



## **Cow Castle & The Barle Valley**

**A relatively easy, but possibly boggy, route along the Barle Valley on the very edge of Exmoor**

### **Essential Facts**

- Route distance: 11.0 km (6.9 miles)
- Approximate time: 3 hours
- Approx. total ascent: 235 metres
- Start point Grid Ref: SS 773 391
- GPS Ref: SS 77319 39184
- Recommended O.S. Map: Explorer OL 9
- Toughness Rating: Somerset 2

Please see the notes on Toughness Ratings at the end of this report

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CHALLENGE ?**

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**Full Info from the Great Walks web site**

## THE ROUTE

The walk route starts from a lay-by in the middle of Simonsbath, about 100 metres down hill from the Exmoor Forest Inn. If the lay-by itself is full use the car park opposite the Inn.

From the lay-by at **S**, and facing towards the New Forest Inn, turn right and take the upper of the two paths into the beech wood. Follow the path, signed to Cow Castle, along the valley beside the River Barle until you reach Flexbarrow at **A**. The main path leaves the river at this point and goes around behind the barrow.

However, if you are willing to take the animal track which plunges downhill here to the gate beneath the tree there is a perfectly navigable and much prettier route by the river. But this does get very boggy after heavy rain. If you take this river route, bear right when the path diverges through the hard rushes, and then bear right again when there's a choice between going inside the dry-stone wall or not.

On the main route, at the far side of Flexbarrow, stay uphill of the fenced-off mineshaft, **B**, at Wheal Eliza and follow the path uphill by the fence to the gate about 50 metres up. Follow this path along the valley again until you reach the gate at **C**, at the foot of Cow Castle.

The path goes around the back of Cow Castle. Alternatively the steep ascent up its side is worth it for the views, and you can pick up the path again on the far side. If you decide to resist this temptation, also resist the impulse to follow the path off to the left, which will take you back to Simonsbath; instead follow the other path around the small mound beyond Cow Castle and on to the conifers beyond.

At **D**, take the stile and cross the bridge, staying on the path to the left which takes you onto the forest track. Follow this through the gate at the far end of the trees and then around the open hillside beyond to the next gate, at **E**. Here a fingerpost will point you uphill on 'Diverted bridleway.' Follow the hedge uphill until you come to the gate at **F** (but halfway up, pause to have a look at the arched bridge further down the valley at Landacre).

At **F**, follow the sign through the gate which points you towards Simonsbath. The gate onto your lane is at the far left-hand corner of this field, then follow the lane between the farm and the barn. Immediately after the barn is a gate to your left, signposted, which takes you through a gate to your right and onto a track which you will follow downhill to the quarry at **G**.

Follow the track uphill again, until it peters out in a field at the top, at **H**. Your path is through the gateway to your left, under the trees and signposted. Follow the right-hand hedge through this field and the next two. The way is signed again at the next gate: follow it downhill and again along the right-hand hedge.

When you reach the gate onto a metalled lane at **I**, do not go through the gate, but follow the fence round to the left until you come to a small gate by the barn to your right, and go through this. Follow the right-hand hedge through the next two fields, and then the left-hand hedge past the big tree to the gate under the trees. Go through this, and through the gate immediately opposite it into the woods.

Take the path to your left and follow it down through the woods, past the sculpted tree stumps and back to Simonsbath, **S**.



**The River Barle  
Near Flexbarrow**



**Hawthorns En Route**



**Wayside Pelicans**

## Refreshment

The Exmoor Forest Inn  
Hotel and Restaurant  
Simonsbath  
Tel: 01643 831341  
Hotel with food available



The Exmoor Forest Inn

## LOCAL INFO

**Wheal Eliza** was opened up as a copper mine in 1846, but work ceased there 9 years later when no copper was found. It was subsequently investigated as a possible source of iron, but again there was not enough ore for it to be viable. It is said to be haunted by the ghost of Anna Burgess, whose father was hanged for her murder in 1858. One version of the story says that he killed her because he couldn't afford to feed her; another says that he did it because his lover hated her

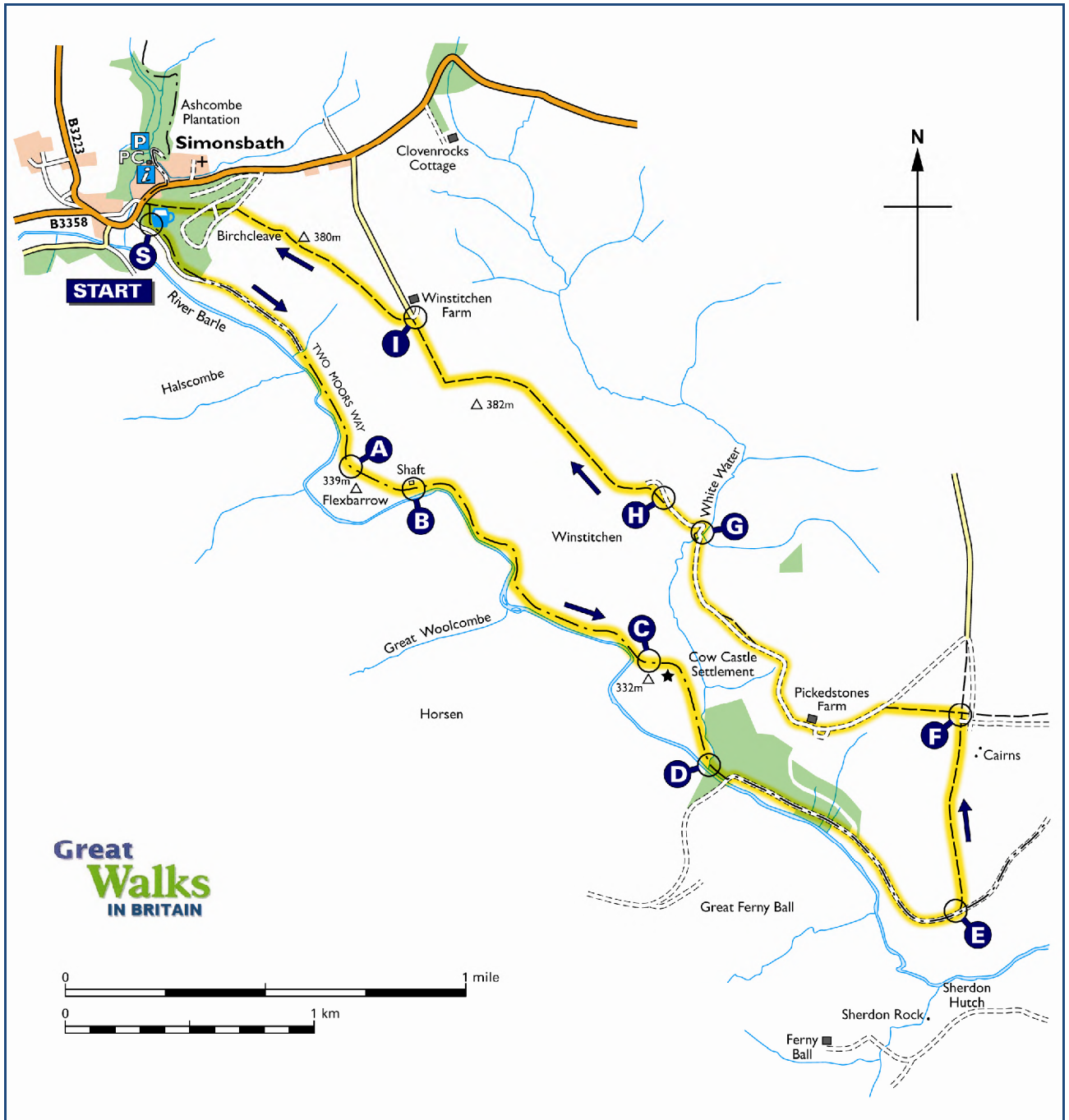
**Cow Castle** was an Iron Age hillfort, defended by a single stone rampart.

Along the valley towards Withypool is Landacre Bridge, an early seventeenth century bridge and a popular picnic spot, as is Sherdon, on the opposite bank of the Barle from Picked Stones.

*Simonsbath* is famed for its beeches, which grow higher here than anywhere else in the country, and the walk also features a number of typical beech hedgebanks, which are only found in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. In the forest, as you finish the walk, you will suddenly come face to face with a pair of pelicans sculpted out of a tree stump, and a bashful-looking creature that is probably a bear!

## COW CASTLE & THE BARLE VALLEY G.P.S. WAYPOINTS

WAYPOINT NAME	MAP REF	CO-ORDINATES	ELEVATION: Metres
COW S	S	SS 77319 39184	332
COW A	A	SS 78162 38228	320
COW B	B	SS 78427 38090	289
COW C	C	SS 79533 37440	292
COW D	D	SS 79627 37027	276
COW E	E	SS 80625 36402	300
COW F	F	SS 80646 37184	392
COW G	G	SS 79595 37912	301
COW H	H	SS 79432 38128	344
COW I	I	SS 78430 38800	365



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IN BRITAIN

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MAP LEGEND					
	Great Walks route		Church with tower		Spot height - metres
	M6 Motorway		Church with spire		Information centre
	A23 Main road		Other place of worship		Parking
	B2116 Secondary road		Cathedral / Abbey		Public convenience
	Minor road		Building		Public house
	Other road		Built up area		Picnic site
	Track		Woodland		Camp site
	Footpath		Sand, shingle or mud		Major tourist feature
	Bridleway		Water feature		Other tourist feature
	National trail				
	Railway				

## Safety First

**Safety should always** be your first priority in planning and undertaking a walk, whether on your own or leading a group. Please read these Safety First and Walking Our Routes notes.

**Lead a group** of other walkers only if you have leadership and navigational experience adequate for the 'worst case' conditions which may be encountered on the particular walk, bearing in mind the terrain, possible weather and navigational demands.

**Weigh up the capabilities** of your party, in terms of fitness and walking speed. Adjust your time expectations accordingly.

**Ensure** all your party are adequately clothed for the weather and conditions. Footwear is particularly important. Clothing must protect against cold, wet or strong sun according to the time of year.

**Emergencies** are quite rare, but it is essential to think ahead about what to do if someone in your party sustains an injury. Will you have a First Aid kit? Is there a qualified First Aider in the party? How could help be summoned in a serious eventuality?

**Refreshment**, particularly water, can be vital. Dehydration in hot summer conditions can be rapid, and frequent intake of fluids is essential.

**On tougher walks** it is a good idea to tell someone where you are planning to go – and when you expect to be back. Remember - mobile phones often lose reception in mountainous or isolated areas.

**All our walks use legitimate routes:** Public Rights of Way, Public Footpaths, Bridleways, Permissive Paths, Access Land, Byways and Roads.

**Road** walking calls for particular care. When there is no defined footpath or verge wide enough for safe walking it is usually best to walk on the right – facing oncoming traffic. An exception may be a tight bend, where walkers would be more visible on the left.

**Occasionally** you may find a public footpath blocked or unuseable. It is perfectly in order to take the shortest available diversion without damaging crops, perhaps around a field margin.

**It is courteous** to close gates after passing through, sometimes even if the gate was open when you arrived – particularly if it is obvious livestock may escape.

**Mutual respect** for farm animals is to be encouraged! Don't frighten or annoy them, but equally don't put your party members in danger or discomfort. You certainly wouldn't be the first walkers to go round the outside of a field of frisky bullocks.

**Dogs** should always be kept on a lead anywhere near farm animals, and under close supervision elsewhere in the countryside.

## Walking Our Routes

**Our walks** are designed to be negotiated using the route directions in conjunction with the map section provided. We suggest walkers also take the Ordnance Survey Explorer or Outdoor Leisure map recommended for each walk.

**On mountain, moorland and open heathland** walks it is **ESSENTIAL** to have navigational expertise and tools, including the recommended Ordnance Survey map(s).

**Take care** to observe any cautions in the route description; exposed paths, areas liable to flooding etc.

**Consider conditions before setting off.** Will heavy rain have made a water meadow impassable? Will frost or snow make a path slippery?

**When navigating the route** look for clues to confirm you are in the right place. Are map features where you would expect on the ground? Are features mentioned in the text where expected? If you suspect you may have taken a wrong turn, take action sooner rather than later. It is better to re-trace to a known point rather than carry on regardless with the possibility of becoming increasingly confused.

**All our routes are carefully checked** before publication, but features can change on the ground – sometimes surprisingly quickly. Footpaths may be re-routed, buildings can appear or change significantly and these days pub names seem to change frequently.

**The approximate time** given for each walk is based on an average walking speed of 2.5 miles per hour (4 km/hour), plus an allowance for ascent, descent and any difficult terrain.

**Total ascent** is the approximate total ascent over the whole walk.

**GPS users** can enter in the waypoints provided in each of our walk reports. It is important to read our guide **Introducing GPS for Walkers**, available as a PDF file from the Great Walks in Britain web site.

**Remember that GPS** is a great navigational tool, but only one of those available to the navigator. Never dispense with conventional map and compass – and the training and skills to use them, especially on mountain, moorland or open heathland walks.

### TOUGHNESS RATINGS

Most of our **Somerset & North Devon** routes can be undertaken by reasonably fit walkers able to utilise the map segments and our recommended Ordnance Survey maps, together with the route guidance notes.

The toughest walks should be undertaken or led only by experienced mountain walkers with navigational expertise. Always consider recent and forecast weather.

Each walk has been allocated a **Toughness Rating**:

1. Easier walks with modest ascent and generally on well defined paths. There may be stiles or narrow gateways to negotiate.
2. Routes which are more demanding. They may include more ascent and possibly paths which are looser or more difficult underfoot.
3. More strenuous walks. There may be prolonged steep ascents, and perhaps several ascents over the whole walk. Conditions may be challenging underfoot.
4. The toughest walks, requiring considerable fitness and navigational experience. There may be prolonged steep ascents. The ability to navigate by compass may be essential.

Toughness Ratings are allocated in the context of the terrain in the edition area. For example a walk rated as demanding in Cambridgeshire may be equivalent to an easier or moderate route in Somerset & North Devon.