

**TOURIST'S GUIDE TO
NORTH DEVON AND
THE EXMOOR DISTRICT**

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Tourist's Guide to North Devon and the Exmoor District by R. N. Worth

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PREFACE.

THIS Guide-book deals, not only with North Devon proper, but with the portion of Somerset containing the ancient Forest of Exmoor, which projects like a huge promontory into the North of Devon, and which, although politically separated from the latter county, is geographically essentially Devonian, and moreover is traversed in whole or in part by two of the main tourist routes with which we have to deal. The railway system not being extended in the same proportions in North Devon as in South, coach roads and walking routes are of greater relative importance; and it has been found desirable, to suit the convenience of the traveller, to arrange the various excursions, irrespective of their character, in general topographical order. As in the writer's 'South Devon,' "throughout the aim has been to give the tourist the greatest amount of practically useful information, brought down to the latest moment, and condensed into the smallest compass,"—he trusts that his 'Guide to North Devon' may meet with the same kindly welcome and prove as widely acceptable as his 'Guide to South Devon.' More he could neither hope nor wish; and he gladly takes this opportunity of thanking his friends and readers for an appreciation and support which have far exceeded his most sanguine expectations.

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TOURIST'S GUIDE

TO

NORTH DEVON.

INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH it is not needful to repeat the general introduction to the history, topography, and characteristics of Devonshire, which will be found in the *Guide to South Devon*, there is room for a few general observations on the peculiarities of the Northern district of the county, to which the present volume seeks to introduce the visitor. This handbook treats of the whole of Devon N. and W. of the London and South Western Railway from Axminster to Lydford, and of the Great Western Railway from Lydford to Launceston, with so much of Somerset as lies to the W. of Taunton, exclusive of that thriving town and its pleasant vale. This portion of Somerset is so inlocked with Devon, to which its associations indeed more properly belong, and so distinct from the body of the county to which it is politically attached, that such an arrangement seems by far the more desirable—all the more desirable, further, from the fact that the district is traversed by two railways, which conduct into North Devon from Taunton, and which therefore make that town a convenient centre of approach.

There are *three railway routes* into the North of Devon from London and the Midland and Northern parts of the kingdom.

From Taunton branch off, (1) the coast line, wholly in Somerset, by Williton and Watchett to Dunster and Minehead; and (2) the Devon and Somerset Railway, which is partially in each county, and which has its terminus at Barnstaple, the North Devon metropolis. Taunton is on

the Great Western Railway, distant from London about 5h. (average) by ordinary, and 3½h. by fast express trains. Refreshment Rooms: Swindon, Bristol, Taunton. Fares from London: (single) 30s. 7d., 23s. 2d., 13s. 1½d.; (return) 52s. 3d., 40s. Express: (single) 35s., 25s.; (return) 55s., 40s. Tourist tickets are issued to the chief resorts in North Devon in the season; and circular tickets, embracing the sea route from Portishead to Lynmouth and Ilfracombe.

The third route is by the London and South Western Railway, *via* Exeter, over the North Devon line to Barnstaple, branching thence to Bideford and Torrington on the one hand, and Ilfracombe on the other. Time by South Western between London and Exeter about 5h. 15m. (average) ordinary, 4h. 5m. by fast express. Refreshment Rooms: Basingstoke, Salisbury, Yeovil, Exeter. Fares from London: (single) 35s., 25s., 14s. 3½d.; (return) 55s., 40s. Third class single tickets issued by all trains except chief express. Tourist tickets issued in the season from London to the principal points in North Devon.

There is yet another way of approaching North Devon, and that is by *sea*. During the summer steamers run from Portishead, near Bristol, to Lynmouth and Ilfracombe; and throughout the year between Swansea and Ilfracombe. Bristol is reached either by the Great Western or Midland Railway. Fares, Swansea to Ilfracombe: (single) 6s., 4s.; (return) 8s., 6s.

There are wide points of difference between N. and S. Devon, associated with striking resemblances and correspondence. "It is curious how N. and S. Devon answer to each other in their respective features. 'Alike, yet not the same.' . . . One may quote Helena's touching remembrance in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* about Hermia:—

'A union in partition,

Two lovely berries moulded on one stem.'

Of course there is nothing in North Devon like the Three Towns . . . nothing like the Breakwater at the entrance of Plymouth Sound, or the Eddystone Lighthouse further out; and I suppose the view from the Hoe at Plymouth can only be rivalled by what I have never seen—the Bay of Naples. . . . Torquay too, of all sea-side places in the West (may I not say of sea-side places anywhere?) is the queen. . . . But Ilfracombe has charms—its cliffs are rocks, and not earth—which have yet to be fully developed,

now that there are easier means of access to such an *Ultima Thule*. Westward Ho! has been patted on the back by the genial hand of Kingsley, as Loch Katrine was brought into notice by Scott's 'Lady of the Lake.' Clovelly is the quaintest and loveliest of sea-coast villages, with Lundy Island in the distance. . . . The climate of Ilfracombe is perfect, and something more, for it is half a degree warmer in winter and half a degree cooler in summer than that favoured spot, Torquay. In both N. and S. Devon, excepting perhaps that district, or sort of middle passage, where it is said Pluto caught cold from the chilling wet, 'the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses;' but on the N. coast it is bracing and biting, and less relaxing than on the S. . . . I have never found it dull [*vide* Herrick's 'this dull Devonshire'] for a single hour in either N. or S. Devon. And having got to the end of my slight handling of their respective beauties and attractions, the best summing up I can give is perhaps what Sir Walter Scott says of Minna and Brenda, the two sisters in the 'Pirate': 'The difference of their tempers and of their complexions was singularly striking, though combined, as is usual, with a certain degree of family resemblance'" (*Rev. Treasurer Hawker*).

From this brief outline of a charming sketch it will be clear that, to know what Devonshire really is, both the N. and the S. of the county must be visited, each district having its own peculiar attractions. There can be no better preparation for a tour in North Devon than the reading of Kingsley's 'Westward Ho!' and Blackmore's 'Lorna Doone,' two works which have made North Devon known and famous wherever the English tongue has spread, and which abound in graphic touches descriptive of people and of places.

Inland North Devon has a varied character—here park-like, there a wild upland. Its *coast line* is remarkable alike for boldness and for beauty. The giant cliffs are broken by frequent creeks or "mouths." "Each has its upright walls: inland of rich oak wood, nearer the sea of dark-green furze, then of smooth turf, then of weird black cliffs, which range out right and left far into the deep sea in castles, spires, and wings of jagged iron-stone. Each has its narrow strip of fertile meadow; its crystal trout stream, winding across and across from one hill foot to the other; its grey stone mill, with the water sparkling and humming

round the dripping wheel; its dark rock-pools above the tide-mark, where the salmon-trout gather in from their Atlantic wanderings after each autumn flood; its ridge of blown sand, bright with golden trefoil and crimson lady's finger; its grey bank of polished pebbles down which the stream rattles towards the sea below. Each has its black field of jagged shark's-tooth rocks which pave the cove from side to side, streaked here and there with a pink line of shell sand, and laced with white foam from the eternal surge, stretching in parallel lines out to the westward, in strata set upright on edge, or tilted towards each other at strange angles by primeval earthquakes. Such is the 'mouth,' as those coves are called, and such the jaw of teeth which they display, one rasp of which would grind abroad the timbers of the stoutest ship. To landward all richness, softness, and peace; to seaward a waste and howling wilderness of rock and roller, barren to the fisherman and hopeless to the shipwrecked mariner" (*Kingsley.*)

This is no ideal picture, no individual portrait. Chasm after chasm in the frowning cliff-wall has just such scene to show. Still, here as elsewhere, while there are "mouths" so cruel, there are "mouths" so tender that they smile without deceit, and have no after-thought in their welcome; ferny combs whence the woods rush headlong to the sea, unbroke by crag, unleft by gully; where the waters roll gently up the tawny sands, and the little stream, its leaping downward neath the branches at an end, ripples peacefully to the tide-way; where the storm-wind rarely enters, and where the ruling spirit of the year is one of perfect loveliness and peace.

The *early history* of the district is uncertain. That it was thickly peopled in ancient times, abundant remains of well-worn trackways, numerous camps, and still frequent barrows prove; but the archaeologist will find few traces of the "rude stone monuments" of these early days which once abounded on and around Exmoor—*Camden's* "certain monuments of anticke work, to wit, stones pitched in orders, some triangle wise, others in a round circle." The *Roman* associations are very vague; and though we may fairly accept the historical character of the traditional defeat of the *Danes* under Hubba, and the capture of the "Raven" standard, at Appledore, near Bideford, it is not so clear that Croyde and Putsborough, on the other side of that estuary, took name from the Norse vikings Crida and

Putta. The chief details of the recent history are dealt with under the different places named.

While the unholibied tourist will rejoice in the delightful scenery and the fine climate, the *angler* will find that almost every stream abounds with fish, and affords excellent sport (particulars as to free and preserved waters and tickets can always be had at the hotels); and the *sporteman* who delights in a run across country may not only indulge in fox-hunting, but take part in the chase of the wild red deer, which have their last English stronghold on the wilds of Exmoor.

Nor are the scientific attractions of North Devon any whit inferior. The *botany* is rich and varied, and the *combes* (*cwm* = a valley, distinctively a valley opening towards the sea) abound in ferns. Devon is the fern paradise of England, and this the cryptogamic paradise of Devon. The local *algology* and *entomology* have also peculiar and noteworthy features.

To the *geologist* North Devon is exceptionally interesting, especially if he desires to study the much-vexed Devonian question, for which the fine coast sections afford abundant opportunity. Roughly speaking, the Devon and Somerset Railway may be taken as dividing North Devon into a Devonian district to the N., from Exmoor right away to Barnstaple Bay, and a Carboniferous on the S. But there is an irregular Triassic area on the E. extending from Watchett, in Bridgewater Bay, to Exeter, and stretching W. in a long tongue by Crediton towards an outlier at Hatherleigh; and while this is associated with Lias at Watchett, the Blackdown Hills further E. still are capped by Greensand. There is a Triassic outlier at Portledge, in Barnstaple Bay, and a presumed Greensand outlier at Orleigh Court, near Bideford. The Devonian rocks are metalliferous at Combemartin and North Molton; and the Carboniferous between Bideford and Umberleigh contain several seams of anthracite. Lundy is of granite, probably of Dartmoor age.

Barnstaple Bay affords fine examples of *raised beaches*. There is a very well defined one extending westward from Westward Ho! "most conspicuous on the numerous projecting points of cliff or mimic headlands," and about 20 feet above the level of the present strand. On the eastern side of the bay similar phenomena present themselves, traceable from the northern extremity of Braunton Burrows, round the western end of Saunton down into Croyde Bay,