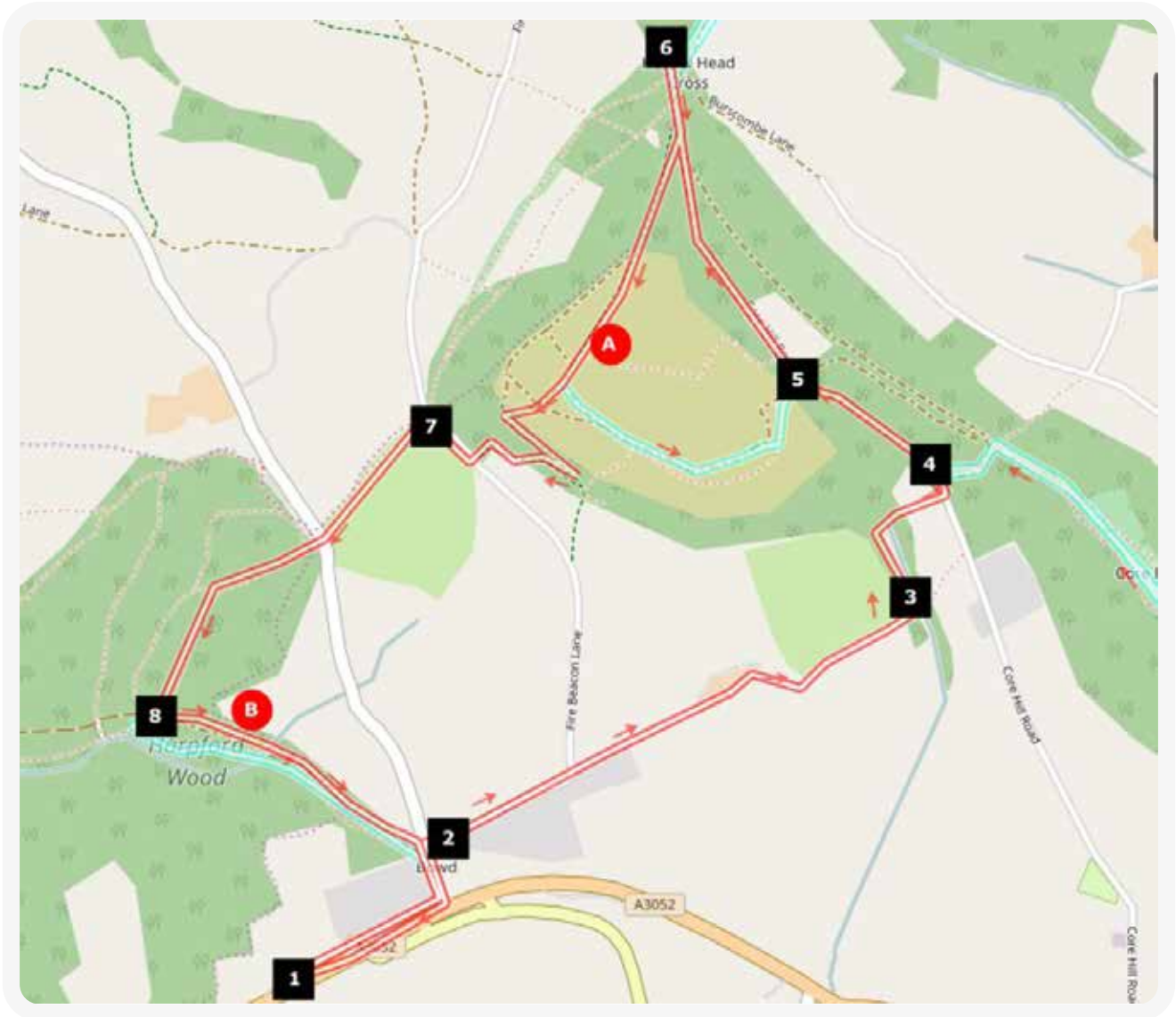
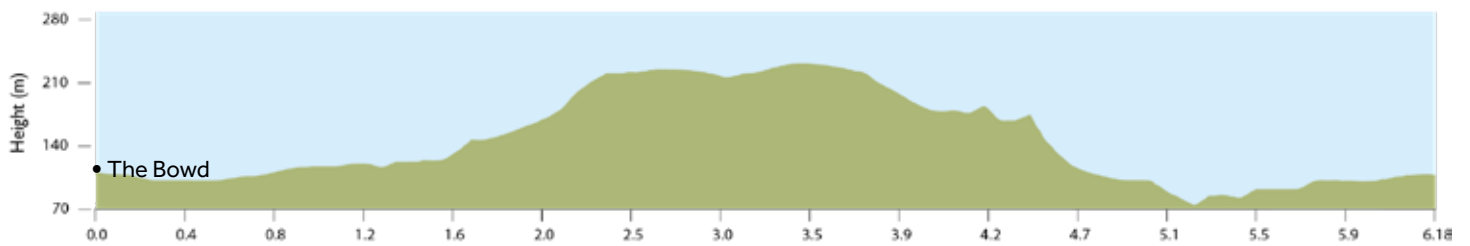


Circular 5

Fire Beacon Hill Circular



Difficulty: Leisurely
Walking time: 2 hours
Length: 6.2km / 3.9mi



Distance 6.18 km Ascent 203m Descent 206m

Circular Route 5

Fire Beacon Hill Circular



Difficulty: Leisurely

Walking time: 2 hours

Length: 6.2km / 3.9mi

Start location: Bowd on A3052

Route Summary: The walk takes in the heathland and spectacular views of the coast from Fire Beacon Hill Nature Reserve before dropping down to Harpford Wood and the former railway to Sidmouth. Alternative routes can be taken to extend or reduce the walk.

Getting there: The walk starts and finishes at the hamlet of Bowd on the A3052 north-west of Sidmouth. There is a layby for parking just west of Bowd on the north side of the A3052. Frequent buses stop at the adjacent bus stop.

Description

[1] From the Bowd west layby or adjacent bus stop walk east towards the Bowd and turn left towards Tipton St. John.

Take care crossing the road to Tipton St. John.

[2] North of the Bowd Inn pass two low brick walls on either side of the road (these are the parapets of the bridge over the old railway line) then turn immediately right, east, along the narrow Fire Beacon Lane. When the road turns to the left go straight on into Saltways Lane, signed as a cul-de-sac and with a footpath sign. Continue straight on through the farmyard and follow way point signs past the loose boxes and farm house. Continue along the unsurfaced track, through the gate into a field and, keeping the fence on your right continue walking east to a stile.

It is a very quiet road but you may have to step aside for tractors and horses.

[3] Climb over the stile and turn left. Carry on up the hill ignoring a footpath on the right until you come to a T-junction, turn right to a narrow, plank bridge and another stile. Cross the stile and head straight ahead to a stile that leads onto a narrow road. Turn left, and at a small parking area the road becomes an unsurfaced track up the hill.

A detour to Core Hill can be made at this point, which will add 1.25 miles/2km to the walk. To visit Core Hill, turn right through the car park, through the gap in the fence and take the lower path which curves up a combe for 200 metres. Turn right up a steep earth bank for 20 metres and then at the top turn right again and follow the ridge for ½ mile/800 metres. The path stops at the end of the hill and you must retrace your steps.

[4] The wide track continues up the hill. After ¼ mile/400 metres the hill levels out. At this point look for an unmarked track that goes off left, west, through the trees.

This is a short cut across Fire Beacon Hill and reduces the walk length by 1/2 mile/800m. It provides magnificent views over Sidmouth and out to sea, and benches enable you to savour the views. If you miss the unmarked track, a signed footpath 150 metres further on takes you across the centre of the hill on another short cut path through the heather.

[5] Carry along the track for another 1/3 mile/600 metres and bear right to Hollow Head Cross where there is a green Forestry Commission sign. Turn left down the lane for approximately 40 metres to admire the view over the Otter Valley with Ottery St. Mary in the distance.

Another detour can be made here along East Hill, following the East Devon Way, which will add 1.25mile/2km to the walk. Return the 40 metres to the main track and turn left. Continue for over half a mile/1km to reach White Cross where there is another spectacular view over the Otter Valley. Return to Hollow Head Cross.

Circular Route 5

Fire Beacon Hill Circular Continued



[6] Return the 40 metres to the main track and turn right. You are now following the East Devon Way until waypoint [8]. Retrace your steps for 120 metres but at the fork bear right, south west along a well-used beech-lined woodland track for 150 metres until you reach a gate to enter the Fire Beacon Hill Local Nature Reserve.

At the notice board take the left hand footpath and cross the heathland. Carry on along the path and, as it starts to descend, look out for the short cut route coming in from the left, east.

Go down the winding path with first a left turn, then watch out for a sharp turn to the right opposite another notice board. Continue until you join a narrow road where there are more views over the Otter Valley and Newton Poppleford. Turn right on the road for 60 metres and look for a footpath sign on the left.

[7] Go down the steps, taking care as you cross the stile into a large field. Make your way to the right hand field boundary then follow the hedge down to the bottom. You may be surprised to see donkeys in these fields from the Donkey Sanctuary near Salcombe Regis, 4 miles to the east. At the bottom of the field look for a footpath sign and a pedestrian gate onto the Bowd to Tipton St. John road. Take care crossing the road, which can be busy, and follow the footpath sign into Harpford Wood and follow the track to the left. Carry on descending on the track until you see a railway bridge.

Take care crossing the road which can be quite busy.

[8] At the railway bridge leave the East Devon Way and climb up the steps on the right and, on reaching the track bed turn left, east. Follow the old railway track until you come out onto the Bowd to Tipton St. John road, turn right and retrace your steps to the bus stop or layby.

Alternatively continue under the railway bridge down the rough track and at the bottom turn sharp left, leaving the East Devon Way.

Note that this path may be slippery but gives a good insight into the power of water that has cut a deep furrow - known locally as a goyle - in the surrounding rock. Look out for ferns along the side of the stream and follow the north bank of the stream, keeping right on a narrower path where the track rises to join the old railway track.

The path eventually leaves the stream at a waymark and climbs between two wire fences until it meets the Bowd to Tipton St. John road, where you turn right back to the bus stop or layby.

POI information

A. Fire Beacon Hill Local Nature Reserve is owned by Sidmouth Town Council and jointly managed by East Devon District Council and the RSPB. This heathland reserve is an excellent site for birds including yellowhammer and nightjars in summer, and is home to a wealth of reptiles including adders.

B. The railway opened by the Sidmouth Railway Company in 1874 and closed in 1967 as part of the Beeching cuts.. The track ran from the junction with the London to Exeter main line at Feniton to Sidmouth, with a further branch from Tipton St John to Exmouth via Budleigh Salterton. At its peak in 1938 there were 11 trains to Sidmouth each way daily.

Route developer: James Baldwin

Route checker: Bob Hewett