

The Royal Oak Walk

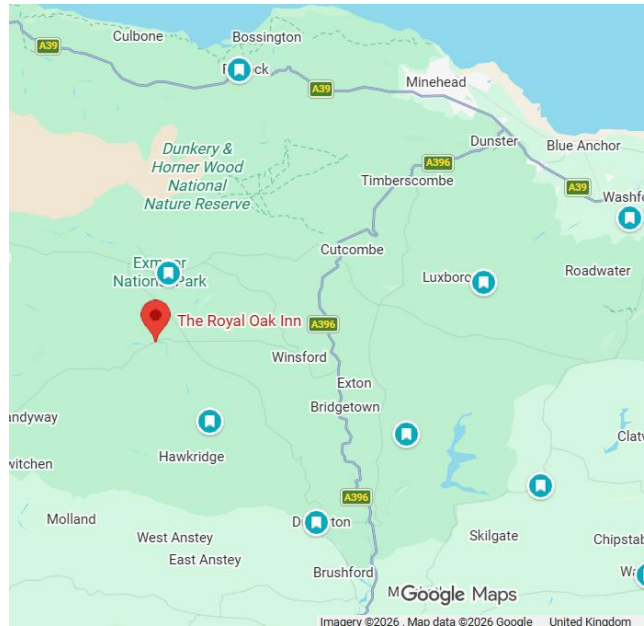
Exmoor Classic: Withypool to Tarr Steps

OVERVIEW

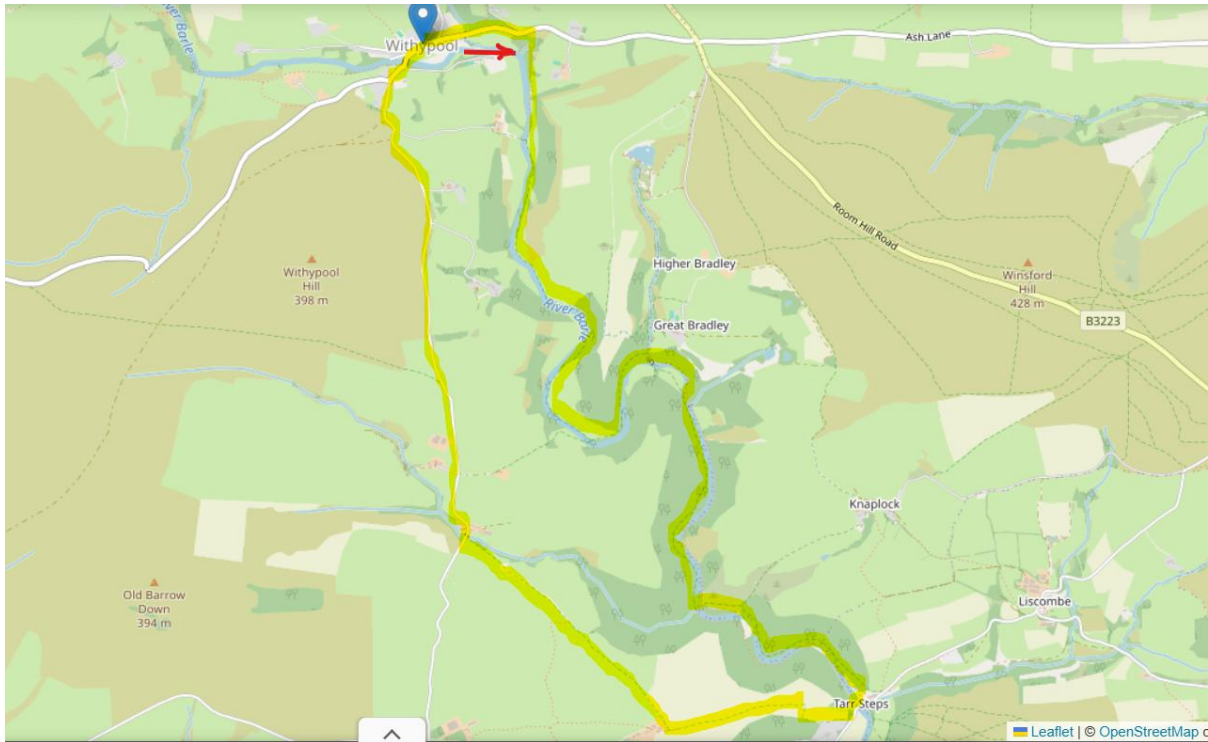
Withypool is a charming Exmoor National Park village set beside the winding River Barle, perfectly placed for a walk to Tarr Steps.

Tarr Steps is an iconic ancient clapper bridge spanning the river formed from massive stone slabs and widely believed to date back to the 10th century, creating one of the most atmospheric and photographed landmarks on Exmoor.

The walk described is a circular route, with the main part of its ascent in the return journey. You could remove that by simply retracing your steps along the River Barle, back to Withypool.



Start/Finish	Royal Oak, Sparrow Lane, Withypool, TA24 7QP 01643 831506
Parking	To the side of the pub and in the lane. There's an outdoor bar in the summer months that takes some of the parking space.
Grid Reference	SS 847 356
What3Words	///equality.condition.safari
Distance	7.5 miles / 12km Time 3 hours Ascent 900 ft / 275 m
Paths/Terrain	Well signposted with a number of stiles, gates and footbridges. Grassy tracks and river bank paths, quiet lanes and field paths.
Difficulty	Moderate – easy to Tarr Steps, some determined up hills to return.
Public Transport	None that I could confirm. Some websites suggest a 198 Bus visits from Minehead, but the 198's timetable itself suggests not.
Toilets	Toilets in the village near Withypool Bridge (and parking close by too). There's a public convenience 400m up the lane at Tarr Steps.
Other Pubs Nearby	Tarr Farm Inn at Tarr Steps. The Royal Oak , Winsford is fabulous. There's an excellent tea rooms and village shop in Withypool.



DIRECTIONS

1. Looking at the pub, follow the lane downhill (right) through the village, heading East in the direction of Winsford. You'll soon leave the village, and the road quickly rises steeply. It'll be over soon!
2. After a third of a mile you'll see the finger markers guiding you over a stile to "Footpath Tarr Steps 4".. "MW" is a reference to the Moors Way.
3. From here the journey is straightforward, following established paths through woodland, then fields and river bank paths, with some crossing point options to the other bank along the way. As long as you follow the River Barle you'll reach Tarr Steps!
4. While you're here, pay a visit to the Tarr Farm Inn, just 50 metres away from the bridge. It can get busy here, not surprising given that Tarr Steps is one of the key locations to visit on Exmoor. So while you've likely seen few people on your walk to this point, things will change: there is a lane down to Tarr Steps from the B3223 at Winsford Hill, via Liscombe, and a public car park c.350m above the Tarr Farm Inn.
5. Now head over the clapper bridge onto the lane and almost immediately look out for public footpath on your right which rises quite steeply up the hillside on a narrow track – the Exe Valley Way.
6. This narrow track does a zig zag as it enters fields. You'll follow waymarked paths through fields from here, initially steeply uphill before finding more level ground in a few fields time.



7. As you approach Parsonage Farm at [///maximum.fires.warms](http://maximum.fires.warms) footpath options are either straight on through the farm, or right to follow a farm track uphill. Turn right here, continuing on the Exe Valley Way.
8. You'll likely be sharing fields with sheep as the path levels out again, before starting to descend to the side of Westwater Farm to your right hand side. There's a gate that brings you to the road before the farm.
9. Turn right as you join the road, and follow it round some bends, uphill on your way back towards Withypool. You have about 1 ½ miles to go from here, with the first ½ mile up this hill which is called Worth Lane.
10. The road levels out with safe walking on the verge now. If you're inclined, Withypool Hill is on your left, a 160 feet / 50 metre climb. Otherwise, follow the road to eventually start a descent into the village.
11. Admire Landacre Bridge as you cross the River Barle again. This medieval bridge is a listed monument.
12. Don't overindulge at the tea rooms, now on your right. It's a short walk through the village to the finish at The Royal Oak, where your righteous pint awaits.

NOTES

Tarr Steps is a 17-span clapper bridge (derived from the Latin 'claperius', meaning 'pile of stones') and is constructed entirely from large stone slabs and boulders. It's the longest of its kind in Britain. It was first mentioned in Tudor times but may be much older. In times of flood the bridge has had to be repaired several times - stones of up to two tonnes have been washed up to 50 metres downstream.



The name 'Tarr' is thought to be derived from the Celtic word 'tochar', meaning 'causeway'.

It's only because the local sedimentary rocks form such suitable slabs that it was built at all. At 59yds (54m), Tarr Steps is by far the longest of the 40 or so clapper bridges left in Britain.