

Bridge of the Month 117. Sept 2020 Exmoor Packhorse bridges

On a brief visit to the north western corner of Somerset I discovered an abundance of old tiny bridges. Since life is so frantically busy, this month is going to be just pictures and a brief commentary. For want of any better way, I will cover them in the order of visiting.

Gallox Bridge, Dunster

Dunster is a classic mediaeval village/town, complete with a market street and a castle on a mound.



Beyond the castle, on the road south is [Gallox bridge](#). It was almost impossible to photograph without the benefit of waders, but here is one pic showing the approach causeway along the river bank. Like most such bridges it has a ford alongside.



Watchet Packhorse Bridge

[Here](#) is another barely visible. Once again, I determined to return with wellies one day.



Cycling back to my hotel in Dunster from Watchet, I came across this remarkably skew little road bridge which must be of some age.

It is between the [White Horse Inn](#), where I had an excellent lunch, and its garden.

Nearby was Cleeve Abbey, which is well worth a visit.

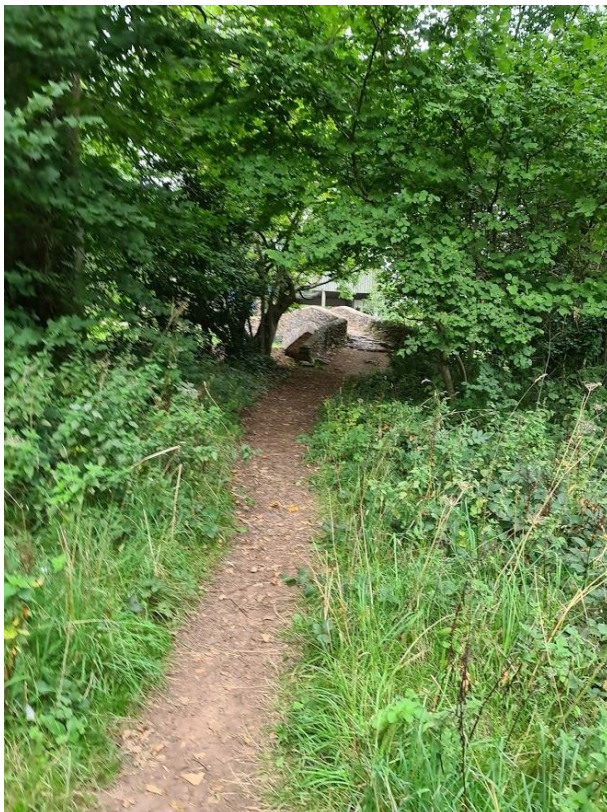
Horner



This looks suitably old and gets the full gothic script treatment on the OS map but....



Really? Is that a mediaeval pack horse bridge or a Victorian footbridge? It is certainly quite a thin ring for such a flat arch but I suppose it could never carry heavy traffic of any sort.



Just down the river at [West Lucombe](#) is something rather different.



This looks altogether older.





It crosses the river on the skew but the span itself is square. The bridge looks cared for, though that abutment is a bit dubious. This form of two almost flat sides meeting at a point seems to be a fashion in the South West.

Just below it is the “[New bridge](#)” which provides road access, but much less room for the river



The tight radius at the end disguises the fact that the arch is again made from two straight sides, in this case, with a single broad keystone. The word “builder” remains on the stone but the name above and the space between it and the date below have been very deliberately carved away.



The makeup of the arch with thin wedging stones, some of which appear to wedge the wrong way, is quite odd (but it seems to work).



The reverse wedge stones seem to be of a very different quality. I think there has been some slip or decentring near the end there.

A peep underneath left me intrigued so I crawled under for a closer look.



Surely built in two halves. Perhaps that explains why the builder's name was carved away.



The boards of the centring are still clearly visible in the mortar. The voussoirs on the downstream side are, though, very similar to those on the upstream.



Finally, there is [Allerford](#).



Here you can see the nicely paved ford behind. But how old is this bridge?

From the top you can see that it is narrow as a packhorse bridge.



It crosses the river on a skew, which I think is visible from here.



And mediaeval skew bridges are not so common.

I took enough photos that it may be possible to build a model, though there is a long queue ahead of them so it might not be soon.



This is interesting though. I suspect this only works because the parent bridge is skew. That little squinch is only supported because it can thrust against the arch that is inclined towards it.

So there you are. Some would call it a busman's holiday but I managed a long day on my bike and an even longer day on foot (30 km and 1000 m of climb) so a proper holiday and finding these bridges was a treat I hadn't looked for when I booked.