



COLATON RALEIGH COMMON CIRCULAR

Route Summary

Starting and finishing at an Iron Age Hillfort, this route sweeps around Colaton Raleigh Common giving a real sense of the space and diversity of the Pebblebed Heaths. Crossing stretches of open heathland before dipping down into oak woodland you may be lucky enough to hear the churring of a nightjar on a summer evening or catch a glimpse of the iconic Dartford Warbler perched on a gorse bush. Climbing back towards the highest point on your return to the car park there are far reaching views out towards the south coast.

Start/End: Woodbury Castle car park (free)

Distance: 4.7 miles/7.5km

Estimated time: 2 hours 10 minutes

Difficulty: Category 3

Nearest postcode: EX5 1JJ **What Three Words:** ///diplomats.episodes.remotest

Accessibility information:

Access: Category 3 - contains some narrow rough sections through woodland with tree roots and mud and one particularly steep rough section after the second stream crossing.

Terrain: Stony tracks including loose rounded pebbles, narrow paths with tree roots and mud. There are two streams that need to be forded as there are no bridges.

Field furniture: There are no stiles or gates, but four gaps alongside metal barriers.

Total ascent: 153m

Maximum gradient: approximately 1 in 5 (17.12%) for a short section.

Narrowest path width: 70cm

Map: OS Explorer 115 Exmouth & Sidmouth

Other useful information:

Dogs: Welcome under close control.

Refreshments: Nearest Woodbury Village

Highlights: Incredible panoramic views, chance to explore the Pebblebed Heaths and the remains of the Iron Age Hillfort. If you're lucky you may spot a Dartford Warbler (year round) or hear a nightjar (summer months).

A landscape of history

The heathland area was created by Neolithic farmers around 4000 BC when they started clearing the area of deciduous woodland to create pasture for their animals. Further clearance, grazing and burning over the centuries created the heathland.

Internationally important wildlife

Woodbury Common and Colaton Raleigh Common are part of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths which are amongst the most highly regarded conservation sites in Europe. They support over 3000 species of wildlife including many which are rare or threatened. Of the 140 bird species, the Dartford Warbler is one of the rarest and most iconic. Look out for it year round in areas of dense gorse. In early summer nightjars arrive from Africa. These nocturnal birds are more often heard than seen. Listen for their churring calls on summer evenings.

The Pebblebed Heaths also support a large number of insect species including 50 species of butterfly, 517 species of moth, 26 species of dragonfly and damselfly, 243 species of beetle, 94 species of wasp, bee and ant. Look out for the southern damselfly, one of the rarest species in the area, and the silver studded blue butterfly flying from June until August.

There are also 38 species of mammals on the heaths including 14 species of bat. Look out for evidence of roe deer, rabbit, badger and hazel dormouse.

Directions:

1. **From the car park facing Woodbury Castle earthworks** turn right by the signs and follow the waymarked East Devon Way downhill.
2. **Where the track bears right**, turn left along a path through the trees following the East Devon Way waymarks. The route keeps to the right of the earthworks.
3. **On the far side of the trees** turn left through a gateway in the bank and then immediately right to a T-junction of tracks. Turn left along a track, signed East Devon Way for approx 200 yards (183 metres).
4. **At the T-junction of tracks**, follow the track around to the right across the open heath (East Devon Way).

5. **Where the track divides after an area of pebbles** keep left along the East Devon Way.
6. **Where the track divides again**, keep left leaving the East Devon Way and heading towards a ring of trees on the skyline.
7. **When you reach the trees bear right** to a path junction and then left with the trees on your left heading straight on along a grassy track and following it to The Warren car park.
8. **Cross the car park and walk out under the metal barrier.** Turn immediately right before the road and walk through the gap beside the second metal barrier. Where the track divides after the barrier keep left and follow a stony track downhill to trees.
9. **Continue along track with the trees on your left** until you come to a cross of tracks.
10. **Go straight across and continue alongside woodland** on your left ignoring a footpath on your left and continuing straight on to a junction of tracks.
11. **Turn left rejoining the East Devon Way** and following it downhill along a stony track.
12. **When you reach the trees keep left** following East Devon Way along a track. Continue downhill ignoring side turn until you come to a low metal barrier.
13. **Turn right just before the barrier**, leaving the East Devon Way and following a bridleway through trees with fields on your left. This can be narrow and rough in places with tree roots.
14. **Where the path divides keep left** on the bridleway eventually bearing right across a shallow ford and then around to the left following the bridleway.
15. **At the T-junction of tracks turn right** along a bridleway (signed) and continue gently uphill along a stony track following the hedge on your left.
16. **Where the path divides keep right on a bridleway uphill.** After a short distance turn left along the bridleway back into the woods and then right alongside the hedge and along the edge of the heath to reach a shallow ford.
17. **Cross the ford and when the path divides** keep left along the bridleway beside the hedge, staying parallel with the hedge until you come to a bridleway T-junction.
18. **Turn left down a stony track to a low metal barrier.** Immediately after the barrier turn right past another metal barrier and follow the track uphill with the woods on your left.

19. **When the trees end continue along the track** across the heath dropping downhill to a junction. Keep left (straight on) heading on to cross a shallow ford and shortly afterwards a wider deeper ford.
 20. **Cross the ford and follow the rough path uphill** through the trees (some steps and tree roots) to join a track. There is a handy wooden bench here. Turn right along the bridleway and at the junction stay on the right (lower) track towards the woods. Continue to follow the bridleway with the woods on your right.
 21. **At the T-junction of tracks turn right along the bridleway.** Continue along this stony track ignoring all side turnings and leaving the woodland behind to climb back towards Woodbury Castle.
 22. **This elevated stretch has excellent views of East Hill**, the Otter Valley, Mutters Moor and Peak hill, near Sidmouth.
 23. **At the top of the hill where the track divides bear left** to the multipath junction on the edge of the woods. Go straight across keeping alongside the woods on your right.
 24. **Follow the stony track** back up to the car park ignoring all side turnings.
-

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