

Walk No 24. Exe Marks the Spot

The Exe Valley Way is a long distance route for walkers exploring this beautiful valley across the heart of Devon. It is almost 45 miles long, stretching from the South West Coast Path on the Exe Estuary to high on Exmoor.

This walk follows a length of the Exe Valley Way in its middle section between Bickleigh and Tiverton. This stretch closely follows the east bank of the Exe, much of it through rich woodlands of oak and ash. It is a one-way walk, designed to be used in conjunction with the adjacent bus service.

Fact File

Tiverton is well served by buses from Exeter and there are links to other towns in Mid and North Devon. For this walk take the Exeter bus service to Bickleigh; the walk then takes you back to Tiverton.

Walk Length: 6.5km/4 miles : 6 stiles : almost flat.

Facilities: Bickleigh - pubs, refreshments, tourist attractions including farm shop, pottery, gifts, models; Tiverton - all facilities.

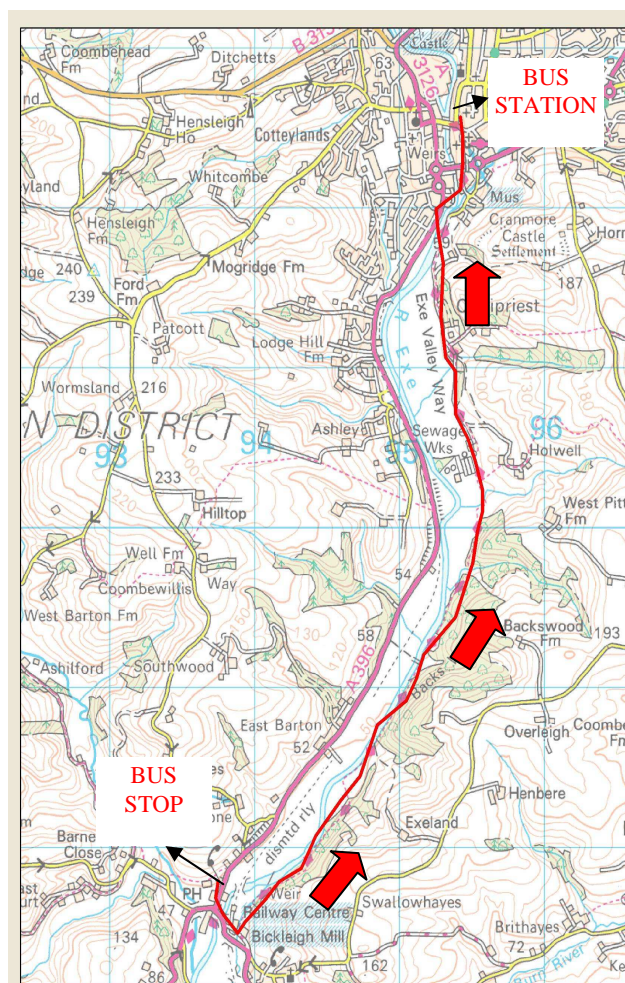
For bus timetable details contact: Traveline on 0870 608 2 608.

The Walk

Start at Tiverton bus station in Phoenix Lane. This is adjacent to Tiverton's Tourist Information Centre, just off Fore Street. At the bus station take the Exeter-bound bus to Bickleigh. From the bus stop walk ahead to Bickleigh Bridge.

Bickleigh is a very attractive location on the middle Exe. The view from Bickleigh Bridge is much photographed, although care should be taken as it is quite narrow and carries a surprising amount of traffic. The bridge itself dates from the 17th Century, although it was much rebuilt in the 1800's. A popular local story is that it inspired the writing of the Simon and Garfunkel song "Bridge over Troubled Water" when Paul Simon was staying in the area.

It may be worth diverting to the right, alongside the Fisherman's Cot, and following the signs to Bickleigh Castle, which is also on the Exe Valley Way but in the downstream direction towards Exeter.



The castle is actually a fortified manor house largely 15th Century in date but with parts possibly dating to the 11th Century. It is still lived in and is open to the public on certain afternoons. Telephone 01884 855363 for details.

Carefully cross Bickleigh Bridge and immediately afterwards fork left towards Bickleigh Mill.

On the left is the Devon Railway Centre. This is based in the old station on the Exe Valley railway line, the station confusingly being called Cadeleigh although the village of that name is nearly 2 miles away. It seems likely that the name Bickleigh was not used because another station of that name existed on the GWR in Devon, at another Bickleigh near Plymouth. The Exe Valley branch opened in 1885, and the station dates from then. It closed as part of the Beeching cuts in 1963. The Railway Centre has narrow gauge train rides, model railways, a museum, picnic area, shop and refreshments. Telephone 01884 855671 for opening times.

Continue walking ahead past the Railway Centre to Bickleigh Mill.

On the right the overflow car park access under the bridge is on the line of the branch railway towards Exeter.

Just beyond on the left is Bickleigh Mill. The Mill has a farm shop, pottery and gift shop, together with refreshments and outdoor attractions. It is open every day of the year.

Continue past the Mill to Millhayes. Opposite the house is a public footpath sign with an Exe Valley Way marker attached. Turn left outside Millhayes and go through the gate. Pass between the buildings and then continue on the clear path to a gate into a wood.

The watercourse on the left here is the leat once used to power Bickleigh Mill.

Continue on the path into the wood.

Through the trees on the left can be glimpsed the railway bridge which carried the line over the Exe on its way to Tiverton.

Keep on the path through the woodland. Note that this path can become rather muddy in patches after wet weather. At an obvious fork bear left, downhill, and the path soon follows next to the Exe.

This middle part of the Exe shows a number of different faces. This is one of its most tranquil sections. The woodlands here are characterised by violets, early purple orchids and Indian balsam, plants up to 3m high with pink or red flowers.

Shortly after the path comes alongside the Exe it starts to bear away again. Look out for the yellow arrow and Exe Valley Way sign pointing left and turn here to the

river bank, then continue along the bank. A short way along a stile leads into a field. Follow the field edge ahead along the riverside.

This length of path gives a good view of the outline of the Exe Valley ahead, framed by its steep sides and with trees marking the course of the river on the valley floor. This landscape is very typical of the middle Exe Valley.

As the river bends it becomes shallower and it becomes noticeable that the flow of the water speeds up quite substantially. The gravelly bank here marks the site of an old ford across the river.

Continue ahead to the gate and stile by the corner of the field. Pass into the next field and turn left, still along the riverside field edge. Cross the stile at the far end and follow the path through the woods.

These woods are carpeted in wild garlic and in spring the smell can be intoxicating.

At the end of the wood the remains of an old suspension bridge are passed and a little further on the river passes over a series of small rapids.

Note that when the river is high this next length can flood.

Follow the path to the stile on the right. Cross this and go diagonally left up the slope ahead. At the top, keep the bank to your right and follow it to another stile.

This length is also often very muddy after wet weather.

Now continue on the path ahead through the woodland. The path then leaves the Exe for a while, descending to the "inland" side of a large riverside pasture.

As the path rises again, note what the erosive power of running water can do to the surface.

Continue ahead through two gates. Just after the second gate, follow the main path round to the left.

The floor of the valley is quite wide here and this level expanse can be seen to advantage from the path. This wide flood plain is probably the result of the Exe being joined by a major tributary, the Lowman, just upstream at Tiverton.

Keep left at the Exe Valley Way sign at the junction, going steeply downhill for a while. Then continue ahead along the edge of the field, parallel to the hedge and fence, to a gap on the left and another Exe Valley Way sign. Go through the gap and continue ahead, hedge now on the right.

Keep going to the end of the hedge, where a stile leads to a path alongside the South West Water treatment works. Another stile leads on to a concrete drive

which is followed ahead. The concrete drive then becomes a lane and passes Lower Collipriest Farm.

The farm buildings here probably date to the 16th and 17th Centuries, and were originally built around a central courtyard.

At the junction for Collipriest House keep to the left.

The house can be seen up on the right. Parts are early 18th Century, but the main front is dated 1778 and it has a very Georgian appearance. At various times Collipriest was the home of the Carews and the Blundells, important local families, the latter best known for their connection with the famous school in Tiverton.

Shortly afterwards the lane passes the confluence of the Exe and its tributary, the Lowman, and follows the Lowman upstream. At the road junction of St. Andrew Street and Tumbling Fields turn left over the Lowman.

The road rises past some attractive urban cottages, built in the early 1800's for the employees of John Heathcoat, the Tiverton clothier and lace maker. It then passes Bridewell House, Tiverton's original police station and dating from 1846.

Continue onto the footbridge over Tiverton's inner by-pass road.

This is Great Western Way, so called because it follows the line of another GWR railway, this one linking Tiverton with the Bristol-Exeter main line at Tiverton Junction.

Continue up St. Andrew Street North past the Tiverton Museum.

The museum was originally the National School for Tiverton, built in 1844.

At the end, St. Andrew Street arrives in the town centre at the Town Hall in Fore Street.

The Town Hall dates to 1864. It was built when Tiverton was a prosperous cloth town, which has been the case for much of its history since the 16th Century.

To return to the car parks, Tourist Information Centre and bus station turn right into Fore Street then right again to Phoenix Lane.

Further Information

A guide leaflet for the Exe Valley Way is available from local Tourist Information Centres price £1 or from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacraft Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £1.50 including p & p. (Quote reference DTY/DP 14; make cheques payable to Devon County

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

OS maps for this walk:

Landranger: (1:50,000 scale) : no. 192 Exeter and Sidmouth (South)
no. 181 Minehead and Brendon Hills (North)

Explorer: (1:25,000 scale) : no. 114 Exeter and the Exe Valley