

# Bude Canal Trails

**...around Tamar Lakes on the  
Devon and Cornwall border**

**devon**



**Explore a length of the historic Bude Canal and scenic Tamar Lakes on a short circular walk in the quiet countryside where Devon meets Cornwall.**

the place to be naturally active

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**Devon**  
County Council

This walk explores an inland section of the Bude Canal on the Devon-Cornwall border. Follow this short circular walk of about a mile (1½km) - this may be shortened to about ¾ mile (1¼km) by doing a simple “there and back” walk. Or perhaps try a slightly longer walk of some 2½ miles (4km) which passes more of the Tamar Lakes.

**Getting There:** The shorter walks are based at the car park at Lower Tamar Lake on the Devon-Cornwall border. The slightly longer one starts at the Upper Tamar Lake car park. Both car parks are accessed along country lanes, and are reached by following brown signs from Holsworthy (via Chilsworthy) or Kilkhampton. There is no public transport to the lakes, the nearest bus route being at Kilkhampton, approximately 2½ miles (4km) from the car parks.

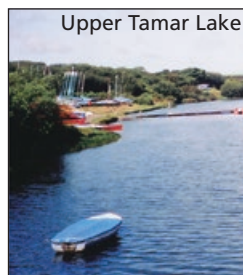
**Walk Length:** There are a variety of options ranging between ¾ mile (1¼km) and 2½ miles (4km). The walk links to much longer walks as set out on the back of the leaflet. The walks are completely level and there are no stiles.

**Facilities:** Upper Tamar Lake has car park, toilets, information centre, seasonal café, plus water sports and angling facilities. Lower Tamar Lake has car park, bird watching facilities and information and seasonal toilets.

## The Walk

**Starting and finishing at Upper Tamar Lake**

The walk starts at the main car park at Upper Tamar Lake, just on the Cornish side of the county boundary.



**From the car park walk back along the entrance track to the road.**

Before leaving, take the time to have a look at the very scenic lake. It was constructed in 1977 to help provide water supplies for the area. Today, as well as a water sports centre and angling facilities there is a path around the entire perimeter.

**At the road cross over and follow the lakeside path to Lower Tamar Lake.**

Whereas the upper lake is used for quiet recreational pursuits, the lower lake is maintained as a bird and wildlife resource. Look out for the bird hide just off the path.

**Follow the path to arrive next to the small car park at Lower Tamar Lake.**

Path near Virworthy



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## Tamar Lakes Walk Map

### Starting and finishing at Lower Tamar Lake

Walk up to the information board at the end of the dam. The walk from the upper lake is joined here.

The Bude Canal element of the walk begins here. Lower Tamar Lake was constructed in the 1820s by damming the River Tamar. It was built by the Bude Canal Company to supply the Bude Canal with water. In more recent times it has, in conjunction with the upper lake, been used for water supply to local settlements. Both lakes are managed by the South West Lakes Trust.

### Location Map



Walk across the dam. At the far end cross the footbridge over the spillway.

The spillway takes the water of the Tamar out of the lake, enabling the river to continue on its course to the sea at Plymouth. The original course of the river would have been where the dam now stands.

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**At the bottom of the slope on the far side bear left.**

At this point will be seen one of the markers for the canal, indicating the original land ownership boundary. This one is metal and has the inscription Bude Aqueduct.

This part of the canal is referred to as the Bude Aqueduct as it was originally constructed purely to carry water to supply the rest of the network. The canal (or aqueduct) then appears almost immediately on the left, emerging from the culvert which originally carried water from the lake.

**Follow the attractive grassy path until it arrives at Virworthy Wharf.**

Just before the road is the end of what was the navigable part of the canal. The wider section of canal here enabled barges to be turned.

**Cross the road and have a look around the wharf area.**

The wharf buildings were used to store coal, sand and manure, the main goods moved on the canal. There was also a wharfinger's cottage, where the person who looked after the wharf would have



Virworthy Wharf



Lower Tamar Lake

lived. Today, the old store is owned by the Bude Canal Trust. It is open to the public and contains information about the history of the canal.



Distance marker

Notice also the boundstone on the wharf, here inscribed BHC (for Bude Harbour and Canal Company). There are other metal markers next to the

canal nearby, one a distance marker indicating 13 miles to Bude.

**To return to the car parks, one way is to retrace steps back along the canal. For an attractive circular route return to the road from the wharf and turn left, i.e. downhill, away from the cottages.**

A little way down the road the Tamar is crossed and with it the county boundary, into Cornwall. For much of its length, the aqueduct section of the canal was parallel to the Tamar on the Devon side. Some 5 miles/8km downstream it crossed the river on a "real" aqueduct. This route, as far as the river crossing, can be followed on the Aqueduct Trail.

*continued...*

Follow this quiet lane as far as a sharp left bend, where the access track to Lower Tamar Lake leaves on the right. Follow this track to the car park.

For those who started at Upper Tamar Lake, go to the lakeside path and turn left, retracing your outward steps back to the car park.

### OS maps for this walk.

- Explorer No.126 Clovelly and Hartland (1:25,000)
- Landranger No.190 Bude and Clovelly (1:50,000)

## History

During the “canal boom” of the late 1700s, ambitious plans were conceived for a canal to link Bude to the south coast via the Tamar. These failed to materialise, but in 1817 work started on a more modest proposal. This comprised a 2 mile/3 km length navigable by barge from Bude to Helebridge, adjacent to the modern A39. Beyond this length, a total of some 40 miles/65 km of narrow tub-boat canal was constructed with three main branches to Druxton (near



Launceston), Blagdonmoor (near Holsworthy) and to a new water feeder reservoir on the Tamar near Virworthy.

The branch to the reservoir had originally been planned purely as a water feeder for the canal system. However, a wharf was built at Virworthy and the branch was used, like the rest of the system, to bring sea-sand from Bude to fertilise the soil and to take agricultural produce out. Nevertheless, because of the original purpose as a water feeder, this branch was always known as the Bude Aqueduct.

Except for the 2 mile length from Bude, the canal network was used by wheeled “tub boats”. These were drawn by horses then winched over the hills on a system of “inclined planes”. The combination of inclined planes, the sea lock at Bude and other historic features make the Bude Canal very important in heritage terms.

The canal closed in 1901 following the arrival of the railway in Bude and the consequent loss in trade. However, the reservoir and the Aqueduct continued to play a role in local water supply until the second half of the 20th Century.

Boating on Tamar Lakes



## Other Bude Canal Walks

### ② The Aqueduct Trail

A continuation of this walk, following the line of the Aqueduct to the crossing of the Tamar and back. A leaflet describes a circular walk, combining the Aqueduct with country lanes. Long (about 10 miles/16km) but level and easy. Leaflet available price 95p.

### ③ The Planekeepers Path

A circular walk following the route of the canal from Bude to the inclined plane at Hobbacott, returning on country footpaths and quiet lanes, via the ancient town of Stratton. Long (about 10 miles/ 16 km) but mostly level and easy although there is one steep climb on an inclined plane. Leaflet available price 95p.

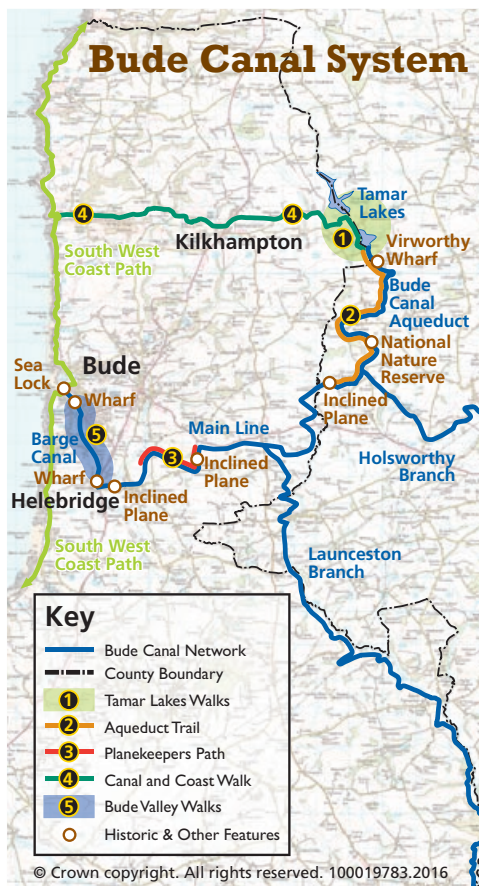
### ④ Canal and Coast Walk

Links Upper Tamar Lake with the South West Coast Path north of Bude. A very scenic walk with much of historic interest to see. Mostly fairly level but with some stiles. Some lengths may be muddy after rain. About 6½ miles/10½km one way. Leaflet available price 95p.

These three walks are all comprehensively signed and waymarked.

## ⑤ Bude Valley Walks

A range of walks, of varying lengths, exist in the Bude Valley based on the canal. A small book is available, containing information and suggested routes, price £4.99.



This map shows the historic line of most of the canal system. Not all of the system or its features are available for public access.

For visitor information including accommodation availability go to [www.visitdevon.co.uk](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk)  
[www.explored Devon.info](http://www.explored Devon.info) walking sections include information on other long and short walks and those which are accessible to all. There are also sections covering Devon's cycle routes and a flavour of some important wildlife and other natural places to visit in Devon.

Devon County Council has made every effort to ensure that the contents of this publication are accurate at the time of printing, however walks are undertaken at your own risk. January 2016.