



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

- 9.3 miles, ascents of 365 metres and descents of 440 metres. 3 hours 40 minutes constant walking, allow 4½-5 hours.

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

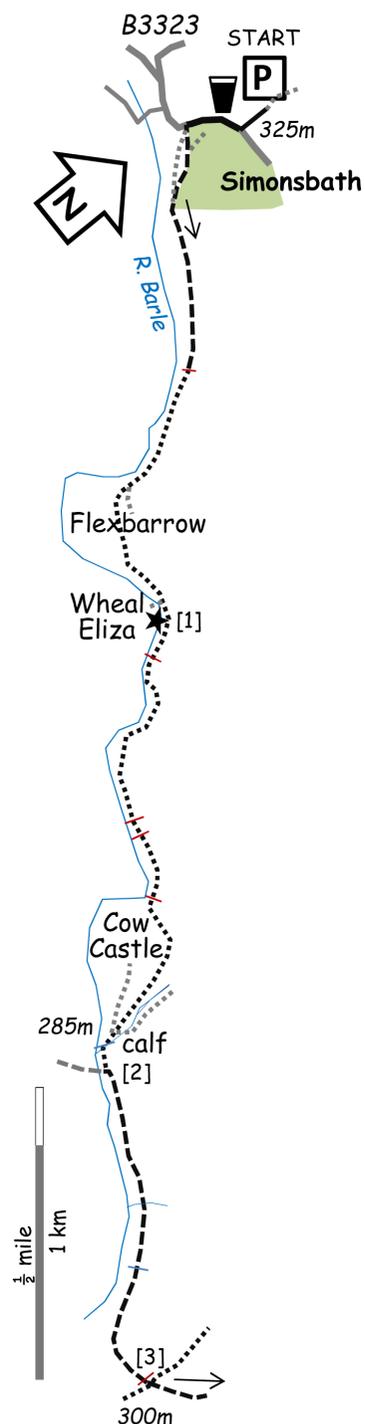
Access: Park in the car park in Exford (SS 854 383, near TA24 7PP), or Simonsbath (SS 774 394, near TA24 7SH, donation), depending on how you have arranged transport. Exford is served by bus 198/467, but there is no bus between the villages so you will have to organise your own connection (or stay in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

Map: Croydecycle 53 Exford or OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

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

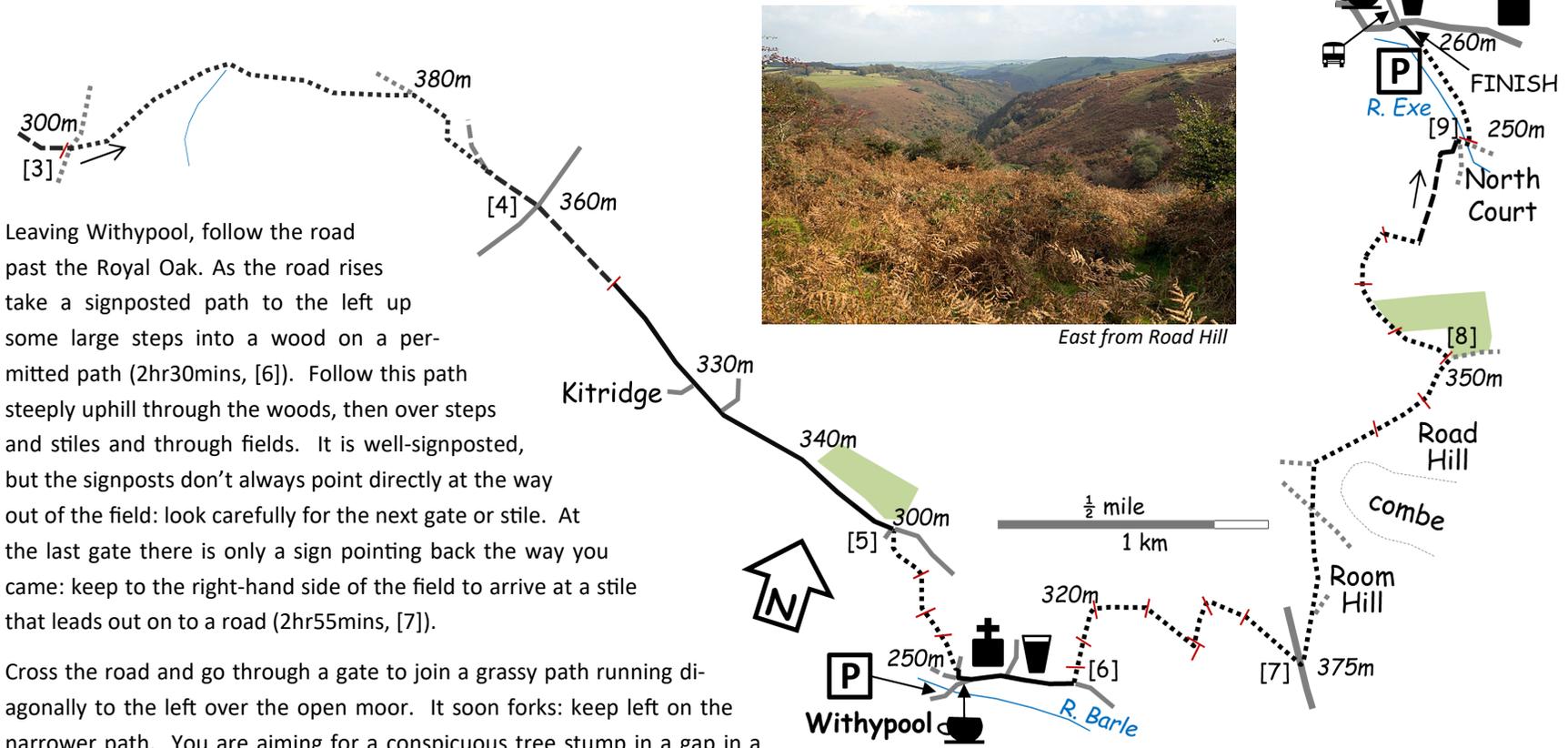
THIS WALK BETWEEN SIMONSBATH AND EXFORD contrasts with the predominantly moorland route described as an alternative in walk 22, although it involves only a little less exertion. The two routes can be combined to make a fairly demanding long day walk, or an excursion over two days with an overnight stop in Simonsbath or Exford. The route follows the Two Moors Way (and for much of its length a delightful stretch of the River Barle), reversing the second half of walk 19 and continuing over moorland and along a lane to Withypool. You will then follow the Exe Valley Way over Room Hill and Road Hill to Exford and the River Exe, overlapping walk 23. The three villages on the walk are all iconic but very different high Exmoor settlements; Simonsbath is largely a 19th-century creation, the seat of the Knight family in the former Royal Forest, while ancient Exford ('the heart of Exmoor') sits next to the River Exe around its 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 and take the left-hand fork (the Two Moors Way), then bear almost immediately right towards Cow Castle. Soon join a path coming up from the River Barle. Continue alongside the river until the path diverts around a prominent hill, Flexbarrow; bear right to go through a gate. 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). Continue alongside the river for fifteen minutes or so. The path reaches a wide pool and again diverts from the bank to round Cow Castle, a steep hill topped by an Iron Age fort. Follow the path back to the right between the main hill and the smaller Calf (if you want to explore the fort, turn right to ascend a grassy



path, returning the same way). Go through a gate and cross over a small footbridge (1hr, [2]). Don't cross the river but follow what is now a stony track ahead, part of the Two Moors Way. On the left is a former wood, clear felled and replanted in 2017; unfortunately the beech trees to the right were felled at the same time. Coming to the sole remaining beech, go through a gate. The path now begins to gain height, bringing you to another gate (1hr20mins, [3]): now head slightly to the left, soon joining a well-defined grassy track and continuing a gradual climb. You will soon catch a glimpse of Landacre Bridge down to the right. The path continues upwards to the rim of the landscape, with views over the Barle; you are likely to encounter Exmoor ponies on this stretch. The mix of heath, gorse and grass here is rather idyllic, at least in summer. Join a vehicle track to continue alongside a tree-lined bank and past a barn. Arriving at a crossroads (1hr50mins, [4]), continue straight over (the road on the right leads to Landacre Bridge, visited in walks 21 and 21A).

In about five minutes pass a signpost dedicated to the celebrated local author and artist Hope Bourne (1918-2010), and go through a gate to continue on a surfaced lane. In another five minutes pass Kitridge Farm, then ten or twelve minutes further downhill there is a wide tarmac drive on the right; immediately beyond it turn right over a stile signposted 'Withypool' (2hr10mins, [5]). Cross the field straight ahead, go through a gate, and walk beside a wire fence and through two more gates. Join an enclosed path, then at its end go through a gate and bear right on a lane at some houses. Turn left at the T-junction just beyond and walk down into Withypool. When you meet the main road through the village your route continues straight ahead, but you might like to turn right first and explore Withypool 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, follow the road past the Royal Oak. As the road rises take a signposted path to the left up some large steps into a wood on a permitted path (2hr30mins, [6]). Follow this path steeply 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 sign pointing back the way you came: keep to the right-hand side of the field to arrive at a stile that leads out on to a road (2hr55mins, [7]).

Cross the road and go through a gate to join a grassy path running diagonally to the left over the open moor. It soon forks: keep left on the narrower path. You are aiming for a conspicuous tree stump in a gap in a tall hedgerow, about half a mile away on a bearing of 340°. 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, becoming a vehicle track and passing between houses. When it comes to a junction at Court Farm (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 through a gate, and follow the river to the car park and the attractive village of Exford (3hr40mins).

Shorter walk: Simonsbath to Withypool (● 6.2 miles, ascents of 215 metres and descents of 300 metres). Finishing at Withypool takes in the beautiful Barle valley and the open moor just beyond, but avoids the steeper part of the route over Room Hill and Road Hill. There is a small car park (quickly filled) and limited roadside parking at Withypool (SS 844 354).

© Stan Lester 2021. Last recce 4/2021. Please email editor@exmoorwalker.uk with any updates or comments.
 This route description is provided freely and in good faith. You are welcome to use, copy and distribute it for personal and non-profit purposes (attribution—non-commercial—no derivatives). No responsibility is taken for any errors or omissions, or for your navigation or safety on the walk. Introductory and safety information at exmoorwalker.uk.