

## *The Hemyock Circuit.*

Map OS Explorer 128 – Taunton & Blackdown Hills 1:25000.

Time: About 6 hours – 10.8 miles

Grade: A quite long walk with wonderfully mixed scenery – Hill, Heath, River, Lane .... Some quite steep sections but the 360 degree view from Culmstock Beacon makes it all worthwhile.



**I**n Hemyock (GR 136 133 ) park in the small amenities car-park – early start needed to get a place –near the Church. Walk South back along the Dunkeswell road passing the castle on your right. Take the Public Footpath off right, just by the Hemyock village sign. Follow the hedge around on your right and at the top bear right to a gate. Cross the field in front looking for the gate in the top far left corner. Move up the grassy track to meet a lane, moving right here to pass Conigar Farm gate on your left. Now stay on this track to emerge at a junction of tracks. Cross over the main track on to the Public Footpath into the woods. Beautiful. Incredible old beech trees. You will emerge on a quiet road. Left here and at the top of the hill where the road curves left, take the Public Footpath off right via a stile.

**F**ollow the lovely track left along the tree line, emerging briefly into a small open pasture area and then via a stile continue on the path left to eventually cross a stile into open pasture. Follow the fence on your right to exit field via a stile beside a wooden gate.

**M**ove straight ahead through partially open ground with some silver birch on your right. Look for a yellow arrow on a tree guiding you to the right. Don't move right yet but continue on, curving right when you see an old metal gate to your right. Drop down to this gate and follow the track downhill to emerge by a lane in a, let's be generous, somewhat run down farm area. Bear left on Public Footpath, following a mesh fence, and look for metal gate and then a stile off to your right. Cross to the farmhouse -? stables – and through the yard via a gate and so down to meet the road. Wander left for about 100m and then take the Public Footpath right, over a plank bridge and across the field, looking for an opening, stile and little bridge. Again, straight across the field to the hedge and about a third of the way along pass through the hedge via a stile. You may see Culmstock Church in front of you depending on the leaf cover. .

Move down to the far left hand corner of the field, over the stile, and then onwards to a metal gate and then the road. Left to the Church. Interesting trees growing on the church tower! Church porch ideal place for a coffee stop if the weather is foul.

**P**ass through the churchyard to meet narrow lane and here move right to find ahead a footpath going between the cottages. Through a gate and keeping the river on your left look for the first stile you come to. Then – **not over the stile** – turn left and drop down some steps, through a gate and walk right following the course of the river passing under a large old oak. Eventually, cross the river by a good bridge and bear left through somewhat wet scrub to a gate followed by a second small gate leading out to the road. Walk about 50m right and then take the Public Footpath left – towards the hill and Beacon! – Follow the left hand hedge. Keep aiming for the Beacon in the distance. You will come to a stile and passing over it turn sharp left aiming to the right of the bungalow in front.

Out on to the lane via the ornate white iron gates. Move right for about 50m and straight ahead find a muddy rocky track. Pass through a metal gate and immediately, bear left uphill following the hedge until a point where you would pass under an arch of hedge and scrub. Here move to your right across the sloping field towards Pithayne farm. At the time of writing there is a signed diversion around the farm. Follow this to find a track moving diagonally left uphill. Follow the track up to the base of the Beacon and the bracken, and then follow the base of the Beacon round to the left, staying just on the edge of the bracken. Do not try following the left hand boundary wall/ hedge – it is very, very, wet and boggy! There are now numerous tracks leading up to the Beacon and it is safe to follow any of these – just keep moving uphill. If you follow the base of the Beacon you will soon see a communications mast off to your left through the trees and near here a thin path leads directly uphill through the bracken to the Culmstock Beacon. What a view. History, too, all displayed graphically on a board. Excellent lunch stop.

**R**ested, replenished and onwards. Walk NW towards another communications mast over the open heath. Good tracks but stay to the main one which eventually, in about 2km, curves round right into the forest, passing round the edge of a pool. Enter the forest and immediately find a slightly muddy junction of tracks. Move left on the main track in front of you and pass through a gate. You will arrive at the base of the communications tower. If in doubt about your route aim for this tower and then, facing the tower, continue left on the good track. Now, stay on the track to meet a thin lane and then right to meet the road. Right, over the road junction, and after a fair bit of road walking look for the **second** Public Footpath off left via a stile. Up the hill – just about the last bit of uphill! – to the trees and then just walk right until you come to the Wellington Monument. More history. At the time of writing the Monument is undergoing a huge overhaul and is draped in a fantastic array of scaffold. When finished it will be superb. Final coffee if you have any left and then take the broad SE track away from the monument to meet the road. Briefly, left and then right at the cross-roads. Now – shame it's road walking but at least easy navigation – stay on the road until you enter Hemyock and hopefully the comfort of your car.

Chris Harwood (Revised June 2020)