigable limit of the Tavy. Mining for silver and lead in this area dates back to the 13th century; Wheal Maristow, in the woods, was worked again in the 19th century. It is recorded that in the early 20th century the Vivian brothers lived in a cottage nearby (now in ruins) and ferried people across the river in a wooden rowing boat. The surrounding area (a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserve) is known today for its plentiful wildlife, attracted by a range of habitats: woodland, marshes – both freshwater and saltwater – and mudflats.

Retrace your steps to Point 4.

**MAIN WALK** Turn left, downhill, to pass derelict cottages and reach the river below Gnatham Farm. Turn right onto the muddy track, then step up onto the marshy ground on the right to cross the bridge over the stream. Bear left to reach a footpath marker post on the track ahead, joining the TCCW.



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Scan for an interactive map and directions



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Here bear right, away from the (at times) very wet track, to follow a narrow path that parallels the estuary. Eventually round a stile to re-join the track and keep ahead: houses at the lower end of Bere Ferrers, and the church, come into view.

**5 SX 460636** Reach a lane and head on to pass the quay (a lovely place to sit – you can see Maristow House, dating from 1760, upriver on the other side of the estuary). Follow the lane uphill past The Olde Plough (16th century), to reach the war memorial and ‘megalithic’ well, commissioned by Frances Lady Shelley ‘for the

benefit of the poor in her son’s parish 1852’ (to visit St Andrew’s Church, dating from the 13th century, turn left here – the wonderful ‘living churchyard’ is home to all manner of wildflowers, grasses, butterflies, birds (including swifts in summer), and daytime species of moths). Continue uphill through the village.

**6 SX 457635** Turn left along Station Road, passing St Andrew’s Church Hall (built as the village school in 1896). Head steadily uphill; at the top follow the road round to the right to reach the station.



Head down the drive towards the Coach House



A ladder stile crosses the hedgebank at the start of Point 2



Hawthorn and cow parsley on the lane to Lopwell Dam



Lopwell Dam



Canada geese at Lopwell Dam



Maristow House



View across the estuary from Gnatham



Bere Ferrers hoves into view



Bere Ferrers' impressive town well

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