

The Venn Ottery Circuit.

Map OS Explorer 115 – Exmouth & Sidmouth. 1:25000.

Time: 1 – 1½ hours

Grade: Easy, may be muddy in places.

Drive from Ottery St Mary on Fluxton / Newton Poppleford Rd (Opposite Kings' School) to Tipton St John turning right to Venn Ottery just past the Church and before the school in Tipton. Drive very slowly through Venn Ottery and look out for the signposted unmetalled road (Grid Ref 080911) leading off to the right.

Go along here and park in the lay-by on the left, just before the houses. Walk up the lane, not turning left beside the cottage, and potter slowly along the deep track enjoying the rich hedgerows and banks (May be a big puddle in Winter. Retrace steps to gateway and by-pass pool using the field on the left. Re-join track) Having climbed gently uphill the track meets another – an unmetalled road- and here we move left following what can in winter be a wet (another deep puddle ! – use the field again) but still beautiful and varied route. It meanders up to and into a wonderful mixed forest, going left along and just inside the forest. Looking back before entering the wood there are excellent views across to East Hill and Beacon Hill on Harpford Common. If time permits, there is a glorious footpath marked leading to the right through a small broken gate into the wood and before following the correct route left along the forest a pleasant stroll can be taken in the other direction as far as the little road. It's a simple matter then to retrace your steps and continue along the forest track to the left. There are numerous ancient mossy banks and lush vegetation canopied by ancient oaks, birch and beech.

Eventually, at the narrow road, turn left and move downhill to the sharp bend and "Benchams" sign. On the corner, take the lane ahead through the avenue of huge old trees, taking time to peek over the hedge at the old house and unique dovecote (pigeonnair) on the left. Stay on this lane and pass the thatched and boarded Benchams Cottage and bear to the right following the footpath signs on to the open heath. Now, follow the path through bracken and gorse but fairly carefully taking about 200 paces and on a bend look for a thin track, marked as path No 22 on a way marker post, dropping down to the left towards the trees. The path meanders downhill through trees with open land through the trees to the left. Soon the path emerges at a track that leads ahead alongside open land toward old farm / nursery buildings and here we forsake the path, moving left up a small road. See remains of old Coach house sign on a gate. Some lovely big properties tucked away here !

Bear right around the S-bend and on to the slightly wider road beside the thatched cottages. Here, amble down the hill and look carefully for the almost hidden unmetalled road sign just before the farm barns, leading off to the left. This is an exquisite lane and should be savoured before emerging at the cottage just above the lay-bay where hopefully your car awaits.

Before driving away it's worth pottering around the churchyard of the ancient church of St Gregory the Great.