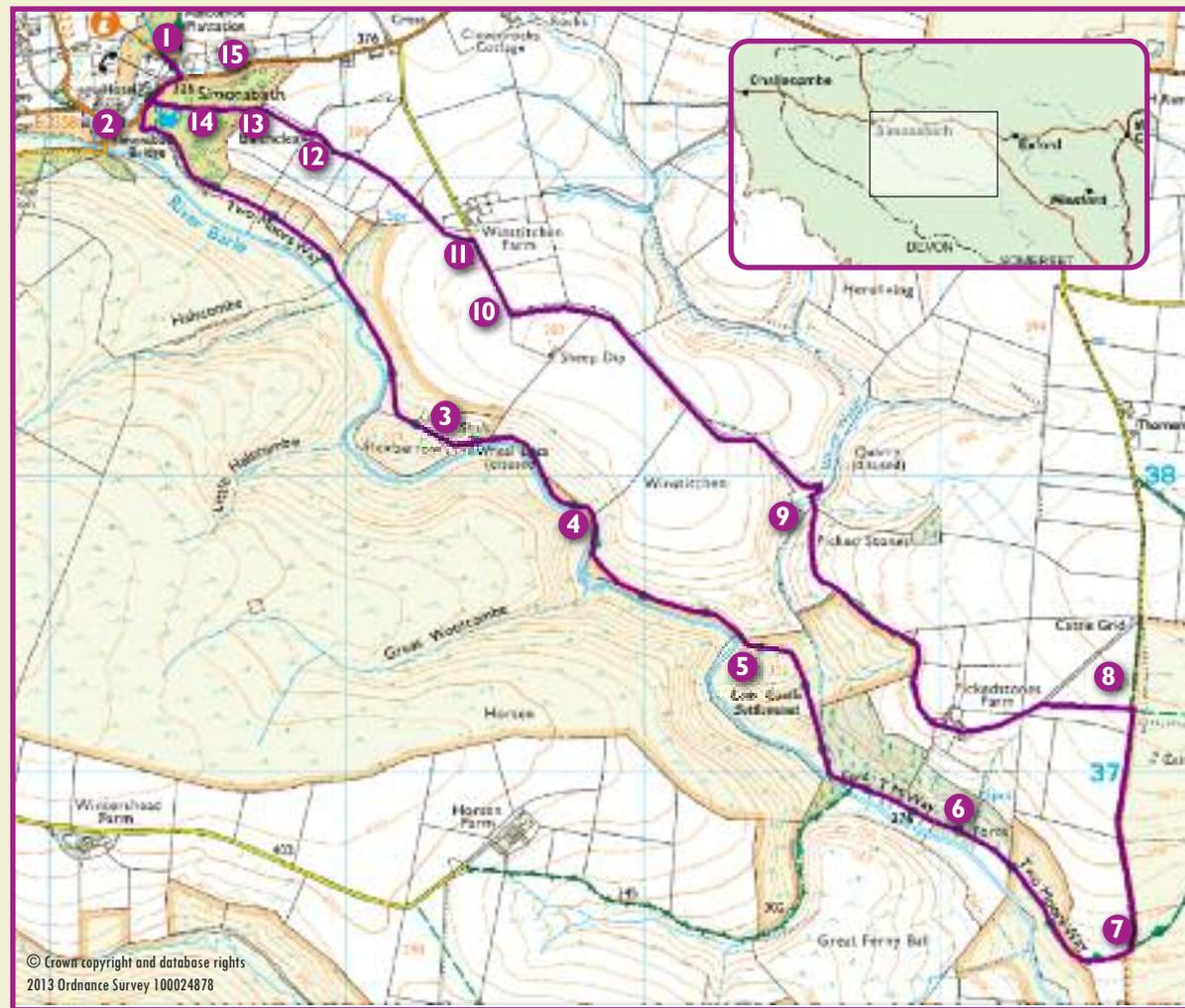


# Directions

- 1 The walk starts at Ashcombe car park, at the eastern end of the village of Simonsbath. From the car park, walk back to the main road and turn right, walking down the road until you reach a right hand bend.
- 2 Cross over the road and go through the gate into Birch Cleeve woodland. You will almost immediately come to a junction; follow the right fork indicated by blue way markers for Wheal Eliza. Continue along this path keeping the field boundary to your right. This path is part of the Two Moors Way.
- 3 After approximately 1.5 km you will pass Flexbarrow and shortly after this you will reach the **Wheal Eliza Mine**.
- 4 Upon leaving this site, continue on along the path you have been following as it begins to drop gradually to the edge of the river and then turns left through a beech hedge bank.
- 5 Continue on, going through a gate. **Cow Castle** will now be visible ahead of you. Continue along the path and choose either to climb to the top of the hillfort or follow the path around the base of the hill.
- 6 Still following the route of the Two Moors Way, you will reach a small footbridge over White Water. Pass the bigger footbridge at Horsen Ford, continuing along the track through the conifer plantation.
- 7 After this, the path passes through a gate, then another one onto the open moorland. Here the path forks; take the left route that follows the bank and the former boundary of the **Royal Forest of Exmoor** straight upward.
- 8 At a crossroad of the paths take the left fork through the gate and straight across the field to a farm drive. Turn left and follow the Simonsbath signs around to the left of the farm, avoiding the farmyard.
- 9 Continue down into White Water combe. **Pickedstones Iron Mine** can be found here.
- 10 Take the path up the opposite side of the valley, where at the top the track bears left through a gap in the bank. The track then bears to



- 11 Just before the gate onto the drive, fork left across the end of the field.
- 12 Follow the blue waymarks straight ahead along the edges of four small fields. Birchcleave is the last of the four fields and unlike the previous fields will open up to your right rather than left.
- 13 Follow the track through this field and into **Birchcleave Wood**. Here there are several tracks. Keep straight ahead, dropping downhill until you emerge back onto the main road.
- 14 Turn right along this road towards the Exmoor Forest Inn and Ashcombe car park.
- 15 To visit the **Parish church of St. Luke**, continue along the road past the car park. The church will then be clearly visible on your left.

## Further Reading:

The following contain further information on the historic landscape of Simonsbath.

Roger A. Burton, *Simonbath: The inside story of an Exmoor village* 1994

Hazel Riley & Rob Wilson-North, *The Field Archaeology of Exmoor*, 2001, English Heritage

Mary Siraut, *Exmoor: The Making of an English Upland*, 2009, Phillimore & Co Ltd

Mary Siraut, *A Field Guide To The Royal Forest of Exmoor*, 2013, Exmoor National Park Authority



**Toilets & refreshments:** Available in Simonsbath  
**Dogs:** Dogs should be kept under control at all times and, between 1 March - 31 July, should be kept on a short lead to minimise disturbance to livestock and ground nesting birds.

**Access land:** Some of this walk is on access land which means that you can visit any part of it on foot, unless otherwise informed. The remainder is on public rights of way which should be followed carefully. An OS Explorer map is recommended.

[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)  
[www.heartofexmoor.org.uk](http://www.heartofexmoor.org.uk)



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Colour photos by Nick Dawson



## Exmoor Moorland Archaeology Walks Series No.4: Simonsbath



Start point: Ashcombe Car Park, Simonsbath

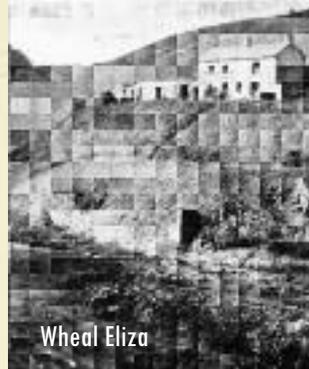
Start Grid Reference: SS 7738 3941

Distance: 7 miles (11 kilometres)

Level of difficulty: Moderate to strenuous. Some parts of the walk cross open moorland, so sturdy walking boots should be worn.

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer Map OL9 must be used in conjunction with this leaflet.

Exmoor's historic landscapes are a very rare survival, both within England and also across the British Isles. They contain many archaeological sites, ranging in date from early prehistory (some 8,000 years ago) to the 20th century. Together they offer a unique insight into our human past.



the larger one to the south-east. Although a ditch is visible around part of the hill fort, the steepness of the slope makes a continuous ditch unnecessary on this side. The hill fort has been built to make use of the natural defences with a cut into the hill to complete the rampart with a revetment. Although not thought to have been continually occupied during the Iron Age, it is possible that Cow Castle was used as a meeting place or central defensive point for the local small community.

The location of Cow Castle in the Barle valley may have strategic as well as aesthetic purposes, with the ability to control river traffic at this point. The presence of iron and copper ore in this area suggest reasons why this control may have been necessary. Further downstream Oldberry and Mounsey Castle hill forts have similar strategic locations overlooking the river.

## The Royal Forest

The **Royal Forest of Exmoor** is one of sixty seven Royal Forests in England, some of which originate in the Anglo-Saxon period. The term 'forest' does not necessarily mean that it is wooded, but is an old legal meaning for an area of land owned by the Crown; deer and other animals were protected by law for hunting by those granted permission. In 1810 a survey was carried out to determine the suitability of the Royal Forest of Exmoor for the growing of oak for use by the navy. It was deemed unsuitable and sold in 1819 to John Knight, a midlands industrialist, for the sum of £50,000.

Knight embarked on a process of reclaiming the land for agricultural use. This involved clearing and dividing up the moorland using stone and earth field boundaries and the grown out beech hedging of many of these remain visible today. The Knight enterprise involved the construction of a number of farms including Pickedstones, Warren and Honeymead, all located near to Simonsbath. This marked the first settlement of the former Royal Forest since the Saxon period, which until its sale in 1819 had only one building.

## Simonsbath

Simonsbath House was built in 1654 for James Boevey and until the disafforestation was the only building within the Royal Forest. The Knight family had ambitions to construct a mansion in its place but this was never finished. Simonsbath also boasts a water-powered saw mill built in the 1890s, used to supply timber and later electricity to Simonsbath Village.

Exmoor parish was created in 1856 with the building of **St Luke's Church** at Simonsbath. In the graveyard is a gravestone set up by the Exmoor Society for Anna Maria Burgess, murdered in 1858 by her father William, to save on the cost of her board and food. He hid her body in an abandoned mine shaft at **Wheal Eliza**, and attempted to escape to Wales but was discovered and brought back to be put on trial, he was subsequently hanged.

**Birchcleave wood**, above Simonsbath, is a beech plantation installed by John Knight. In the field below the wood is a pear shaped enclosure. Its origin and previous use are unknown, but it has been suggested that it may be an uncompleted prehistoric hill fort. Another explanation is that it was constructed by the Knight Family; the local name 'reservoir field' may explain the intended use of this feature.

## Mining

Metal ores are found in small quantities over much of the moor. **Wheal Eliza** is one of a number of mines on Exmoor and although relatively small scale, highlights the area's industrial past. The remains of buildings constructed when the mine was active can still be seen alongside the footpath at Wheal Eliza. After the mine was abandoned these later became a shepherd's cottage. Iron mining also took place at **Pickedstones**.

## Cow Castle

**Cow Castle** is an Iron Age (800BC to 42AD) hill fort. Like other Exmoor hill forts it has a small internal area. The current entrance, to the north east, is a post medieval alteration, possibly connected to the quarry pits spread around the lower slope of the hill. The original entrance is

