



Walk 14. Horner, Stoke Pero and Dunkery Beacon.

- 8.2 miles, ascents and descents of 700 metres. 3 hours 40 minutes constant walking, allow 4½-5 hours.

Terrain: Stony and muddy paths through woods and open moorland, shallow fords. Some steep ascents and descents but no scrambling.

Access: Park in the National Trust car park in Horner (SS 899 455, TA24 8HY; £ for non-NT members). Bus 10 (Minehead to Porlock) stops at West Luccombe half a mile from the start. Alternatively start from Webber's Post car park (SS 903 439, off the Dunkery road).

Map: Croydecycle 03 Horner & Dunkery; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

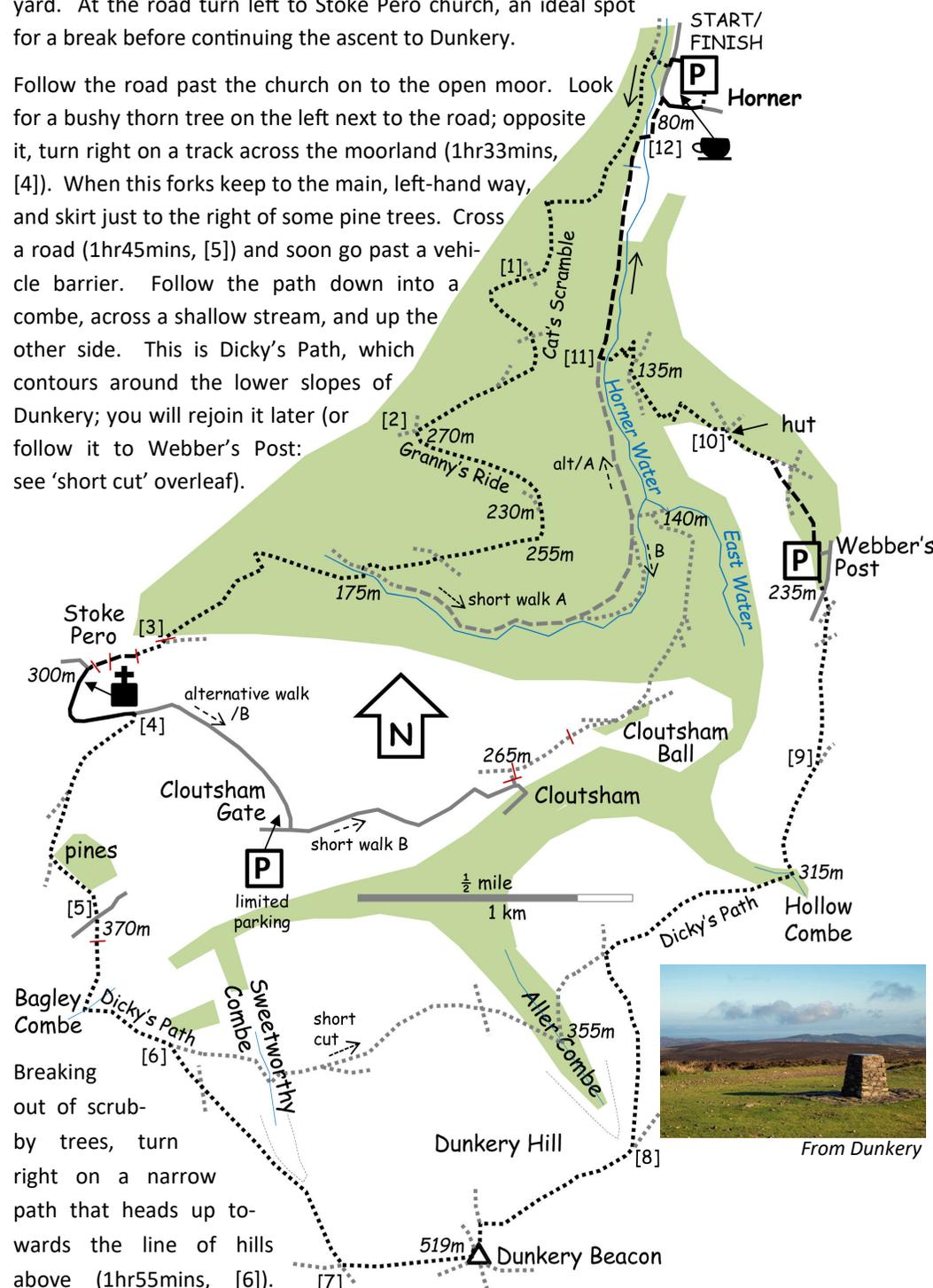
Refreshments: Seasonal tea-garden in Horner; wider selection in nearby Porlock.

THE ANCIENT OAK WOODS SOUTH OF HORNER, part of the great Holnicote estate once owned by the Acland family and now in the care of the National Trust, make up the largest area of deciduous woodland on Exmoor. A multitude of paths traverse the woods, and many different circuits can be made up between Horner and Dunkery or at a lower level around and above the various branches of Horner Water; buy the Croydecycle map if you want to make up your own routes. This walk ascends to Exmoor's highest point via one of its highest churches, providing a contrast between the steep combes and hanging woods close to Horner and the open moorland and views on the uplands. The alternative and shorter walks are less strenuous, but they provide a good introduction to the area around Horner Water.

Start from the National Trust car park in Horner. Leave through the vehicle entrance, turn left on the road then almost immediately right on a signposted bridleway. Go over the stone bridge and follow the path to the right, but in 30m or so turn left to take a track heading uphill (called Cat's Scramble, though not on the signpost at this point; the paths were named by the Aclands, and they have been kept by the National Trust). The path climbs steadily above Horner Water. Continue ahead at a crossing path, signposted to Stoke Pero (25mins, [1]); when the path levels off, go ahead at a second, unsigned crossing path. If the trees are bare you will see Dunkery Hill ahead. Ignore a path joining from the right. At the next crossing, after the path rises again, turn left towards Stoke Pero on Granny's Ride (45mins, [2]). Again ignore a path from the right, continuing along a contour before going straight ahead at a broad crossing, still on Granny's Ride. Descend to Horner Water (1hr), cross it on a narrow footbridge, and continue up the other side on a steep zigzag. Turn right at the top, then go through a gate and keep right (1hr20mins, [3]); head for a track on the far side of the field (indicated by a blue-topped post), continuing through a gate, down a lane and across a farm-

yard. At the road turn left to Stoke Pero church, an ideal spot for a break before continuing the ascent to Dunkery.

Follow the road past the church on to the open moor. Look for a bushy thorn tree on the left next to the road; opposite it, turn right on a track across the moorland (1hr33mins, [4]). When this forks keep to the main, left-hand way, and skirt just to the right of some pine trees. Cross a road (1hr45mins, [5]) and soon go past a vehicle barrier. Follow the path down into a combe, across a shallow stream, and up the other side. This is Dicky's Path, which contours around the lower slopes of Dunkery; you will rejoin it later (or follow it to Webber's Post: see 'short cut' overleaf).



Breaking out of scrubby trees, turn right on a narrow path that heads up towards the line of hills above (1hr55mins, [6]).

Cross a broad diagonal path at some isolated thorn trees. Head upwards alongside a steep combe, then rise to the crest of the hills. Meet a broad crossing path (2hr 15mins, [7]) and turn left to head to the conspicuous cairn on Dunkery Beacon. On a clear day you will have distant views in all directions; a toposcope below the cairn points out landmarks.

To continue the walk, head to the left of the cairn and take a broad path almost due north (a little over 90° from your line of approach). Initially you will be heading just to the left of Bossington Hill, the left-hand end of the line of coastal hills in the distance. In a minute or so, turn right on an initially grassy path. After eight or ten minutes on this now stony track, arrive at the head of a steep combe (2hr30mins, [8]). Immediately past the combe turn left and descend gently down the side of the hill. In another ten minutes or so, come to a grassy clearing with stunted thorn trees. Walk down to a crossing path and turn right; this is the other end of Dicky's Path. This too becomes a stony trail. You will soon see two of your objectives ahead: Webber's Post car park, slightly to the left, and the Jubilee Hut, further to the left just below the hilltop. To get there, follow the path into woods, down to a stream (Hollow Combe), and back out again to contour around the side of the hill. Five minutes beyond the stream, the path forks (2hr55mins, [9]); take the left-hand way. Ignore crossing tracks, cross a narrow road and continue into the car park.

Your route ahead is on a broad and possibly muddy path into woods, starting from near the (vehicle) entrance to the car park; it is marked by a low Coleridge Way signpost in the form of a quill pen. Pass a wooden sculpture and a stone seat to come to a wide triangular junction; veer left on the bridleway towards Horner, which will bring you to the Jubilee Hut (3hr15mins, [10]). This simple and useful shelter is designed so that at least two of its four segments should be protected from the elements. Turn left here, downhill towards Horner Water. Zig-zag down until you come to a crossing path; head right then left to continue on Tucker's Path. At a T-junction, turn left away from Horner, then cross the footbridge over Horner Water and turn right (3hr30mins, [11]). Stroll back to Horner on this broad track, crossing back over the river on a stone bridge. At the road, turn right for the tea garden, and just beyond it a convenient footpath on the left returns to the car park.

Short cut: Dicky's Path (● 7.6 miles, ascents and descents of 610 metres). This is my favourite version of the walk, more varied and with nearly as good views as climbing Dunkery. Dicky's Path (named after Sir Richard Acland) contours around the northern side of the hill, undulating gently in and out of the combes. At the 1hr55min point ([6]) continue ahead on the main path. Drop briefly into Sweetworthy Combe, then fifteen minutes later traverse around pretty, wooded Aller Combe to cross a babbling stream. Shortly afterwards the main route comes in from the right; continue ahead to Hollow Combe, then five minutes later come to the fork (the 2hr55min point, [9]) and bear left to come to Webber's Post car park.

Alternative walk: Horner, Stoke Pero and Cloutsham Ball (● 5.8 miles, with ascents and descents of 500 metres). Follow the main route to the 1hr33min-point ([4]), but continue on the lane across the moorland. At a T-junction, turn left and cross a cattle grid. The lane narrows between hedges and heads downhill; keep a look out for vehicles. Round a double bend and come to Cloutsham Farm. Opposite the farmhouse where there is a rough green, turn left on a signposted bridleway, then where it splits fork right over a stile. Walk alongside the right-hand fence, through a gate, then along a stone wall. When the wall ends at a tree with a seat, bear slightly left; the Horner Valley opens up to the left. Just past the viewpoint, take a grassy path to the left in front of a birch tree. Ignore any turns to the right. This path runs along a ridge at first then descends steeply off Cloutsham Ball to a T-junction in front of a stream. Turn left here, go over a footbridge, keep left, then at another path junction turn right towards Horner on a broad track. This rejoins the main walk at the 3hr30min point ([11]).

Short walk A: Horner Woods (● 3.6 miles, ascents and descents of 305 metres). Follow the main walk until it descends to Horner Water (1hr). Don't cross the bridge here, but turn left. This path soon becomes a broad track, keeping the stream to its right (sometimes at a distance) all the way back to Horner. It rejoins the main walk at the 3hr30min point.

Short walk B: Circuit from Cloutsham Gate (● 3.5 miles, ascents and descents of 250 metres). Park at Cloutsham Gate (SS 885 430) after following steep and narrow lanes. Walk over the cattle grid and join the instructions for the alternative walk above. At the path junction after the footbridge, turn left towards Stoke Pero. Fork left off the track on to a narrower path and follow it down to Horner Water; the small stone memorial that you will pass on the right makes sense knowing that 'Recorder' was the name of the staghound. Continue alongside the stream to rejoin the track. Half a mile (around 12 minutes) further upstream you will come to a narrow footbridge, the 1 hour point of the main walk. Cross the bridge and follow the main walk instructions past Stoke Pero church, continuing on the lane back to Cloutsham Gate.

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