



## South Devon

### Budleigh Salterton Circular



*Basic hike: from Budleigh Salterton west along coast path to West Down Beacon then inland to find cycleway which takes you back east to inland Budleigh.*

*Recommended map: Ordnance Survey 115 Exmouth and Sidmouth. Distance and going: four and a half miles.*

In terms of residential property, Budleigh Salterton is one of the most expensive locations in the South West - which isn't surprising when you walk around some of its attractive environs. This walk explores the coast west of Budleigh, before returning via an inland route.

So alluring and exotic did Straight Point appear and so warm was the sun that we set off up the coast path that heads out of Budleigh Salterton to the west. It climbs to the surprising heights of West Down Beacon, which is a well known name among those who go to play upon the East Devon Golf Course.

This course takes up much of West Down as a whole, and the coast path runs nervously along between the border fence and the cliff. I say nervously, because the cliffs here are not exactly granite in their constitution. They are red sandstone. More sand than stone, I should say. Bits of cliff regularly depart seawards.

Halfway up the hill, the path veers from the cliff edge and passes through a rather scenic wood of the pine and scrub variety.

Suddenly we are reintroduced to the cliff-side as we approach the beacon's 129 metre summit. You will know you've reached it because you will see a trig-point situated just inland of the path.

You will also know, because this is where you get the very best views. Not only can you look down on Budleigh and its tiny estuary to the east - and gaze beyond to Sidmouth and way into Dorset past Chesil Beach to Portland Bill - you can also look west across the gigantic Exe estuary and follow the coast down past Torbay to Berry Head.

As coastal vistas go, this has to be one of the best - thanks to the fact that West Down Beacon is situated at the apex of one of the biggest corners to be found along Westcountry shores.

The plan had been to go on to Exmouth and catch a bus back to Budleigh, but the Marines were rattling their machine guns down on Straight Point training ground - which is depicted on the OS map as a danger area.

So we took the public right-of-way directly north of the trig-point into another pleasant wooded area, and from there found the lane which would take us a few hundred yards to the Exmouth to Budleigh Salterton Cycleway. This, in turn, would take us on a large arc inland of Budleigh Salterton.

This was an excellent alternative and, having done the route, I can now assure you of its merits. The path from the trig-point offers fantastic views of the Exe basin up to, and beyond, Devon's capital city - and it introduces you to those pleasant woodlands. Be warned that you must cross the golf course at one point - so watch out for small white projectiles and listen out for people shouting «Fore!»

Eventually the path meets a lane and a minute's walk along this will bring you to the cycleway. You have to turn left and walk down a longish feeder-path for a few hundred yards before you can get onto the sunken track - then it's a matter of turning right.

It is, of course, a disused railway. To be exact, it was the railway that used to run down from the mainline, past Tipton St John (the junction for Sidmouth) and on to Exmouth where it linked up with the branch-line to Exeter.

It closed like most of our rural lines and now looks set to become part of what is known as the Southern Coastal route (National Cycle Network Route No.2). When built, the final route is expected to run from Plymouth to Dorset and beyond. It is planned to pass through Totnes, Newton Abbot and beside the Teign estuary, Teignmouth, Dawlish, beside the Exe estuary to Exeter, Exmouth and on eastwards to Sidmouth, Seaton, Axminster before heading into Dorset.

At the moment it takes you along a pleasant section to northern Budleigh Salterton. The path weaves along through a deep cutting and then makes a big bend to the east. After a mile or so it ceases and we are led away from the old line to a place called Bear Lane.

Down the lane we walked - regretting that the cycleway didn't go further - and then it was a matter of crossing the

main road and entering the northern hinterland of Budleigh Salterton. You can't lose your way - it's simply a matter of heading through the housing estates towards the sea.