



COLYTON, SHUTE HILL & AXE VALLEY CIRCULAR

Route Summary

Starting and finishing in Colyton this route takes you on a journey through the valleys of the Umborne Brook and the River Axe and a range of hidden habitats including watermeadows, fields, woods and unimproved marshy areas rich in wildlife. You will pass the historic Shute Gatehouse before climbing over Shute Hill and enjoying wonderful views out across rural East Devon

Start/End: The pay and display car park in the centre of Colyton

Distance: 7.9 miles/12.7km

Estimated time: 3 hours 39 minutes

Difficulty: Category 3

Nearest postcode: EX24 6JS **What Three Words:** ///clincher.dozed.reeling

Access: Category 3 - Some sections are not accessible to mobility vehicles and buggies/pushchairs due to 2 in 1 gates with stepover bars, kissing gate, steps and narrow footbridges.

Terrain: Tarmac, rough stony tracks, grass and mud.

Field furniture: 19 gates (including two 2 in 1 gates and 1 kissing gate), 12 narrow footbridges and 120 steps.

Total ascent: 784ft (239m)

Maximum gradient: 1 in 7.7 (12.9%) ascent for approx 200 metres; 1 in 5.6 (17.9%) descent for approx 140 metres.

Narrowest path width: 45cm

Map: OS Explorer 116 Lyme Regis and Bridport

Other useful information:

Dogs: Welcome under close control.

Refreshments: There are a range of shops and places to eat in Colyton.

Highlights: A chance to explore several different habitats and see woodland, water and marshland birds and flowers. The unusual octagonal lantern top stage on top of St Andrew's Church tower in Colyton. A great view of the historic Shute Gatehouse.

A landscape of history

Colyton, now a market town with a range of shops and places to eat, was reputedly one of the first Saxon settlements established in Devon. It is known as 'the most rebellious town in Devon' due to the 105 local men and boys who supported the Duke of Monmouth in the Monmouth Rebellion, a plan to overthrow the King James II in 1685.

The main building of the church of St Andrew's, in the centre of Colyton, dates back to the 15th and early 16th centuries, while the tower is 12th century with an unusual octagonal lantern top stage sitting on top. During renovation after a fire in 1933, a late 10th century cross was found, which now stands beside the font.

The Elizabethan Shute Gatehouse watches over the entrance to what is left of the medieval and Tudor house at Shute Barton. It is thought to have been built by William Pole who purchased the Shute estate in around 1560. Now leased by the Landmark Trust and available to rent as holiday accommodation, it rather unusually has a Jacobean plaster ceiling recycled from a house that was demolished in Barnstaple in the 1930s.

Important wildlife

Look out for wetland flowers, particularly in the unimproved areas, including orchids and kingcups. The area also supports many birds and mammals that favour woodlands, hedgerows and river margins. Prints in patches of wet mud will give you an idea of what has been there before you, maybe a wader or even a badger. If you're particularly lucky you might spot the ghostly shape of a barn owl hunting over the fields and wetlands during the day.

Directions:

- The walk starts from the pay and display car park in the centre of Colyton.** From the car park entrance go straight across Dolphin Street and follow Silver Street through to Market Place. With St Andrew's Church on your right, carry straight on into Vicarage Street and follow it around ignoring all side turnings until you come to the T-junction with King Street.
- Turn right and cross Chantry Bridge before forking right** towards Umborne. Pass Road Green Farm and look for a footpath sign on the right.
- Climb over the stile into a field and head slightly left** to a pair of metal pedestrian gates on either side of a farm track. Go through the gates and head diagonally to the left of the telegraph pole down to the bottom left corner of the field.
- Turn left and go over the stile and ditch boards** to follow the path alongside the field edge on your right.

5. **Go through the gate into the next field** and follow the right hand hedge until you come to a stile on your right into an area of woodland. Go over the stile and turn left following the path over a ditch board to reach a footbridge over the Umborne Brook.
6. **Go over the bridge and head diagonally left across the field** to a stile in a wire fence. Climb the stile and continue diagonally left across the next field to another footbridge.
7. **Cross the footbridge and follow the hedge** on your right to a stile into another field.
8. **Head diagonally left along the footpath with the brook on your right**, following it around until you come to a footbridge.
9. **Go over the footbridge and turn left through an uncultivated marshy area** rich in wildlife to reach another footbridge.
10. **Cross the footbridge into another field** and go diagonally left heading for a gap near the top of the left hedge. Go through the gap and onto a concrete drive.
11. **The public footpath goes left along the drive** and to the right of the farmhouse, before bearing right to a gate into a field. From there bear diagonally left to a stile into woodland.

An alternative route goes straight across the concrete drive and over a stile into the field. From there head straight on, keeping left of a large oak tree, to the stile into woodland.

12. **Climb the stile and follow the footpath through the trees** to a metal pedestrian gate.
13. **Go through the gate and turn left to reach a footbridge over the railway.** Go over the footbridge and turn right along Shute Road. Follow the road to a junction just before a road bridge and look for a footpath on your left.
14. **Go through a gate into a field** and follow the hedge on your right climbing over a stile and continuing straight on with the hedge on your right towards Woodend Farm. The path becomes a track.
15. **Follow the track towards Woodend Farm.** The official line of the footpath goes right over a stile into a field to a path junction and then back left to the farm. An alternative route continues up the track to just before the farm buildings, then bears left in front of the buildings to a narrow metal gate through a hedge.
16. **Go through the gate and turn right across a field** to another metal pedestrian gate. Go through the gate and turn left down a farm track to a metal gate into a field.
17. **Go through the gate and follow the hedge on your right** around to the right and uphill to reach a gate out onto a lane.
18. **Go through the gate and turn left along the lane** to the junction with Shute Road.

19. **Turn right and walk up to the crossroads.** Turn right and then immediately left leaving the war memorial on your right to follow Ashes Road uphill.
20. **Follow Ashes Road up to Shute Hill.** The surfaced lane turns into a track which can be rough in places.
21. **At the cross of tracks stay on the central track and carry on up the hill,** over the brow and down the other side. Ignore all side turnings until you come to a footpath on your right along the edge of the plantation.
22. **Turn right over a stile (there is a gap alongside)** to follow the footpath heading straight on through the plantation with a field on your left.
23. **Leave the plantation via a metal kissing gate** and turn right along the road to a crossroads.
24. **Turn left and then immediately right** and follow the road signposted to Hampton.
25. **Turn right at the T-junction towards Hampton and Whitford** and walk through the hamlet. Just before the last barns on the left, turn left and look for a metal gate set back from the road. Go through the gate into Woodhayne Lane, an unclassified county road that is unsurfaced and very rough and wet in places.
26. **Walk down the lane past Woodhayne Farm** to a road junction.
27. **Turn left along the road and then take the first right** down a footpath that follows a track under the main railway line.
28. **Go through the gate into a wet field** and head diagonally across to a wooden footbridge.
29. **Cross the bridge and turn right alongside the river** to find a smaller gated footbridge on your left.
30. **Cross the footbridge and head diagonally right** across the field to find a gateway in the far right corner.
31. **Go through the gate and continue diagonally across the next field** to another gateway. Go through the gate and follow the footpath along a track through the next two fields to Maidenhayne Lane.
32. **Turn right along the road and follow it to the crossroads.**
33. **Go diagonally right across the road into Waterford Lane** and follow it around to the right and past Waterford Farm to a field gate at the end.
34. **Go through the 2 in 1 gate on the right and follow the track** around to the right over a stream, then turn left to climb over Nunford Bridge. Walk across the field with the river on your right and Rawling Hole to the north and Nunford Hole to the south.

- 35. Leave the field via a gate and footbridge into Nunford Lane.** Follow the track, ignoring the footpath to the right and continuing straight on where the East Devon Way goes left along another footpath.
- 36. Go past Nunford Dairy and follow the lane over Kingsdon Hill** and past the entrance to the Seaton Tramway terminal at the old Colyton Railway Station.
- 37. Follow the road between the piers of the old railway bridge** then turn right at the T-junction.
- 38. At the T-junction turn left to cross the bridge over the River Coly** and bear left at the next junction into Dolphin Road.
- 39. Follow Dolphin Road until you come back to the pay and display car park** on your left.

This route was originally developed by James Baldwin and checked by Ted Swan. It was reviewed and updated in 2025.