



## Walk 41. Simonsbath and Cow Castle.

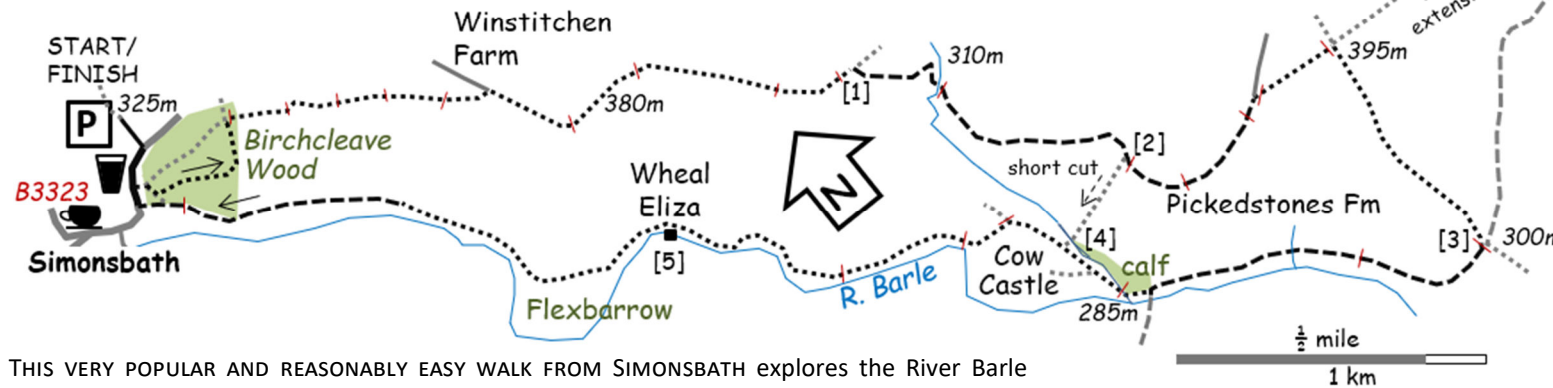
- 6.8 miles, ascents and descents of 315 metres. 2 hours 40 minutes continuous walking, allow up to 4 hours.

Terrain: Fields, paths and tracks, some potentially muddy. The short-cut involves a steep and slippery descent and a shallow ford to cross.

Access: By car, park in the Ashcombe car park in Simonsbath (SS 774 394, near TA24 7SH, £). No bus service.

Map: Croydecycle 53 Exford or OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Inn and seasonal tearoom at Simonsbath.



THIS VERY POPULAR AND REASONABLY EASY WALK FROM SIMONSBATH explores the River Barle further downstream, past the imposing Iron Age hill fort known as Cow Castle (the name is thought to be a corruption of the Celtic *caer*, a fort, but it hasn't stopped the small mound on the downstream side from being called the Calf). The return route passes the remains of the Wheal Eliza mine and its miners cottages, all that is left of an unsuccessful attempt by the Knight landowners to extract copper in the 1840s. In 1858 after a long search the body of seven-year-old Anna Maria Burgess was found in the mine; she had been killed by her father so that he could spend her welfare money on drink.

From the car park, return to the road and turn right. Opposite the Exmoor Forest Inn turn left on a bridlepath. Turn right, then take the left fork signposted Picked Stones. Follow the path up through the woods, and turn right through a field gate. The well-marked path (blue posts and markers, and the occasional signpost) continues ahead through several fields. When it arrives at a farm (Winstitchen) bend right next to a tree-topped bank. Turn left halfway along through a gap or gate. Two fields further on go through a gate, descend into a small valley and cross a gully or small stream (40mins, [1]). Immediately after the gully turn right on a

grassy track that drops between banks, soon becoming stony. Descend into a valley, cross a bridge, and climb up the other side. There will soon be good views to the right over Cow Castle, an Iron Age fort. As the path levels out, arrive at a field gate that leads through a bank topped with young beech trees (55mins, [2]).

You now have a choice. In dry weather a short-cut can be made by turning right immediately before the gate, following a vague path steeply downhill beside the bank. Care is needed towards the bottom, where the path becomes very steep and possibly slippery. Cross a shallow ford and head for the gap between the two hills, turning right when you come to a larger path to rejoin the main route (keep Cow Castle on your left). For the main walk continue ahead through the gate, then take the second gate left and walk past Pickedstones Farm.

Head uphill on the farm drive. After passing through a gate (normally open), turn right through a field gate on a bridleway towards Lanacre and Withypool. Cross the field and go through the gate in front of you. The extension (see overleaf) continues ahead here; the main walk turns right. Head downhill with the hedge to your right. Lanacre Bridge soon comes into view in the valley across to your left, then the blue ribbon of the River Barle appears in front of you. Before reaching the river, turn right through a gate to join the Two Moors Way towards Simonsbath (1hr25mins, [3]); the extension rejoins at this point.

The path curves right and becomes a stony track before going through a gate. The Barle is on your left; pass a ford and a footbridge over the river, then cross a stream on a small bridge and go through a kissing gate. Follow the path to the right of a small outcrop, and left of a larger hill (the Calf); the short-cut rejoins here (1hr40mins, [4]). A path heads up to the top of Cow Castle in front of you if you want to explore.

Now keep to the right-hand side of Cow Castle, bending gradually around to the left between the hill and a stone wall. Go through a gate to walk alongside the River Barle. A mile further on, note the disused copper mine and walls of the miners' cottages at Wheal Eliza, just before the path diverts away from the river to round Flexbarrow (2hr10mins, [5]). Follow the path parallel with the river to Simonsbath, turning right at the road for the inn and car park (2hr40mins).

**Extension** (adds 1 mile, negligible ascent). This short extension takes you on to the moorland above Lanacre Bridge, and provides a gentler descent than the route in the main walk. After Pickedstones Farm follow the main walk instructions, continuing ahead where indicated for the extension. A well-defined path crosses the moorland; after fifteen minutes or so come to a bridleway sign among gorse and small trees. Turn sharply right here ('Simonsbath via Cow Castle'). Follow the path gradually downhill, in a little over fifteen minutes arriving at a gate. This is the 1hr25min point of the main walk ([3]): continue ahead here.

**Short walk: Cow Castle from Picked Stones** (●/● 2.6 miles, ascents and descents of 170 metres including one very steep hill; wide stream to ford). Park on the Picked Stones road sign-posted off the B3323 between Simonsbath and Exford (there is usually room to squeeze a car off the road near the entrance to Picked Stones Farm, SS 807 375). At the end of the road go through a gate ('no motor vehicles') on a blue-signposted bridleway. Keep to the right-hand side of the field, joining the main walk just before the 1hr20min point ([3]). At the 1hr40min point ([4]) turn right to reverse the short-cut: head for a tall tree, ford the stream beneath it, then climb the steep hillside next to the bank. Turn right at the top to go through a field gate, then take the second gate left and walk past Picked Stones Farm. Head uphill on the farm drive. After passing through a gate (normally open), turn right through a field gate on a bridleway towards Lanacre and Withypool. Cross the field and go through a gate, turning left to return to the Picked Stones road.

**Walk 42** continues past Cow Castle on a one-way route to Exford, while **walk 46** links Cow Castle with Landacre Bridge and Sherdon.



*Cow and Calf*

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