

Top to bottom: near Hatherleigh. Off-road 'shortcut' after Mary Tavy. Dartmoor ponies. St James' Church, Jacobstowe

Weekender

Devon Coast to Coast

One of England's best coast to coast routes isn't across the north but in Devon. **Laura Laker** rode it



LAURA LAKER

Laura is a cycling journalist. Her book, *Potholes and Pavements, a Bumpy Ride on Britain's National Cycle Network*, is reviewed on page 28

In any list of the top routes on Britain's National Cycle Network, the Devon Coast to Coast is reliably there.

Running 99 miles from the south coast at Plymouth to Ilfracombe on the north, it manages to span one of the bumpiest parts of the country largely (but not entirely) via gentle gradients on a number of rail trails

The Devon Coast to Coast stitches together several routes, including the Granite Way, Drake's Trail and the Tarka Trail. It also offers a generous collection of breathtaking views. Once you've zig-zagged out of Plymouth following the little blue and red NCN signs, you climb gradually to meet the edge of Dartmoor on the first rail trail, via dripping tunnel and dizzying bridge, flying high above the tree canopy.

The moors are delightful. In the middle, somewhere around Sheepwash, are some very stiff little Devonian hills, before more glorious rail paths take you via flatter countryside and gorgeous estuary, via Okehampton, to Barnstaple and then on to Ilfracombe on country roads.

This is a route I'd happily recommend to family cyclists with child passengers (they might need e-assist). As Ilfracombe lacks a rail service, I cut the ride short and boarded a train home at Barnstaple. If you finish at the coast, it's about 15 miles back to Barnstaple station.

West Kernow Way

Cycling UK's 230km bikepacking route is nearby in Cornwall. cyclinguk.org/west-kernow-way

