

## *The Harpford Stroll.*

Map OS Explorer 115 – Exmouth & Sidmouth. 1:25000.

Under 2 Hours

3.8 miles

A very level, short but immensely interesting walk, following the old Feniton to Sidmouth branch railway track and returning along the banks of the River Otter. In between the two you can enjoy incredible woodland and sculptured sandstone gullies that still channel a steady stream of clear water over falls and between lichen covered rocks. A long finely bricked culvert can provide entertainment en route. Finally, a welcoming hostelry to round off a fine walk.



**P**ark in the good car park in Tipton St John, opposite the garage (GR SY 0904 918) and moving up the road to the left passing the Golden Lion (Yes, pass it, time for that at the end of the walk) look for the road signed Hayne hill off to the right. Take this road and move very gently uphill passing an interesting old house on the right. Soon you will come to an old brick bridge and just before this look for the wide track veering off to the left.

**N**ow, onwards on the route of the old branch railway line. You can imagine the sound of the old steam train chugging along high up above the river. It must have been a wonderful route. Take a moment to peep down to the right at the old River Otter meandering along in the valley. Eventually, your track moves into the trees and what fine specimens they are. Tall, very tall, mixed hardwood and softwood many of which have luxuriant mossy growth on them. The good firm path runs high up on the edges of a large ravine the sides of which all hide under the growth of scrub and forest. Not easy to distinguish but you will soon pass over a high embankment that spans a gully and here you will come to an old

brick bridge that sports old iron railing on its walls. Look now for the steps just before the bridge and leading down to the left.

*F*ollow these down to curve to the right under the bridge. There are many walks from here but stay on your track, perhaps taking a moment to admire the ancient brickwork. On a wonderful, now narrow, earthy path drop steadily downhill, passing through even more fine woodland. Once again the height of some of the trees is evidence of their fight to reach the light. Your path borders the stream running in the deeply eroded sandstone channel on your left where the odd waterfall eats its way even more deeply into the stone whilst old fallen trees cause the water to make small diversions. Soon you will leave the canopy of trees to emerge into, hopefully, the sunshine!

*N*ow, just potter along the track to meet a small road. Here, move left to drop down into Harpford, emerging opposite the Church. Left again and follow the good road down and to the right, passing the village hall on your left. At the bend in the road move right on to the Public Footpath passing through a little wooden gate and over the River Otter on a narrow bridge. Right here to amble at your leisure along the river back to Tipton St John. At the road, right and back to your car ... or, of course the Golden Lion.

Chris Harwood February 2020.