



Walk 23. Exford and Withypool.

- 8 miles, 3 hours 10 minutes. Ascents and descents of 400 metres.

Terrain: Paths, fields and roads. Some sections are likely to be muddy other than after prolonged dry spells, and there is a stream to ford.

Access: By car, park in the car park in Exford (SS 854 383, near TA24 7PP). The walk can also be started from Withypool, from the 1hr55min-point: there is a small car park over the bridge from the village centre (SS 844 354, TA24 7RA). Bus 198 from Minehead to Dulverton stops at Exford, normally twice daily in each direction Monday-Saturday: check the timetables and note that not all buses go to Exford. There are no buses to Withypool.

Map: Croydecycle 53 Exford or OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: In Exford and Withypool.

EXFORD AND WITHYPOOL ARE TWO QUINTESSENTIAL EXMOOR VILLAGES of quite different character. Exford, on the River Exe, sits partly around a large green, and it is perhaps bound up with hunting, riding and shooting more than any other village on Exmoor, as will be apparent from a visit to either of its grand and characterful inns. Withypool, on the Barle, has a quieter and more remote feel, perhaps epitomised by the homely Royal Oak and the multi-purpose village shop and post office. This varied walk connects the two villages via fields and lanes on the outward stretch, and a brief excursion on to open moorland on the return.

Start from the car park in Exford. Walk back to the road, then turn left and through the village. Follow the main road over the river and around to the right. As the road bends left, go up some steps on the right to join a signposted footpath. Follow the path left through a kissing gate, then go back over the Exe on a wooden bridge and emerge into a field. Head diagonally to the right, crossing a small plank bridge before meeting a road. Turn left here, then take the left fork as the main road heads right and uphill. In less than ten minutes come to a string of houses on the left; immediately before the last one, Lower Mill (20mins, [1]), turn left down a lane and cross the River Exe yet again (it is already smaller than at Exford, having lost two of its tributaries). Turn left if you have used the bridge, straight on if you have paddled across the ford: either way, keep left on the bridleway to South Ley, gaining height above the river. When the bridleway comes into a field, head diagonally right to a white house. Join a lane here, and follow it to the main road (the B3224). Turn left, pass two driveways on the right, then look for an almost hidden stile in the hedge on the right, signposted to Chibbet Post [2].

Enter the field and keep right. Turn right through the second of a pair of gates, then head down diagonally across the field to a stile that takes you well to the right of a farmhouse. Cross a small stream, head uphill, go to the right through a gate, and turn left. Keep to the left-hand field boundary and head steeply upwards to a field gate in the far end. Continue uphill, go over a ladder stile, turn left and then right along the field boundary, and finally go over a stile to meet a road (50mins, [3]). The short walk turns off here.

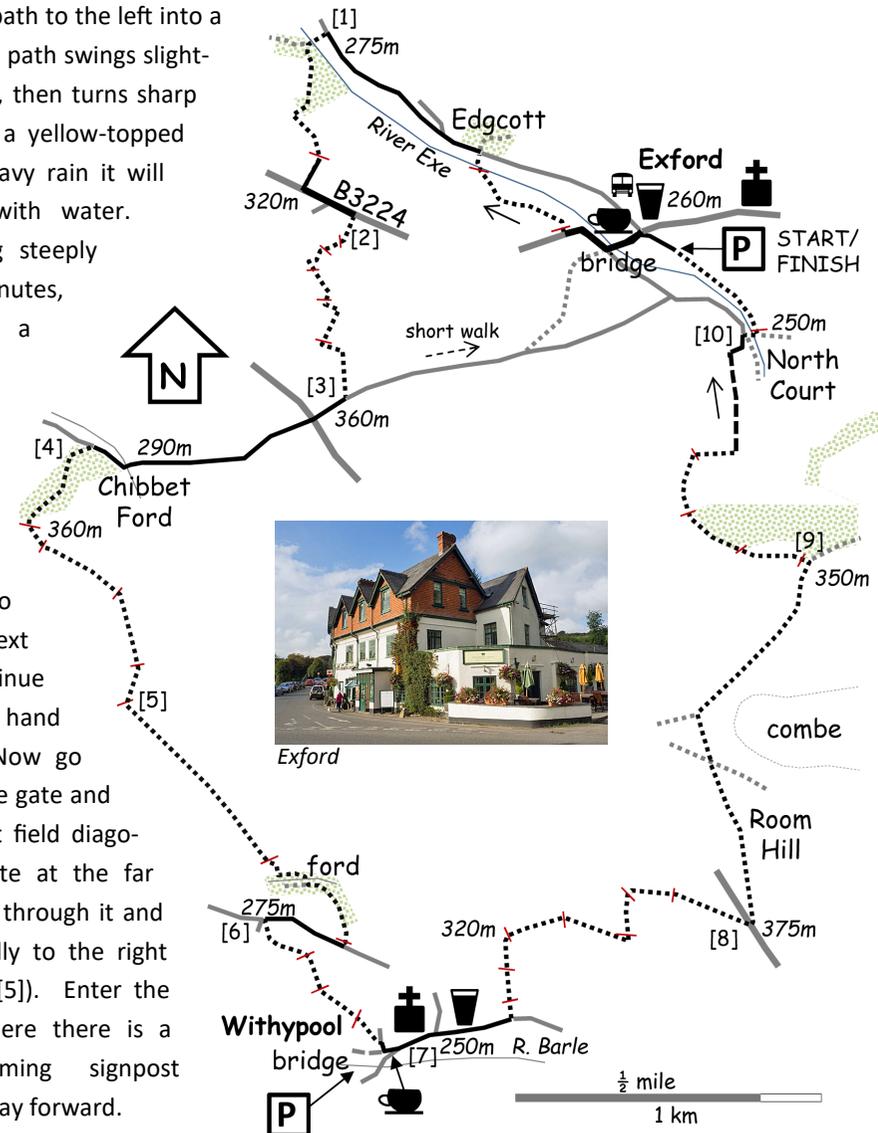
Turn right on the road and go straight ahead at Chibbet Post crossroads. Follow the road downhill to a ford (there is a narrow footbridge to the left). As the road begins rising again,

take a grassy path to the left into a wood [4]. The path swings slightly to the right, then turns sharp left just after a yellow-topped post; after heavy rain it will be running with water.

After climbing steeply for several minutes,

go through a gate into a field and turn diagonally left past the gantry of an old wind-pump. Go through the next gate and continue along the left-hand field edge. Now go through a wide gate and cross the next field diagonally to a gate at the far corner. Head through it and cross diagonally to the right (1hr 20mins, [5]). Enter the next field where there is a small confirming signpost pointing the way forward.

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Follow the path through several more fields always keeping the field boundary to your right. Come to a pedestrian gate in front of you, then head downwards towards a telegraph pole. Just beyond is a finger post: turn right here, descend on a steep path and then steps, and cross a stream. Now turn left along a broad woodland track. When you arrive at a narrow road, turn right. In five minutes there is a tarmac drive on the left (1hr45mins, [6]); immediately before it, go over a stile to the left signposted 'Withypool'. Cross the field ahead, then follow the path through two more fields. Come to some houses, where the path becomes a surfaced lane. 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 (1hr55mins, [7]), your route continues straight ahead, but you might like to turn right first and explore the village and bridge. Refreshments are available at the seasonal tea rooms and the Royal Oak pub.

Follow the road out of Withypool past the Royal Oak. As it rises, take a signposted path to the left just beyond a '20%' sign ('permitted path to Exford via Room Hill'). Go up steps and through a small wood, then follow the path 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 a yellow marker and a signpost pointing back the way you came: keep to the right-hand side of the field to come to a stile that leads out on to a road (2hr25mins, [8]). Cross the road and join a signposted bridleway running diagonally to the left over the open moor. It soon forks: keep left. You are aiming for a tree stump in a gap in a tall hedgerow, about half a mile away on a bearing of 340°. Continue ahead 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 (2hr45mins, [9]). You will 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 eventually passing between houses. Where it comes to a junction at Court Farm (3hrs, [10]) turn right ('footpath to Exford and Winsford'), then immediately turn left to go over a bridge. On the far side of the bridge turn left through a gate, and follow the path back to Exford (3hr10mins).

Short walk around Exford (● 2.8 miles, ascents and descents of 150 metres). Follow the main route as far as the 50 minute-point, then turn left on the road. In under ten minutes, come to a house on the left. Just after the house, a signed footpath points left; follow it across the fields back to Exford.

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