



Walk 13. Malmsmead, Badgworthy and Oare.

- 7.4 miles, 2 hours 55 minutes. Ascents and descents of 430 metres.

Terrain: Mostly on paths and tracks, possibly muddy. Open moorland, but with reasonably well-defined paths. Two or three streams to splash through. The descent and re-ascent of Lank Combe on the main walk is steep and uneven.

Access: Start from Lorna Doone Farm in Malmsmead, down narrow lanes (SS 792 478, near EX35 6NU, £/NT members free). Summer 'coaster' bus 300 stops at the County Gate car park, just under a mile from the start and 80m higher up (SS 793 486, near to EX35 6NQ).

Map: Croydecycle 04 Lynton Lynmouth & Doone Valley; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: In Malmsmead at Lorna Doone Farm and seasonally at Cloud Farm (both now National Trust). There is no longer a café at County Gate.

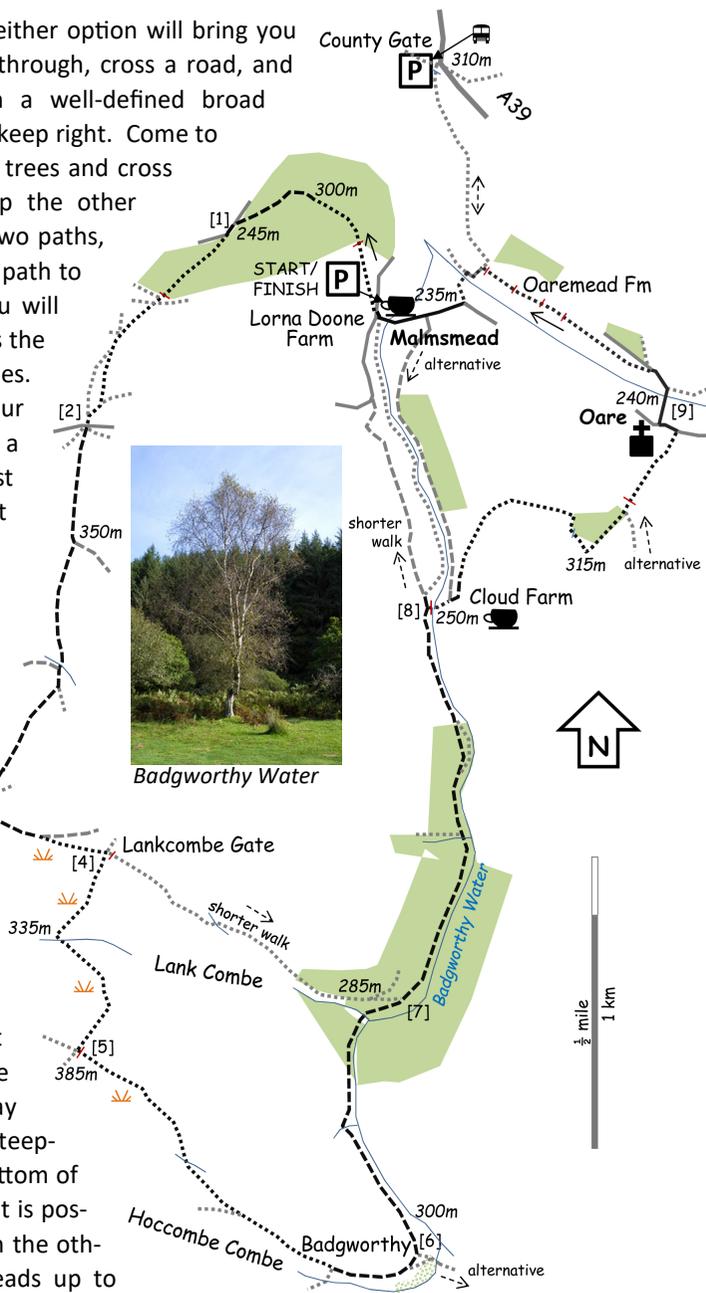
R. D. BLACKMORE'S CELEBRATED NOVEL *LORNA DOONE* is set in a readily identifiable Exmoor landscape, with the Badgworthy ('Badgery') and Oare area at the centre of the story. Blackmore's grandfather was vicar of the small 15th-century Oare church, which becomes the location of Lorna's dramatic wedding. 'Doone Country' is marked on the map between Lank Combe and Badgworthy, but the location of Doone Valley is debated. The 'water-slide' in the book is an exaggerated version of the cascade at the end of Lank Combe, though Hoccombe Combe, with Badgworthy at its mouth, is a more likely candidate for the valley. Literary associations apart, this is a rewarding area of Exmoor to explore, with partly-wooded combes descending from the open moor to the Badgworthy valley. This walk takes in Badgworthy Water and the surrounding hills, including the abandoned village of Badgworthy, before returning to the hamlet of Malmsmead with its National Trust café. It is a *relatively* gentle introduction to upland Exmoor, as is the alternative walk described overleaf.

If you are starting from County Gate, from the bus shelter face away from the road, go through a gate and follow a signposted bridleway alongside the fence to the left. Malmsmead is immediately below you. The path soon starts descending. At a bridleway sign, turn right then go over a bridge. When you meet a road, turn right: this will soon bring you to Malmsmead Bridge and Lorna Doone Farm.

Start the walk from the car park next to Lorna Doone Farm. Cross the road and go through a field gate with a sign marked 'public bridleway to Southern Wood'. Follow the path uphill, through another gate, then crest the hill as the path bends to the left. The path, now quite a wide track, descends through woods and arrives at a road (17mins, [1]). Bear left, taking the first path on the left (signposted to Brendon Common). Follow the path uphill through the woods and go through a gate on to open moorland; go straight ahead where a path crosses. Keep slightly left and uphill where two paths come in from the right. Where the path forks at

a blue-topped marker post, either option will bring you to a gate (35mins, [2]). Go through, cross a road, and continue straight ahead on a well-defined broad track. When the track forks, keep right. Come to a group of windswept beech trees and cross a small stream; continue up the other side on the leftmost of the two paths, but soon after ignore a small path to the left. On a clear day you will have views behind you across the Bristol Channel to South Wales. A combe falls away to your right; just beyond its head is a T-junction marked by a post (55mins, [3]). Turn sharp left here on a wide gravel track. In about three minutes this path starts to veer left; take a narrow and fairly indistinct path forking to the right across the moorland. This will bring you to a field gate at a stone wall (1hr5mins, [4]).

The shorter walk continues ahead here, through the gate. Otherwise just before the gate a narrow path heads off to the right, at first almost parallel with the stone wall, then bearing away to the right and descending steeply. It will bring you to the bottom of the combe at a point where it is possible to cross the stream. On the other side a reciprocal path heads up to the left. Watch your footing here as the way is steep and uneven. Continue upwards and slightly to the left, until you arrive at the continuation of the wall; it is now a low bank with a wire fence on top. Follow the wall to the right, then turn left through a field gate (1hr20mins, [5]) and follow the signposted path straight ahead. Splash through a shallow stream, bear slightly left on a wide grassy path, then pass a blue-



topped marker post on the left. A little way beyond, go through a gap in a stone wall. This is the entrance to Badgworthy, or what remains of it; nowadays it is populated only by sheep. Continue past a mound of rubble, the ruins of a cottage. Follow the well-defined path ahead and then around to the left to come above Badgworthy Water (1hr 35mins, [6]); it is also possible to continue ahead to the plank bridge for a longer route to Oare via the alternative walk described below). Carry on above the river, then cross the stream coming down from Lank Combe at the bottom of a small cascade (take care here as the rocks can be slippery), then go over a second stream via a footbridge. The path from Lank Combe comes in from the left at a wide grassy area (1hr50mins, [7]).

Continue alongside Badgworthy Water beneath oak trees. Go through a field gate, then a little later look out for a large stone on the left with a plaque commemorating R. D. Blackmore. Soon afterwards you will see a camp site on the opposite bank, and come to a footbridge on the right (2hr10mins, [8]). The short walk continues ahead, back to Malmsmead; for the main walk cross over and come to Cloud Farm, where there is a seasonal tea room. Keep straight ahead with the farmhouse on your right, and take the path diagonally left and upwards towards Oare (the left-hand path returns directly to Malmsmead). This is at first a small lane, then it runs along the edge of a field. Turn right at a field corner where the gate is signposted 'private', then left through the next gate. Follow the path around to the left, then down to the road. Oare church is on the left (2hr35mins, [9]); take a moment to explore the interior, where there is another plaque commemorating R. D. Blackmore. Opposite the church, head down to the road bridge and cross the river. Turn left on a signposted bridleway and follow it towards a smart farmhouse, going through gates to keep to the right of the house. At a T-junction turn left down a muddy path (right to return to County Gate), cross a footbridge, continue along the lane and then turn right on the road to return to Lorna Doone Farm and, beyond it to the right, the car park.

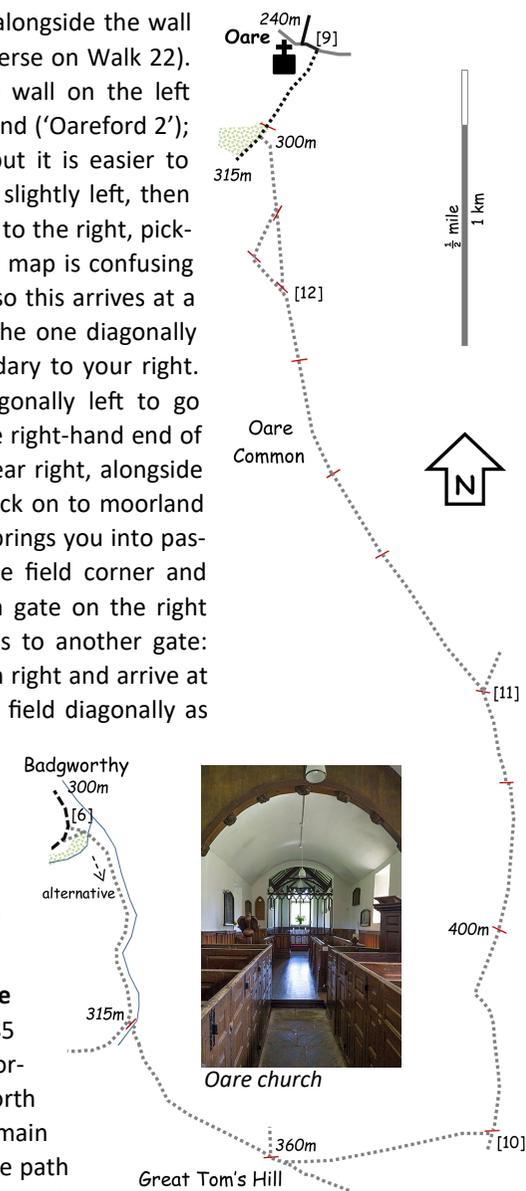
Alternative walk: East of Badgworthy Water (● 7.8 miles, 3 hours 5 minutes, ascents and descents of 330 metres). From the car park walk past the Lorna Doone Farm buildings and bear left on the road to go over the stone bridge. Follow the road for two minutes then turn right into the entrance to Cloud Farm. In fifteen minutes or so arrive at the farm, a white-painted house with a seasonal tea room. Turn right to pass the camp site, and cross Badgworthy Water on a footbridge (25mins, [8]). Turn left and upwards on a track parallel with the river: you are now reversing the return part of the main walk. After a gate, the path enters light woods. When the path splits, keep left parallel with the river but not so close as to have to fight your way through bracken. Cross the Lank Combe stream on a footbridge (50mins, [7]). A little further on splash through a small stream (possibly slippery), and continue on a high path above the river. In slightly over ten minutes come to a signpost above some mounds, remains of medieval Badgworthy village (1hr, [6]); turn left here to descend to a side stream, crossing it on a plank bridge. Keep left to walk on a narrow path parallel with the river, and in another ten minutes or so go through a gate on the left and over a footbridge.

Head upwards on the path opposite, from where you will have views across rounded moorland hills typical of this part of Exmoor. The path gradually converges with a dry stone wall.

Go through the gate then turn left to walk alongside the wall (ignoring the path to Exford, followed in reverse on Walk 22). At a wire fence, go through a gate in the wall on the left (1hr45mins, [10]) and head on to the moorland ('Oareford 2'); the direct compass bearing is due north, but it is easier to follow a fairly well-defined path that bends slightly left, then after six or seven minutes start to veer back to the right, picking up a narrow track (the Ordnance Survey map is confusing at this point). In another three minutes or so this arrives at a gate in a bank. Go through this gate and the one diagonally left to continue ahead, with the field boundary to your right. When the boundary turns right, head diagonally left to go through a gate (2hr5mins, [11]). Aim for the right-hand end of a line of trees, where there is a signpost; bear right, alongside the banked field edge. A gate takes you back on to moorland with the bank on your right. The next gate brings you into pasture, then after a further gate come to the field corner and head left. The official path goes through a gate on the right (2hr25mins, [12]), and diagonally left across to another gate: you may be diverted to the next gate to turn right and arrive at the same point. Either way, cross the next field diagonally as signposted towards the right-hand end of a line of trees. Cross a vehicle track and descend to a gate in the corner of the field. A wide grass path leads onward from here, becoming a gravelly track before joining a road. Turn left to come to Oare church (2hr40mins, [9]) and rejoin the main walk.

Shorter walk: Malmsmead and Lank Combe

(● 4.8 miles, ascents and descents of 285 metres). Although you will miss out Badgworthy, the descent of Lank Combe is well worth doing. At the 1 hour 5 minute point of the main walk ([4]), go through the gate and follow the path downhill into Lank Combe. Cross a small stream, then continue downhill until the path meets Badgworthy Water at a wide grassy area ([7]). Turn left to rejoin the main walk, but at the 2hr10min point ([8]) continue ahead on the track to Malmsmead.



Oare church

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