



## Walk 19. Simonsbath and Cow Castle.

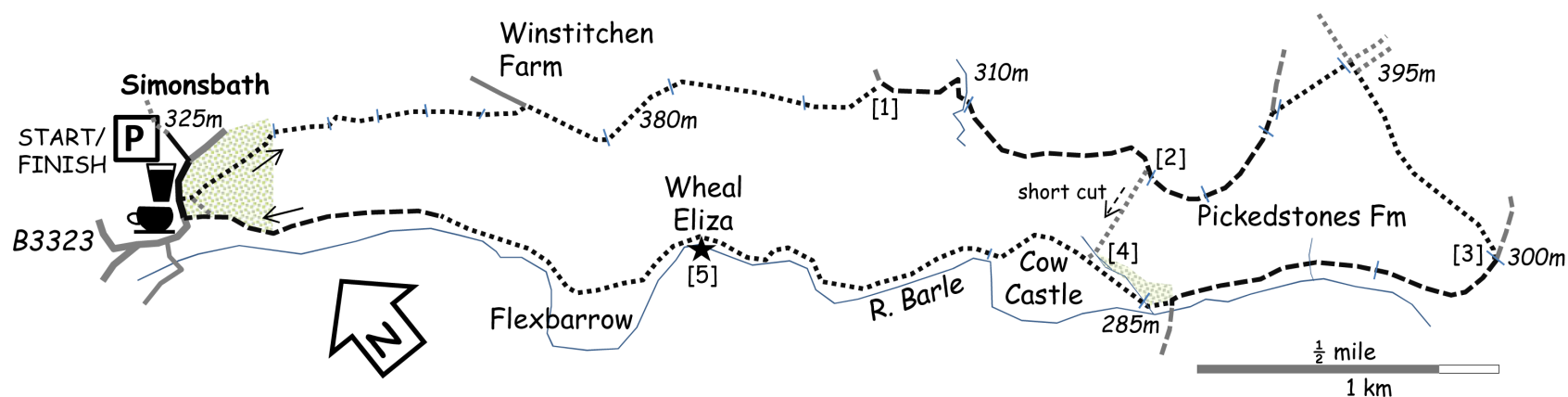
- 6.7 miles, 2 hours 35 minutes. Ascents and descents of 315 metres.

Terrain: Fields, paths and tracks, some potentially muddy. The short-cut involves a steep and slippery descent, and there are small streams to cross on both routes.

Access: By car, park in Simonsbath (SS 774 394, near TA24 7SH, donation). No bus service.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Tea room and inn at Simonsbath.



Cow and Calf

THIS SECOND, VERY POPULAR AND SOMEWHAT EASIER WALK FROM SIMONSBATH explores the River Barle further downstream, past the imposing Iron Age hill fort known as Cow Castle (the name is thought to be a corruption of the Celtic *caer*, a fort, but it hasn't stopped the small mound on the downstream side from becoming known as the Calf). The return route passes the remains of the Wheal Eliza mine and its miners cottages, all that is left of an unsuccessful attempt by the Knight landowners to extract copper in the 1840s; nowadays the mine is as well known for its association with the heartbreaking murder of seven-year-old Anna Burgess.

From the car park, return to the road and turn right. Pass the Exmoor Forest Inn, then turn left on a bridlepath next to Birch Cleave Barns. Take the left fork signposted Picked Stones. The well-marked path (blue posts and markers, and the occasional signpost) continues through several fields. After the path starts to descend it crosses a small gully (40mins, [1]): turn right, where it becomes a stony track. Descend into a valley, cross a bridge, and climb up the other side. There will soon be good views to the right over Cow Castle, an Iron Age fort.

As the path levels out, arrive at a field gate that leads through a bank topped with young beech trees (55mins, [2]).

You now have a choice. In dry weather a short-cut can be made by turning right immediately before the gate, following a vague path steeply downhill beside the bank. Care is needed towards the bottom, where the path becomes very steep and possibly slippery. Cross a shallow ford and head for the gap between the two hills, turning right when you come to a larger path to rejoin the main route (keep Cow Castle on your left). Otherwise continue ahead through the gate, then take the second gate left and walk past Picked Stones Farm. Head uphill on the farm drive. After passing through a gate (normally open), turn right through a field gate on a bridleway towards Lanacre and Withypool. Cross the field and go through a gate; turn right here, heading downhill with the hedge to your right. Lanacre Bridge soon

comes into view in the valley across to your left, then the blue ribbon of the River Barle appears in front of you. Before reaching the river, turn right through a gate to join the Two Moors Way towards Simonsbath (1hr20mins, [3]). The path curves right and becomes a stony track before going through a gate. Pass a group of trees and a ford to your left, then cross a stream and go through a kissing gate. Fork right through a small outcrop; the short-cut rejoins here (1hr40mins, [4]). A path heads up to the top of the fort from the southern side if you want to explore.

Follow the well-marked path around Cow Castle, to the left, and then to the right and through a gate to walk alongside the River Barle. Note the disused copper mine and walls of the miners' cottages at Wheal Eliza, just before the path diverts away from the river to round Flexbarrow (2hr5mins, [5]). Follow the path parallel with the river to Simonsbath, turning right at the road for refreshments and the car park (2hr35mins).

**Short walk: Cow Castle from Picked Stones** (● 2.6 miles, ascents and descents of 170 metres including one very steep hill; wide stream to ford). Park on the Picked Stones road (there is usually room to squeeze a car off the road near the entrance to Picked Stones Farm, SS 807 375). At the end of the road go through a gate ('no motor vehicles') on a blue-signposted bridleway. Keep to the right-hand side of the field, joining the main walk just before the 1hr20min point ([3]). At the 1hr40min point ([4]) turn right to reverse the short-cut: head for a tall tree, ford the stream beneath it, then climb the hill next to the bank. Turn right at the top to go through a field gate, then take the second gate left and walk past Picked Stones Farm. Head uphill on the farm drive. After passing through a gate (normally open), turn right through a field gate on a bridleway towards Lanacre and Withypool. Cross the field and go through a gate, turning left to return to the Picked Stones road.

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