

Breage & Carleen Circular

Time: Allow 3 hours.

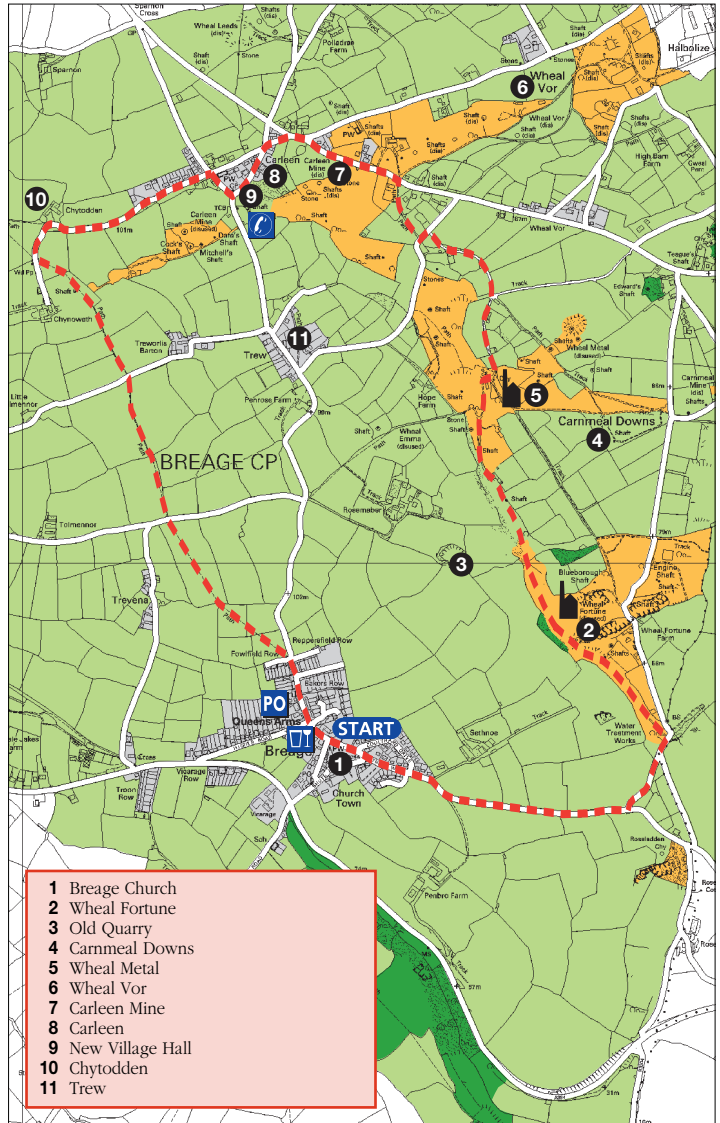
Difficulty: Moderate.

Length: 6 miles.

Location: Take the A394 Penzance-Helston Road, and turn off at Breage.

Parking: You can park on the roadside in Breage village near the church.

Refreshments: At Breage the Queens Arms serves real ales and food; or you can buy snacks at the Post Office. There is no pub or shop at Carleen.



This walk starts at Breage church, which is famous for its 15th century wall frescoes, then takes you through some of the richest mining land in the county, where John Wesley preached. The small village of Carleen was once the centre of great mining activity and the first steam engines to work on Cornish mines were erected here at Wheal Vor. There are some unexpected extras like the decoration on Wheal Fortune stack supposed to represent the dancers at Helston Flora Day, and the vast springtime sea of yellow gorse.

Start at Breage by the church and pub, where you can park on the roadside.

The village gets its name from the St Breaca, who came here from Ireland with her brother Germoe around 460 AD and established a church here. Later, with the expansion of the local mining industry, Breage grew as people moved into the area to work at Wheal Vor, Wheal Fortune and Trewavas Mine. According to the 1841 census, the population of Breage parish was in excess of 6,000. At that time, the village had its own baker, grocery shops, wheelwright, blacksmith and carpenters' shops, as well as its own water supply – all now disappeared.

John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher, visited Breage in 1750 and many converted to Methodism. Chapels were built in the village, today only one remains open.



The Queens Arms, Breage.

Breage Church

"An old and pretty village dominated by the grand fifteenth century church tower of its wholly granite church. The south porch has a carved outer arch. Inside the church shows a splendid vista of granite arcades ... the roofs ... are rich fifteenth century. The many mediaeval wall paintings, notably St Christopher and Christ of the Trades in the north aisle, are more vigorous and impressive than is usual in English churches." (John Betjeman, 1964)

The church is dedicated to the Irish missionary St Breaca. Her first church was built on the slopes of Tregonning Hill between the farmsteads of Tolmenor and Chynoweth, later moving down on the hill of Penbroc, or Penbro, as it is known today. Germoe established his church not far away.

The Godolphin family worshipped here and three Godolphin helmets are displayed in the Godolphin Chapel. Margaret Blagge, wife of the famous Sidney 1st Earl of Godolphin (1645-1712) died after giving birth to their only child Francis (later 2nd Earl). Her request was to be buried close to her husband's ancestral home, although she had never visited the area. Her body was "conveyed in a hearse drawn by six horses from Whitehall to Breage", a journey that took 14 days. Following the hearse were two coaches, each with 6 horses. She was buried in the Godolphin family vault and the funeral, in 1678, is reputed to have cost £1,000! Stained glass windows to her memory are in Truro and Liverpool Cathedrals.



Godolphin Chapel ceiling.



Roman Stone on display in the church.



Breage Church.

The wall frescoes were uncovered in 1890 by Parson Barnes during restoration works. *"Some extremely curious and rare frescoes have been discovered on the walls of the parish church of St. Breage of the date of about 1400. There is a figure of Our Lord 10 feet high, and from all parts of the body streams of blood are issuing from emblems of various trades, such as anchors, shears, battle-axes, pruning-hooks, netting-needles, masons' mallets, plumbers' beads, harps, and others."* (extract from the West Briton).



Wall frescoes.

Wildlife around Breage

The road verges change dramatically throughout the year. In spring the smell of onions is the Three-cornered Leek now a well-established introduction from the Mediterranean that looks like a white bluebell. Brightening up walls and hedges in the summer months is Red Valerian, and Tall Tutsan, a garden escapee originally from Madeira. The strings of brightly coloured beads dangling from Hazel bushes in the autumn are the fruit of Black Bryony.

Slender Speedwell, an alien species with delicate violet flowers occurs in the churchyard amongst the mown grass, as does Chamomile and the orange flowered Fox-and-Cubs.



Three-cornered leek.

From the front of the Queens Arms, face the church and take the road to the left, which skirts the edge of the churchyard. At the far end carry straight on, following a country road past some houses. As the road goes downhill look left for views up the valley. At the bottom of the hill, turn left at the staggered crossroads just after the stream. Follow this lane as it bears round to the right. Just before the left bend go left onto a footpath that follows the valley to Carleen.

The first part of the footpath is through trees, then gradually opens up. On your left are fields, but in places you should be able to spot evidence of quarrying. The mine spoil heaps to your right are from Great Wheel Fortune, which operated into the early years of the 20th century. After passing a ruined cottage go straight for a while. Soon you reach a lane, here bear left then after 10 yards take the footpath to the right uphill towards a chimney stack with a band of ornate white brickwork near the top.

The chimney stack is at Watson's Shaft, part of Wheal Metal. The white brick decoration at the top is said to represent dancers at Helston Flora Day. The stack was connected by an underground flue to the nearby boiler house, which dates from 1885. The accompanying engine house contained a 30-inch engine that powered both pumping and stamping operations until 1901.



Watson's Shaft chimney stack.

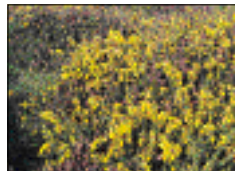
Carnmeal Downs

This valley is known as Carnmeal Downs and has been intensively mined for hundreds of years. Today it supports a variety of wildlife habitats that attracts badgers, foxes, rabbits, weasels, stoats and grey squirrels. Old shafts are ideal roosting places for bats and several species are found here including the Natterer, Greater Horseshoe and the Lesser Horseshoe. These little creatures are amongst our most protected animals, because of recent decreases in their numbers. If you see them flitting around at twilight, just remember one bat can eat thousands of midges during its evening flight!

Carnmeal Downs is an area of heathland where Heath Milkwort, Lousewort and Southern Marsh-orchid grow among the heathers. European Gorse grows here in abundance – its yellow flowers exude a coconut fragrance in the warmth of the sun. In summer you might be lucky enough to gather wild strawberries.



Bat.



Gorse.

At the chimney stack go left and follow the track past Lower Scotts Cottage on your right, then Higher Scotts Cottage on your left. Look left for views towards Tregonning Hill and you should soon be able to glimpse the housing at Carleen.

At the T-junction, go left, then after about 25 yards go right up a footpath, which brings you to the road on the edge of Carleen. Turn left along the road. The lump in the road here is nicknamed the "Wheal Vor Hill" and was once a bridge over water pumped from Wheal Vor Mine down the valley towards Porthleven.

Carleen still has many of its miners' cottages, the difference today being that they would have originally been thatched. William Gilbert of Carleen recalls that many miners had one or two small meadows for growing potatoes and other vegetables as well as keeping animals. Goats provided milk and meat, many families took their goats to Carnmeal Downs for grazing. A pig would be killed and salted down to feed the family. And a donkey was kept to pull the shay, a simple 2-wheeled cart that was their only form of transport.

On your left is a gorse area, this is the site of Carleen Mine. On the right, the cottages set back from the road were once the mine Count Houses and are still known as that locally. Next on the right, the three cottages beside the road are known as Churky Burrow.

Carleen was once the centre of great mining activity – Wheal Vor, Wheal Metal and Wheal Metal & Flow were all close by. Wheal Vor covered almost four square miles and in the mid-19th century was one of Cornwall's biggest and richest tin mines. It is also claimed that Wheal Vor was the first mine in Cornwall to use steam power for dewatering the mine.

To give you some idea of how busy it was, the mine would have employed around 1,200 men, women and children at any one time. People came from miles around to work here, travelling on foot or by donkey



Woodcut of Wheal Vor.



A team of horses pulling a mine boiler from Harveys of Hayle to Wheal Vor Mine in 1906. The horses were owned by Mr Will Tyacke of Carleen and driven by Harry Meagor.

shay. Women and girls worked at the surface and were not allowed to work underground as this was considered bad luck. Known as balmaidens, their job involved crushing and processing the ore.



Seen here is the Carleen Methodist Sunday School Tea Treat procession setting off for Breage c1900.

A little further along beside a modern bungalow is a small stone building.

This is the remains of a carpenter's shop. Next door was the village blacksmith's shop, where old men would gather for a smoke and a chat.

Walk on into the village. The bus shelter, just past the road junction, is outside what was the last village store.

Closed in the mid 1990s, the shop is greatly missed as a meeting place and as the hub of the village. For many years it was run by Kenneth and Mildred Bucket and became known to all as 'Bucket's Shop'. Mrs Bucket had worked in the shop as a young girl for

her aunt, Mrs Williams, who began the business back in 1925.

Take the next road to the left signed for Breage. This takes you past Gilbert's Row, a row of cottages named after the Gilbert family who still live in the village. Go straight over at the crossroads. The large building on the left just before the next crossroads was the village's first chapel.

John Wesley the celebrated preacher, visited the area in the 18th century. This led to the building of the first Methodist Chapel in Carleen in 1762. Because of a huge increase in the mining community during the 19th century, a new chapel was built in 1833. This landmark is by far the largest building in Carleen, and hasn't changed much since. Though it's now a private dwelling, it still dominates the centre of the village.

Carleen was renowned for its tea treats, held annually on the first Saturday in August. On their procession of witness, the first teachers and scholars always performed the "Serpent's Walk" over the Green at Trew before returning to Carleen to enjoy their saffron buns and other Tea Treat fare.

From the chapel, a short detour down the hill to the left takes you to the new village hall constructed in 2001.

After many years of waiting, the dream has become a reality. This modern building replaces the old wooden hut, which was the home of the Men's Institute for nearly 100 years.

Return back to the chapel. The cottage on the right is known as 'Tyack's Toff'.

This is where a haulier called Tyack kept his horses. They pulled the huge wagons, which worked around the mines. It is said that the teams of horses would take the wagons home even if their driver was too drunk to drive. When let out of their harnesses, they would charge up the lane towards Chytodden to drink from the spring

water by the side of the road, then return to their stables for a feed at the end of a hard day's work.

There used to be three drinking pools at Carleen where local farmers sent



Men's Institute before demolition in 2001.



The opening of Carleen Institute c1904. Behind is Flat Rod Shaft engine house of Carleen Mine.

their horses and cattle to drink. At the top of the lane, adjacent to Chytodden Farm is a well, which for many years supplied most of the villagers with drinking water.

From the crossroads, take the road to Chytodden and soon you'll leave Carleen behind. At the first farm buildings (Chytodden Farm) follow the road round to the left and soon you'll come to a cattle grid at the entrance to Chynoweth Farm. Just before the cattle grid go left over the stile into a field. From here the rest of the walk back to Breage is across farmland.

Go diagonally across the field to the stile on the right. Then go across three more fields, keeping to the left hedge in each one. On your right is Tregonning Hill and on your left you should be able to spot Ivey's Shaft engine house, part of Wheal Metal.

Go straight across the lane and over the stile into the next field following the hedge to the left. Go over the stile into the next field and again keep to the left hedge. Go over the stile, straight across the lane and then over another stile into the next field.

Walk straight up the middle of the field taking time to look left for great views towards Sithney with its prominent church tower, and beyond to Helston and the Lizard. Down the hill on your left is Trew.

The little hamlet of Trew, means 'black farm' in Cornish. Most of the cottages here date from the mining boom of the 19th century, when men, women and children were employed at the great mining complex of Wheal Vor. According to the 1841 census, around 50 families lived in the village, but by 1881 the number had more than halved, a reflection of mine closure and emigration.

The big house on the village green was once called The Trelawney Arms and was a thriving concern during the 19th century. It was here that the tenants of the Trelawney Estate came to pay their rents on *quarter days*. The Green was a popular place for events such as Cornish wrestling, travelling fairs and menageries.

At the top of the field bear a little to the left to reach the next stile – this is an elegant curved granite cattle grid arched by trees. Go diagonally across the field to the next stile. Cross the right corner of the field and over another stile into the last field.

Go diagonally across to the stile and onto the road at the edge of Breage. Follow the road into the village and back to the church.



The water carrier at Carleen with the Methodist Church on the left. In the distance is Flat Rod Shaft engine house of Carleen Mine, which was demolished in 1948.



Trew, with The Trelawney Arms on the right next to the green.