

Walk No. 20 - Do Tell Sid! A Walk along the Sid Valley

The East Devon Way runs for some 40 miles between Exmouth and the county boundary at Lyme Regis, inland of and parallel to the South West Coast Path. In a variety of places there are walks which link the two, creating a series of long-distance circular routes throughout East Devon.

This walk links the two routes along the valley of the River Sid. Although a short river, its valley forms a distinctive attractive landscape feature as it nears the sea. Linking the village of Sidbury on the East Devon Way with Sidmouth on the coast, the route uses quiet lanes and then a surfaced footpath. It is therefore a good walk for the winter months, since it is unaffected by wet or mud, and can also be used by wheelchairs or pushchairs.

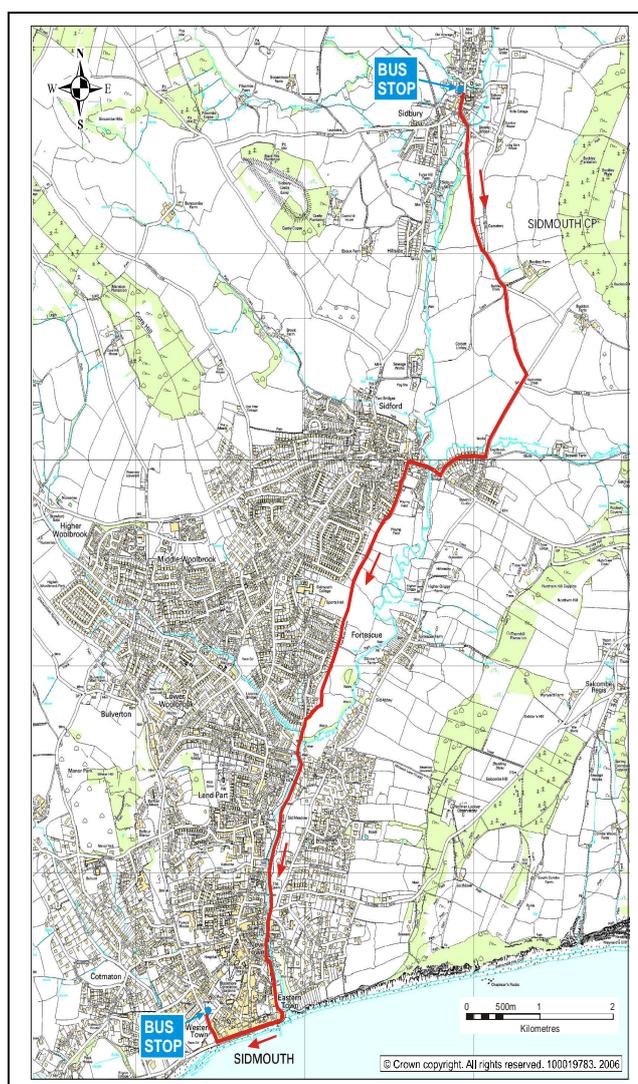
This is a one-way walk, from Sidbury to the sea at Sidmouth, and it is recommended to be used in conjunction with buses to Sidbury from Sidmouth or Exeter.

Fact File

Buses link Sidmouth with Sidbury on average twice an hour, Mondays to Saturdays, reducing to an hourly service evenings and Sundays. Buses also serve both places from Exeter on a similar frequency. For timetable details telephone Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

Walk length: 6km/3.75 miles. Largely flat except for a gentle climb and descent leaving Sidbury. No stiles.

Facilities: Sidbury: pub, shop/PO, buses, car park.
Sidford: pub, shops, buses, car park, toilets.
Sidmouth: all facilities.



The Walk

This is a one-way walk, so it is suggested that a bus is taken from Sidmouth to Sidbury, and then walk back. Alternatively, it is possible to use Exeter as a base; in this case get the bus from Exeter Bus Station to Sidbury, returning to Exeter from The Triangle at Sidmouth.

Buses from Sidmouth to Sidbury are taken from The Triangle. This is just inland of the western end of the seafront Esplanade, near the church. At Sidbury, alight from the bus at the Post Office, outside the Red Lion.

Sidbury is an attractive village in the middle part of the Sid Valley, among the more compact of Devon settlements. The church, opposite the bus stop, is one of Devon's most interesting, including what appears to be a Saxon crypt, possibly the only example of Saxon work in a Devon church. The village was once an important centre, a market and fair being granted in 1290.

Cross the road and take the right-hand of the two lanes opposite [Bridge Street].

Bridge Street is lined by rows of attractive, mostly 18th century, cob cottages, typical of this part of Devon.

The lane leads down to the bridge over the River Sid. Turn right immediately after the bridge, next to the river, along Deepway.

Bridge Street is also the route of the East Devon Way as it heads towards Lyme Regis. This walk leaves the line of the East Devon Way at Deepway.

Sidbury takes its name from the "bury", or fortified place, now known as Sidbury Castle. This prominent wooded hill on the other side of the Sid Valley comes into sight on the right as the lane of Deepway rises away from the river. This earthwork dates from the early Iron Age, one of a number situated in similar prominent locations in East Devon.

Immediately after passing Sidbury's cemetery, Deepway joins another lane. Bear right and ahead here.

On the left the land rises steeply to Buckley Plantation and Buckton Hill. These long fingers of high land, topped by trees, are characteristic of the landscape of East Devon. Formed of more resistant greensands, this not only leaves them elevated in the landscape but also their less fertile nature make forestry a suitable use. They contrast markedly with the fertile valleys.

Keep bearing right on the lane at Buckley Cross.

The Sid Valley, with Sidmouth on its floor, is clear ahead, framed by two of the characteristic ridges - Salcombe Hill on the left and Peak Hill on the right - with the sea in the background.

Stay on the lane as it bears right again, gently descending to the outskirts of the village of Sidford. Immediately after the 30 mph sign turn right into Harcombe Lane. At the main road at the end turn right, crossing the River Sid again on a footbridge next to the road.

This is the original packhorse bridge, said to date from around 1100. It was retained as the footbridge when the road was widened by Devon County Council in the 1930s.

Continue into the village, passing the red-brick Sidford parish church.

This church was built in Victorian times when Sidford was beginning to expand. It was completed in 1873.

Cross the road by the church and turn left into Warrens Mead. Continue ahead into Byes Lane. Keep on ahead as the lane becomes a tarmac footpath.

The surfaced path continues along the floor of the Sid Valley, the river over to the left, giving good views of Salcombe Hill and its wooded summit. This path ["The Byes"] is largely the result of the actions in the latter half of the 19th century of the Sid Vale Association. This body, founded in the 1840s as the Sidmouth Improvement Committee, is one of the earliest amenity societies in the country.

The path continues until it arrives alongside the Sid by a weir giving the appearance of an attractive waterfall. Shortly afterwards is a junction of paths at a wooden footbridge. Cross this bridge then turn right to continue alongside the Sid, the river now to the right. Continue on the path parallel to the river until it reaches a road.

At the road, just to the right, is the old Toll House. This was built in the early 19th century on the road into Sidmouth from the east.

Cross the road by the bridge into Millford Road. Cross the river on the footbridge by the ford and continue ahead into Mill Street.

This eastern part of Sidmouth is where the original fishing village was based. By the early 19th century the fishing trade had declined, and this corresponded with its being "discovered" by the well-to-do who were unable to visit Europe because of the Napoleonic Wars. They began to visit and settle in the town, building themselves ornate "cottages", often now converted into hotels, residential homes and the like. The Mill Street area retains something of earlier Sidmouth.

Take the left turn, into Riverside Road. Follow this road round to the right then continue on the path ahead, which leads to the end of Sidmouth's sea front, by the mouth of the River Sid.

The South West Coast Path to the east continues over the footbridge across the Sid to the left. This is Alma Bridge, named after a Crimean War battle. Originally constructed in the mid-19th century, it was replaced by the present bridge in 1900.

Now turn right, along the sea-front Esplanade.

There are a number of interesting buildings along the Esplanade. These include the York Hotel, Sidmouth's first purpose-built hotel (1807), built on an area earlier used for boat-building. A little further along is Beach House, said to be the first house built on the sea front and dating to the late 18th century. The Mocha, the next large building, also dates to the early years of Sidmouth's development. Of later date is the Kingswood Hotel, built in the 1890's as the Marine Baths. It became a hotel following the first World War.

Turn right off the Esplanade into Station Road, next to the Bedford Hotel.

The Bedford Hotel is another early Sidmouth building, originally a library. The rock breakwaters a little offshore here were built in the 1990's to prevent the erosion of the beach. They were constructed of Cornish granite, much of which was brought in by sea.

Ahead and to the left in Station Road is one of Sidmouth's most prominent landmarks, Fortfield Terrace. The houses were built in the 1790's for renting to the gentry, as a speculative development. A prominent feature of the terrace's design is the double headed eagle on the terrace pediment, added in the 1830s to commemorate the visit of Grand Duchesse Helene of Russia, accompanied by a staff of over 100, including a Russian band. She occupied No. 8 and her close entourage No.7, the rest of her staff taking lodgings all over the town.

The Triangle, with its bus stops, is to the right a short way along Station Road.

Further Information

A guide book on the East Devon Way is available in local shops and Tourist Information Centres, price £4.95. Alternatively it may be obtained from Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 6085531, price £6.45 including p and p; cheques payable to Devon County Council, 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, price £6, or from the above address price £7.50 including p. and p. [quote reference DP33].

The East Devon Coast has become part of a World Heritage Site due to its outstanding geology, representing 165 million years of earth history in just 95 miles between Exmouth and Swanage. Often referred to as the "Jurassic Coast", this is England's first natural World Heritage Site, putting it on a level with the Great Barrier Reef and Grand Canyon as one of the wonders of the natural world. Information on the Jurassic Coast, including an introductory free leaflet, is available at local Tourist Information Centres.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon, obtain the free leaflet "Discover Devon - Walking " from Tourist Information Centres or from the address given above. Alternatively, visit the website www.discoverdevon.com which has all the walks information and an order form.

For further information on the history and buildings of Sidmouth, there is a range of publications available in the town's Tourist Information Centre. Especially useful is "Life and Times in Sidmouth", published by the Sid Vale Association.

OS maps for this walk: Landranger [1:50,000 scale] No. 192 Exeter and Sidmouth;

Explorer [1:25,000 scale] No. 115 Exmouth and Sidmouth.