

Walk No. 14 - A Potter Down the Otter

The East Devon Way, one of the County's long-distance recreational walking routes, stretches for nearly 40 miles between Exmouth and Lyme Regis inland of and parallel to the South West Coast Path. There are a number of places where the two can be linked, thus creating a series of long-distance circular walks throughout East Devon.

One of the links is provided by the valley of the River Otter. This rises in the Blackdown Hills, on the Devon-Somerset border, and in its lower lengths it forms a distinctive landscape feature, cutting across the surrounding higher land to reach the sea at Budleigh Salterton.

The route is described as a one-way walk, as if for walkers on the East Devon Way heading for the Coast Path. However, there are also convenient bus links to form a circuit. Buses serve Newton Poppleford, the start of the walk, from Exeter, Exmouth and Sidmouth and also run from Budleigh Salterton, at the end of the walk, to Exmouth or Sidmouth. Alternatively, a good way to do the walk is to get the bus from Budleigh Salterton to Newton Poppleford and then walk back.

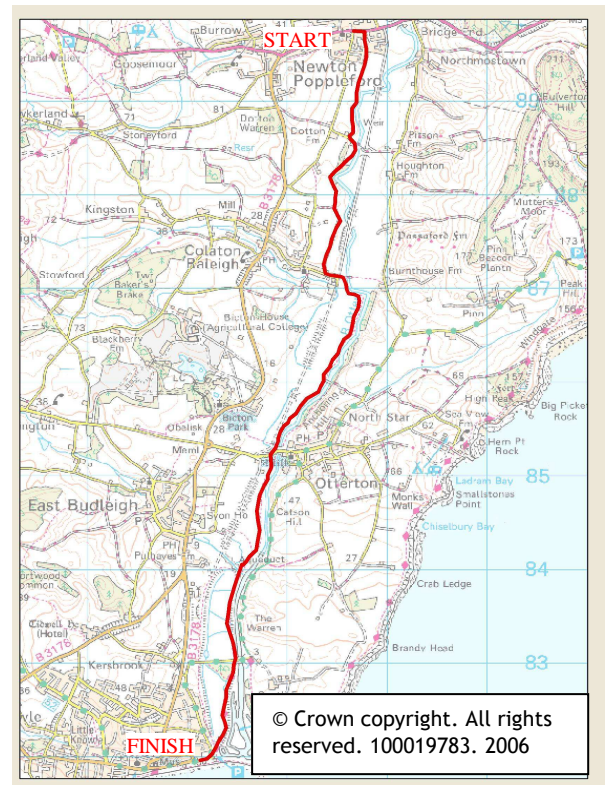
Fact File

Buses serve Newton Poppleford from Exeter, Exmouth and Sidmouth regularly, on at least an hourly basis and Budleigh Salterton from Exmouth and Sidmouth. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

OS maps for this walk:- Landranger (1:50,000 scale) no.192 Exeter, Sidmouth and surrounding area; Explorer (1:25,000 scale) no.115 Exmouth and Sidmouth.

Walk length: 9 km/5.5 miles: almost entirely flat.
No stiles.

Facilities: Newton Poppleford and Budleigh Salterton have pubs, cafes, shops and toilets.
Colaton Raleigh (pub, buses); Otterton (pubs, café, shop, buses).



The Walk

If taking the bus from Budleigh Salterton to the start of the walk at Newton Poppleford, the bus stop is in Station Road outside the Public Hall. Station Road is the road that leaves the main road through the town in an inland direction at the traffic lights. There is a car park and toilets immediately behind the Public Hall.

Alternatively, there is a large car park at the mouth of the River Otter. To reach the bus stop from here walk along the promenade, then along the main road through the town to the traffic lights. Turn right here into Station Road.

Get off the bus in Newton Poppleford adjacent to the church.

Newton Poppleford was a deliberately planned new town in the medieval period, hence the first part of its name. The right to hold a market here was first granted in 1226 to William Brewer, Lord of the Manor of Aylesbeare, and from this arose the planned settlement on the road leading to the Otter. The second part of the village name shows that the crossing of the Otter was by a pebbly ford.

From the bus stop walk down the main road, towards the river. Turn right into Millmoor Lane, just past the Old Bakery. At the end of the lane bear left and almost immediately turn right down a narrow footpath, signposted to Colaton Raleigh.

After a while the path emerges in a field corner. Keep ahead, hedge to your left, through four fields. Occasional views of the Otter will be seen below and to the left. Towards the end of the fourth field, go through the kissing-gate then continue in the original direction, hedge now to the right. Continue ahead over an open pasture area to another kissing-gate.

Go through the gate to the lane and turn left. At the bottom of the lane bear right then follow the path to the river and then right, alongside the river.

The walk has now reached the bottom of the Otter Valley. Opposite can be seen the wooded slopes of Bulverton Hill and Otterton Hill. These long wooded ridges, overlooking the pastoral valley, are a very characteristic landscape feature of this part of East Devon.

Follow the riverside path, the river to your left.

Notice the sandstone cliff ahead formed by the meander in the River Otter cutting into this area of slightly harder rock.

At the end of the field follow the path out and up to the left, climbing to the top of the cliff seen earlier. Go through a kissing-gate and follow the hedge ahead, keeping it to your right. Go through another kissing-gate and continue ahead, hedge now to your left. Continue ahead as the path becomes a green lane and follow this until it arrives at a minor road.

This is Colaton Raleigh. The main part of the village is up to the right, the church just some 200m up the lane. Just beyond is Place Court, a house of medieval origin, the former mansion house of the Deans of Exeter. The village has a pub and buses to Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth and Sidmouth should you wish to end your walk here.

To continue the walk, turn left along the lane and go through the two kissing gates in quick succession at the bottom.

Between the two gates, the private track crossed marks the line of the former branch railway line to Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth. This scenic line through an idyllic pastoral landscape followed the Otter Valley for some distance. It was closed as part of the Beeching cuts in 1967.

Follow the fenced path ahead to the river. Do not cross the footbridge but turn right, alongside the Otter.

The river has had its name since Anglo-Saxon times, but for some time in the post-war period it lost the animals after which it was named. Recently, however, otters have made a return to the river. Nevertheless, you should not expect to see one of these shy and nervous animals. You are more likely to be successful in catching sight of the vivid colours of a kingfisher, a bird which favours this length of the Otter.

More sandstone cliffs follow on the opposite bank as you follow the clear path alongside the river. Eventually the path reaches the road at Otterton Bridge.

To the left, just over the bridge, is the village of Otterton. This attractive settlement has a pub and shop and next to the bridge is Otterton Mill. This is a working traditional mill selling bread and cakes baked from traditionally ground flour; there is a craft shop, café and toilets. Otterton also has buses to Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth and Sidmouth.

In medieval times the river was navigable to here and the hill on the opposite bank above the bridge is still called Anchoring Hill. It is said to have provided a landmark for sailors to moor their vessels and would also have provided some shelter.

To continue on the walk, go through the kissing-gate on the opposite side of the road and follow the riverside path.

Looking to the right from the riverside path in the Otterton area can be seen a distinctive needle. This was built in 1730 a "point de vue", or visual point of interest, as seen from Bicton House, the seat of the Rolles, the local major family.

Continue on the riverside footpath past a footbridge over the Otter. A little later the path crosses the end of an aqueduct carrying water into the Otter.

The aqueduct now leads water from Budleigh Brook, on the western side of the valley, into the river. Its original purpose was to help drain the water meadows so as to reclaim the valley bottom for agriculture. It dates to the early years of the 19th century.

Follow the path onwards until it reaches a lane and a bridge.

This is White Bridge, and the walk has now reached the South West Coast Path. In order to cross the Otter the Coast Path has to take a diversion inland to use White Bridge; the rest of the walk uses the line of the Coast Path to Budleigh Salterton.

From here the Otter widens to become a small estuary, with much marsh and wetland alongside. This has made it valuable for wildlife and the estuary is maintained as a Devon Wildlife Trust nature reserve. Look at the information boards alongside the path to discover some of the estuary's nature conservation interest.

Also from here the path is maintained as suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Soon the distinctive pine trees that mark the mouth of the estuary come into view. Continue on the path to arrive at the main car park at the eastern end of Budleigh Salterton.

Further Information

A guide book on the East Devon Way is available in local shops and Tourist Information Centres. Alternatively it may be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Rd, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, or telephone 0870 608 5531 price £6.45 including post and packing. Quote reference DP17. There is a range of information on the South West Coast Path; especially useful is the guide book and accommodation list produced by the South West Coast Path Association or from the above address. This is priced £7.50 including post and packing - quote reference DP 33.

For further walking in the Otter Valley see also "Walking Devon's Rivers - The River Otter", by Richard Easterbrook and Geoff Broadhurst, available locally price £4.54; also available locally is "Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley", by the Otter Valley Association.