



NORTHLEIGH & COLY VALLEY CIRCULAR

Route Summary

Starting and finishing in the tranquil village of Northleigh, this route takes you on a journey along quiet roads, ancient green lanes and through hidden flower-rich meadows in the Coly Valley. From the highest points there are outstanding rural views.

Start/End: The roadside parking near Northleigh Church.

Distance: 4 miles/6.5km

Estimated time: 2 hours 4 minutes

Difficulty: Category 4

Nearest postcode: EX24 6BL **What Three Words:** ///puppy.templates.prospers

Access: Category 4 - Some sections are not accessible to mobility vehicles and buggies/pushchairs due to stiles, kissing gates, steps and a narrow footbridge.

Terrain: Tarmac, a very rough stony track, grass and mud.

Field furniture: 6 gates, 3 kissing gates, 7 stiles, 1 footbridge and 3 steps.

Total ascent: 725ft (221m)

Maximum gradient: 1 in 5 (20%) ascent for approx 70 metres; 1 in 5 (20%) descent for approx 70 metres.

Narrowest path width: 30cm

Map: OS Explorer 115 Exmouth & Sidmouth and OS Explorer 116 Lyme Regis & Bridport

Other useful information:

Dogs: Welcome under close control.

Refreshments: There are no refreshment stops on the walk, but Honiton with its range of shops and eating places is a 3.8 miles (6.2km) to the north. There are also shops and places to eat in Colyton 3.3 miles (5.4km) to the south east.

Highlights: Following the ancient green lanes and enjoying far-reaching views from the highest points.

A landscape of history

St Giles church in Northleigh has features, a Beer stone font and an archway over the south door, that date back to Norman times, although it is not known whether they were from an existing church on the site or were brought in from elsewhere. The current church dates back to the late 14th century with additions in the 15th and early 16th centuries.

The tower has gone through several transformations. Originally rendered, the outer coating was removed during a time of Victorian renovation and improvements. However, the tower then became rather damp inside with moss and ferns growing from the stonework. At the end of the 20th century the decision was made to re-render the tower which changed its appearance once again, but has allowed it to dry out.

Inside St Giles has a rich collection of late 15th century woodwork. The oak benches in the nave have beautifully carved ends with a variety of intricately designed carvings within foliage borders. The early 17th century pulpit has lovely carved panels including a traditional frieze of acanthus flowers and scrollwork.

Heard, but not often seen, the church has Devon's only complete ring of pre-reformation bells, one of the few such rings in the country.

Important wildlife

The area is rich in wildlife. Look out for buzzards soaring overhead and many smaller woodland birds in the network of ancient hedgerows. In spring and summer there's also the chance to see a mix of wild flowers in hedgerows and some of the hidden meadows.

Directions:

1. **Go into the churchyard and take the path around to the left** of the church. Follow it down to a gate out into a field. Go through the gate and follow the hedge on your left down to a stile.
2. **Go over the stile to a minor road and turn right.**
3. **At the next road junction keep left and follow the road to Farway Cross.**
4. **Turn left and follow the road uphill.** Just before the phone mast turn right along a track.
5. **Where the track divides, keep right following the track north of Ball Hill.**
6. **Continue to follow the track down the hill** until it eventually becomes a narrow road. Follow the road around until you come to a road junction.
7. **At the road junction bear left and follow the road to Tricombe Farm.**
8. **Go straight through the farm with the house on your right** and follow a track up the hill. This can be wet, muddy and rough in places.

9. **Continue to follow the track around a steep bend to a junction of tracks.**
10. **Turn left and follow the track uphill**, around and out through a gate to a minor road at Baker's Gate.
11. **Turn right, cross the road** and look for a kissing gate on the left. Go through the gate and head diagonally right across the field towards a woodland.
12. **Go through a gate into the wood** and follow the path through the trees and out over a stile into a field. Continue straight on across the field.
13. **Keep to the left of the hedge and follow the footpath** out over a stile to a minor road. Turn left and follow the road downhill. Just after a right hand bend look for a footpath on your right along a track.
14. **Follow the footpath along the track ignoring the footpath** on your right. Where the track divides keep right passing a house on your left and continuing to a field gate.
15. **Go through the gate and follow the footpath** left down the field and through a gap into a second field. Head straight down to a narrow footbridge.
16. **Go over the footbridge and a stile shortly afterwards** and follow the footpath uphill alongside the fence on your right to a stile out onto a minor road.
17. **Turn left down the road towards Collins Farm.**
18. **At the T-junction turn right and follow the road** for a short distance until it swings around to the left by Northleigh Village Hall. Look for a footpath sign on your right.
19. **Go over a stile and follow the footpath straight across the field** to a wooden kissing gate. Go through the gate and turn left to follow the footpath alongside the hedge on your left.
20. **Follow the footpath uphill** going through another kissing gate and up to a stile out onto a minor road.
21. **Go over the stile and turn left along the road.** After 164 yards/150 metres take a footpath on the left past the cottages and gardens back to the church.

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