

4. Heath and Valley

The East Devon Way

This walk is based on Newton Poppleford and uses minor lanes and old tracks to the west of the village before circling back on the route of the East Devon Way. It offers a pleasant walk through quiet countryside as well as some good views over the valley of the River Otter, one of East Devon's characteristic landscape features.

Start the walk at Newton Poppleford church, which is where the buses stop.

Newton Poppleford was a deliberately planned new town in the 13th century, which is how it acquired its name – the new town at the pebble ford (over the River Otter). The pattern of the original layout is still seen today, with the buildings fronting the main road. Some of the long narrow garden plots, or "burgage plots" behind also still exist.

Walk downhill along the main road from the church, then turn right up School Lane (signposted to the car park). Pass the car park entrance and then the village school then just past the school turn right up the steps at a public footpath sign. The path at first meanders somewhat between garden fences but then straightens and takes on a more rural aspect.

The path marks the rear of the medieval gardens set out when the new town was established.

Pass through a kissing-gate on to a gravelled path. At the drive at the end of the path turn right to arrive at the main road between two thatched buildings.

On the right is the Old Toll House. Dating from 1758 when the main road was re-built and then maintained by the local Turnpike Trust, this is the oldest toll house in Devon.

Turn left and at the junction keep left along Exmouth Road. Take the first turning on the right,



The Old Toll House

Littledown Lane, and follow this as it climbs slowly out of the Otter Valley.

Looking back to the left can be seen the distinctive wooded outline of Peak Hill, the site of a prehistoric coastal hill fort. To the right is the high land of Harpford Common, which is traversed on the return leg.

Bear right at the road junction. Continue along the pleasant hedged lane for another half kilometre (third of a mile). Turn left along a narrow green lane 125m before Ashe Brooke cottage on the main lane. Follow this green lane to its end, where it meets a wide, sandy track. Turn right here.

This is Naps Lane, an ancient track between the village of Colaton Raleigh on the Otter and the parish's common, on the heathlands ahead.

At a junction of green lanes keep ahead, bearing very slightly to the right.

Clearly visible ahead is the rim of high land formed by the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths. The geology of sand and pebbles makes these areas infertile and they have become wild, uncultivated areas punctuated by plantations. The neighbouring parishes each have commons on these heights, but today they are much prized for their recreational value.

Follow the green lane until it arrives at a surfaced lane by a cottage. Turn right here, then keep ahead at the junction of Hawkerland Cross.

The walk has now joined the East Devon Way, which arrives here from the left after leaving the heaths. From now on keep an eye open for the mauve arrows marking the East Devon Way, often with a foxglove symbol.

At the next junction turn right and climb the hill. About 100m up the hill bear left along the track and keep to the main track as it climbs steadily.

This is the Hawkerland Valley, at the eastern edge of the Pebblebed Heaths. While slightly lower than the bulk of the heathlands, it shows their general landscape of gorse with scattered pines and other distinctive tree groups of pine, fir or beech, creating local landmarks.

Follow the track around a sharp right hand bend near the top of the hill to emerge at a lane opposite a car park. Turn left up the lane to the main road at the top, the A3052 between Exeter and Sidmouth. Carefully cross the main road to the lane opposite.

This is Aylesbeare Common, part of the Pebblebed

Heaths complex. As the sign indicates, it is an RSPB Nature Reserve. It is worth studying the board near the start of the lane, giving information on the heath and its management.

Follow the surfaced lane downhill over the common.

This part of the route gives superb views over the Otter Valley. Newton Poppleford, the start and finish of the walk, can be seen towards the right. The wooded ridge running north – south on the far side of the valley is especially obvious. Such ridges, parallel to the river valleys, are very typical of this part of East Devon.

Keep to the lane as it descends. Where it bears left to Woolcombes Farm take the other, unsurfaced track directly ahead. Keep on this track as it descends to cross a stream. It then rises slightly again, off the heathland now, to arrive at a surfaced lane by a white house. The dovescotes on this house are especially noteworthy. Turn right along the lane, passing Benchams Cottage, looking like a house from a fairy tale. Follow the track which forks to the right shortly after the cottage. Continue along this track over more heathland.

This is Harpford Common, the most easterly of the pebbled heaths and among the most low lying.

Continue on the track as it leaves the common and becomes a tree-lined green lane. At the junction at the end take the path ahead, then almost immediately go left over the stile into the field (or through the gate if it is unlocked) at the waymark. Follow the trodden path ahead over the field to a stile. Cross this and descend the steps. Follow the path to arrive at a lane at Court Barn. Turn right here.

Over to the left is the hamlet of Southerton. While lying north of Newton Poppleford it is south of the older settlement of Venn Ottery, hence its name.

Go to the end and cross the road, go through the gate opposite and diagonally to the left. Follow the field edge round to the right, cross a stile and continue ahead through the orchard.

The village of Harpford now appears ahead, the church especially prominent. Although not apparent from here, Harpford is on the opposite side of the Otter.

At the bottom of the orchard turn left and almost immediately right down the green lane. Descend the steps at the bottom, turn right then follow the path round to the left to a footbridge. Cross the field ahead and on the far side cross another footbridge and descend from an embankment to another field.

The embankment carried the branch line to Budleigh Salterton from the Southern Railway's main line at Feniton. It was opened in 1897 and closed as part of the Beeching cuts in 1967.



Cross the next field towards a prominent footbridge.

The bridge crosses the River 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, they have made a return to the river. Nevertheless, you should not expect to see one of these shy and nervous animals, which tend to be largely nocturnal.

The East Devon Way now crosses the river to Harpford on its route towards Lyme Regis, but to return to Newton Poppleford this walk now turns right, alongside the river.

Go through a kissing gate onto the line of the railway and continue ahead next to the river towards some stock pens. Turn right here to a lane, opposite a children's play area. Go left along the lane, then turn right along the signed footpath alongside the recreation ground. Continue on the path to arrive at a road on a small housing estate. Go ahead on this, taking the first turn left to arrive at the main road in the centre of the village, almost opposite the church.

Facts & Features

Walk length: 10km / 6.25 miles; 3 stiles; 1 relatively gentle climb of 70m/230 feet.



Newton Poppleford is well served by the regular bus services between Exeter and Sidmouth and between Exmouth and Sidmouth. For timetable details contact Traveline on 0871 200 22 33. There is also a spacious free car park off School Lane.

OS Maps :

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

Facilities: Newton Poppleford – car park, toilets, shop, pub.

For further information on the East Devon Way see page 8. To order books and leaflets, see pages 32 and 33.