

Ottery to West Hill via Birdcage – and Back.

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

Time: 2 – 2½ hours

Grade: Very Easy, no hills. Wonderful open pastures with extensive views across to Sidmouth Gap. Some lane walking near end.

From Fairmile Inn cross-road follow the Ottery St Mary road, soon turning right by the garage, on to the Kings School road, and after about 200 m look for the Public Footpath sign on the right. (Grid Ref 087 966). You could park down the lane beside the thatched house on the grass verge.

Follow the footpath beside the open pasture for about 1.5 km, enjoying the ancient hedges and the panoramic views. Shame about noise from the A30 but with wind in the right direction it's not too bad. Eventually you arrive at Birdcage – (origin of the name?) – and a thin lane. Left down the lane and arrive at a fork in the road. Decisions! This is known as the Green. Take the left fork, but note the now heavily lichen and bramble covered tree stump, a relic of some former giant tree. This is a wonderful old lane AND mostly downhill. A row of old oaks stands like sentinels on the right marking the route of a long gone hedgerow.

On arriving at the T-junction and main road, look in the hedge to your right for the gate on to the public footpath. Take this and follow the open field side – safe from the traffic on the other side of the hedge. You will reach the end of the path at a small gate opening out on to the road. Cross with care and go into Toadpit Lane. (There is a small Public Footpath diversion through a field but it is not really worth the effort for a few metres). Stay on the road and eventually at the fork, bear right along the Private Road (**also a Public Footpath**) past Lowlands. The road is secluded and leafy, passing over a small brook. Immediately after the brook, hop over the stile in the bank on your left. An ancient metal footpath sign leans in the right direction but anyway, move uphill and diagonally right across the open pasture to the top right hand corner of the field beside the woods. Take time to look behind and around. Over the first of four stiles and along a wonderful path for about a kilometre. After stile number four walk down the lane and enter the copse in front of you, as directed by the yellow arrow. Right, at the way post, and over the little brook via the footbridge.

Up the narrow track to the road, and then left down Bendarrook Road to the junction. Right, up the hill, (not a REAL hill !) for about 200 metres to the Public Footpath sign that you follow to your left. Straight on and then, gently bearing left, look for the wonderful leafy footpath off to the right. Keep going down to the road and then right until you come to Elsdon Lane. Here, go left down the signed public footpath and you will be on one and a half kilometres of what has to be one of most open-viewed footpaths giving unique views of Sidmouth Gap, East Hill strips, Fluxton and much much more.

Eventually, on reaching the road, turn left and passing the now desolate looking Salston Hotel keep going to cross over two main crossroads to return to your start. Shame about the last bit of road walking but small price to pay for the rest of it.