



Walking on Exmoor and the Quantock Hills

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AW6. Knightshayes.

- 4.3 miles, steady ascents and descents of 190 metres. 1 hour 45 minutes continuous walking, allow at least 2½ hours.

Terrain: Quiet lanes, paths and fields.

Access: Start from Bolham. There is a small car park in Bolham outside the school (SS 952 148, EX16 7RA) and sometimes a couple of spaces on the street. Bus 398 (Mon-Sat) runs between Tiverton, Bampton and Dulverton, stopping outside the Hartnoll Hotel in Bolham.

Alternatively start from the parkland car park in the National Trust's Knightshayes estate (SS 956 146, near EX16 7RH, £/NT free: turn left after entering the estate); the gates are closed at dusk (8pm in summer) and on Christmas Day: see www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/knightshayes for details. A third option particularly if you are also visiting the house and gardens is to park in the main visitor car park in Knightshayes (£/NT free) and start the walk 1hr point ([3]).

Map: OS 114 Exeter and the Exe Valley.

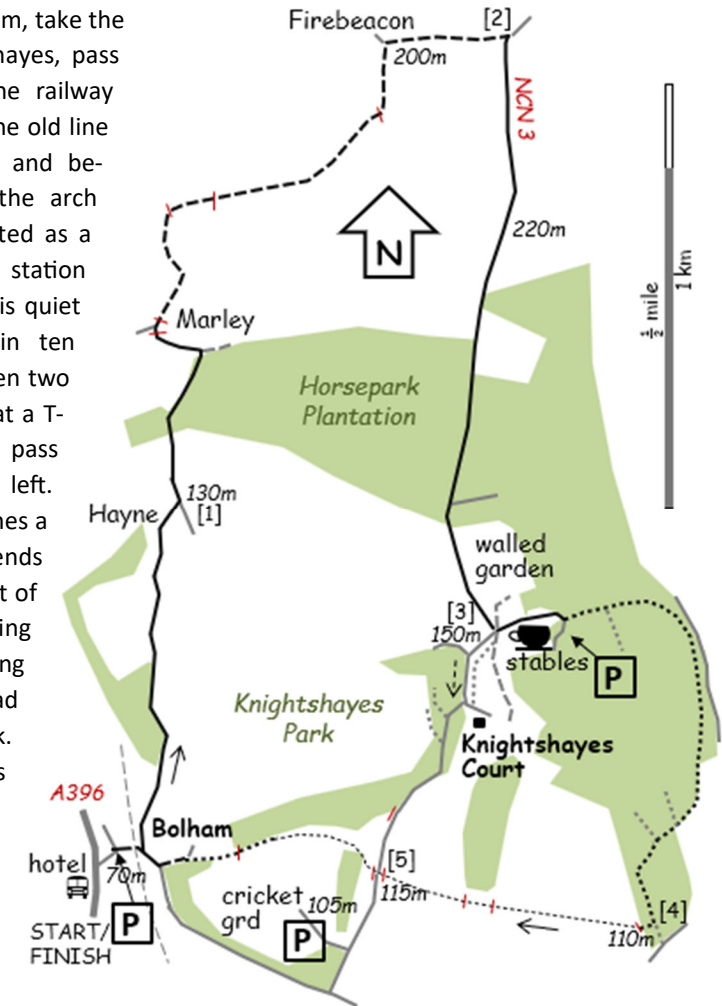
Refreshments: Café in Knightshayes during house/garden opening hours, hotel at Bolham, larger choice in nearby Tiverton.

KNIGHTSHAYES COURT IS A GRAND VICTORIAN COUNTRY HOUSE designed by William Burges for Sir John Heathcoat-Amory, a self-made textiles manufacturer who had recently relocated from Loughborough to Tiverton after his factory had been sabotaged. The house was completed in 1874 and given to the National Trust in 1972. The house is attractive and imposing in the Gothic Revival style, but with a more restrained and homely interior than Burges intended. The gardens are as much an attraction as the house: the main garden blends seamlessly into the surrounding woods and contains many specimen trees and shrubs (the estate has the tallest tree in Devon, a 54.5m (179ft) redwood), while the 2½-acre kitchen garden is used as something of a showcase by the Trust. There is an entrance fee to visit the house and gardens, but access to the wider estate is free including the main driveway (part of National Cycle Route 3), the woodland paths and the stables café. The walk explores some of the hinterland of the Knightshayes estate in the rolling hills north of Tiverton, with a short diversion to visit the café and ornate stables if wanted.

If you are starting from the parkland car park in the Knightshayes estate walk behind the cricket pavilion, then gradually bear left and head downhill to the left-hand corner of the field. A pedestrian gate takes you on to an enclosed path under trees. Bear left on a track then turn right on the road. Immediately before the railway arch turn right on a road signposted as a public footpath, joining the route from Bolham.

Starting at the A396 in Bolham, take the road signposted to Knightshayes, pass the school and walk to the railway arch. This is a remnant of the old line from Tiverton to Bampton and beyond. Immediately after the arch turn left on a road signposted as a public footpath. The old station platform is on your left. This quiet lane rises gradually and in ten minutes or so passes between two houses at a farm. Turn left at a T-junction (12mins, [1]) and pass two more houses on your left. The lane narrows and becomes a concrete farm drive as it bends to the left. Keep to the right of the next farmhouse, going through a gate and turning right at a T-junction to head upwards on a narrow track. Fork left in front of a gate as signposted. A view across the Exe Valley opens up briefly to the left before the path becomes closed in by hedges. Soon go through a gate and bear right on the track. Through another gate and into a field, keeping to the right-hand side. Pass a spreading oak, then go through a gate and turn left on a gravelled track. At the next farm turn right in front of a barn on to a wide, roughly-surfaced lane. In four or five minutes turn right on to a surfaced road signposted as cycle route 3 (35mins, [2]).

The lane climbs to some roadside pine trees, the highest point of the walk. Soon afterwards enter woodland and start descending. Ignore a road to the left, continuing past the bollards. A tile-hung house on the left, one of the Knightshayes estate cottages, is followed by the rather grand turreted wall of the 2½-acre kitchen garden. Just beyond is a green with the estate's ornate stable block on the left; the National Trust café and shop are through the archway. At the T-junction (1hr, [3]) the main walk continues to the left, but the shorter version leaves here and follows the driveway towards the vehicle exit.



Walk along the side of the stable block towards the car parks. As the road bends right, turn left on to a woodland path signed as the Impey Walk. Keep ahead at a path junction. The path tracks around the edge of the estate above a road. Ignore paths coming in from the right, but two or three minutes after the second of these look for a metal kissing gate set back on the right (1hr20mins, [4]; if you arrive at the road you have gone slightly too far). Go through the gate and walk alongside a metal fence. There may be some Exmoor Horn sheep grazing here or in the next field. At the far side of the field go through two metal gates in quick succession, then head just to the right of a spreading, almost cone-shaped chestnut tree. A gate takes you on to the main drive (1hr30mins, [5]). Cross over and enter the field opposite. If you have started from the parkland car park turn left and it will soon come into view, otherwise continue ahead and follow the path just to the right of a massive Turkey oak. Bend left to walk alongside the fence, gradually descending into a gully. Go through a pedestrian gate beneath trees; this takes you on to an enclosed path. At its end turn bear on a track then turn right on the road; this brings you back to the railway arch in Bolham.

Shorter version (● 3.4 miles, ascents and descents of 165m). At the T-junction after passing the walled garden turn right on to the main vehicle drive. Follow it past the house, continuing to the second gate on the right. This is the 1hr30min-point ([5]) of the main walk: turn right through it and follow the main walk instructions back to Bolham (or continue ahead for the parkland car park).



The stables at Knightshayes