



Buck's Mills – A Coastal Walk Looking at Devon Hedges



Devon Hedge Facts

- A Devon Hedge comprises of an earth bank, usually with a line of shrubs growing on top
- The bank may be faced with either stone or turf
- Devon has around 33,000 miles (53,000 km) of hedges, more than any other county in the UK
- Three quarters of Devon's hedge are thought to be medieval
- Around 20% of the UK's species-rich hedges are in Devon
- Hedges require management, including periodic rejuvenation by laying, to prevent them from disappearing

For more information about Devon Hedges visit <http://www.devon.gov.uk/hedges.htm>

The Devon Hedge Group

The Devon Hedge Group is a forum of organisations and individuals interested in working together to promote the appreciation and conservation of hedges found across the county. Members of the Group represent the full range of interests associated with hedges in Devon, including agriculture, the conservation of wildlife and landscape, and historical and cultural values. This leaflet has been produced as a part of the Devon Hedge Group's Green Veins and Lanes project.

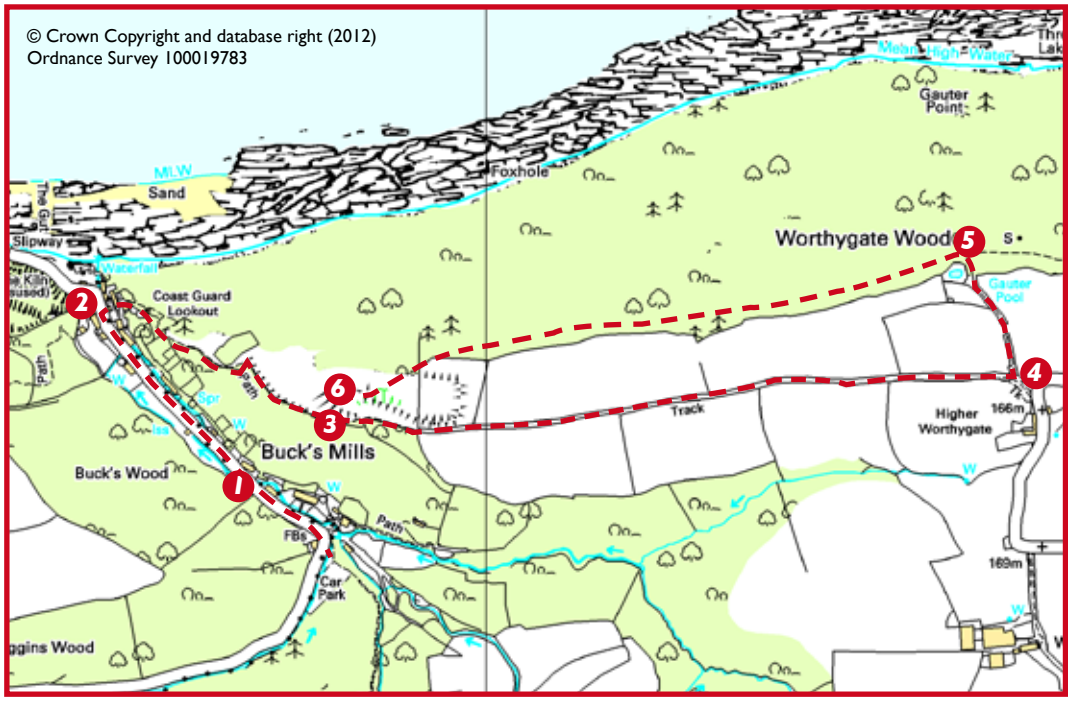
Follow the Countryside Code



- 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



This short walk follows some fine Devon hedges, and by following this leaflet you can find out about the history of the local landscape and how the hedges are managed. The walk is 2 miles and will take about one hour to walk, at a leisurely pace. The walk has some muddy sections, so boots may be needed even in summer.



1. The walk starts at the public car park (grid reference SS 358 233) in Buck's Mills, 8 miles west of Bideford, just off the A39. From the car park walk down the main street through the village. Just before the end of the road take the Coast Path on the right signed *Peppercombe*.

2. Walk between the houses and then up through Worthygate Woods soon entering National Trust land. The Woods are a Site of Special Scientific Interest and are carpeted with bluebells in spring.

Half way up through the woods there is a beautiful old hedge on the right. You will see that the hedgerow shrubs are growing on an earth bank, which is faced with stone. The presence of an earth bank is one of the main characteristics of Devon hedges and a key difference with those found in most other parts of the country.

Generally in northern Devon, stone faced hedges have their stones on edge, whereas elsewhere in the country, stones are generally laid flat in hedges and walls. Although there is no definitive answer to why northern Devon is different in this respect, one explanation is that the stones here tend to be poor quality and need to be put on their edge to get them to sit well.

3. After 1/2 mile leave the Coast Path by keeping right, signed Worthygate, along the "green lane" - a hedged path between two fields.

Along the section of stone-faced hedge up to the gate there is a wonderful display of fern species including the hart's-tongue fern (looking like the tongue of a "hart" or deer) and the scaly male fern, which has golden-brown scales along the leaf stalks.



The National Trust manage the green lane and cut it to allow an abundance of wild flowers to grow spring and summer. You may see primrose, red campion, greater stitchwort, knapweed, foxgloves and honeysuckle. The combination of plenty of nectar rich flowers and the shelter from the hedges make it an ideal place for insects including red admiral, peacock and gatekeeper butterflies and the golden-ringed dragonfly, the female of

which is the UK's longest dragonfly.

At the first gap in the hedge with a view out over the sea, look to the left. Between the headland (Gallantry Bower) and Clovelly (the village "tumbling down to the sea") you will see a group of long thin fields. These well preserved "strip fields" have ancient hedges which date back to the Middle Ages (1250-1450) when, in Devon, hedges were built to enclose cultivated open strips. Around three-quarters of Devon's hedges are thought to be medieval in origin, whereas elsewhere in the country, open fields persisted much longer and hedges were mainly created during the C18th/19th Parliamentary Enclosures.

Research by Dr Max Hooper in five counties, including Devon, developed what has become known as "Hooper's Rule" - the age of a hedge in years can be worked out by counting the number of woody plant species in a 30 yard section of hedge and multiplying this by 110. So a hedge with 5 woody species in 30m would be around 500 years old. The "rule" is far from accurate but as a general rule of thumb it is a useful tool even if it is only to identify which hedges have a good diversity of shrub species. Why not try to work out how old the hedges beside the Green Lane are according to Hooper's Rule?

4. At the junction of paths near Higher Worthygate turn left over the stile along the public footpath to the Coast Path.



From the stile there is a fine view towards Fullabrook Wind Farm. Just in front of the wind farm there are good examples of Enclosure Award hedges. You will notice the rectangular fields, the shape of which is typical for hedges which date from the 18th and 19th century parliamentary enclosures, when many areas of remaining common land across Devon were enclosed.

The hedge to the right of the footpath is cut by laying every 5 years. The work is done by volunteers learning the traditional skills. The rotation is shorter than the usual 12-15 years cycle, making the hedge easy to work on.



5. After 100 yards turn left along the Coast Path signed *Buck's Mills*

After 150 yards on the Coast Path you will notice an old coppiced ash tree, which sits on top of a redundant hedge that now runs between two areas of ancient oak woodland. The tree would have previously been cut to ground level on perhaps a 12-15 year cycle to produce ash poles for many uses including firewood, tool handles, rakes and tent pegs. The size of the multi-stemmed tree shows that it has not been coppiced for many years.

6. At the next Coast Path sign keep right along the Coast Path and retrace your steps down through Worthygate Wood back to Buck's Mills. Turn left at the road and walk back up through the village to the car park.