

South West Coast Path walk in Cornwall: Lundy Bay NT Car Park to Kellan Head and return.

I had walked this section of the coast path before as part of a longer walk from Polzeath to Port Isaac. On that occasion I had been thwarted from exploring the beach at Lundy Cove by the high tide. Low cloud had drifted in from the south west, bringing rain and veiling the landscape. This time I had planned my walk around an exploration of the beach and it depended on the state of the tide. Clear weather would be a bonus.

Today proved to be perfect. Low tide was at 12.04 and I timed my arrival from Mid Devon for 11.00. I left home with mist and low cloud persisting past Exeter and Dartmoor to Launceston. Tantalisingly short glimpses of sun preceded the sky clearing when I was well into Cornwall. What a joy! For the whole day I walked in warm sunshine, wearing a tee shirt and wishing I had worn shorts. Despite being early November it was around 15°C.

Lundy Cove looked great with firm golden sand exposed to the sun. There was one family down at the water's edge, that was all. The ebbing tide had not gone out far enough for me to walk round the rocks to the western beach and the sea caves I wanted to see, so I climbed over the rocks. No-one had walked on this stretch; the virgin sand was marked only by oystercatcher feet and the laborious trail of a single snail. The sun shone through the blow-hole of the biggest cave, illuminating the sand like a spotlight. When I walked into the deep cave I was delighted to find a passage that led to a narrower cave and back out to the beach. The timing was perfect; low tide at mid-day coincided with the Autumn sun at its highest, just cresting the top of the cliffs. The beam of light streamed through the rock window and out through the mouth of the cave, producing a wonderful ethereal effect, all the more magical as it lasted only a few minutes before the sun moved. On the north coast, the sun often fails to fully clear the cliffs and much of the beach remains in deep shadow so this light show was indeed special.

A group of oystercatchers flew off complaining about my presence and landing near the water. Up on the cliffs a sudden commotion of crows saw off a kestrel that had invaded their patch. This western end of the best was the best: a deep cove of unspoilt sand with a few pools around isolated rocks. Perfect. This was why I was here. The waves were small but still produced spray at the foot of the exposed headland. In three pools fish darted into the safety of recesses in the rock.

Turning around to look along the full length of the beach I saw the rocky castle of Trevas Head and the path to Port Quin climbing its slopes. By now the tide had ebbed sufficiently to expose a walkway of sand past all the projecting spurs of rock. The family had gone and the beach belonged to me and the oystercatchers. Shadows were at their shortest and the sand gleamed in the sunlight. By the time I had climbed the lower slopes of Trevas Head, the tide had already turned and had closed the route to the caves and the western sands. It hadn't been a particularly low tide and the opportunity to explore had been short-lived.

Walkers on the coast path miss so many experiences like this if they stick to the route. My return walk today would only be 4.5 miles but my detours added a further 1.5; it

is always worth looking out for alternative routes instead of rushing along the cliff-tops. On Trevas Head, I again left the Coast Path and followed a lower path close to a fence on the cliff edge, enjoying views of the cliffs and down to the rocks of Pigeon Cove that I would have otherwise missed. Leaving the path again on Pennywilgie Point and scrambling over the rocks at the end gave me a great view into Epphaven Cove.

On my return along the main path I climbed the rocky outcrop at the top of Trevas Head to gain broad views along the coast northwards and southwards. Doyden Point, Port Quin and Kellan Head were all revealed in the sun, sharp shadows emphasising the shape of rocks, a vivid contrast to the grey landscape of my previous visit. Dropping down to the enclosed hamlet of Port Quin there was no sign of life in the shadows and it was almost a relief to mount Kelway Head and regain the sense of space and freedom. Away to the north-east the distant line of cliffs was barely visible—a pale line in a misty blue distance.

How blessed I had been to have walked and explored in clear, warm sunlight, and this in November.