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Cornish Coast-to-Coast

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Cornish Coast-to-Coast

Yes, you did read that right. The North has the number one C2C. Devon isn't far behind. Cornwall's one is much less well-known... but rather fun.

Its first distinguishing feature: it's short. Very short. At just 11 miles from north coast to south coast, it's not just the only C2C you could complete in an afternoon, it's the only one you could complete in an *hour*. But that would be a shame.

What's on the route?

Eleven miles of former mineral railway track, almost entirely traffic-free, make this a blissfully stress-free ride for a summer afternoon. There's nothing to interrupt your gentle amble through the Cornish countryside save the occasional café and bike hire centre. It's bookended by two fishing villages, and there's a hamlet at the (single) hilltop with two pubs. Sounds good? It is.

Two old railways make up the route of the path, both initially horse-drawn. The Redruth & Chasewater Railway (opened back in 1825) is the southern section, the Portreath Tramway the northern. They didn't survive long into the 20th century, but in recent years Cornwall Council has made a concerted effort to bring these and other old mineral lines back into use as cycle routes.

Practicalities

The gravel and compacted earth surfaces aren't ideally suited for a road bike, though you should be ok if your tyres are tough enough. Any hybrid or mountain bike will be fine. In fact, the gradients are so gentle – a gentle climb up to 110m, and then a slow descent to the other coast – that you could readily do it on your commuter bike.

The route starts at the little fishing village of Portreath on the north coast. There's no railway station there, but it's only four miles (downhill) from Redruth on the Great Western mainline. The southern terminus, Devoran, is under a mile from Perranwell station on the Falmouth branch.

The signage deserves a note as quite the most rustic on any cycle route we've ever seen – lumps of rock hewn from local quarries, with 'Coast to Coast Trail' and a mine symbol etched into them.

Mile by mile

Whitewashed cottages overlook the colourful fishing boats at **Portreath**. Fishing isn't big business here any more, but surfing is – not least the notorious 'Vortex' by the harbour wall. It's stunning to watch if you get the chance, ideally from the safety of the shore with a pasty from the Portreath Bakery in your hand.

The cycle route begins on a little village lane before peeling off onto the first of the mineral railway tracks – wooded and fairly narrow, but well surfaced. Watch out for the occasional lumps of granite which remain from the old railway construction.

At **Cambrose** the path follows alongside a road for a while, and you might find it more comfortable to ride on the main carriageway up the gentle incline. There's a bike hire centre here plus the Elm Farm Café.

A tiny lane leads onto perhaps the best views of the inland route, looking down over the undulating countryside. The passage over the notorious A30 road is safe and easy, but requires a bit of attention to find your way without getting lost. There are two pubs at **Scorrier** if you need refreshment after your arduous (ahem) five-mile climb – and yes, this is the top of the route.

The trail descends through the lovely Poldice Valley into a grassy scrubland once worked as quarries and mines. The old engine-houses and other paraphernalia of mining are all around, and you'll see a few metal mesh cones which are used to seal off the mine shafts. It's all cyclable and walkable now, and you'll see that NCN 3 shares your route as part of its long trek from Bristol to Land's End. There's another bike hire centre and café here, making this the busiest section of the whole route.

The impressive **Carnon Viaduct** takes the Falmouth branchline high above the trail, opened in 1933 to replace an older timber structure. From here it's just a mile and a half to the terminus at the pretty estuary village of **Devoran**, perhaps more river than coastal but nonetheless an important mineral port in the 19th century.

Strictly speaking you can't cycle all the way to the little headland, but it's worth pushing your bike to take in the view. The Old Quay Inn does a very nice line in sandwiches and beer-battered fish and chips.

If you're returning to Perranwell station, retrace your steps until the trail begins, then take a left turn when the first road crosses it: continue up the hill until you reach the station.

