



10 Salcombe

Walk | 6 miles | 3½ hours | Devon



The waves roar below the cliff path above Lantern Rock, looking toward Bolt Tail between Salcombe and Hope Cove
RIGHT Spot the swallows before their grand depart to Africa

Follow the swallows along a spectacular stretch of the south coast of Devon **By Mark Rowe**

For birdwatchers, early autumn can be a time for melancholic leave-taking. The swifts have already departed, headed for Africa. Let's be thankful then, for the swallows. They've graced our skies for four months or more, darting furiously after insects, and even being hunted down themselves in aeronautical combat with hobbies.

Now, however, the swallows are packing their bags for their big trip south. Typically for such an elegant bird, they often do this in style. No sneaking off in the middle of the night, one by one. They know they have

a substantial journey ahead of them, so will spend the last few days feeding voraciously and gathering near the southern shores of Britain.

One of the best places to see this spectacle is the **South Hams** in Devon, and this walk gives you a fighting chance of giving these magical birds a cheery send-off – as well as taking in some thrilling coastal scenery.

A Soaring high

We start in the small car park at **Soar Mill Cove**, just behind Soar Mill Cove Hotel, just west of **Salcombe**. We walk down to the small beach, where

the path follows a signpost for **Bolberry Down**, climbs steeply above **Hazel Tor** and undulates its way north-west along the coast path.

Suddenly, the hemmed-in woodland features are replaced by open sea. Classic autumn flowers, such as rock samphire, can be found along here.

B Wide open coast

The path reaches **Bolberry Down** with the views throwing much of Devon – from **Dartmoor** to **Wembury** and the **Eddystone** lighthouse, 13 miles south of Plymouth – wide open. The coast path sweeps

down to dramatic **Bolt Tail**, the eastern end of the headland bookended by **Bolt Head**; to the right is sheltered **Hope Cove** and beyond, crumbling rocky outcrops edge out into the sea, resembling giant windbreaks.

C Clifftop scramble

Follow the coast path down to **Bolt Tail** and the remnants of a hillfort, dated to around 500–600 BC. The ramparts are clearly visible as you approach – they were built on three sides, with the sheer cliffs forming the

◉ impregnable fourth side. A word to the wise is necessary here: Bolt Tail's unfenced cliffs are tucked away behind the ruins and can spring themselves on even the most steel-nerved of tightrope walkers. Keep children and dogs on a firm leash.

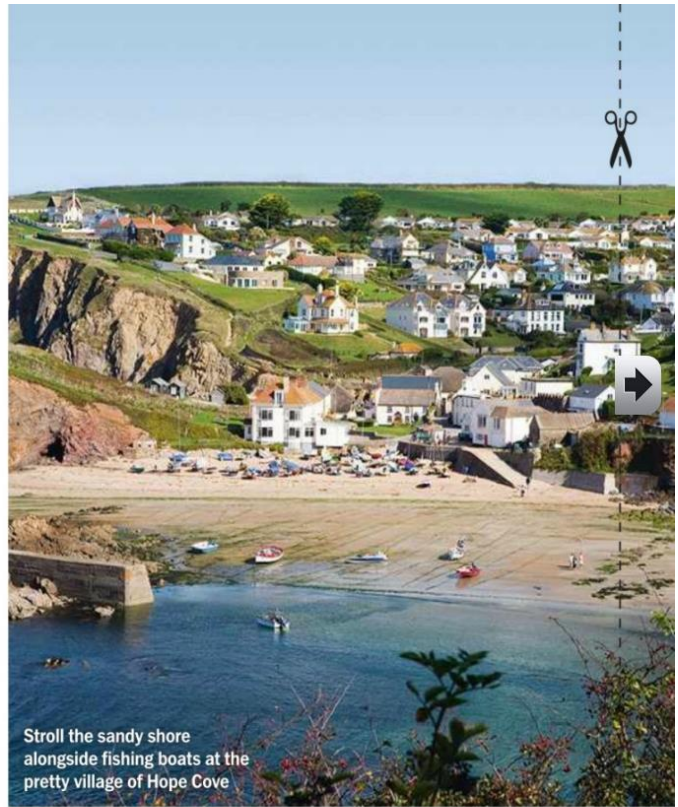
I've no idea whether the swallows here made their summer home in Devon, or if these are long-distance birds from northern Scotland. But there are several hundred of them, swirling, darting in the air, like a modest-sized starling roost. They rest on telephone wires, tree branches, their numbers briefly recreating a less terrifying scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

Then, in the crepuscular light that follows the setting sun, they funnel their way out to sea. Many remain when I reluctantly call it a night. But by the next morning, they are all gone.

Make your way back

This is a there-and-back-again route, and the views returning east are just as wonderful, with much of the South Hams spread out before you. The coast pulls away towards Bolt Head, **Gara Rock** and **Portlemouth Down**.

I've seen the swallows go from Bolt Tails, but this is also a place to see them make landfall: so why not return next April and welcome this brilliant bird back to our shores? ☺



Stroll the sandy shore alongside fishing boats at the pretty village of Hope Cove

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USEFUL INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE

Park in Soar Mill Cove car park, west of Malborough, near Salcombe.

FIND OUT MORE

◉ salcombeinformation.co.uk

EAT

Soar Mill Cove Hotel
Nr Salcombe, South Devon
UK TQ7 3DS
◉ 01548 561566
◉ www.soarmillcove.co.uk
Soar Mill Cove Hotel is tucked away above the cove of the same name and serves enormous cream teas overlooking the coast.

MAP

Ordnance Survey

OL20 South Devon
Grid Reference: SX 703 375

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Blackpool Sands Devon
Crack a crab with Julia Bradbury, as she tours the Devonshire coastline.

Greenway Devon
Explore the beautiful River Dart valley and examine the home of Agatha Christie.

