

Tregothnan

COOMBE  
WALKS

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# Tregothnan

All walks begin in the centre of the village by the grey hut with a corrugated roof otherwise known as the Reading Room. The Reading Room was built in 1908 as a Men's Institute – or Reading Room as it was generally known - and newspapers were supplied by the then owners of Killiow House. The road down to Coombe was only built in 1924 (by the local men) so the Reading Room and the newspapers were much appreciated. On the roadside of the Reading Room is the Shute, the village's source of drinking water until the arrival of mains water in the mid-1960s. As villagers would have to fill their earthenware pitchers several times a day the Shute area was the hub of village life.

## Coombe Walk 1

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**Creekside walk, orchards and extensive views over the Truro and Fal rivers and of Tregothnan. Circular walk, allow about 45 minutes.**

**A** Go up lane (marked as a footpath) between Coombe Cottage and Riverside Cottage passing Sunnyside house and turn left at top of lane before the track narrows. At the end of the lane turn left and exit on to foreshore beside Beach Cottage. The orchards of Sunnyside and Beach Cottage are traditionally maintained and planted mainly with Kea plums as well as apples. In the early spring these orchards are renowned for their amazing displays of primroses, followed in mid-spring by a sea of white plum blossom (often featured in the local newspaper) and then by the multi-coloured apple blossom.

**B** At the bottom of the lane the orchard on the right contains large concrete tanks, the remnants of what was once a thriving oyster fishery. Most of the local men were oyster fishermen and the tanks were where from the 1930s to the 1950s William Gunn and Co, the largest oyster merchant on the Fal, had their grading shed and purification plant. Along the foreshore traditional oyster rowing and sailing boats can usually be seen, the Fal being the only place in Europe where fishing is still carried out under sail.

**C** On reaching the bottom of the lane turn right along the waymarked footpath. Here there are seats where a rest may be taken to admire the view of the creek, entrancing both when the tide is in and out when many birds – particularly herons, egrets, curlew and shell duck - can usually be seen. Continue to walk along the path with the creek on your left, but be aware that this is a very narrow path and children need to be carefully supervised especially when the tide is in. People are always fascinated by the boats and quays opposite, it all looks as if it has been there forever but the quays were only built about twenty years ago – and all without planning approval, but in Cornwall officialdom can seem quite distant. All the land on the far bank is now owned by the National Trust.

**D** Pass Bethel cottage. Bethel was once the closest shop to Coombe so locals often referred to the creekside path as 'shop lane' and the son of the shopkeeper was known as 'Jack shop'. As well as the present cottage Bethel also had a small chapel and at least one other cottage, all situated in the garden of the present cottage.

**E** At the junction of the path from Coombe and the track to Turnapenny there are good views of Cowlands Creek. The wood on the right of the creek is a coppice oak wood, this was part of a major local industry where the trees would have been cut down about every thirty years, the oak bark was essential to the local leather tanneries and the timber was sawn up for firewood. At the head of the creek on the right stands Cowlings Mill (Cowlands has been called Cowlings as well as Cownance over the centuries), this was a corn mill and latterly a boat builders where many of the local oyster boats were built.

**F** Turn right and up the track to Turnapenny. No one knows the derivation of its name, it was once called Ball Bate House and its name is a mystery as well! Behind Turnapenny new apple orchards have been planted by Tregothnan Estate. As you walk up the lane towards Lower Lanner farm there are excellent views towards Cowlands, but in the early spring the orchard on the right probably has the best display of primroses in the area. This orchard has recently been replanted with a mixture of medlar and quince tree by the Estate. Look out for the oak tree on your left whose roots have been completely eroded, a great place for small children to hide.

**G** Pass through Lower Lanner farm. The farmhouse on the left was built in the 1930s after the original thatched farmhouse was destroyed by fire. The present farmer keeps a small herd of Highland cattle which can often be seen in the yard or the adjacent fields, and they are renowned for their docility.

**H** Turn right as you reach the road and after about 100 metres turn right through the gate into the field. The first field has recently been planted with tea by Tregothnan Estate. These fields all afford excellent views across a large area of Cornwall. To the north can be seen Truro and on the river the village of Malpas. To the east can be seen Tregothnan house, its gardens and deer park. To the south can be seen the river Fal, sometimes with ocean going ships laid up waiting for an upturn in the market, as well as an excellent view over the orchards of Coombe. To the east lies Cowlands, Penelewey and Carnmenellis in the far distance.

**I** Walk through these three fields, over the stile at the bottom of the last field, down the narrow path and then down the lane past Sunnyside to where you started.

#### **Alternatives:**

- Instead of walking across the fields follow the road all the way back into Coombe.
- Begin from Coombe by walking up the road, turn left at the top of the road and continue along the road until the entrance of Lower Lanner farm and then walk down the lane – essentially reversing the order above.

# Coombe Walk 2

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**Views of River Fal, ships, Roundwood Quay and Tolverne.**

**Circular walk, allow about one hour, perhaps 90 minutes if you take the option in G to walk down to the river.**

**A** Walk left past Holly Cottage, Coombe Villa and The Brake. Until very recently old posts could be seen in front of Holly Cottage and Coombe Villa, they were once used by fishermen to dry their nets. On the opposite shore, where a track now lies, posts once lined the foreshore and in summer would have carried nets being dried. Also in front of these cottages can usually be seen examples of the local oyster dredging boats. The smaller ones, usually about 15 feet long, carried one dredge and are rowed – and some of these would have been built in the shed which once lay behind the Reading Room. The larger ones, from 24 to 30 feet, are sailing boats and carry upwards of two dredges – and the Fal is the only place in Europe where fishing is still carried out under sail. Oyster fishing is still carried on from the creek but recently only by two fishermen whereas between the wars perhaps thirty boats went out dredging.

**B** Just past The Brake turn left and walk up the path. Here there are excellent views of the Coombe orchards, famous for their Kea plums and for many years the area was known as the Kea plum gardens. Tourists would come in May to see the clouds of white plum blossom as well as at the beginning of September to buy the plums which make excellent jam.

**C** At the top of the hill continue along the path which here forms a tunnel with trees overhead. You pass through orchards which were all planted in the 1860s but by the 1960s had become neglected and are now overgrown. Eventually you emerge from the tunnel and look across at Roundwood. Roundwood is part of the National Trust's Trelissick Estate and can be accessed via the Trelissick woodland walk or along the track from above Cowlands. Roundwood has a fascinating history, in the Iron Age it was a hill fort, it is known that Phoenicians traded tin from here, it later became a major port for exporting Cornish tin and then as ports such as Devoran grew in prominence it developed as a shipyard in the nineteenth century. From here there are also views of King Harry Ferry, a chain ferry which gives access to the Roseland peninsula, and sometimes ocean going ships which are laid up waiting for an upturn in the market – or the scrap yard.

**D** Enter the short stretch of woodland, in May well known for its blue bells. As you pass into the wood on the right is a large depression, a bomb crater from the Second World war.

**E** Cross the stile, turn right and pass into a field planted with tea by Tregothnan Estate. Walk through the fields and past Halwyn farm. Here there are superb views of Tolverne and King Harry reaches of the Fal. The Fal is a ria, a deep flooded valley with wonderful hanging oak woods.

Much of the woodland you can see on the opposite bank is coppice oak, this was part of a major local industry where the trees would have been cut down about every thirty years, the oak bark was essential to the local leather tanneries and the timber was sawn up for firewood. Opposite is Tolverne passage, like King Harry once one of the major ferry crossings of the Fal but only by small wooden boat and it ceased early in the twentieth century. The thatched cottage was the ferryman's cottage but the area changed enormously during the Second World War when it became an embarkation point for the Normandy landings. A concrete road was driven through the woods, slipways and a long jetty (the latter no longer there) were built and the road still bears the caterpillar marks of the tanks which went down it. After the war the cottage became known as Smugglers and served as a pub and more recently as a popular tearoom.

**F** Walk past Halwyn farm and out to the road. Halwyn, meaning in Cornish the white hall, is one of the oldest settlements in the area and was mentioned in the thirteenth century.

**G** At the road there is a choice. If you turn right there is a path down to the river, the old ferry crossing to Tolverne, and this was of such major importance that it is still technically a highway rather than a path. At the bottom there are still very large boulders on which travellers would have walked on to board the ferry. Just before the bottom there is a depression in the path and a small quay beneath, and the depression marks a tunnel or cave which was all part of the smuggling trade on the Fal in the nineteenth century. Between the path and the river one field has been turned into a tea plantation, all part of the Tregothnan Estate's successful tea brand.

**H** If you do not walk down to the river then turn left and walk up the road to the top of the hill and then along to Higher Trelease farm. At the entrance to the farm there is a well known view of Truro cathedral, a view used in many guidebooks and television programmes.

**I** Continue along the road as it goes downhill. On the left is a derelict cottage, once home to Derek Tangye the well known Cornish author. On the right once lay a footpath, now sadly closed, which took travellers from Tolverne ferry via Old Kea to the ferry at Malpas and thus to Truro. Thus this was a major road of its period, which today it takes a huge leap of the imagination to comprehend.

**J** Walk past a delightful pair of nineteenth century estate cottages – one was built for the local gamekeeper. Here another path on the right leads past Trevean to Old Kea and this is dealt with in Walk 3. At the road junction turn left for an easy stroll down hill into Coombe – remembering that this part of the road was only built in 1924.

# Coombe Walk 3

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**Views of Truro river, delightful Old Kea church, and returning via Cowlands. Circular walk, allow about one and a half hours, perhaps two and a half hours if you take the option in F to walk down to the river opposite Malpas and the option to walk into Cowlands.**

**This walk may be done separately or as a continuation of Walk 2, starting from the last point – J – of Walk 2.**

**A** Leave Coombe by the road and walk uphill across the two cattle grids to the road junction. The road you have just walked along was built by the efforts of local men in 1924. They borrowed a plough team from a farmer and spent two weeks building the road, but the cattle grids only replaced gates in recent times. Until then everyone came or went by boat or via the footpath which runs past Sunnyside and over the hill.

**B** Turn right and walk towards the pair of nineteenth century estate cottages, typical of many that were built on estates all over the country and very different from Cornish cottages. They were known as Keepers' Cottages and were probably built to house Tregothnan Estate gamekeepers. Walk down the lane on the left (it is a public footpath) leaving the cottages on the right.

**C** On the left is Trevean, the name means small farmstead. The present delightful thatched house is very recent having been converted from farm buildings. The farmyard is nineteenth century but the small cottage is far older, probably sixteenth century and has a huge inglenook fireplace, but until recently it was a semi-derelict cattle shed. Walk ahead leaving the house and cottage on the left. The grassed area you enter is a much older farmyard and Trevean itself is a very old settlement that was first mentioned in 1278. The granite cross is modern and placed there by a former owner of Trevean. As you face the cross there is a track on the right which goes down to the river, and this helps to explain the location of Trevean. This track is private so take the public footpath on the left, and enter the field. On your left the slight mounds in the field are the remains of two cottages.

**D** From here there are excellent views on the right towards the Truro river and, in the trees, the spire of St Michael Penkivel church. Ahead is Old Kea, you can see the ivy covered church tower in front of you. Head towards the large oak tree in the middle of the field and follow the footpath across the field down to Old Kea.

**E** Old Kea is full of history. Legend has it that in the fifth century an Irish monk floated across from Ireland on a hollowed out granite boulder and he founded a monastery where he landed. It is more likely that he was one of several monks from Glastonbury who did found small monasteries and one seems to

have existed here in 500 AD. The manor of Landeke (Landegea or Kea) is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1068. A medieval church replaced the pre-Norman building and is recorded in 1265, but was rebuilt in the fifteenth century, but all that exists of it now is its tower. Unfortunately, the church was at the extreme eastern end of its large parish and in 1802 it was dismantled. A new church was built to the west side of the A39 but seems to have been an early example of jerry-building as it was replaced by the present All Hallows church in 1895. (Its steeple can be seen when driving from Coombe up to the A39 when you reach Kea School. The new church is a fine Victorian building, very 'unCornish', and has a thriving congregation.)

When the fifteenth century church was demolished some of the materials were used to build a parish poor-house in the churchyard, and it is likely that parts of this building were then converted into the present mission church which held its first service on 5th October 1858, the Parish Feast of St Kea. Walk on the public road towards the church. Pause to look through the gateway on the right before you reach the churchyard. You might just be able to make out a slight depression in the field and this was the site of the Glebe farmhouse until towards the end of the nineteenth century. The 'Glebe' was the land owned by the church and farmed by a tenant farmer, and the name of the field is Sentry or Centry. You may not realise that all fields did have names but this is a derivation of the Norman French 'sanctuarie' which means 'church land'. Turn right through the gateway (note the date stone on the left pier) and into the churchyard. Do explore the churchyard, which houses some fine tombs, but be wary of the dangerous tower! Enter the church past the tall cross shaft outside the church (more on this later in H). The little church is a delightful building with some interesting stained glass and a fine Norman font (though the font from the original church is now at All Hallows). Services are still held on a regular basis.

Leave the churchyard and turn right. At the junction you have a choice. If you turn right and walk up the hill you then walk to the river opposite Malpas (see below under F), but you will have to retrace your steps back to Old Kea. If you do not opt for the walk to the river opposite Malpas then go to G and walk up the left fork of the public road.

**F** Walk up the hill to the top of the public road and then where the public road ends take the footpath which leads down through Kea wood to the river opposite Malpas. This is a very ancient path as until the mid twentieth century a foot ferry ran from the cottage in front of you to Malpas. By taking this ferry and then the ferry at Tolverne many miles would be cut from a journey from Truro to the Roseland. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the ferry was kept by a big, brawny woman known as Jenny Mopas, and a portrait of her for many years hung in the servants' hall at Tregothnan. When asked by the rector of St Michael Penkivel what types of passengers gave her the most trouble she answered 'Wemmin and pigs!' It is now difficult to imagine that in January 1537, when France and Spain were at war, a fleet of Spanish ships sought shelter in the river Fal and next day four French men-of-war also sought shelter. In the skirmish that followed the French came off worst and



fled up-river as far as Malpas being pursued by the Spanish. Eventually both sides were forced to stop fighting, captains on both sides had to appear before the Justices of the Peace in Truro and the French were forced to allow the Spanish to leave. This episode helped Henry VIII decide to build Pendennis and St Mawes castles in 1539 to ensure that never again would the Spanish or French threaten the Fal and its towns. In 1876 the farmer at Woodbury dug up a cannonball in his orchard, probably a relic of this skirmish. The ferry crossing at Malpas, said to derive from 'Mal pas' or 'dangerous crossing', also features in the Arthurian legend of Tristan and Iseult as it is where Iseult was ferried across the water to King Mark's palace at Blanchland (in Kea parish).

Walk back through the wood to Old Kea.

**G** Walk up the hill via the public road. About half way up there is a gateway on the right hand side with views of Truro and Lambe or Sunset creek immediately in the foreground. Just behind the creek can be seen Penpoll farmhouse. The farmhouse was the centre of smuggling in the area, to the rear of the house was a large cave where contraband was hidden and a tunnel ran from the bottom of the front garden to the creek. Eventually it was raided by Excise men. Still today one of the parlour windows bears the signatures scratched into the glass with diamond rings by leading smugglers from that era.

**H** Stop at the top of the hill at the junction. The narrow piece of land between the roads was very probably the site of the medieval cross marking the path to the church. Part of the base of the cross supports the font at Old Kea and the size of the base suggests that the cross was particularly tall. The cross itself was lost many years ago. If you peer through the hedge on the right there are good views of Malpas.

**I** Turn right and go up the hill to the junction. Turn left signposted to Cowlands. On the left is Higher Lanner farm. To the right once stood a small field, the manorial pound in which stray animals would have been kept until their owners had paid a fine.

**J** As you meet Cowlands wood, on the left there is a public footpath, partly sunken through moss covered banks, running diagonally down through the wood. Alternatively walk down the steep hill and near the bottom take the track on the left, a public footpath, through the wood but parallel with the creek. Both paths enjoy lovely views of the creek through the oak trees. The wood is a coppice oak wood. The trees would have been cut down about every thirty years for their bark which was used for tanning leather. There are extensive coppice oak woods in the area and the last tannery was Croggons at Grampound which ran from 1712 to 2002. The bark would have been stripped in May when the rising sap made it easier to separate the bark from the tree, and the trees would have been sawn up for firewood.

If you decide to take the lower path then before you leave the road walk the



very short distance into Cowlands. The white house on the right was a corn mill, and the black shed on the quay was originally two stories high and a boat yard where surprisingly large rowing and sailing boats were built.

Both paths through the wood meet at a white cottage, and the public footpath goes around to the rear of the cottage and swings right along a sunken path to a large stile. After the stile turn right and follow the path (Pencreek is on the right) to Turnapenny. At Turnapenny turn right down to the creek, and at the creek turn left and follow the riverside path past Bethel and on to Coombe.

## Coombe Walk 4

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**To the Punchbowl and Ladle pub at Penelewey via Cowlands, with good food, good views, two fine houses and (at the right time of year) one of the best bluebell woods.**

**Allow a minimum of one hour to walk up to the pub. To return to Coombe either take the same route back or see the second option which would add an additional half hour to the walk back.**

**A to E below are the same as in Walk 1.**

**A** Go up lane (marked as a footpath) between Coombe Cottage and Riverside Cottage passing Sunnyside house and turn left at top of lane before the track narrows. At the end of the lane turn left and exit on to foreshore beside Beach Cottage. The orchards of Sunnyside and Beach Cottage are traditionally maintained and planted mainly with Kea plums as well as apples. In the early spring these orchards are renowned for their amazing displays of primroses, followed in mid-spring by a sea of white plum blossom (often featured in the local newspaper) and then by the multi-coloured apple blossom.

**B** At the bottom of the lane the orchard on the right contains large concrete tanks, the remnants of what was once a thriving oyster fishery. Most of the local men were oyster fishermen and the tanks were where from the 1930s to the 1950s William Gunn and Co, the largest oyster merchant on the Fal, had their grading shed and purification plant. Along the foreshore traditional oyster rowing and sailing boats can usually be seen, the Fal being the only place in Europe where fishing is still carried out under sail.

**C** On reaching the bottom of the lane turn right along the waymarked footpath. Here there are seats where a rest may be taken to admire the view of the creek, entrancing both when the tide is in and out when many birds – particularly herons, egrets, curlew and shell duck - can usually be seen.

Continue to walk along the path with the creek on your left, but be aware that this is a very narrow path and children need to be carefully supervised especially when the tide is in. People are always fascinated by the boats and quays opposite, it all looks as if it has been there forever but the quays were only built about twenty years ago – and all without planning approval, but in Cornwall officialdom can seem quite distant. All the land on the far bank is now owned by the National Trust.

**D** Pass Bethel cottage. Bethel was once the closest shop to Coombe so locals often referred to the creekside path as 'shop lane' and the son of the shopkeeper was known as 'Jack shop'. As well as the present cottage Bethel also had a small chapel and at least one other cottage, all situated in the garden of the present cottage.

**E** At the junction of the path from Coombe and the track to Turnapenny there are good views of Cowlands Creek. The wood on the right of the creek is a coppice oak wood, this was part of a major local industry where the trees would have been cut down about every thirty years, the oak bark was essential to the local leather tanneries and the timber was sawn up for firewood. At the head of the creek on the right stands Cowlings Mill (Cowlands has been called Cowlings as well as Cownance over the centuries), this was a corn mill and latterly a boat builders where many of the local oyster boats were built.

**F** Turn right and up the track to Turnapenny. No one knows the derivation of its name, it was once called Ball Bate House and its name is a mystery as well! Take the left turn when you reach Turnapenny. You will pass on the right new apple orchards which have been planted by Tregothnan Estate. Turn left over a stile into a sunken lane, cross a tiny stream past a broken stile and bend left around the rear of a white cottage. With the cottage on the left and the creek in front of you, follow the track on the right which runs parallel with the creek and takes you through Cowlands wood to the road. As mentioned in E this is a coppice oak wood, it was last clear felled about 80 years ago and the trees are growing from 'stools', a sure sign of coppiced wood. At the road turn left and walk down into the hamlet of Cowlands. On the right is an old water mill which ground corn, the black shed on the left was where a shipwright built wooden boats.

**G** Cross the bridge and turn right up the footpath to the left of the large thatched house, and follow the path to the rear of the house. The path then widens to a track. Later you will pass a large quarry, the track was used to carry the stone to barges – propelled by sail and poles – which would come up to the quay in Cowlands. Look right above and across the stream, what looks like a hedge was the leat which carried the water to Cowlings mill. The wood on the left is celebrated as being one of the best bluebell woods in the area, and in the winter it is notable for its enormous ferns. The quarry on the left is substantial and is now luxuriant with enormous ferns and cascading ivy. Walk up through the wood into the field and head straight up towards the buildings on the brow of the hill, through to the road and turn left.

**H** Treloggas house is on the right. It probably dates from the 17th century but at some stage in the 18th century it was given a fine brick front. For many

years it was home to the Martin family and the last member of the family, a spinster, lived there alone for many years. She had no modern services – electricity, phone etc – and lived alone but had tamed rats who were her only companions. She lived there until her death in the late 1990s, the farm was then sold, the house modernised and the old farm buildings turned into accommodation. Continue along the road and then turn right along a track skirting the old farm buildings on the right (these buildings have been converted into dwellings). Note that a minor modification of the footpath route by the farmyard has been agreed but may not as yet have been put in place.. Do look out for the recently renewed waymarking posts between here and Penelewey Farm as the path is a little tortuous.

**I** With Treloggas behind you walk along the path with a fence to your right, cross a stile, walk as directed across a small field and up a lane. Just before the metal gate take the waymarked path through the hedge on your left into a field. Turn right and walk with the hedge on your right towards a stile by a metal gate. Cross the stile and again walk with the hedge on your right towards a metal gate. Go through the gate and bear left across a field towards the farm buildings. Go through a small wooden gate and into the farm complex, pass through a series of small gates. The farm buildings on the right are a particularly fine set probably from the late 19th. Note that these farm buildings are also being converted into dwellings so there may be some building work taking place which may slightly obscure the route of the path. If in doubt just head towards the drive which passes Penelewey Barton farmhouse.

**J** Penelewey Barton (which is privately owned) is an exceptional farm house. The present building was a remodelling of an older house and dates from 1710. The south front is almost entirely unaltered from then with its brick front and superb 16 pane sash windows with original crown glass. The interior also survives virtually intact from its 1710 remodelling. Note also the fine gate piers and garden wall which survive from the 1710 remodelling. Both Penelewey and Treloggas have brick fronts and brick was an unusual building material to be used in Cornwall at that time, most fine houses being built of stone and lesser houses of cob (mud, dung and straw). It is possible that ships coming to Roundwood Quay (at the mouth of Coombe creek) to collect cargoes of tin or copper would have brought in bricks as ballast and it was these bricks which allowed these two fine houses to be remodelled.

**K** Directly in front is a slightly incongruously sited modern bungalow in a corner of a field. Enter the field by the gate to the right of the bungalow. Head diagonally across the field towards the buildings. Cross a stile into a short lane between two cottages. At the main road (Beware, it is a little blind and traffic is often fast!) turn left and the pub is on the left. The Punchbowl and Ladle is a pretty thatched inn, the old part largely dates from the 17th century and it drew most of its custom from travellers crossing the river Fal at King Harry ferry.

**L** The return. Either return the way you have come or follow the route below.

**M** Leave the pub and turn left along the road. After a short distance turn down the road on the left (it is signposted to Coombe and Cowlands). Walk past the modern bungalows on the left, past Mount George farm and continue straight on. You then come to a fork, the more major road heads right and after a few twist and turns drops down into Cowlands. The prettier route is the left fork which takes you to Treloggas and from there you can pick up the path down across the field to Cowlands. The left hand route offers no great excitements but is a delightfully quiet road, with wonderfully huge oak trees and seems a left over from another age.

Do be aware that in winter the section of the path from Treloggas to Penelewey can be especially muddy and wellington boots might be preferable to walking boots.