

# Tarka's Route

## Anne Williamson

To help the photographer, Simon McBride, whose work illustrates the beautifully produced Webb & Bower edition of *Tarka the Otter* (1985), I prepared a list of map references which would enable him to find the key sites easily. With the thought that this list might also be useful to some of our members and possibly to students unfamiliar with the actual countryside, it is reproduced here, embellished with appropriate quotations.

Maps used were Ordnance Survey 1:50 000, Sheet 180, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe; Sheet 191, Okehampton and North Dartmoor

For those unfamiliar with map references; the letters refer to a particular square kilometre on the National Grid System (this is indicated in the information provided on each particular map); the first three numbers are 'eastings' and read along from west to east; the last three numbers are 'northings' and read up from south to north. A little practice soon clears any confusion.

CHAPTER NO.		MAP REFERENCE
1	<i>Twilight upon meadow and water, the eve-star shining above the hill, and Old Nog the heron crying kra-a-ark! as his slow dark wings carried him down the estuary. A whiteness drifting above the sere reeds of the riverside, for the owl had flown from under the middle arch of the stone bridge that once carried the canal across the river.</i> Canal Bridge Owlery Holt (Beam mansion is a school; it is possible to park off the road and to walk up the river bank in both directions. Beam Weir is upriver and Weare Giffard below.)	SS474209
2	<i>While the moon was full and bright the otters went to hunt the fish lying in the Tunnel Pool below Halfpenny Bridge — bass, grey mullet, and flukes, or flat-fish. The cubs were two months old and they had learned to squeeze through the inner opening of the holt, and run along the root, in order to play on the grassy bank.</i> Mostly in the same area as in Ch.1 above. Halfpenny Bridge	SS475210
3	<i>Calling the cubs to follow her, she sank into the water and swam upstream. . . At the end of the night, Burnt Sycamore Holt lay a mile and a half behind them. . . The bitch led them out of the water, through willows and ash trees and brambles, and across a narrow-gauge railway track to the fir plantation.</i> Upstream towards Torrington Narrow-gauge railway, follow along to Badslake Farm Willeswell Moor Clay Pits Marland Moor (Marland Jimmy) Blackdagger Pond is somewhere here	SS481197 SS475165 SS496134 SS505125 SS510119
4	<i>The brook was a haunt of dippers, whose cries were sudden as the cries of water-and-stones;</i> Mere Brook Braund's Hill Wood Sallow Islet	SS525110
5	<i>They hunted and ragrowstered for many days under the high wooded hills, below which the river wound and coiled like a serpent. . . Early one morning the south-westerly wind arose from off the Atlantic, and brought fast low clouds over the land. . . The river pushed to the sea with the fresh brown flood-water . . . the otters rode down on the fresh, over the spillway of the Dark weir . . . under Rothern Bridge . . . round a bend . . . to where the smooth and thundering fall-over of the bubble-whitened water slanted across the river, . . .</i> Merton Millpond Beaford Water (bridge) Dark Hams Weir Rothern Bridge (below Torrington) Beam Weir Canal Bridge (as before) Beam Pool ('Shiner')	SS538126 SS543143  SS480197 SS475206 SS474209 SS475206
6	<i>The otters . . . followed the eels down the river . . . the brown water rocked them down . . . soon the sweep of the fresh lessened, for the tide was pressing against the river . . . In front twenty-four arches, of different shapes and sizes, bore the long bridge. . . They drifted with the tide up the other horn of the estuary, and turned into Branton Pill, . . . and arrived at the Ram's-horn duckpond.</i> Downriver to Leaning Willow Island, Halfpenny Bridge Lancarse Pill (Landcross Pillmouth) Railway Bridge Long Bridge (Bideford Bridge) The estuary Ram's-horn Pond Marstage Wall (farm marked)	SS463245 ditto SS456264 SS485338 SS487352 SS484353

- 7 *Tarka fished the pools and guts of the Branton pill . . . One night a restlessness came over him, and he rode on the flood-tide to the head of the pill. . . he went under the bridge and fished up the stream . . . he had been travelling for an hour, when on a sandy scour he found the pleasing scent of otter. He whistled and hurried upstream.*  
 Branton Pill — upriver  
 Caen Bridge (Caen River enters here) SS495400  
 Buckland Meadow (North Buckland area)? SS493402  
 Back down river — estuary
- 8 *One evening . . . the otters set out on a journey. The bright eye of the lighthouse . . . blinked in the clear air . . . Two hours after midnight the otters had swam five miles along the shallow coast and had reached the cave of the headland.*  
 Lighthouse (disused) SS458328  
 Bag Leap (Baggy Point) SS419407  
 Wreckers' Path
- 9 *The otters were alarmed by the coming of the man, and that night they left the headland, returning to the Burrows, and hunting rabbits in the great warren of the sandhills. . . For two days and two nights the frosty vapour lay over the Burrows, and then came a north wind which poured like liquid glass.*  
 Braunton Burrows (large area) SS450350  
 Horsey Marsh SS475336  
 Heaton Marsh — Ram's-horn Pond SS487352  
 Branton Pill (as before)
- 10 *The tide beyond the tail of the Shrarshook was divided by a string of froth made by the leap and chop of waters beginning to move north and south. . . The swans turned north, borne by the tide racing past Crow Island. . . Every day on the Burrows was a period of silence under a vapour-ringed sun that slid into night glowing and quivering with the zones and pillars of the Northern Lights.*  
 Shrarshook and Crow Island SS467320  
 White House Shingle SS470330  
 Ram's-horn Pond (as before)  
 The Great Field SS480359  
 Caen Farm ?  
 Scur Farmyard ?  
 Branton marsh SS475345
- 11 *Bogs and hummocks of the Great Kneeset were dimmed and occluded; the hill was higher than the clouds. . . Tarka ran past a heap of turves, set around the base of a post marking Cranmere tarn. . . By pools and waterfalls and rillets the river Taw grew.*  
 Great Kneeset (Dartmoor) SX589859  
 Cranmere Pool SX603858  
 The R. Taw rises at SX610860  
 — then follow down to Cosdon Beacon (Cawsand) SX635915  
 Watchet Hill SX616930  
 Belstone Cleave SX630936  
 Follow river downstream (flowing northwards)
- 12 *Below one bridge the river slowed into a wide pool where the waters of a smaller south-flowing river meditated before turning north with big brother Taw.*  
 Junction Pool SS662177  
 Shaggery's bed SS627220  
 'last bridge above the tide' is apparently that below Chapelton SS576272  
 The road bridge is New Bridge SS570283  
 Spady Gut (small creek below New Bridge)
- 13 *Through the soft pasture ground the river roamed, coiling and uncertain. The tide water filling it gleamed dully like a seal's hide, greyish brown and yellow freckled. . . Working down the river, crossing from side to side and searching for fish under stones and in deep holes, he left the grassy sloping tide-walls behind and passed by boats resting on a ridge of gravel above a long road-bridge.*  
 A long road-bridge — Barum Bridge (Barnstaple) SS558329  
 Barum Yeo (Tarka turns up 'pill' — which enters on right hand bank just below bridge) SS553334  
 Pilton Bridge. Follow up the River Yeo to Swine Park — return — back up the Taw to Bishop's Tawton, turning into Landkey Brook  
 Venn Pit's (quarries) SS564303  
 Continue up to Swimbridge SS582306  
 SS620300
- 14 *Exmoor is the high country of the winds, which are to the falcons and the hawks: . . . served by rain-clouds and drained by rock-clittered streams, which are to the otters.*  
 How Tarka travels to Exmoor is not related; if he continued up Landkey Brook to its source he could easily cross over to the River Bray going upstream, say to Challacombe and thus across to The Chains  
 Pinkworthy Pond SS730425  
 Hoar Oak Hill SS723423  
 SS737427  
 Hoar Oak Water (leads off Chains to join the East Lyn at Watersmeet and thus Lynmouth) SS733465  
 SS744486  
 Tarka crosses two miles of land (westwards) and finds 'other water' — the West Lyn below Beggar's Roost Hill SS723478

- 15 *Here sunlight was shut out by the oaks and the roar of the first fall was beating back from the leaves. The current ran faster, narrowing into a race with twirls and hollows marking the sullen rocks. The roar grew louder in a drifting spray.*
- Ilkerton Water SS702470  
 Lynton Road — the A39 possibly at Cherrybridge SS710478  
 Beggar's Roost Bridge  
 Barbrook Mill all in area of SS715477  
 Glen Lyn Bridge SS720485  
 And so out to sea SS724496
- 16 *Autumn's little Summer, when day and night were equal, and only the woodlark sang his wistful falling song over the bracken, was ruined by the gales that tore wave and leaf, and broke the sea into roar and spray, and hung white ropes over the rocks. Fog hid cliff top and stars as Tarka travelled westwards.*
- East Cleave SS645490  
 Heddon Water — Heddon's Mouth SS655498  
 Then west along coast — Hangman Point SS583484  
 Wild Pear Beach SS578478  
 Bull Point Lighthouse SS462479  
 Morte Stone SS440456  
 Morte Hoe SS450450  
 Morte Bay (south from the Hoe) SS455425  
 Woolcombe Sands (Woolacombe) SS465414  
 Pickwell Down  
 Georgeham — Skirr Cottage (where HWW lived) SS464399  
 Croyde SS445394
- 17 *White-tip and Tarka had followed the salmon up the big river, but at the beginning of the new year they had come down again. Drifting with the ebb under Halfpenny Bridge, they crossed the marsh and came to the Pool of the Six Herons, out of whose deep middle reared the black iron piers of the railway bridge.*
- Horse and Crow Point (off end of Burrows — as before) SS465319  
 Across the estuary and back up R. Torridge to Canal Bridge (as before) SS474209  
 Beam Weir (as before) SS475206  
 Halfpenny Bridge (as before) SS475210  
 Railway Bridge (as before) SS463245  
 Lancarse Yeo (as before) ditto  
 Orleigh Mill (up R. Yeo) SS440225  
 Lancarse Pill SS463245  
 Back up R. Torridge to Canal Bridge
- 18 *And there Deadlock, his black head scarred with old fights, sat on his haunches, apart and morose, watching for the yellow waistcoat of the Master.*
- Town Mills, Torrington SS500184  
 Dark Hams Bend SS503169  
 Dark Hams Weir SS503174  
 Town Mills Leat (as above) SS500184  
 Town Mills (Tarka hides in wheel) ditto
- 19 *Tarka listened to (the hounds) working among the roots under the island bank, and across the river. He heard the chaunting voices of huntsmen and whippers-in . . .*
- The Rolle Straight SS495187  
 Taddipport Bridge SS488187  
 Elm Island (just below Railway Bridge) SS481196  
 Rothern Bridge SS480197  
 Beam Pool and Weir (as before)  
 Furzebeam Hill SS481204
- 20 *At the beginning of the ninth hour a scarlet dragonfly whirred and darted over the willow snag, watched by a girl sitting on the bank. Her father, an old man lank and humped as a heron, was looking out near her.*
- Beam Weir (as before) SS475206  
 Canal Bridge (as before) SS474209  
 and below
- And the tide slowed still, and began to move back. . . And while they stood there silently, a great bubble rose out of the depths, and broke, and as they watched, another bubble shook to the surface and broke; and there was a third bubble in the sea-going waters, and nothing more.*