



Walk 53. Around Wheddon Cross.

- 7.2 miles, ascents and descents of 375 metres. 2 hours 50 minutes constant walking, allow around 4 hours.

Terrain: Mainly paths and tracks; expect some mud and slippery bedrock, even in summer.

Access: Start at Wheddon Cross car park next to the Rest and Be Thankful inn (SS 924 388, TA24 7DR). By bus, route 396 connects Wheddon Cross with Minehead, Dunster and Dulverton, stopping outside the inn.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

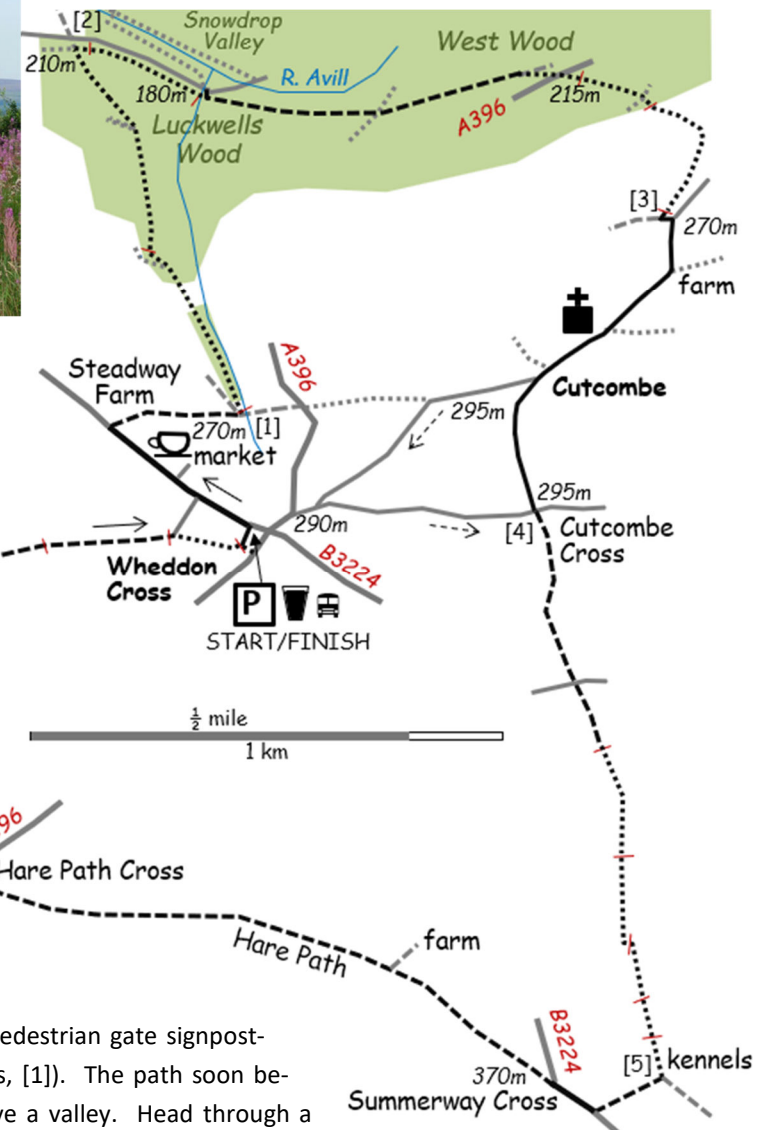
Refreshments: Pub and shop selling take-away food and drink in Wheddon Cross, café in the market building on market days and for Snowdrop Valley.

WHEDDON CROSS SITS AT THE HIGHEST POINT ON THE A396, on the watershed between the north-flowing River Avill and the south-flowing River Quarme, as well as on the dividing line between the western part of Exmoor and the Brendon Hills. The modern village divides into two, with the busy village hub (pub, petrol station, shop and agricultural market) west of the crossroads, and quieter Cutcombe (with the parish church) to the east. This circuit from encounters both the Quarme and a tributary of the Avill. It explores the wooded combe to the north of Wheddon Cross before heading across to Cutcombe, then south to the B3224 - the old Summerway - to join Hare Path. This ancient road is nothing to do with hares, but part of the Saxon herepath or military road that is thought to have run between Bristol and Barnstaple. The route then leaves the herepath on a lane to Luckwell Bridge, before returning along the Quarme and uphill to Wheddon Cross. In February there is the option of making a short detour to see Snowdrop Valley in North Hawkwell Wood, a private valley alongside the River Avill that is carpeted with snowdrops. There is extra parking during this period in the livestock market (£) and additional refreshments are often laid on.

From the car park in Wheddon Cross walk behind the inn and turn left on the road. Pass the petrol station and continue just beyond the 40mph signs. Turn right into Steadway Farm, taking the left-hand track; this passes a house and heads downhill. At a wider track turn right,



Hare Path, Dunkery beyond



then back left through a pedestrian gate signposted to Draper's Way (8mins, [1]). The path soon becomes a broad ledge above a valley. Head through a gate and continue above the now steep, densely-wooded valley. Keep right where the path forks, confirmed by a blue mark on a tree. The path now starts to descend. Just before arriving at a road turn sharply right on a crossing path signposted with a snowdrop (20mins, [2]). The path goes through a barrier and tracks above the road. At a second barrier continue ahead and slightly to the right to head away from the road. (To visit Snowdrop Valley cross the road here; the path takes you alongside the River Avill for a quarter of a mile, then crosses it and returns higher up on the other side. Turn right at the road then left to rejoin your original path).

The path ascends gradually. Ignore a broad crossing path, but a few minutes later look out for a narrow signposted path to the right. This brings you to the A396: cross over carefully and head uphill past a barrier. The path rises quite steeply to a pedestrian gate. Go through, and keep the field boundary on your left to come to another pedestrian gate in the opposite corner of the field. Go through this gate, turn left then immediately right on a lane (45mins, [3]). The steep climbing is now over for a while. Pass a farm, a church and some houses, then take the left-hand road which in three or four minutes brings you to Cutcombe Cross (1hr, [4]). The road bends right here to Wheddon Cross, but your route continues ahead on a concrete track towards Lype Hill.

The track soon loses its artificial surface and turns to bedrock, slippery any time of year. It rises steadily. Cross a farm road then a little later go through a gate; the path now narrows alongside a field. Go through a second gate, then in front of a third you are directed to the left to continue with the hedge now on your right-hand side. Two gates follow in quick succession, then pass a house on the left and turn right on an unsurfaced, unsignposted lane (1hr20mins, [5]). In a couple of minutes the lane comes to a main road, the B3224 (Summerway); cross over, turn right, and in a minute bear left on another unsurfaced lane. This is marked on maps as Hare Path; the herepath roughly followed the 'top road' across the Brendon Hills, then continued on this lane. Follow the lane past a Dutch barn and head gradually, then more steeply, downwards; this will be slippery after rain. It is easy to imagine a group of Saxon warriors marching along this road to intercept Viking raiders making their way inland from the coast. At the junction with the A396 (1hr40mins, [6]) cross over with care, heading downwards on the (now surfaced) lane. Cross the River Quarme at Bushel Bridge (a ford in Saxon times) and continue upwards. Ignore the turn to the right at Thorne Farm; keep uphill, ten or twelve minutes later coming to a crossroad of sorts (Oldrey Cross). Leave the herepath here: turn right on an unsurfaced track between hedges, marked as a restricted byway to Luckwell Bridge (2hr5mins, [7]). In wet weather this becomes almost a stream, and there is plenty of mud as well as slippery bedrock.

Ignore any gates, following the lane first right then left, then finally right at a T-junction to walk into Luckwell Bridge. Immediately before the bridge turn right on a bridleway towards Wheddon Cross (2hr20mins, [8]), and walk alongside the river. At a former mill you are directed up and to the right, above the house. Keep around the house then bear left on the bridleway rather than the footpath. Fork left when the path splits but don't descend to the river. Go through a pedestrian gate, then keep to the left-hand side of the field. There is a prominent quartz stone over to the right; this is known as the Devil's Stone or Hour Stone, the legend being that an irate Devil threw it off the top of Dunkery Beacon in an attempt to hit nearby Ison Hill (more prosaically, it probably came from the nearby quarry). Just before the river bends right to head down to Bushel Bridge, go over a footbridge on the left then take

the second gate on the right, marked with a square of blue paint (2hr35mins, [9]). The path now becomes a lane between hedges, ascending steadily. Go through a gate across the path; the next gate you come to leads into a small car park. Cross into the sports field opposite and head for the play area. A gate leads back to the car park, toilets and pub at Wheddon Cross.

Shorter walks. The route divides neatly into two. For the **southern circuit** (● 5.1 miles, ascents and descents of 250 metres), start the walk by taking the main road towards Minehead and Dunster. In less than a minute turn right at a memorial, then right again on a lane towards Putham. In just over five minutes come to Cutcombe Cross: turn right on the bridleway to join the main walk at the 1-hour point ([4]). The **northern circuit** (● 2.7 miles, ascents and descents of 140 metres) can be done as a short walk on its own, or to visit Snowdrop Valley in season. Follow the main walk to Cutcombe, but just before the 1-hour point take the right fork back into Wheddon Cross.

Alternative walk: the rivers Avill and Quarme (● 5.5 miles, ascents and descents of 300 metres). Follow the instructions in **walk 54** to come to Dunkery Gate. Turn left on the road. In approximately ten minutes turn right on a track. In eight minutes or so cross another narrow lane, and in another ten come to a road at houses. Turn right and almost immediately left, looking out for traffic. Go over the bridge and turn left on a bridleway towards Wheddon Cross. Use the instructions from point [8] of the main walk to return to Wheddon Cross.

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