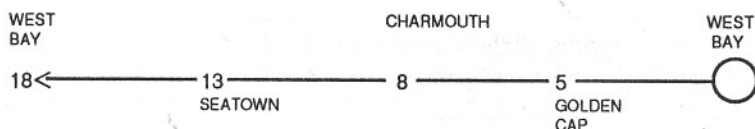


Day Return to Charmouth

This is a walk when you may well feel like the Grand Old Duke of York — a walk when you never seem to be off a hill, either climbing or descending. An exhilarating jaunt with the most spectacular of coastal views coupled with a visit to one of Dorset's almost unknown communities at Upcot.



PARK in the all-day car park at the end of the B3157, preferably up against the trees facing south for protection from the sun. The old railway station is in the corner and there is hope of a return to the days of steam between West Bay and its big brother Bridport.

West Bay is a popular, no nonsense, small seaside resort — nice and compact — with a busy picturesque harbour always crammed with fishing boats and small leisure craft. Note the Flemish-style block of photogenic flats aptly named Pier Terrace. Walk on around the harbour — reserving your bag of chips on your return — and along the promenade to the obvious exit. Your day in earnest has now commenced.

Steadily climb up over and down into Eype Mouth. Here the path crosses a stream that trickles out of the valley bottom by means of some steps and stepping stones. Continue on through a small car park at the top of some steps, passing a caravan site to your right and a cottage with a view to your left as you head for Thorncombe Beacon — which at 155m (508ft) is second only to Golden Cap in height. Continue over the style into the dip, followed by another rise to the top of Doghouse Hill from which you will get a picturesque view of Seatown in the valley below. Keep looking through your viewfinder and you should get the best picture about half way down — unless you have got a zoom that is!

At the bottom of the descent cross over a sluggish stream and although you will not have been walking long it may well be worth having a “quickie” at the Anchor. Sample the atmosphere by the footpath sign before continuing towards Golden Cap.

As you begin to climb more steeply, keep to the left hand track where it forks to the right and cross a long meadow keeping a wood at the top of the hill to your right. As you exit this meadow there is a seat for weary travellers to rest awhile and look back at the marvellous view behind. Cross over the style and after approx. 30yds. take the style on your left that will drag you up to Dorset's crowning glory — Golden Cap, whose height of 191m (626ft.) makes it the highest cliff on the coast. It derives its name from the golden

sandstone near the summit. Ahead is the glorious view of Lyme Bay. Golden Cap is part of a 2,000 acre National Trust estate.

Leaving the summit follow the path westwards, eventually dropping down by a series of steps before regaining higher ground. Do not take or follow any footpath signs that lead inland, but keep rigidly to the coast, at times looking carefully for styles and exits that are almost hidden in the hedges. After skirting the landfall marked Cain's Folly you begin to climb again and eventually you will emerge overlooking Charmouth. It is quite a delightful stroll down a grassy slope to cross the River Char by a footbridge and reach the half way stage and your turn round point. The Heritage Centre next door to the Beach Cafe is worth a visit.

Charmouth itself is approx. 400yds. inland down the road from here and a variety of pubs, cafes and restaurants are waiting to serve the hungry walker. However, anyone wishing to maybe re-enact a piece of history may prefer to lunch at the Queen's Arms Inn where Charles II took refuge when forced into hiding in 1651. The choice is yours.

Leave Charmouth by the A35 heading SE. Look for the old Toll House on the left, re-cross the River Char and where the road swings to the left take a right wheel and begin to climb the lane to Stonebarrow Hill. This is indeed quite a stagger and at times you may wonder when does it end. Well it ends at the cattle grid with further superb views towards Golden Cap from another angle. There is a National Trust Centre just along on the left. Continue along Stonebarrow Hill towards Chardown Hill, then follow the path south. It gives one the appearance that you are about to "drop off" into space, but as you reach that point you will see that the path drops suddenly. At the bottom turn left and in a short while this will bring you into the enigma of Upcot — a small community that still appears to be in a time warp and where you may never grow old! Poultry run freely, the horse stables are at "pathside" and you may be forgiven if you think you could be walking right into the living room of the cottage on the left.

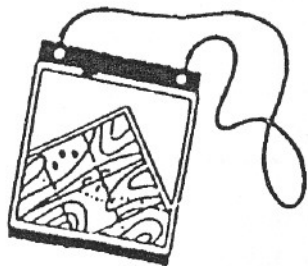
As you enter the farm, turn left and follow the path out with the garden wall on your left. Continue along

this track looking for the first track right — should be marked to St. Gabriel's Church. Walk due south down this track, ignoring the temptation to cut through the fields on your left. Turn left at the end of this path and after crossing a small stone bridge you emerge from the cover of trees into a spacious area dominated by some National Trust Cottages. These are available for holiday let. What more could one ask for. The ideal location for a week of good walking. Notice the "shed" looking building to one side. At the rear is the public telephone — take a look and make someone happy . . . *it's good to talk*.

Continue east to view the remains of St. Gabriel's Church and with Golden Cap now high on your right head east across the fields before exiting in the last one in the top corner for a path that will take you across another small meadow to the edge of Langdon Wood. Continue alongside the wood until you see a path on your right (should be just on the curve), this will take you down to rejoin the coastal path heading for Seatown. However, after approx. 200yds. for those among you that do not suffer from claustrophobia, look for the gate in the field adjacent — take the path that leads down to this delightful little alternative through a tunnel of trees will bring you out into Seatown and the chance to take five and enjoy an ice-cream.

Ahead lies the steep ascent of Ridge Cliff, followed on by Doghouse Hill and then on and yet up again to reach the summit of Thorncombe Beacon with majestic views over Eype towards the finish at West Bay.

The steep descent from the Beacon leads into a grassy bowl. Carry on down past the caravan site and into the jaws of Eype Mouth. It is now just one more up and over, passing a further caravan and camping site and exiting the meadow in the top right-hand corner. Pause here awhile for perhaps a final "aerial" shot of West Bay, before taking the final steps down to the promenade and maybe stop by the kiosk for the largest 99-er with flake that money can buy. West Bay will be a hive of activity if you're there in season. Absorb it all in as you complete your "victory parade" around the harbour back to the all-day car park and a "High Five".



FACT FILE

Distance

18 miles

Time

Allow 7/8 hours

Maps

OS Pathfinder SY49/59

OS Pathfinder 1316

Start/Finish Parking

West Bay — Grid Ref 465904

Terrain

A good long hill walk using coastal path, tracks and a little road work

Refreshments

Pubs and Cafes at West Bay

Anchor Inn at Seatown

Pubs and Beach Cafe at Charmouth

Toilets

West Bay, Seatown and Charmouth

Accommodation

West Bay and Bridport

Youth Hostel at Bridport

Tourist Information

Bridport (01308) 424901