

CICERONE

# WALKING THE END TO END TRAIL

Land's End to John o' Groats on foot



Andy Robinson

# THE END TO END TRAIL

# **THE END TO END TRAIL**

**LAND'S END TO JOHN O' GROATS ON FOOT**

**by Andy Robinson**

**CICERONE**

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*This route and this book have been inspired by the books of John Hillaby, Alfred Wainwright and many others. It is dedicated to the memory of Elihu Burritt and of Robert and John Naylor, who seem to have been the first End to End walkers.*

### Updates to this guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the author's website ([www.longwalks.org.uk](http://www.longwalks.org.uk)) or the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/1147/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1147/updates)), so please check both sites before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: *Duncansby Stacks, near John o' Groats (top); Land's End (bottom)*

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## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### **International distress signal** (*emergency only*)

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

### **Helicopter rescue**

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### **Emergency telephone numbers**

To call out the Mountain Rescue, ring 999 or the European emergency number 112: this will connect you via any available network. Once you are connected to the emergency operator, ask for the police.

### **Weather reports**

The Mountain Weather Information Service (MWIS) provides forecasts for Scotland's mountain areas: [www.mwis.org.uk](http://www.mwis.org.uk). Other useful websites include [www.xcweather.co.uk](http://www.xcweather.co.uk) and [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk).

## Key to the symbols used in the strip maps

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
|              | End to End Trail on tarmac road, arrow indicating direction    |
|              | End to End Trail on untarred road or enclosed track            |
|              | End to End Trail on clear unenclosed path or track             |
|              | End to End Trail on intermittent path: not always clear        |
|              | End to End Trail following no visible path                     |
|              | Other road or enclosed track                                   |
|              | Other clear unenclosed path or track                           |
|              | Other intermittent path  |
|              | Stream or river, arrow showing direction of flow               |
|              | Canal, with lock and a numbered bridge over it                 |
|              | Sea, loch or lake  |
|              | Pond or pool   |
|              | Railway  |
| <b>Laing</b> | Town or village (named in bold)                                |
|              | Building or group of buildings, and a church or chapel         |
| .....        | Other visible feature (explained by accompanying text)         |
|              | Conifer or conifers, broad-leaved tree or trees                |
|              | Summit of hill or mountain, often marked with height in metres |
|              | Connector to elsewhere on the same map page                    |
|              | Connector to another map page (in this case Day 5 Map 2)       |
|              | Connector to another guidebook (eg South West Coast Path)      |
|              | Links the map to the start of a route description paragraph    |

The following abbreviations have sometimes been used where space was tight:  
fp = footpath, fb = footbridge, PO = post office, LH & RH = lefthand & righthand



### Acknowledgements

I owe thanks to Ben MacGregor for his assistance with the route in Caithness, and to Ian Smith for his encouragement and his advice on photography. The End to End Trail borrows parts of its route from various sources, and in particular I am grateful to the late James Roberts, author of *Walking in Somerset* (Cicerone, 1997) for showing me the way out of Bridgwater, to Denis Brook and Phil Hinchliffe for the Alternative Pennine Way, to David Paterson for the Cape Wrath Trail, and of course to all the people involved in the development of the more official routes the Trail uses.

This second edition of the guide benefited from the feedback of many End to End walkers, who have made it possible for me to improve the route, correct some errors, and add some additional details. There have been too many to list them by name, but my thanks go to them all.

Lastly and most importantly, I'd never have got away with so much walking, or completing this book, without an unreasonable amount of tolerance, encouragement and material support from my family. The biggest share of thanks therefore has to go to Nicola, Esther and Flossie.

## PREFACE

For this third edition of The End to End Trail there have been no significant route updates. Options for food, drink and overnight stops have been checked using the internet and updated where necessary. Land's End and John o' Groats have not moved, and are still the same distance apart.

The whole route was reviewed for the second edition in 2019. Every stage end was revisited, and every detailed map was re-walked and revised to bring it up to date. I took the opportunity to revise the route in places to take advantage of new walking routes, particularly in Scotland, and to find alternatives where people had reported the going difficult, mainly due to overgrown paths and boggy ground.

I was interested to find out how things had changed over time. The main things turned out to be:

- Lots of stiles replaced by gates. Good news for those of us whose knees are past their best, but on the other hand I do like a traditional stile.
- Many pubs, banks and village shops had closed
- The disappearance of phone boxes. There were still a few around, particularly in remote locations with no mobile signal, but these days it's best to carry a mobile phone and charger with you if you want to stay in touch with the rest of the world.
- There are now many more waymarked walking routes in Scotland. I took advantage of these where I could. Additionally, one of these new routes, the John o' Groats Trail, gives a great alternative route up the east coast from Inverness.
- Cycle tracks and towpaths had been surfaced with tarmac, particularly in Scotland. Good for cyclists, but not so good for those walkers like myself who dislike walking on tarmac wherever it is.
- Many forestry plantations had been felled, particularly in Scotland. Some have been replaced by native species, and in many others it's not clear what's going to happen next. Not much has been replanted with conifers.
- The Scottish Highlands are undergoing a rash of small hydroelectric schemes that seem destined to fill every quiet valley in Scotland if they continue to multiply at the present rate. They make an awful mess, but given a few years the land seems to recover OK, often leaving useful tracks for us walkers.





## INTRODUCTION

---

Where am I going? I don't quite know  
What does it matter where people go?  
Down to the wood where the blue-bells grow –  
Anywhere, anywhere. I don't know.  
*AA Milne, 'Spring Morning'*

---

Land's End and John o' Groats are the two ends of the island of Great Britain – the two points that are the furthest apart from each other. As the crow flies they are 968km (602 miles) apart. Linking the two in a single, long off-road walk gives a magnificent expedition almost exactly twice that distance, and takes you through the very best that the British countryside can offer.

Such a walk is also a great challenge, one of the greatest that many walkers have the time to attempt, and unlike many great challenges, this one is also a great experience. As well as enjoying doing it, you will also enjoy looking back on it afterwards and thinking 'I walked all the way from Land's End to John o' Groats'. What more is there to say? Make your plans and go for it!

A lot of books have been written about getting from Land's End to John o' Groats, but good reading, inspirational and useful as many of them are, this is the first to describe a route with the level of detail that walkers expect from a guide to a long-distance

path. This book sets out to solve that perennial walker's problem: when walking in unfamiliar areas without a guide, you are dependent on maps that can't always tell you whether the way you are thinking of going is practical or pleasant. Is it boggy? Is that path visible on the ground? Is the path blocked by barbed wire? Is that stream fordable? Is there an insurmountable deer fence in the way? In practice, what often happens is that you end up making too many mistakes and doing too much road walking. When you are walking a long-distance route, you don't want to waste time trying to find the right way to go – it gets very frustrating. I've written this book because it's what I needed to walk from Land's End to John o' Groats the way I wanted to. I hope it will be of similar help to you.

The recommended 1956km (1215-mile) route is described using two resources. About 60% of the route is described in detail in this book, with accompanying strip maps at the end of each of the six sections. For the remainder you will be following established



### Pubs

For many walkers, pubs are of great importance, and I have pointed out many of those that are on or near the route. Pubs are often the only places where there is any chance of finding food and drink out in the country – there is much more chance of finding a pub than a village shop, for instance. If you are camping, they are often the only places you can spend a warm and dry evening in bad weather (and of course they also serve beer, which is an essential part of the diet of many walkers, including mine).

### Romany hint for hikers

If you are tramping through a village, make a meal off a nice piece of new bread and cheese washed down with a tankard of foaming ale.

Most, but not all, of the pubs mentioned serve food, and some have accommodation as well. Real ale enthusiasts will find they are well provided for as far as the Scottish border, after which prospects become patchy, although you will still be able to find some excellent beer.

## SECTION 1

### The South West Coast Path: Land's End to Barnstaple

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>Start</b>           | Land's End  |
| <b>Finish</b>          | Barnstaple  |
| <b>Distance</b>        | 268km (167 miles)   |
| <b>Road walking</b>    | 12%. This is mainly through coastal towns such as St Ives, Hayle and Newquay, plus the private Hobby Drive through the woods near Clovelly.   |
| <b>Days</b>            | 9 (main schedule), or 13 (alternative schedule)   |
| <b>Maps and guides</b> | <i>Land's End to Constantine Bay</i> : South West Coast Path guide; <i>Constantine Bay to Port Isaac</i> : this guide, strip maps Day 5 Map 1 to Day 6 Map 2; <i>Port Isaac to Kipling Tors</i> : South West Coast Path guide; <i>Kipling Tors to Bideford</i> : this guide, strip map Day 9 Map 1; <i>Bideford to Barnstaple</i> : South West Coast Path guide |

From Land's End in Cornwall to Barnstaple in Devon, the Trail follows the South West Coast Path (SWCP). This is a national trail, so rights of way have been created where they were previously missing, and the route follows the coast closely.

The coastal scenery along the north coast of southwest England is so good that it seems a bit perverse to try to go any other way, although by its very nature a coastal path is rarely the most direct possible route between A and B, and this one is no exception, following the coast round headlands and bays.

Inland routes are possible, but footpaths going in the right direction are few, and you would end up walking many miles on tarmac. The south coast of Cornwall has considerably more deep estuaries and indentations to get round, meaning either taking ferries (which is not allowed on this End to End walk!) or long detours inland, often on roads. Also, the south coast doesn't really point in the right direction anyway.

The north-coast route includes so much spectacular cliff scenery that it is unquestionably the best way to start the walk (despite missing out Bodmin Moor and Dartmoor). While there are many tourist resorts in this popular holiday area, it is still very attractive, with many small seaside communities and plenty of remote coastal walking.

## Section 1 Overview Map – Land's End to Barnstable



## SECTION 1 – LAND'S END TO BARNSTAPLE

The north coast is rocky for much of the way, and there is rarely a road along it, apart from where the path passes through coastal towns such as Newquay and St Ives. This makes for mostly excellent walking on good paths, except for occasional areas of sand dunes (often avoidable by walking on the beach). In common with many coastal walks there are plenty of steep climbs, but none are very long.

There are opportunities for shortcuts and variations, but only four places where it seemed worth recommending an alternative to the official national trail, which is after all an excellent route. Between Padstow and Rock the SWCP takes a ferry, so the alternative via Wadebridge is necessary to avoid cheating if you want to be able to claim you walked all the way.

### Maps

#### 1:25,000 Explorer maps

- 102 Land's End
- 104 Redruth & St Agnes
- 106 Newquay & Padstow
- 111 Bude, Boscawen & Tintagel
- 126 Clovelly & Hartland
- 139 Bideford, Ilfracombe & Barnstable

#### 1:50,000 Landranger maps

- 203 Land's End & Isles of Scilly
- 200 Newquay & Bodmin
- 190 Bude & Clovelly
- 180 Barnstable & Ilfracombe

### Guidebooks

- *The South West Coast Path* by Paddy Dillon (Cicerone, 3rd edition, 2021, reprinted 2023). This guide includes 1:50,000 OS strip maps. Unfortunately it describes the route in the wrong direction for the End to End Trail, but then so do most of the alternative guides.
- South West Coast Path Map Booklet – Vol 1: Minehead to St Ives, Paddy Dillon (Cicerone, 1st edition, 2017, reprinted 2021)
- South West Coast Path Map Booklet – Vol 2: St Ives to Plymouth, Paddy Dillon (Cicerone, 1st edition, 2017, reprinted 2021)
- *The Complete Guide to the South West Coast Path*, South West Coast Path Association (revised annually), plus their *Reverse Guide*. The annual publication includes details of the latest changes to the route and has a comprehensive accommodation guide, although it too describes the route in



the wrong direction for the Trail. Available from the SWCPA (see Appendix C), and free to SWCPA members. The *Reverse Guide* is designed to supplement the annual guide, and gives notes for walkers going in our direction.

### Recommendations

For this part of the Trail you are not really in any danger of getting seriously lost, even if you rely only on the guidebook maps – the trick is to keep the sea on your left. The detailed route-finding can be surprisingly tricky at times, though, so hints from guidebooks are significant timesavers. The guidebooks are both well written and researched, and give plenty of information about the route, and points of interest along the way.

My suggestion is to get the Cicerone guide (or an alternative that also includes OS strip maps) and the South West Coast Path Association guide, to save you time in getting accommodation lists and for the other useful information it contains. Get Explorer 106 to cover the Trevone to Port Isaac shortcuts (Days 5 and 6), unless you already have Landranger 200. Get Explorer 139 to cover the shortcut from Westward Ho! to Bideford (Day 9), unless you already have Landranger 180. You should be able to manage without other maps.

### Accommodation

Because this area is so popular for seaside holidays, accommodation is plentiful, although it can fill up in the summer and the Easter holidays. Apart from the most remote section, between Bude and Clovelly, there are plenty of alternative places to halt, with many bed and breakfasts and campsites. Not all campsites provide for backpackers though – some will charge the same rate as for a frame tent and a car. The annual South West Coast Path Association guide (see above) includes a comprehensive accommodation list, so is recommended, as is their website [www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk](http://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk) and the list at [www.nationaltrail.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk). The only additional information you may need, apart from that in your YHA handbook, is a bit more about accommodation near Land's End and around Wadebridge. The local tourist information centres for Land's End and Wadebridge are:

- **Land's End:** National Trust Visitor Centre, Station Approach, Penzance TR18 2NF, tel 01736 335530 [www.visitcornwall.com](http://www.visitcornwall.com). There is also a good accommodation list at [www.landsendcornwall.co.uk](http://www.landsendcornwall.co.uk).
- **Wadebridge:** The Red Brick Building, North Quay, Padstow PL28 8AF, tel 01841 533449 [www.padstowlive.com](http://www.padstowlive.com)

Accommodation is limited at a few stage end points, so you may want to consider booking ahead for these (Note: 'A' in stage numbers indicates a stage end on the alternative schedule – see Appendix A):

- **Zennor** (Day 1)
- **Gwithian** (Day 2)
- **Trevone** (Day 5, Day A6)
- **Hartland Quay** and **Stoke** (Day 8, Day A10)

### Equipment shops

- Day 1: There are three outdoor shops in **Penzance**
- Day 2: Mountain Warehouse, 35–37 Fore St, **St Ives** TR26 1HE, tel 01736 793884
- Day 2: Trespass, 13 High St, **St Ives** TR26 1RY, tel 01736 447706
- Day 3: Aztec Leisure, Old Garage, Trevellas, **St Agnes** TR5 0XY, tel 01872 552372
- Day 4: There are three outdoor shops in **Newquay**
- Day 5: There are three outdoor shops in **Padstow**
- Day 5: Countrywise, 5 Eddystone Rd, **Wadebridge** PL27 7AL, tel 01208 812423
- Day 6: Camping Sport & Leisure, Fore Street, **Tintagel** PL34 0DA, tel 01840 770060
- Day 6: Cornish Rambler, The Bridge, **Boscastle**, tel 01840 250330
- Day 7: There are three outdoor shops in **Bude**
- Day 9: Mountain Warehouse, Unit 20/21, Affinity Devon, **Bideford** EX39 3QU, tel 01237 475890
- Day 9: Trespass, Unit 32/33, Affinity Devon, **Bideford** EX39 3DU, tel 01237 476605
- Day 9: There are four outdoor shops in **Barnstaple**



Land's End



## THE START: LAND'S END

It would be difficult to conceive of any battle-ground on the face of earth or ocean, where the clutch and conflict of the elements could be more terribly grand than at Land's End.

*Elihu Burritt, A Walk from London to Land's End and Back, 1865*

Land's End can be found at the end of the A30, 12km beyond Penzance. Penzance can be reached by train, and from there you can either walk or hitchhike to Land's End, or catch a bus – go to [www.firstgroup.com](http://www.firstgroup.com) for times.

The first sight of Land's End Hotel, a low, drab-coloured building standing on the bleak headland, is apt to beget in the wayfarer who approaches it at sunset a feeling of regret that he passed through Penzance without stopping for the night.

*Thos D Murphy, On Old-World Highways, 1914*

There has been a hotel at Land's End for a long time – Elihu Burritt stayed there in 1864 after walking from London. More recently it has expanded into a small theme park, which is a good place to take children for a day out, but not a hiker's natural habitat. The Land's End complex usually gets a bad press from walkers, with the national press, outdoor magazines and walkers' guidebooks referring to it as an awful eyesore despoiling the whole area.

If you're there on a sunny weekend in summer you are likely to get that impression as well, but it's different when it's quieter. There are still big car parks and some ugly buildings, but the buildings are mainly together in a compact group, with the garish bits facing inwards rather than outwards. It's the number of visitors that makes it unpleasant, not the facilities. I'd much rather visit Land's End than Newquay, for example, provided it's out of season, or in the evening when it's quiet.

At Sennen the inhabitants are most primitive, and there are those amongst them who believe in witchcraft, sorcery, snake-charming and other fables of bygone generations.

*Evelyn Burnaby, A Ride from Land's End to John o' Groats, 1893*

Sennen, a forlorn collection of stone huts...

*Thos D Murphy again*

Sennen, which is the last village on the A30, 1.5km before Land's End, is a bit more respectable these days, and the place to stay the night before you set off, rather than Land's End itself, which is only a short walk along the A30. At Sennen there's a **campsite** (Seaview Holiday Park), **bed and breakfasts**, a **shop** and a **pub**. (Land's End **youth hostel** is actually 8km north of Land's End.) There is also a **bunkhouse/B&B** in Trevescan, between Sennen and Land's End ([www.landsendholidays.co.uk](http://www.landsendholidays.co.uk)).

Walkers are permitted through the grounds of the Land's End complex without charge. If you plan to collect evidence of your walk, don't forget to start collecting it here (see 'Recognition of your feat' at the end of this guide). Five minutes from Land's End and the theme park is forgotten – you're on your way.

### DAY 1

*Land's End to Zennon*

*The game's afoot*

|                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Distance</b> | 26km (16 miles) |
| <b>Ascent</b>   | 960m            |

For most of Section 1 you will be following the route description in your chosen guidebook, so it is not repeated here. The recommended variations from the national trail are described in full, however, on the accompanying strip maps (see end of Section 1).

On the main schedule, daily stage lengths for the first week have been kept down to below 32km (20 miles) a day (32km is the average for the whole Trail). This is to give a reasonably gentle start to the walk, although it has to be said that coastal cliff walking is often steep and rough, so it won't feel that gentle.

You may want to perform some kind of ceremony to mark the start of your expedition, and for most of the year there should be no shortage

of people to take photos of you. (This will probably have to be with your camera, however, as your trip is unlikely to be taken very seriously when you haven't even started.)

I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:  
Follow your spirit; and upon this charge  
Cry 'God for Harry! England and Saint George!'  
*William Shakespeare, Henry V*

Head for the cliff top and turn right, in the direction of Sennen Cove, following your South West Coast Path guidebook. On the way round to **Sennen Cove** the cliff-top path gives superb walking from the very start. From Sennen Cove, as long as the tide isn't in too far, the sands of **Whitesand Bay** give much easier walking than the official SWCP route through the dunes. At the far side of Whitesand Bay, it's back to the cliff tops all the way to **Cape Cornwall**.

**Wild flowers** are everywhere in spring: violets, squills, primroses, thrift, celandines, kidney vetch, campions, white bluebells, and even an area of escaped Hottentot fig. There is also golden gorse in abundance.

Levant Tin Mine, Trewellard



Cape Cornwall is a small peninsula with a hill on top and an old tin mine chimney. From here all the way to Zennor there is evidence of the old **tin mining industry**, with many ruined buildings, tracks and spoil heaps. The Geevor mine was the last operational tin mine in Cornwall, closing in 1990, and is a scene of absolute devastation, but it is soon passed, and for the rest of the day it is back to spectacular cliff scenery. (It makes one wonder what a coastal walk would have been like when the mining was in full production – probably a lot less pleasant than it is now.)

From Cape Cornwall, continue along the SWCP to Pendeen Watch and Zennor. If you are breaking overnight at **Pendeen Watch**, 15km from Land's End, you will have to head inland to find accommodation. The road from the Pendeen Watch car park leads to Pendeen village, which has **bed and breakfasts**, and **camping** at the North Inn.

To reach Zennor itself, continue on the coastal path, crossing the footbridge in Pendour Cove (before Zennor Head), then going steeply up (steps) past a house on the right to a T-junction of paths and a National Trust signpost for Zennor Head. The SWCP continues by turning left here, but turn right and the track reaches **Zennor** in about 10 minutes.

Zennor has a very good **pub**, the Tinner's Arms, with a coal fire, and excellent **food** and beer. It's a tiny hamlet, but there are a handful of **bed and breakfasts** in and around the village. There is no campsite as such, but if you follow the right-hand (one-way) road out of Zennor and along the main road to the third farm on the right, you may be able to pitch **camp** at Higher Trewey Farmhouse. There is a café at the Zennor Chapel Guesthouse.

## DAY 2

Zennor to Gwithian  
St Ives Bay

|                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Distance</b> | 24km (15 miles) |
| <b>Ascent</b>   | 610m            |

Today the Trail follows the South West Coast Path through St Ives and round the Hayle estuary. It's 2km further if you go right round the Island – also known as St Ives Head – in St Ives, without cutting the corner.



- 1956km (1215 miles) • the length of mainland Britain
- follows national trails and hill routes wherever possible
- unspoilt scenery, unique and ever-changing landscapes

This guide describes a 1956km (1215 mile) walking route from Land's End in Cornwall to John o' Groats in Scotland's far north – the two points on mainland Britain that are the furthest apart. The route avoids road walking as much as possible and frequently takes advantage of existing long-distance trails, including the South West Coast Path, Pennine Way and West Highland Way. Since it passes through remote terrain and keeps to the hills where practical, this is a route intended for experienced hill walkers.



- presented in 61 days, averaging around 32km (20 miles) each day
- includes an alternative three-month schedule
- preparation and safety advice
- information about accommodation and services

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