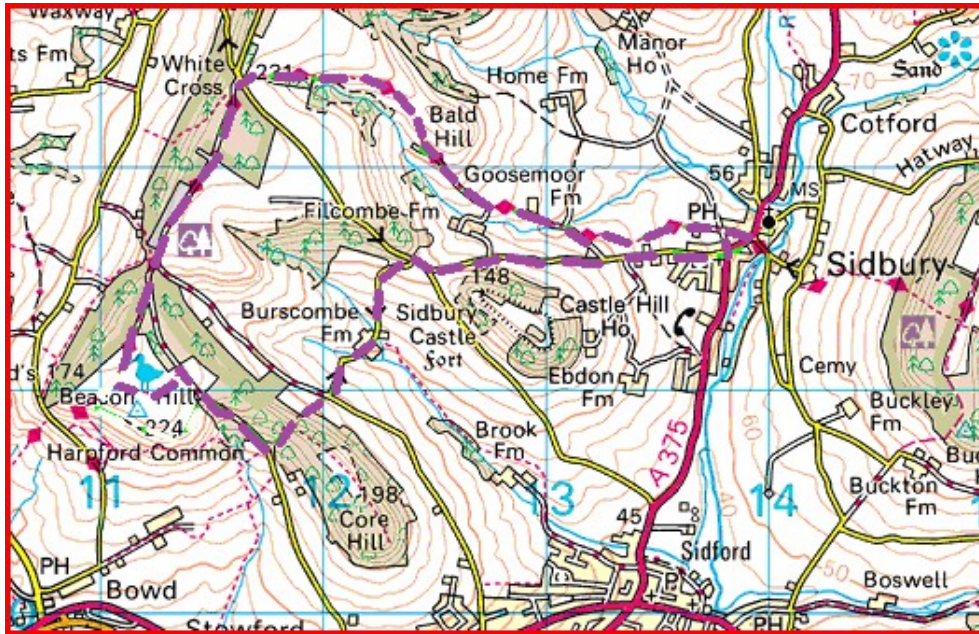


Circular Pub Walk – Red Lion, Sidbury and Fire Beacon Hill – 5 miles

NB: Expect this walk to be muddy along the farm lanes

The East Devon Way runs parallel to the coast and a few miles inland between Exmouth and Lyme Regis. Part of its route is something of a roller coaster, as it crosses a number of parallel valleys which run north - south to the sea, as well as the ridge lines in between. This walk is based on the attractive village of Sidbury, in the valley of the River Sid. It climbs out of the valley, following the East Devon Way in a westerly direction to the ridge overlooking the valley, then follows the ridge to its southern end, the superb viewpoint of Fire Beacon Hill. From this vantage point the walk leaves the East Devon Way to return back into the Sid Valley and Sidbury, alongside the Iron Age hill fort of Sidbury Castle.



Sidbury is an attractive village in the Sid Valley. It is of Saxon origin, probably being one of Devon's earlier settlements. Among its attractions is the church, which has elements of almost every period of English church building. This includes 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, receiving a royal warrant to hold a market and fair from 1290.

Start in the centre of the village, outside the Red Lion Inn and the church. Walk in the direction of Sidmouth, past the Old Bakery. Take the footpath on the right, opposite the telephone box, which leads up a track, next to the Court House. This is signed as a public footpath to White Cross.

The Court House was originally Sidbury's Manor House until a new one was built outside the village in the 19th century. The front is 16th or 17th century in origin, although there are also later additions. At the lodge (dated 1884 on the side), cross the entrance drive which leads to the later Manor House. The Manor, visible in glimpses to the right, was built in 1879 for Sir Stephen Cave MP, a member of Disraeli's cabinet. The Cave family still lives there.

Pass the lodge and continue up the track ahead. Keep ahead through the left of the two gates. The track is the route of the East Devon Way and on the gate is an East Devon Way foxglove waymark and a purple arrow, a good guide for the outward leg of the walk.

The wooded hill ahead and to the left is Sidbury Castle, an Iron Age hill fort. Despite its name, there is no built castle. However, the hill fort gave its name to the village, the "bury" part of its name being the Saxon name for fortification.

Keep along the field edge to the top right corner. Leave the field and continue between two hedges into the next field. Head for the metal gate on the far side which will take you into a green lane. Turn right down the hill. The first of many views up the Sid Valley can be obtained from here. Cross the stream then continue up the track ahead, climbing now. At the farm (Goosemoor) go through the gates ahead onto the grassy green lane and continue climbing steadily but gently. Parts of this lane can be muddy after rain. Follow this lane, still climbing slowly, to its end where a gate leads to the corner of a field. Go ahead between the hedges, and then head up the grassy hill, heading to the top left of the field. From here there are superb views back over Sidbury Castle to Sidmouth and the sea beyond. At the summit, look for the footpath signs heading to the left beside trees above the wooded gully to the left and fenced field to your right. The gully or "goyle" as they are known locally is one of the characteristic features of this part of the East Devon landscape. These goyles tend to be cut into the sides of the main valleys, and add variety to the landscape. This follows the East Devon Way arrows and passes through another metal pedestrian gate. Keep ahead next to the hedge and then on across the field past the top end of the goyle to reach another metal gate beside an old rusty field roller.

The walk has now reached the plateau top of the ridge separating the Sid Valley from the valley of the River Otter which runs parallel. The landscape here is quite different from that of the valley and valley sides. Up here the terrain is generally flat with large fields with straight hedges, compared with the steeper terrain and smaller, irregular fields lower down. This contrasting scenery is typical of the East Devon valleys and ridges.

Go through the gate and walk along the short track to the lane. This is White Cross. Just to the right is a car park and from here there are wide views over the Otter towards Exeter. Cross the surfaced lane to the track opposite through the woods. Keep on the track as it follows the ridge line ahead, firstly through woodland and then alongside fields. At a "crossroads" of tracks where the woodland re-starts, continue ahead and shortly afterwards fork right, still following the East Devon Way. This track soon emerges from the woodland to the open area of Fire Beacon Hill. Continue on the track straight ahead and keep on to the brow of the hill.

The walk leaves the East Devon Way here - that route continues ahead and downhill whereas this walk follows the main track to the left. This is a superb location for views. To the right, or west, are views towards Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton, the sea clear behind Budleigh. Ahead is the prominent wooded dome of Bulverton Hill while farther to the left is Sidmouth with Salcombe Hill behind and the sea beyond.

Keep to the main track as it contours round the hill until it passes over a small hump into trees to reach a main path. Turn right here, going downhill. This is an ancient trackway, leading from the old ridge route, probably prehistoric, to the old river crossing at Sidford. The track descends quite steeply to arrive at the end of a surfaced lane. Turn left here, along the signed public footpath. Follow the path into the bottom of a goyle, ignoring the narrow footpath that turns off to the right. After a little way in the goyle look out for a footpath waymark post high up on the right. Climb up to the post, and cross straight down the other side descending steeply to reach the outer corner of a field. Follow the fence right a short distance to a stile on the left. Go over this and straight down the middle of the field to another stile and steps onto a lane. The walk is now nearing Sidbury Castle and there are good views of this side of the hill fort and its earth ramparts from here. Sidbury is one of a series of Iron Age hill forts found on the East Devon ridges. Take the lane opposite the stile, downhill towards the farm. Follow the lane down, through Burscombe Farm and up the other side to a junction. Turn right here and at the next junction bear round to the left. The lane now descends back into the Sid Valley, alongside Sidbury Castle high up on the right. As the lane drops, Sidbury village comes into view and the walk passes a number of picturesque cob and thatch cottages. Most date back to the 17th and 18th centuries and one, Little Thatch on the right, is dated 1621 on the chimney. On arriving at the main road at the bottom bear left to return to the village centre and pub. You can cut through past the lodge again to avoid walking along the main road.