

Blackbury Camp to Harcombe and Buckton Hill –and back either by a short or longer route.

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

Short route - time: 3 – 3½ hours

Longer route – time: 5 hours About 9 miles

Grade: Moderate with some good wooded track walking. Longer route is more demanding presenting some steep uphill walking but beautiful tracks.



Take the Hare and Hounds road out of Ottery St Mary and crossing the junction at the Inn drive on for a few miles to the Blackbury Camp turning off left. Do not turn left but rather park on the left just before the turning.

Cross the road on to the Public Bridleway and follow this wonderful wide track for some 500m through glorious forests and beside ancient banks to a clearing and a small barn – grandly named Barkers Barn. Bear left here and again follow the wide, lush Public Bridleway through the woods. You will see a sign denoting Harcombe Hill Living Forest that details the attempts to get the forest back to its original form of broad-leaved trees and heath. Options to follow permissive paths are given but for now follow the main bridleway, ignoring the public footpaths off to the left. Eventually, you will emerge into a clearing that offers a simple bench seat from which you can sit and enjoy the view over Sidford, Sidmouth and the sea, not to mention the long fertile valley that rises up to Buckton Hill. The remote settlement of Harcombe and its associated farms and cottages nestles below this hill. Bear right out of the clearing down a flinty track, through – or round – a wooden gate to meet a small road.

Right here and downhill to pass numerous attractive cottages. Take the first road to the right and follow this, curving round and in front of cottages until you see a Public Bridleway sign to the left. Down here and over a thin bridge beside a ford. Stay on the main bridleway around the cottage – don't take the footpath through the gate – and up the glorious lane to a T-junction. Left here and at the left hand bend the follow Public footpath sign to the right for a few metres before going over a stile on the right.

Follow the left edge of the field uphill to a stile and then into the glorious Buckton Hill woods. You are now on a slightly overgrown path through the woods but take a moment to enjoy the ferns, honeysuckle etc and the views back over to Harcombe and the valley. There are convenient walkways over ground that can be boggy in wet weather. After some time, having come through forest and ferns you will come to a short square marker post guiding you up and diagonally left through the woods.(Fairly obvious because it would not be easy to keep going along straight) Bit steep but not too far to a gate. Interesting little shack and associated sheds here, all very remote. Up to another gate and out right on to the bridleway. Bear right into a clearing and keep moving through to the right on what is part of the East Devon Way. Follow this excellent flinty track easily all the way to a road. About an hour and a half to here.

At this point there are two options, a shorter route or a longer route!

First, the shorter route

Here, turn right and move up passing Lower Sweetcombe farm entrance before reaching the road off right (public bridleway) to Higher Sweetcombe Farm. Stay on this good track to just before the farm buildings and beside an old cattle grid turn right on a bridleway and follow this for some way downhill – past some beehives and through rich woodland. Probably a few streams down here in winter. Move downhill to a thin footbridge over a stream and then bear right climbing steadily up through the woods on a sometimes-wet track to a small clearing and old ruin. Move right on the bridleway NOT left along the footpath and stay on this clear track back to the Barkers Barn from whence you started. Stay on the track back to the car.

Now, the longer route and this is a beauty, really worth the effort.

Here, turn left steeply down the road with a beautiful valley to the right. After a few hundred metres look for the Public Footpath sign off right and pass through a small gate on to the East Devon Way. Follow the hedge on your left, through a small gate and on to a superb wooded track, rich in every sort of vegetation. (Huge old house tucked away down to your left through the trees.) The track opens out somewhat and there is evidence of badger activity before a stile opens on to open hillside. Move straight across past some

scraggy trees and through a wooden gate into the woods. **M**agic woods! Some permissive paths have been created but stay on the main path – bit wet at times but good walkways for the bad spots. Ignore turnings and gates until you come to a yellow marker post showing a Public footpath off left. Bear right downhill to an old stile but walk round it (!) then bear left NOT straight on. There are a few token yellow dots on trees and follow these and the good path down to a stile on to a stony lane. Move right down to a small stream, over the bridge and right up a very stony, wet and narrow track. This opens out and moves steeply uphill beside open meadow to meet a small road beside some cottages. Right a little way along the road to a Public Footpath sign, slightly hidden in the hedge, on the left. Follow this up a few wooden steps and over a stile and move uphill beside the hedge on your right and close to what is sometimes a wonderful wild flower meadow. Near the top moving round the back of the distinct hummock and just before the trees, curve left to a gate and so up a stony track into the woods. Soon, out into a small open field and aim more or less straight ahead to a stile in the corner, by the trees.

Over the stile and move easily to the right through some fine woods – level ground! Soon, emerge via a gate into a clearing often used as a farm silage store and following the hedge on your left move into and through the farmyard on to a good – but long - farm road.

Just before the main road take the Public Bridleway to your right – looks like someone’s tarmac drive! - And note the enterprising tree house above you. Now for a few gates -leave the path on the bend and move straight ahead through a gate and then another gate, then right and then left via a small gate to skirt the house. Bear left downhill, passing some once fruitful gardens and over a stile. Move right and very steeply downhill, curving gently left – look for the yellow arrowed posts - following the tree line. Into the woods, crossing a rough hewn track, and via a few small stiles emerge into an open meadow with wonderful views overlooking the valley and farms. (Once, a farm, now Lower Knapp Farm Holiday complex!) Amble down towards the complex passing just below the solitary old oak tree and curving gently left to find the gate in the hedge. Follow the track round (you are in the Knapp Copse Nature Reserve) and through the complex, emerging on to a good concrete track that leads you to the road. Turn right up the road.

So, up the road to the farm and then left on the Public Bridleway. Immediately after the little bridge go right and prepare to climb steadily up for quite a while, following the track that will eventually emerge onto an open hillside. Upward, ever upward to the road and here move straight across on to a concrete drive leading to farm buildings. Move left around these buildings and then after about 50 yards move right through the gateway following the line of trees on your right. Stay in a straight line and you will emerge on to your starting track. Left and very rapidly back to the car!

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