

East Coker Parkland and Woodland Walk



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This moderate walk (3.6 miles, 5.8 km) crosses some of the beautiful parkland surrounding Coker Court and also follows an ancient road through leafy woodland on the southern boundary of the parish. It is marked in Dark Green on the Discover East Coker map and walkers should refer to OS Explorer Map 129 for more detail. Parks and woodland paths can be muddy at times and waterproof footwear is advised. Park considerably and start at the Village Hall (Grid Ref. ST537128)

From the Village Hall turn left into Halves Lane past the old Saw Mills buildings. At the T-junction turn right, signposted East Coker and Halstock. Follow the footpath along the road as far as the hamstone Millennium Memorial Stone. There are views here towards the north of the Parish. Take the footpath to the right behind the memorial, signposted Restricted Byway. At the top of the hill this becomes a country lane - Back Lane - with cottages and houses on your left, including the rear of the Old Vicarage. At the T-junction, turn right and follow the lane as far as Compton and Bassett cottages on the right. A footpath sign indicates Primrose Hill 3/4 mile. Enter the kissing gate behind the holly bush and follow the footpath along an avenue of old oak trees, through Coker Park passing a small "ice pond" on your left, which was used to supply Coker Court with ice in the 19th and early 20th centuries from the ice house situated in the grounds.

Coker Court

Coker Court is Grade 1 listed and was built in the 15th century by the de Courtenay family who were lords of the manor in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was bought in 1616 by Archdeacon Helyar from Sir Edward Phelips, who owned Montacute House. William Helyar extended Coker Court. He supported the King during the English Civil War. The 18th century additions were built by Sir William Chambers, architect whose best known work is Somerset House. Coker Court is now divided into several properties. Emma, based on Jane Austen's novel was partly filmed at Coker Court in 1996



At the end of the avenue is a public bridleway signposted Moor Plantation 1/2 mile. Pass through the kissing gate and cross Lodge Hill Road into a lane, passing a bungalow on the right and then Westfield Farm. At this point, the lane turns into a farm track. There are views to the right towards Holywell and North Coker. The track bends to the left. Continue as far as the footpath sign at a T junction. Turn left, signposted Upper Sleight 1/2 mile, over a stile, passing a house to the left. Continue along the ridge which presents beautiful views of rolling hills, woodlands and farm houses. At a waymarked gate, continue straight ahead to the opposite side of the field. Stop to look back at the views. Cross the stile, taking care on the steps down to the road. Turn right on this road downhill as far as the crossroads, which is marked by the Parish South Boundary Stone.

Parish Boundary Stone

Four parish boundary stones were erected in 1995 to commemorate the centenary of the Parish Council. Carved to designs of local artist, John Horwood, they are placed for each point of the Compass



Take the farm track to the left, signposted to Sutton Bingham 1 1/2 miles. Follow the farm track, known as Isles Lane. At the farmhouse on the right, there is a footpath signposted to the left to Coker Court Park 1/2 mile.

Isles Lane

This ancient track was once the coaching route between Yeovil and Crewkerne. Although often muddy and waterlogged by comparison with modern roads, coaching routes frequently followed ridges and high ground for the security of better visibility and improved drainage.

Alternative Route (Shorter): Take this footpath directly through the woodland to a stile, straight across Coker Court Park to return to the two cottages passed previously. Turn right to reach St Michael's Church and continue the walk from there as below. The full walk continues along the public bridleway, signposted Sutton Bingham 1/2 mile (although actually further), passing through a wooded dell. Stop at gateways to enjoy beautiful views of rolling countryside of South Somerset and Dorset borders. Closworth Church Tower can be seen in the distance. When you reach a row of beech trees, the lane widens with a turning to the left called Stoney Lane. Stop to enjoy the views over the village and beyond at the farm gate.

Alternative Route (Longer, with views of Sutton Bingham and a visit to Goose Slade Farm Shop): Continue straight towards Sutton Bingham. Views of the reservoir can be seen from gateways to the right. At the T junction, turn left. At the bottom of the hill the next turning to the left returns to East Coker village. Goose Slade Farm Shop, which also serves teas, is a little distance further to the right. Walk with care along the road into the village and cross the paddock to get back to St Michael's Church to continue as below. Turn down Stoney Lane, which bends to the left. At the next bend to the right, go straight on between two hamstone pillars and through a kissing gate into a field. Walk across this field behind Townsend Farm running parallel with the houses and cottages and finally the back of the old Walled Garden with views of St Michael's Church and Coker Court to your left. On reaching the kissing gate, take the opportunity to visit St Michael's Church to the left and enjoy further views of the village. The walk continues to the right past the Almshouses and the Old Vicarage. The Helyar Arms is just a short distance from here, across the Paddock to the right. To return to the Village Hall, continue down the hill to the T junction and continue straight on up a slight hill following the footpath past the Cemetery to the right and the Millennium Memorial, passed at the start of the walk. Turn left into Halves Lane and back to the Village Hall.



St Michael and All Angels Church is a Grade II* listed building in the form of a cross whose foundations date back to Saxon times. The tower contains a clock, carillon and eight bells. Most of the building we see today was built by the de Mandeville and de Courtenay families between the time of King John and Edward III. In the 250 years that Hugh de Courtenay, Earl of Devon, and his family held the Manor, the North Aisle and Chapel dedicated to St John and The Holy Cross was added. During the Puritan revolt of 1645 - 1660 terrible destruction to churches and monasteries was performed under the instruction of the leader, Oliver Cromwell. In East Coker, the rood screen, chapels, silver and altars were severely damaged. The Baptismal Font was cast outside into the Churchyard. as were the de Courtenay stone and marble family tombs. The village and Manor were known to be strong supporters of the Royalist cause and suffered badly. When the King was restored in 1660, the Royal Arms 'four times the normal size' was installed in recognition. This is over the north porch door with the dates altered to 1690 for King William and Queen Mary. The church contains a number of interesting memorials. The ashes of T S Eliot, one of our greatest poets, are buried under his memorial in the north-west corner. There is also a memorial to Captain William Dampier, great navigator, explorer and chronicler, who was born in the village and was the first explorer to circumnavigate the globe three times. There are memorials to the Helyar and Heneage families, holders of the estate much nearer to our times.

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