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Holford to Beacon Hill

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Free car park at Holford (ST 155411).
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer 140 – Quantock Hills and Bridgewater.
Distance	5 miles
Date of Walk	15 July 2018
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This walk in the Quantock Hills, from Holford, takes you in a circuit from the attractive village through ancient oak woodland to Beacon Hill then returns via the pretty Smith's Combe.

Holford village was home to a Huguenot silk factory in the 16th century and there is a green by the car parking where they used to play bowls. It also has a dog pound, which you pass on the walk. The reason for its existence is that hunting dogs were kept in this area but their meat was hung in the trees. This attracted feral dogs. Following an incident where a huntsman was killed by his own dogs, after he went out to investigate a commotion, the pound was built to keep the hunting and feral dogs apart.

The oak woodlands comprise Sessile Oak rather than the traditional English (pedunculate) Oak, the difference being that its acorns are not carried on stalks (peduncles) but directly on the outer twigs (sessile). It provides a home for much wildlife, including deer, woodpeckers and wood warblers.

Beacon Hill as you would expect, provides fabulous views in all directions including to Dunkery Beacon, Selworthy Beacon and across the Bristol Channel. The trig. point sits on the southerly of two bowl barrows, covering an ancient grave or cremation site.

The return route takes you past Alfoxton Park and the derelict (at the time of writing) hotel. Converted from a Grade II listed 18th Century country house, the estate was home to the poet William Wordsworth and sister Dorothy between July 1797 and June 1798, during the time of their friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was living locally.

The walk starts from the free car park at Holford. To get there, turn off the A39 around 9 miles west of Bridgewater, at the village. Unless you like a challenge, or have a very small car, avoid the turn by the Plough Inn which runs along its north side!

Start: Exit the car park (ST 155411) and turn left along the lane. After three hundred yards or so, turn left at the dog pound up a "Restricted Byway", indicated by a post and climb through the oak woodland (ST 153412).

Around a third of a mile later, at a 'Y' junction, take the right fork.

As you exit the trees, meet a junction with multiple paths. Keep straight ahead following the direction on a wooden post for "West Quantoxhead" and "Staple Lane". You start to get views over the Bristol Channel.

At ST 139409 meet a path coming up from the right but just carry on straight ahead.

You get good views towards the sea with, I think, a particularly attractive view down Gay's House Combe towards the sea (ST 131407).

The path divides at the head of the combe. To achieve the summit of Beacon Hill, keep to the left fork.

As you crest the brow of the hill, you start to get good views over to Exmoor with Dunkery Beacon and Selworthy Beacon.

At the brow, take the right fork (ST 128407), and keeping straight ahead at a crossroads of tracks, arrive at the summit trig. point (ST 125410).

From the trig. point, with your back to the trig. point and the sea directly ahead of you, take the broad track heading downhill (017° magnetic). You might just make out a direction post in the near distance.

When you get to the post there is a cross-roads of paths, go straight ahead following a blue arrow in the direction of Smith's Combe. Quickly come to another cross-roads but continue straight ahead.

As you descend this attractive combe, there are a number of paths leading off. Keep to the main descending track which is quite obvious.

It descends to a stream, where the path divides, with each path crossing a twin plank bridge. Take the right hand path (ST 132423). Almost immediately there is a three way fingerpost. Follow the finger for "Holford", climbing out of Smith's Combe.

Once out of the combe, the path descends slightly. You come to a four way fingerpost, with the "quill sign" for the Coleridge Way. On the post is "Quantox Greenway". Keep straight ahead.

At a junction of paths with two lots of fingerposts, turn right to the second fingerpost then left. There is a green arrow and a "quill sign" and someone had scrawled "Holford" on the sign, though how long this will be visible is anyone's guess. You should be passing by a five bar gate.

Keep straight ahead at a group of houses.

Follow the tarmac lane round 'S' bends. There are a number of fingerposts but they have no names and can be quite confusing but all you need to do is stay on this lane, passing the derelict Alfoxton Park Hotel.

Eventually, you will come to the dog pound passes on the outward journey. Continue to the car park.

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