

# Red River Valley Walk Camborne



Start your walk in Camborne's Rosewarne car-park. This was once a walled garden to the estate of the Holman family whose endeavours helped shape the town we have today. Their Georgian mansion still stands amongst the trees to the north. The poetry of John Harris, a celebrated Cornish poet, is on the surrounds of the car park.

From the car park, walk straight ahead to Trelowarren Street, named after the Vyvyan family of Trelowarren who owned much of the Town.

Turn right and walk up Trelowarren Street, past Commercial Square until you see the imposing buildings of the town clock and the CornExchange, built by the Basset family of Tehidy at the height of Camborne's industrial past. Just past the Corn Exchange is one of Camborne's oldest buildings, the Parish Church, parts of which may date from the early medieval period. The tower dates from the 15th century, inside is a much older altar stone dating from before the Norman Conquest. From this point you will be following the course of the ancient church way from here to near the parish boundary which was once marked by crosses.

4. Walk along the footpath in front of the church and then bear left. The building on the opposite corner next to the Plough Inn is near the site of an eighteenth century school, provided by Francis Basset for teaching the poor children of Camborne. This was demolished for the turnpike road in 1839 and the present building erected. College Street may be named from this school.

5. Turn left and then take the immediate first right, going behind the Health Centre and Nursery School. You are now on the Glebe, land once belonging to the church on the ancient churchway.

6. Keep walking straight on through the modern estate until you reach Crane Road. Cross and enter Cranberry Road.

7. Stop here and find the footpath running to the right of Camborne Science and Community College. All along the church way, crosses were erected according to the will of Dr Reginald Mertherderwa, in 1447. In the days of walking funerals, these crosses were stopping points for the bearers, for prayer and rest. Near the furthest point of the church way one old cross was re-erected in the early twentieth century. People who used the church way to go to school still remember the tradition of curtseying when passing the cross. Due to road improvements the cross has now been removed to the courtyard of the Donald Thomas Centre in Commercial Square.

8. Now take the footpath and follow it until you reach the Choughs Inn at Treswithian. Behind the Choughs Inn is a depression known locally as "The Merry Pit". This may be a corruption of the term 'Marl Pit', where suitable clay could be found for the creation of "cob" a very popular building material in earlier days. There is another depression in the fields of Treswithian Farm. Treswithian was once a hamlet some distance from the centre of Camborne and was known to locals as "Jethan".

9. Cross the A3047 here and walk along the grass verge until you come to the "Welcome to Camborne" sign. Just south of this point was the old village of Croon (Cornish ker an un-the



fortified place on the downs). It was demolished to make way for the turnpike road (now the A3047).

10. With extreme care, turn right and cross the bridge over the main A30, keeping to the pavement on the left hand side. When you reach the slip road leaving the A30, look for a footpath sign.

The path goes through cultivated land that was formerly Treswithian Downs, where the militia once held exercises. You will pass the most westerly meteorological station in the British Isles. The village of Kehelland was called *Kellihellan* in 1297 and lies on the church way and the more recent architecture is interesting as it shows the development of non conformist faith in the village.



11. Go through Kehelland and down the steep hill to Menedarva.

12. Continue until you reach the river. Here the church way crosses the Red River, named due to the discharges of iron oxide from many tin and copper mines. The bridge still contains medieval elements and Dr Mertherderwa left provision in his will for its maintenance.

Although running relatively clear today, the river still contains toxic elements and should not be drunk.

13. Cross the bridge and your walk will continue around the right hand bend. A short detour following the public footpath sign to your left up the unmade track. Do not leave the track as this is private property. The first building is the more recent farmhouse with holes in the gable end for pigeons or doves.

Farm buildings have 16th century window frames which may have been part of the original Tudor homestead. There is also evidence of a medieval chapel in the fields near the house.

14. Return to your original walk and continue along the road for about 100 metres until the sign on your right directs you onto the river banks. The path takes you through what was once an intensively industrialised area, with every square metre of the valley bottom utilised for the recovery of stream tin discharged from the mines of the Camborne area.

Many of these were small ventures, named after the family running them. Unfortunately, there are few remains to see as nature has reclaimed the valley.

15. Continue until you come to a bridge across the river. The river runs far below the present ground level as a result of a build up of treated sediment over many centuries of tin streaming. The material in the path you are walking on is a very fine sand with a reddish hue left after the process of tin recovery which utilised water to separate the heavier tin from the lighter waste. The valley side on your left was once covered in an oak wood which was cleared for timber during the First World War.

At the end of the track almost on the road over the gate on your left a blue door at the base of the hill-side can be seen. In the 1920's mines were closing because of cheaper tin overseas. To give the miners work a project was devised to drive a tunnel from here to the base of the North Cliffs to carry untreated Camborne sewage to the sea.

16. From here turn right onto the road and then sharp left again to follow the river further up the valley. If you leave the main track and walk towards the river you will see some more substantial remains from the tin streaming era. Soon the track enters a narrow section on the way to the small hamlet of Reskadinnick.

Here, up the slope to your left is Magor Farm – 'ruin' in Cornish – this is the site of the only Roman type villa ever found in Cornwall. It is so poorly constructed that it is thought to have

been built by a British person who copied the design of the Villas that he had seen when travelling. It is likely that it controlled an estate in the Iron Age from here to other Romano-British remains at Godrevy.

17. Take the narrow track to Reskadinnick, turn left when you reach the road, go down the hill, cross the stream and up the other side until you see a path on your right. Take this path and go straight on until you reach the outskirts of town. At the junction, turn right and go straight on until you reach the roundabout.

Follow the first exit into Tehidy Road and follow the road around to the right. The wall on your left was once the boundary of the Holman's estate at Rosewarne. Near here was also the site of "Meriasek's Well" renowned for treating complaints of the eye. It was drained long ago by mining operations. Behind the wall is the elegant mansion of the Holman family, mentioned at the start of this walk.

There is a plaque on the wall to commemorate Trevithick's first successful run with his steam carriage for you are now on the famous "Camburn Hill" of the song.

18) Take the next left into Vyvyan Street and then left again when you will find yourself back at Rosewarne car-park knowing a little more about the Camborne District.

### **Industrial Archaeology of the Red River**

The Red River Valley has been the centre of tin industry for many centuries. Roman artefacts have been found throughout the valley. Tin was won from the valley in every period from the Bronze Age to the 15th century, when the industry began to expand there.

By the 19th Century these steam works had changed from working the alluvium to reworking the tailings from the many mines on both sides of the river. By 1870 there were about 40 tin streams along the river, employing thousands of men, women and children. Some only employed a dozen or so, but some, like Reskadinnick, had 300 workers. In the 1880s there was an estimated £100,000 worth of machinery along the valley. By the 1920s most stream works were gone, although Kieve Mill worked till the 1950s and Tolgarrack until 1985.

About 20 mine drainage adits feed the river, most hundreds of years old, some still produce large volumes of water. These adits, together with the many leats which run along the valley, remain easily recognisable features of the valley's landscape.

Tin was not the only industry in the valley. Fulling mills and corn mills were also spread throughout its length. Fulling or tucking mills were used to clean, dip and dress homespun cloth, using machinery powered by a waterwheel. For centuries they processed the cloth for the clothes worn by the people of Camborne.

Even more important were the corn mills along the valley, providing essential food for the populace: Rosewarne Mill, mentioned in 1509, Tehidy Mill in 1555, Menadarva Mill in 1565 and mills at Reskadinnick, Bushorne and Treswithian up until the early 20th century. Part of the wheel at Reskadinnick Mill can still be seen.

When we walk along the Red River Valley, we might like to reflect upon those ancient industries, which flourished for so long. They brought employment and prosperity to local people, rich and poor, and provided them with food and clothing. So much remains of those industries and it gives great pleasure to identify those features as we explore this fascinating part of Camborne.

### **Wildlife in the Red River Valley**

Whilst the valley has been altered over the centuries by mining activities, actually creating a greater diversity of habitats, the chemical conditions have not been immediately favourable to life. In deed it has taken decades for the soils and standing water to be colonised by plant and animal communities.

Studies have shown that burrowing beetles such as the green tiger beetle and other burrowing wasps and bees are to be found throughout the valley.

Many plants like Lousewort and Common Gorse have enriched the soil with nitrogen encouraging the succession of other types of plant life. Common Bent and Creeping Bent are grasses which send their stolons across the bare hard surfaces rooting in the odd cracks or pits.



On the drier parts shrubs and trees such as Alders, Sallows and Elms have spread. In the springtime common willow which forms small stands beside the river and across the valley bottom where it is marshy produces its 'pussy willow' catkins in profusion and Common Gorse starts an incredibly long season of flowering.

The wealth of life that could again live in the Red River can be gauged by what can be found in the clean waters of the tributary streams. The Tehidy Stream which joins the Red River at Kieve Mill contains Caddisfly, Stoneflies, Mayflies and Molluscs as well as trout which have been effectively landlocked for many decades.

At present the Red River Valley is the headquarters of one of Britain's rarest dragonflies, the scarce Blue Tailed Damselfly. It is also an important site for another rarity, the Small Red Damselfly, as well as for a Southern species of local importance, the Keeled Orthetrum or Keeled Skimmer. In addition over 80 species of birds have been recorded from in the valley. Many mammals including bats also live in the valley. As the Red River Valley is now a Local Nature Reserve, it is hoped that with careful management, many of the rare and special habitats and their diverse wildlife will be preserved for others to enjoy and cherish.