



Walk 22A. Simonsbath to Exford via Cow Castle and Withypool.

- 9.3 miles, 3 hours 40 minutes. Ascents of 365 metres and descents of 440 metres.

Terrain: Paths and tracks, short stretches on roads, some fields and open moorland. Possibly muddy in places but no difficult terrain.

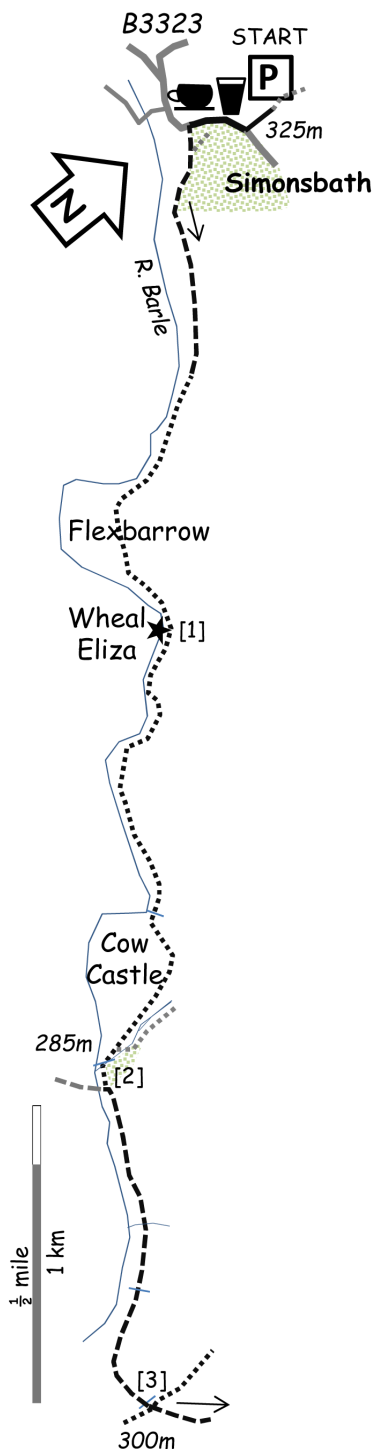
Access: Park in the car park in Exford (SS 854 383, near TA24 7PP), or Simonsbath (SS 774 394, near TA24 7SH, donation), depending on how you have arranged transport. Exford is served by bus 198/467, but there is no bus between the villages so you will have to organise your own connection (or stay in Exford and use route 22 to return).

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Pubs and (seasonal) tea rooms in Simonsbath, Withypool and Exford.

THIS WALK BETWEEN SIMONSBATH AND EXFORD contrasts with the predominantly moorland route described as an alternative in Walk 22, although it involves only a little less exertion. The two routes can be combined to make a fairly demanding long day walk, or an excursion over two days with an overnight stop in Simonsbath or Exford. The route follows the Two Moors Way (and for much of its length the River Barle) to Withypool, then it picks up the Exe Valley Way to Exford and the River Exe, overlapping walks 19 and 23. The three villages on the walk are all iconic but very different high Exmoor settlements; Simonsbath is a 19th-century creation, the seat of the Knight family in the old Royal Forest, while older Exford ('the heart of Exmoor') sits around a village green and Withypool nestles in the Barle valley.

Start the walk from the car park in Simonsbath. Turn right on to the road to pass the Exmoor Forest Inn and two low cottages. At the end of the second cottage, turn left on a signposted path (the Two Moors Way) and follow it down to the River Barle. Continue alongside the river until the path diverts 'inland' around a prominent hill, Flexbarrow. As you come back to the river, note the disused copper mine and walls of the miners' cottages at Wheal Eliza (30mins, [1]; see walk 19). In a further 15 minutes or so go through a gate and follow the path away from the river to round Cow Castle, an Iron Age fort (if you want to explore, a path ascends to the top of the fort before you reach the river). Cut back to the right between the main hill and the smaller Calf. Go through a gate and cross over a small footbridge to rejoin the Barle just before a group of trees (1hr, [2]). Don't cross the river but follow what is now a stony track ahead. Go through a gate, then as the path narrows another gate to enter a field (1hr20mins, [3]). Continue ahead, gently uphill through fields, in around ten minutes coming back into moorland at the head of a small stream. Five minutes or so later the track passes



through clumps of gorse then gradually veers to the right to come alongside a hedge. Arriving at a cross-roads (1hr50mins, [4]), continue straight over (the road on the right leads to Landacre Bridge, visited in walk 21).

In about five minutes your track becomes a surfaced lane. In another five minutes pass Kitridge Farm on the right, then ten or twelve minutes further on there is a wide tarmac drive, again on the right; immediately beyond it turn right over a stile signposted 'Withypool' (2hr10mins, [5]). Cross the field straight ahead. The path becomes increasingly well-defined before joining a surfaced track at some houses. Turn left at the T-junction just beyond and walk down into Withypool. When you meet the road coming in from the right and below your route continues straight ahead, but you might like to turn right first and explore the village and its bridge over the River Barle. Refreshments are available at the seasonal tea rooms (or in winter the shop), and the Royal Oak pub.

Leaving Withypool, pass the Royal Oak and as the road rises take a signposted path to the left up some large steps into a wood ('permitted path to Exford via Room Hill'; 2hr30mins, [6]). Follow this path uphill through the woods, then over steps and stiles and through fields. It is well-signposted, but the signposts don't always point directly at the way out of the field: look carefully for the next gate or stile. At the last gate there is only a blue-topped post: keep to the right-hand side of the field to come to a stile that leads out on to a road (2hr55mins, [7]). Cross the road and join a signposted bridlepath running diagonally to the left over the open moor. You are aiming for a conspicuous tree stump in a gap in a tall hedgerow, about half a mile away. Continue straight on at the first signpost, towards Exford. Round the head of a deep combe and

join another bridleway in front of the tree stump, keeping right. Go through a gate, followed by two lines of beech trees. After the second line of trees the path starts descending; turn left through a gate signposted to Exford (3hr15mins, [8]). You have a panoramic view over Exford and beyond before the path goes through a gate into a small wood. The well-defined path now continues downhill towards Exford, eventually becoming a vehicle track and passing between houses. Where it comes to a junction (3hr30mins, [9]) turn right ('footpath to Exford and Winsford'), then immediately turn left over a bridge. On the far side of the bridge turn left, and follow the river to the car park and the attractive village of Exford (3hr40mins).



East from Road Hill

