



Spring, best for bats and bees

Ladies Mile meander

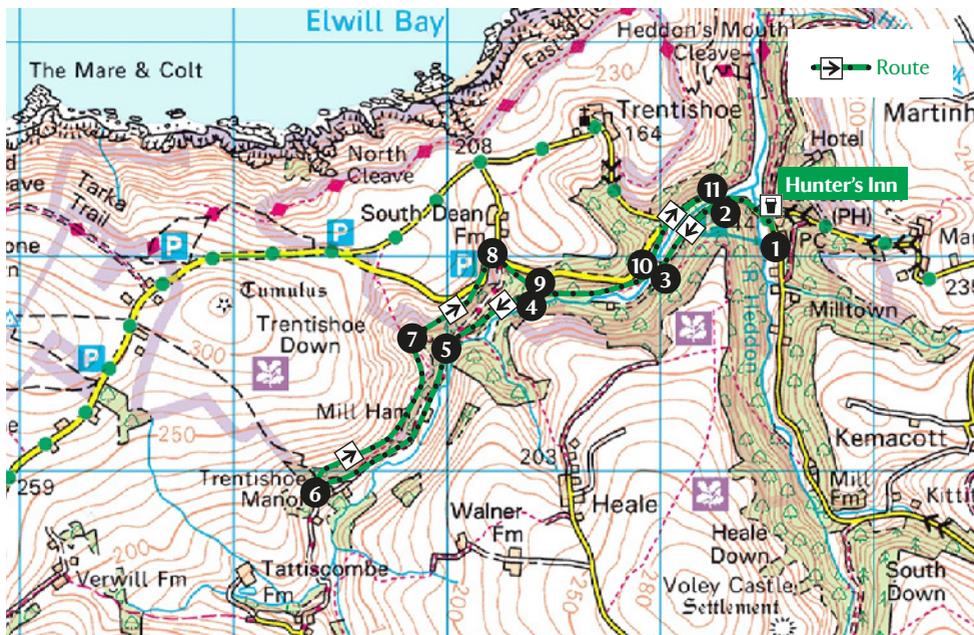
Explore Exmoor's hidden Heddon Valley, a vibrant oasis of coastal and moorland life, during this circular stroll that goes via the door of one of the moor's most iconic pubs: the Hunter's Inn.

3mi (4.8km)

Relatively easy. Mostly wide paths, rocks and roots to watch out for, and only a modest amount of ascent.

1.5-2 hours approx.

SS654/480 / OS Explorer OL 9



Nature highlights
The National Trust's woodland management is creating areas rich in floral diversity throughout this Exmoor valley, and the colourful spring explosion of wildflowers attracts a wealth of bees, bats, birds and butterflies, including the high brown fritillary. Listen out, too, for the coo of cuckoos in spring.

'There's no better perspective of Heddon Valley as it springs back into life after winter than from Ladies Mile trail, which clings to the side of Trentishoe Down.'

Dan, National Trust Ranger

Start: Heddon Valley car park, EX31 4PY

- Before setting off, take a look around Heddon Valley car park. Spend a moment on the bench, contemplating the river as it rushes past en route to the sea. There's also an orchard, bug hotels, bird feeders and much more to explore. When you're ready, exit the car park and walk along the road to the left of the Hunter's Inn, keeping an eye out for the resident peacocks, until you reach the stone bridge.
- At the bridge, take the track leading left. Peaceful 'Harry's Orchard' here, named after a local character, has several apple trees and a large damson.
- By Vention Cottage, go right and cross the wooden footbridge, then turn left along the footpath. The National Trust has created a large glade here, felling beech trees to allow other tree species and ground flora to grow. More diverse flora attracts new animals, including insects, birds and bats. As you wander, look out for spring flowers such as wood sorrel, wood anemone and wood ruff (all delicate little white flowers).
- Carry on along the lower footpath. During spring, this meadow is great for spotting a range of butterfly species, including the speckled wood. In April and May you may also see some small, pretty pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies.
- Continue along the road to Trentishoe manor. More woodland management here has seen the National Trust clearing birch and nursing a young group of oak and rowan trees. With trees better spaced, the area will become wood pasture, again increasing species diversity. In spring the glade will come alive with butterflies and birds.
- At the manor, take an acute right turn and walk northeast, along Ladies Mile Path, with the road to your right and Trentishoe Down rising to your left. These 'scallops' (imagine a scallop shell) increase the area of edge habitat as well as species diversity. Edge habitats are the most important areas for wildlife and these will be frequented by butterflies and birds. This more linear feature also creates great foraging grounds for bats.
- When another path crosses your way, carry on straight ahead. This crossroad is a real suntrap - a lovely place to pause for a rest, and to spot spring butterflies. It's usually chilly here in April, so only a few emerge, but by May the place comes to life. Listen out for cuckoos too - they're regular April visitors.
- At the road, go right, then right again at the crossroad 20yds/metres further on, and then immediately left onto another footpath. In another example of woodland pasture restoration, the National Trust have coppiced this area, rejuvenating existing oak and rowan trees, and planting some new trees. This spot is directly below a high brown fritillary site, and the sun now reaches the bracken and warms the butterflies' eggs in winter and the caterpillars in spring. More nectar is also produced from the bramble created by piling up the treetops.
- Rejoin the footpath you were on earlier, leading back towards the Hunters Inn. In this woodland area, several trees have been felled by the wind, and a glade is likely to be opened up naturally, creating the same conditions as those helped along by the National Trust. Here rangers have simply cleared the path, otherwise letting nature take its own course.
- Go past the wooden footbridge and continue until you reach the road. You will pass a stone embedded in the ground; this is a boundary marker, but according to a local tale, a young girl who lived nearby used to call it 'fat man's grave', and she was warned never to go beyond it while out exploring. An impressive lime tree next to the stone measures some 6 metres in circumference - this was probably also once used as a boundary marker.
- Go past the footpath to Heddon's mouth (unless you fancy a detour) keeping on the road until you pass the Hunters Inn and reach the car park.

