



## South Devon

### Shute to Beer

The web of routes and roads that lead hither and thither across this peninsula tends to promote habits which are sometimes difficult to break. If you live in a certain zone, then you will be inclined to use certain roads, rat-runs and corridors which you know from experience are the best ways from a to b. But sometimes breaking the geographical habit can be a joy. Such a thing happened to me the other day, opening new horizons and providing me with a delightful walk. The adventure occurred as I tootled through East Devon. Having covered something or other for this newspaper, I decided to meander wherever seemed appealing.

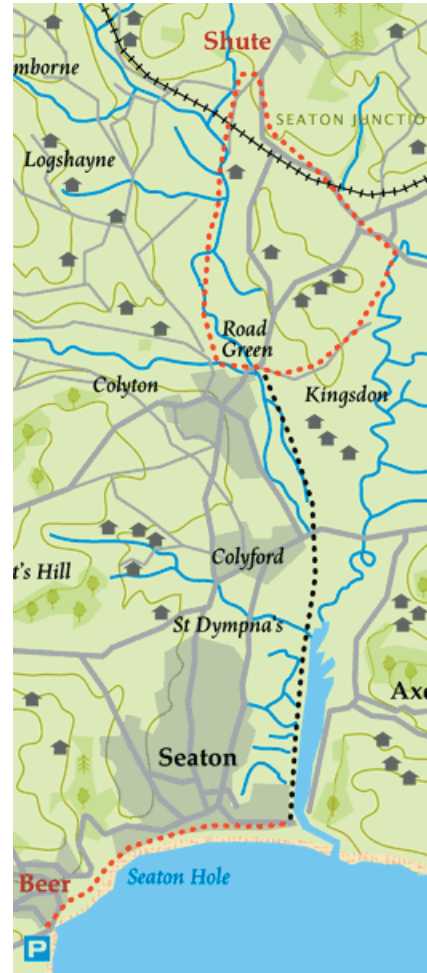
And so we found ourselves travelling along the A35 somewhere east of Axminster. Shute Hill looked like a fine eminence protruding into bright blue skies, and it inspired me to pull off the main road and head towards the hamlet named after the hill so that we could, perhaps, explore the National Trust property of Shute Barton.

I'd forgotten my National Trust card so we went for a walk instead. By following the footpaths south we were able to enjoy a fantastic old-fashioned tram-ride and lunch at the seaside.

But first let me tell you what I've found out about the fabulous fortified manor house called Shute Barton. Apparently, the earliest part of the house dates from around 1380. Later the place was extended by the Grey family who were Marquises of Dorset. They remained until 1554, when the family fell from favour following their failed attempt to install Lady Jane Grey on the throne. The Pole family then took over the place and made great changes. Today, it is still the home of the Pole-Carew family, although the property is now in the care of National Trust.

I look forward to returning with my pass. I'm told the entrance hall has the largest fireplace in England - which is saying something. It's 22 feet wide and takes up the entire end wall of the room.

A footpath heads south of the Barton towards Woodend Farm. This we took to reach Shute Road near Seaton Junction. Turning right we walked along the road a few hundred yards to cross the railway via the footbridge. Then south again - past Lexhayne Farm and across half a dozen low watery meadows



*Basic walk: From Shute down the valley to Colyton where we boarded the Seaton and District Electric Tram. At Seaton we turned west to follow the coast path to Beer. We took the same route back but at Colyton climbed Kingsdon Hill and walked along the Axe to Whitford, passing through the village to find the path back to Shute.*

*Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 116 Lyme Regis and Bridport.*

*Distance and going: seven miles of easy going walking. The Seaton and District Electric Tramway can be contacted on 01297 20375 and has an informative website at [www.tram.co.uk](http://www.tram.co.uk)*

to Road Green Farm. Basically the walk follows the valley of a tributary of the River Coly - which in turn is a tributary of the Axe.

We meet the former stream at the delightful village of Colyton, and turn left following signs to the Seaton and District Electric Tramway. This is reached within five minutes.

After a brief wait we were rattling south and soon we were admiring the wide open, bird-filled, stretches of the estuarine Axe. As readers will know, and as the name suggests, the Seaton Tramway terminates at the seaside town tucked deep in the apex of Seaton Bay.

Seaton is an odd little place and, although I like it for its no-nonsense style, I decided to march west to an alternative luncheon venue. The coast path is a path for just a few hundred yards, and then it turns inland a bit and joins a road. I am always disappointed when the coast path does this, but I don't think there's much choice along the cliff-tops near Seaton Hole.

But soon it's path again, as we descend into the little valley of Seaton Hole, and the climb around the headland above East Ebb. By now we were nearly faint with hunger, but that pebbly oasis of charm - the lovely coastal nook of Beer - was close to hand.

I love the woodland approach that the path to Beer affords. All at once you find yourself gazing down upon the cove - and the more you walk the more of the village hoves into view. I don't know why, but this prospect of Beer reminds me of certain fishing communities dotted along the Ligurian Coast. Maybe it's the pines - perhaps it's the beach huts.

Two of us had a cheerful and honest repast in a cafe down on the beach for less than a tenner, which was definitely not a Ligurian price.

We took the same route back via Seaton and the tram, but at Colyton we turned right and climbed over Kingsdon Hill to walk north along the River Axe to Whitford. It was a matter of passing through the village to find the path north west over the low ridge back to Shute.