

AN UNCOMMONLY FINE WALK

The East Devon Commons cover an area of heathland east of Exeter and inland of the coast. Extremely important as a wildlife habitat, they also provide an area of superb walking. The open spaciousness of the terrain and the views afforded from their relatively high elevation over the surrounding lowlands to the Exe Estuary and the sea mean that they are deservedly popular as a destination for walkers.

Part of the Commons is crossed by the East Devon Way. This is a 38 mile/60km long-distance path linking Exmouth with Uplyme and passing through inland East Devon, parallel to the coast. The walk below uses a length of the East Devon Way as it passes over the Commons. It is based on the village of East Budleigh, on the eastern edge of the Commons, following a circular route which includes not only the open heathland of the Commons but also woodland and quiet country lanes, not to mention the historical highlight of the birthplace of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Fact File

Walk Length: 8 miles/13km: no stiles: a number of ups and downs but no steep climbs.

Facilities: East Budleigh: pub, toilets, car park (café and another pub next to the B3178 on the edge of the village, 0.3 mile/0.5 km from the walk); car parks along the route, especially at Woodbury Castle and Four Firs.

East Budleigh is accessible by a regular bus service from Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Sidmouth, which goes to the centre of the village. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

The Walk

Start outside the pub in the centre of the village, the Sir Walter Raleigh. Go down the lane opposite the pub, Hayes Lane, and continue past the car park and toilets and then a row of attractive thatched cottages on the right.

East Budleigh is a very picturesque village with a number of historic thatched cottages which give it great charm. The Sir Walter Raleigh pub was formerly the Kings Arms, and dates back to the 16th century when it was a private house. The cottages on Hayes Lane date from the 1700s. A little further along Hayes Lane, on the left, is Vicar's Mead. This was the village vicarage until 1852. There is documentary evidence of this house going back to 1513. It is said that Sir Walter Raleigh, who was born just outside the village, received his early education in this house.

Keep following the lane out of the village, climbing gently. Pass the junction with a narrow lane on the right then, a little further on, in a hollow on the right of the lane and beyond some modern farm buildings, is Hayes Barton.

The house is renowned as the birthplace of Sir Walter Raleigh in 1552. It was at the time owned by the Duke family, being leased to Raleigh's father in 1551. It may have been built in the 1400's.

Leave the lane by going through the kissing gate on the right just before the farmyard. Follow the path round the right hand side of the field.

There are good views over the end of Hayes Barton from here.

Cross two tracks which go to the right, continuing ahead to a stile and gateway, then on along the right hand side of the next field. Climb then descend slightly to a kissing gate onto a lane. Turn right here to arrive in the attractive little hamlet of Yettington.

Yettington is a linear hamlet on the edge of the East Devon Commons, established where the Budleigh Brook cuts a distinctive valley in the higher land around.

Turn left along the road at Yettington.

Keep an eye open for traffic on this short length. It is not an especially busy road but does get some use by local traffic.

Shortly after passing the national speed limit sign, the road bends to the left. A little way round this bend a track forks off to the right, signed as a public bridleway. Leave the road here and follow the track; do not go through the first gate, but bear right here. Keep on the track to the right of the second gate. Shortly afterwards there is a junction of tracks – turn left here.

This track climbs along the edge of a plantation. The walk is now reaching the area of the East Devon Commons. Most of the land is either open heathland or plantation, these land uses resulting from the poor soil arising from a band of infertile land, known as the Bunter Pebble Beds, laid down over 200 million years ago in river beds of the time. The pebbles are very characteristic of the area – they are now appearing on the ground of the track, and will become even more obvious further on.

Bear left at the next junction and then at another junction take the middle of three paths. The track, even more pebbly now, continues to rise until it meets a broader track. Turn left here and keep following the obvious track until it emerges on open heathland. Continue ahead on the most obvious track.

The walk now emerges on typical landscape of the Commons, more formally known as the Pebble Bed Heaths. This is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest, a nationally important representative of Atlantic-climate lowland heath. It carries a range of heathland-related plant communities and also a wide range of birds (over 70 breeding species) and invertebrates (over 20 species of breeding dragonflies). Most of the area is owned and managed by Clinton Devon Estates for the benefit of its wildlife and for public access.

Keep following the main track, now heading for the prominent wooded area on the skyline ahead.

The trees ahead mark the site of Woodbury Castle. This fortification of earth banks is late Iron Age in origin, but was also used during the Napoleonic Wars, between 1798 and 1803 as a fortified lookout over the Channel.

Bear right at the junction just before the trees then at the next junction, next to the trees, bear left to go along the edge of the trees. Keep following the track as it skirts the outer rampart of the old fortification then re-emerges onto heathland.

There are some fine views from here, especially to the right over the heathland to the sea. Prominent on the horizon is Peak Hill, the site of another Iron Age fortification. Running inland is Mutters Moor, the line of a prehistoric trackway, and another such trackway ran through Woodbury Castle. Not only is this a scenic view, it is also an historic one.

Keep on the path as it now runs parallel to the B3180 road. At the next fork bear left, along the slightly narrower path, and soon after left again. This immediately leads to a broader track. Go left here to arrive at the B3180.

The walk has now arrived on the line of the East Devon Way as it crosses the Commons on its way between Uplyme and Exmouth. Look out for the mauve arrows and foxglove symbol.

At the road very carefully cross over and follow the lane opposite. The lane swings left and then right; as it swings right there is a public bridleway on the left marking the East Devon Way. Leave the lane and follow this track.

This part of the East Devon Way follows the western edge of the high heathland. Through gaps in the trees on the right can be seen views over the River Exe from Exeter downstream, with the outline of the Haldon Ridge on the far side. On a clear day the tops of Dartmoor may be seen beyond.

Keep on the main track, following the mauve arrows. Eventually it returns to the B3180. Carefully cross again, to the path opposite. Follow the path to a road and cross to the Four Firs Car Park.

Have a look at the information board in the car park. It shows some things to look for on the Commons as well as giving some indication of their importance to wildlife.

Leave the car park at the far right-hand corner and follow the path ahead.

The walk is now re-entering the heathland heart of the Commons. Soon, views over the Commons to Peak Hill and the sea open up ahead. A little nearer, ahead and left, can be seen two villages. That on the right is the walk's start and finish point, East Budleigh, with its church tower prominent. The other village is Otterton.

As well as its ecological importance, the area has also been used for military training since 1940, especially by the Royal Marines whose Commando Training Centre is at Lypstone on the Exe. This use still continues. There is also some evidence of World War II structures further on the walk.

At the prominent line of trees turn left, still on the East Devon Way, and follow the broad track downhill.

Over to the right can be seen the workings of Blackhill sand and aggregate quarry, a somewhat different use of the local geology.

At the bottom bear left and uphill, keeping the plantation on the right. Continue ahead on the track, then take the second turning on the right, still following the East Devon Way arrows, where the main track turns left. Keep on this track, still following the East Devon Way and skirting another area of quarrying then, when the track turns left to a car park, continue ahead on a narrower path. Follow this path parallel to the road, then fork left at a junction.

The walk is now parting company with the East Devon Way, which continues to the right at the next path.

To return to East Budleigh turn left immediately after the fork to arrive at a road. Turn left on the road then immediately right, along a narrow footpath through trees, scrub and bracken. Keep ahead as the path opens out. Cross a road and pass through a car park onto another track.

This pleasant track descends over a mixture of heathland, conifers and deciduous woodland, slowly leaving the pebble bed heaths behind.

Towards the bottom of the slope the track divides at an open area. Bear right here and follow the track downhill. At the bottom keep bearing left, leading to a green lane.

This is the old highway of Hayeswood Lane. Historically, each of the surrounding villages had the use of parts of the Commons, and access tracks went between villages and Commons. Hayeswood Lane was one of East Budleigh's access lanes.

Having emerged from the woodland, Hayeswood Lane descends steadily over attractive countryside towards East Budleigh. At the junction towards the end continue as directly ahead as possible, heading towards the buildings of the village. Just before arriving at the village the lane becomes a farm access track. Pass through

the farmyard of Wynards Farm to arrive at the village street of East Budleigh, opposite the school. Turn left to return to the start at the Sir Walter Raleigh.

Further Information

An information and guide booklet on the East Devon Way is available in local shops, price £4.95. It may also be obtained from the Discover Devon Information Service, Westacott Road, Barnstaple, EX32 8AW, telephone 0870 608 5531, price £6.45 including post and packing – quote reference DTY/DP17.

For information on the wider network of walking routes in Devon obtain the free brochure “Discover Devon – Walking” from local Tourist Information Centres or the address above. Alternatively visit the website www.discoverdevon.com which has all the walks information.

OS Maps for this walk:-

Explorer	(1:50,000 scale)	No. 192	Exeter and Sidmouth
Landranger	(1:25,000 scale)	No. 115	Exmouth and Sidmouth