



East Devon
National
Landscape

EAST DEVON WAY - WEST TO EAST (WOODBURY CASTLE TO SIDBURY)

Route Summary

Starting at the 2,500-year-old Iron Age hillfort of Woodbury Castle, this section of the route takes you through a wonderful range of landscapes including open heathland, apple orchards, field footpaths and green lanes. Sweeping across Collaton Raleigh and Harpford Commons, part of the famous Pebblebed Heaths, it descends to the apple orchards north of Newton Poppleford. From here it's a short walk across the flood plain of the River Otter and through the village of Harpford to Harpford Woods. The route passes under the old Feniton to Sidmouth branch line before climbing steeply to the top of Fire Beacon Hill, where on a clear day you will have stunning views out to Sidmouth and the coast. Following the crest of the hill to White Cross the route then descends through thickly hedged green lanes and footpaths to the village of Sidbury.

Start: Woodbury Castle car park (free)

End: Sidbury

Distance: 10.4 miles/16.8km

Estimated time: 4 hours 59 minutes

Difficulty: Category 4

Nearest postcode: EX5 1JJ **What Three Words:** ///diplomats.episodes.remotest

Accessibility information:

Access: Category 4 - Some sections are not accessible to mobility vehicles and buggies/pushchairs due to kissing gates, 2 in 1 gates with a stepover bar, steps and narrow bridges.

Terrain: Tarmac, stony tracks, narrow paths with tree roots, loose stone, mud and grass.

Field furniture: 16 gates (including six 2 in 1 gates), 6 kissing gates, 4 footbridges and 72 steps.

Total ascent: 1272 feet/388m

Maximum gradient: There are several steep sections, one ascent of approximately 1 in 3 (26.6%) for 66 yards/60 metres and one descent of approximately 1 in 5 (18.5%) for 77 yards/70 metres

Maps: OS Explorer 115 Exmouth & Sidmouth

Other useful information:

Dogs: Welcome under close control. Please follow the Paws on Paths messages, particularly during the bird breeding season from 1 March until 31 July.

Refreshments: Woodbury, close to the start of the route, has a shop and several pubs. There is a shop and pub close to the route at Newton Poppleford and Sidbury has a pub and a shop at the end.

Highlights: The chance to explore the Pebblebed Heaths and Fire Beacon Hill Nature Reserve. If you're lucky you may spot a Dartford Warbler (year round) or hear a nightjar (summer months). Panoramic views out towards the coast, particularly from the top of Fire Beacon Hill.

A landscape of history

The heathland area was created by Neolithic farmers around 4000 BC when they started clearing the area of deciduous woodland to create pasture for their animals. Further clearance, grazing and burning over the centuries created the heathland.

Newton Poppleford's claim to fame is the King Alfred daffodil which was bred by the Hill family and received an RHS Gold Medal in 1899. The original daffodil field has now been built over, but groups of bulbs were planted around the village and can be seen flowering every March.

The route passes under the old Feniton to Sidmouth branch line railway which closed in 1967. Part of the old railway between Tipton St John and Bowd is now a cycle path.

Fire Beacon Hill was one of the sites where a beacon was lit to warn Elizabethan London that the Spanish Armada was coming.

Sidbury was mentioned in the Domesday Book and is said to be one of the oldest settlements in Devon with its Iron Age Fort at Sidbury Castle. It still has a working mill producing flour.

St Giles in the centre of the village is a Grade I listed church with a 7th century Saxon crypt under the chancel.

Important wildlife

The East Devon Pebblebed Heaths support over 3000 species of wildlife including many which are rare or threatened. Of the 140 bird species, the Dartford Warbler is one of the rarest and most iconic. Look out for it year round in areas of dense gorse. In early summer nightjars arrive from Africa. These nocturnal birds are more often heard than seen. Listen for their churring calls on summer evenings.

The Pebblebed Heaths also support a large number of insect species including 50 species of butterfly, 517 species of moth, 26 species of dragonfly and damselfly, 243 species of beetle, 94 species of wasp, bee and ant. Look out for the southern damselfly, one of the rarest species in the area, and the silver studded blue butterfly flying from June until August.

There are also 38 species of mammals on the heaths including 14 species of bat. Look out for evidence of roe deer, rabbit, badger and hazel dormouse.

Fire Beacon Hill is a Local Nature Reserve and an important area of lowland heath, 85% of which has been lost in the UK since the 1800s. It has sandy, acidic, nutrient poor soils which support a wide variety of plants including ling, bell heather, cross leaved heath and gorse which all look spectacular in season.

The area is also an important breeding ground for yellowhammers and Dartford warblers. Other birds to look out for include stonechats, merlins, crossbills and, in the early summer months, listen for the churr of a nightjar at dusk.

Grazing management is carried out with small herds of cattle and Exmoor ponies to reduce bracken and scrub encroachment.

Directions:

1. **Leave the car park on the side closest to Woodbury Castle** and turn right down the path. At the path junction keep right (straight on).
2. **Where the track swings right, turn left into the wood.** At the path junction bear left to the earth bank and then right alongside it. Follow the path to the end of the wood.
3. **Turn left through a gap in the bank and then immediately right** to a path T-junction. Turn left alongside the wood.
4. **At the path junction turn right.**
5. **At the Y-junction bear left.**
6. **At the next junction go straight on.**
7. **At the Y-junction bear right.**
8. **At the path junction turn left.**
9. **At the cross paths go straight on.**
10. **At the next path junction continue straight on.**
11. **At the cross paths by the pines go straight on.**
12. **At the next cross paths go straight on.**

13. **At the cross paths go straight on.**
14. **At the next path junction go straight on.**
15. **At the next path junction keep left (straight on).**
16. **At the next junction bear right and then right again.**
17. **At the cross of tracks under the trees bear slightly left** (straight on) and follow the track downhill ignoring all side turns.
18. **Where the track divides bear left past a metal barrier** and follow the track down to a minor road.
19. **At the road turn left and then take the first right** after Hawkerland Cross and follow the road uphill.
20. **Just before the cattle grid turn left through a wooden gate** onto the heath. Follow the track as it curves right and then continue straight on ignoring all side turns.
21. **At the cross paths go straight on.**
22. **At the next cross path go straight on.**
23. **At the cross tracks turn right** and follow the track up to a minor road.
24. **Go through a wooden gate and cross diagonally left** into Joney's Cross Car Park. Turn left and walk up the left side of the car park and follow the path to the A3052.
25. **TAKE CARE crossing diagonally left onto a tarmac drive.** Follow it over a cattle grid.
26. **Follow the tarmac drive, ignoring all side turns** until you come to a second cattle grid. Go through the gate alongside and continue straight on downhill.
27. **Where the tarmac drive bears left,** keep straight on down a stone track through a metal bridleway gate. Follow the track down to a footbridge.
28. **Cross the footbridge and bear left onto a track.** Turn right and follow it along the edge of the common to a T-junction.
29. **At the T-junction turn right** and follow the track to the end.
30. **Turn right onto a footpath.** Go through the wooden pedestrian gate and follow the path left and then right.
31. **Ignore the footpath on the left** and continue straight on.
32. **Where the path divides keep left (straight on).**
33. **At the next path junction keep straight on,** then, at the following path junction, turn right and follow the track alongside the fence on the left.

34. **Go through a wooden bridleway gate** and follow the track straight on.
35. **At the path Y-junction bear left** then take the footpath on the left.
36. **Follow the fenced path and go through a metal pedestrian gate** and down some steps. Follow the footpath around to the right and then left and follow the hedged path to a minor road.
37. **At the road turn right and then right again** to follow the road past a footpath on the left to a T-junction.
38. **At the road junction cross diagonally left** and go through a 2 in 1 gate onto a footpath.
39. **Follow the hedge on the right** up to a metal kissing gate.
40. **Go through the gate and follow the footpath** on the right of the row of poplars down through the orchard to a path junction.
41. **Turn left for a short distance and then right down some steps.** Follow the hedged path straight on to another flight of steps.
42. **Go through a wooden kissing gate and down the steps** and turn right. Where the path divides bear left down through the trees to a footbridge.
43. **Cross the bridge and follow the footpath** arcing slightly left across the field to another metal pedestrian gate and footbridge. This area can be very wet at times.
44. **Cross the bridge and follow the path** around to the right and through a wooden kissing gate.
45. **Go over a sleeper bridge** and follow the fence on the left to Harpford Bridge.
46. **Cross the footbridge and beware of river bank erosion on your left** as you follow the footpath to a wooden kissing gate. Go through and continue to a minor road.
47. **Turn left along the road** and follow it to the next junction.
48. **Turn left at the T-junction by the church** and then take the first right up Knapps Lane.
49. **Where the road bears left, turn right along a footpath.** Follow the track and, where it divides, bear right to a wooden kissing gate.
50. **Go through the gate and follow the path** alongside the stream.
51. **At the path junction bear left** and go under the railway bridge. Continue straight on up through the woods.
52. **At the path junction turn right** to the road.

53. **TAKE CARE going straight across the road onto the footpath** to Fire Beacon. Follow the path around to the left to a metal kissing gate. Go through and straight across the track and through a 2 in 1 gate.
54. **Follow the fenced path uphill to a metal pedestrian gate.** Go through and head diagonally right up the field to a metal kissing gate. These fields are used by The Donkey Sanctuary so you may see donkeys grazing.
55. **Go through the gate and up the steps** to a minor road and turn right.
56. **Follow the road for a short distance and turn left** up a bridleway. Follow the path up and around to the right. Continue straight on to a cross paths.
57. **At the cross beside the interpretation board,** turn left uphill (back on yourself).
58. **Follow the path uphill and around to the right.** Continue straight on ignoring all side turns.
59. **Go straight on at the next junction.**
60. **At the path junction turn right to a metal bridleway gate.** Go through and follow the track along the avenue of beech trees.
61. **At the path junction bear right** and then immediately left. Follow the track to Hollow Head Cross.
62. **Go straight across and follow the track** to the next junction.
63. **Continue straight on along the track.**
64. **At the Y-junction bear right to a minor road.**
65. **Go straight across the road** and follow the track to a 2 in 1 gate and stile.
66. **Go through the gate and head straight down the field** towards the wood. Bear to the left of it and follow the edge of the wood to another 2 in 1 gate.
67. **Go through the gate and follow the fence** on the left.
68. **Go through the gateway and bear right** down the field to a 2 in 1 gate.
69. **Go through the gate and follow the hedged track downhill.** Go through one metal field gate and continue straight on.
70. **Go through a wooden field gate** and continue straight on past Goosemoor Farm on the left.
71. **Where the track divides turn right over the bridge** and follow the road for a short distance. Turn left through a 2 in 1 gate onto a footpath through fields.
72. **Follow the hedge on the right to a gateway.**

73. **Go through the gap and turn left.** Follow the hedge on the left down to a track.
74. **Go past a barn on the right** and follow the track straight on.
75. **Go straight across the drive and follow the track** between buildings to the A375 through Sidbury.
76. **TAKE CARE crossing the road and turn left** along the pavement to the junction with Bridge Street.