



## Walk 17. Molland and Anstey Common.

- 8.5 miles, ascents and descents of 500 metres. 3 hours 40 minutes constant walking, allow 5-5½ hours.

Terrain: Stony and sometimes muddy paths, a few roads. Stream to splash through near Brimblecombe. ! Open moorland with indistinct paths; take a compass or GPS, and be prepared to spend time route-finding. Some of the terrain after Molland Moor Gate (avoided on the shorter walk) is uneven, and it can be boggy in winter or after heavy rain.

Access: By car, park in Molland in front of the church (SS 808 284, EX36 3NG). Alternatively, the walk can be started from Molland Moor Gate (Anstey Gate on the OS map, SS 835 298). No bus service.

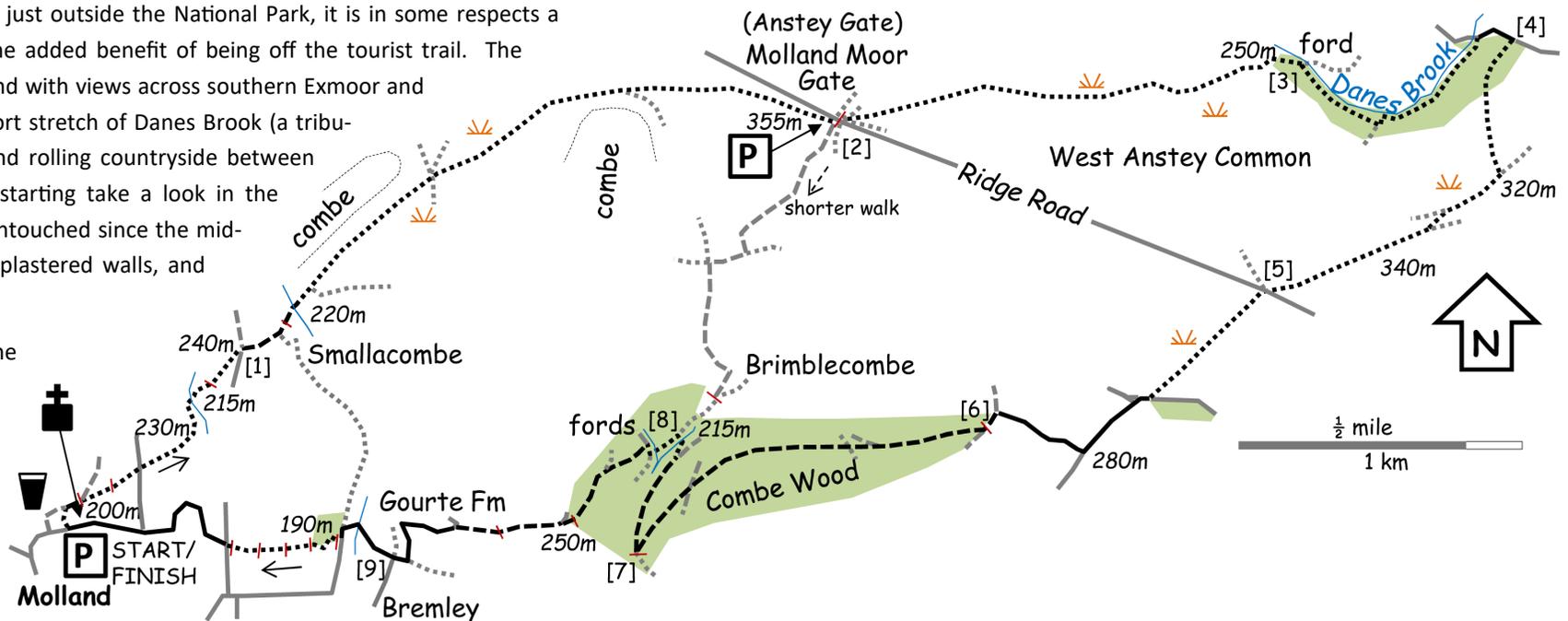
Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor or 114 Exeter and the Exe Valley.

Refreshments: London Inn in Molland (next to the church), closes in the afternoon, the Black Cock inn off the route south of Molland, or otherwise in Dulverton or South Molton.

THIS WALK ON THE LESS VISITED SOUTHERN EDGE OF EXMOOR starts from the timeless village of Molland, with its fascinating church and welcoming inn. Accessible only on narrow lanes, Molland is the centre of a 6,250 acre estate that owns the London Inn, several farms and many houses in the village; although just outside the National Park, it is in some respects a quintessential Exmoor village with the added benefit of being off the tourist trail. The walk is varied, taking in open moorland with views across southern Exmoor and across mid-Devon to Dartmoor, a short stretch of Danes Brook (a tributary of the Barle), and the woods and rolling countryside between Molland and West Anstey. Before starting take a look in the church, which has been left largely untouched since the mid-18th century; it has boxed-in pews, plastered walls, and alarmingly angled arches.

Leave the churchyard through the small gate on its northern side, and turn right on the farm track. Follow the track as it starts to turn left into the farm, then turn right into a field on a signposted footpath, ignoring the obvious track. Cross the field diagonally to a gate. Cross the next

field heading slightly left, aiming for a gap in the hedge. Go through the gate, across a road and into the field beyond. Head to the right-hand side of a group of trees, then follow a path down to a stream. Look for a signposted but otherwise hidden path to the right, which drops down some steps and crosses the stream. On the other side go steeply uphill heading diagonally left to the corner of the fence. Bear left through or around a redundant gate and cross the field diagonally to a(n initially hidden) gate in the far top corner; this brings you to a lane at a junction (15mins, [1]). Cross the lane and head towards Smallacombe, as signposted. Go straight ahead, through a gate signposted 'Anstey Gate 1¼', and immediately cross a stream on to open moorland. Take the left-hand fork above the side of Smallacombe Combe. Climb up a path between small trees and scrub, then when you come into the open head for three small trees. Continue ahead on a vague path, on a compass bearing of 045°. Views open up behind you across mid Devon to Dartmoor. The track gradually veers right, heading towards a ridge with a road (065°); the road will be invisible, but you may see the occasional passing car. Come to some scattered small trees; the path now continues due east (090°). You will soon come to the head of Anstey's Combe on the right. The path splits here; take the left, upwards fork, which meets the road at Molland Moor Gate (1hr, [2]), an ideal picnic stop. (This is marked as Anstey Gate on the OS map; locals will tell you that Anstey Gate is another couple of miles down the road, where it crosses the Two Moors Way).



The short walk turns right here on a vehicle track before the cattle grid. For the main walk, go through the gate, then immediately turn left between the posts on the middle of three grassy paths (approximately 070°). The path heads gradually downhill, and passes the right-hand end of a large clump of gorse. Come to a grassy area with scrubby hawthorn trees. The path continues ahead here, but it becomes vague; head towards a field on the far side of a valley, surrounded by woods (the bearing is now 080°). Soon join a narrow stony path and follow it downwards, keeping left when it forks, then bearing slightly right. This will bring you to Danes Brook at a ford (1hr25mins, [3]).

Turn right in front of the stream and follow a narrow path into the woods. When the path meets a side-stream bear left, continuing alongside the brook on a well-defined path. This gradually strays away from the brook; when it comes to a gully, turn left to rejoin it. Walk alongside the bank; if the path is too waterlogged or broken down there is an alternative (vaguer) route in the woods just above. Arrive at a stone bridge and turn right on the road. Ascend steeply for two or three minutes. Turn right on a narrow path opposite a gate, marked 'MW' (Two Moors Way) on a short post (easy to miss; 1hr45mins, [4]). This takes you up on to the open moor, with views to the right down the Danes Brook valley. Pass a small stone on the right marked 'Venford'. Just afterwards come to a T-junction with a well-defined path: turn right and head upwards towards the crest of the hill. Take a narrower, soon stony track when it forks left. Keep left soon afterwards at a second fork, then ignore a path that crosses diagonally. Continue to the end of a clump of gorse and turn right on a well-defined track. Ignore any crossing paths, and converge with the ridge road at a small parking area (2hr10mins, [5]). There are views here across to Dartmoor.

Cross the road, joining a bridlepath signposted West Anstey. The path is indistinct, but head downhill and for the right-hand end of a large group of tall pine trees (bearing approximately 280°). Arrive at a hard road just before a cattle grid sign; turn right, then left to go over the grid. In less than five minutes take the first road to the right. When the tarmac runs out (2hr25mins, [6]) turn left on to the signposted bridleway, go through a gate into woods, then at a fork follow the main track right. A little while later at a second fork keep left and slightly uphill. Continue ahead where a track crosses diagonally, then descend fairly steeply, coming to a gate (2hr45mins, [7]); don't go through but turn right here to walk along the line of a fence. In under ten minutes take a left fork between trees ('public bridleway'). Turn left to paddle across a shallow stream, then left again (2hr55mins, [8]; the short walk rejoins here). Unusually for Exmoor, the streams here run into the River Yeo to the south, from where they reach the sea westwards via the Taw. Come to another stream with a shallow ford and a footbridge; turn right, then take the first left turn uphill and into some woods. Climb steeply through the woods, meet a path from the right, keep climbing, then go through a gate to walk along the right-hand side of a field. The track goes through another gate and downhill; where

it joins a hard road, keep left. The road bends around to the left, then to the right to arrive at a junction (3hr15mins, [9]). Go straight ahead here, signposted to Stone and Molland, keeping a look-out for traffic on the narrow lanes.

After crossing a stream, a bridlepath heads right to Smallacombe. Head up some steps in the bank ahead, and then over a stile to join a footpath; bear right, and scramble steeply uphill on an ill-defined path through bracken to a yellow-topped post. Turn left here then bear slightly right to cross the field to the middle of the three gates in its far side. Go over the stile next to the gate and continue with the field boundary on your right. Go through two field gates and finally a pedestrian gate leading on to a road. Continue ahead here (watch for vehicles: the lanes are very narrow). Head downhill and then up again, ignore a turn to the right, and stroll back to the church and parking area at Molland (and, if you have arrived during opening hours, the London Inn).

**Shorter walk: Molland and Molland Moor Gate** (● 5 miles, ascents and descents of 265 metres). Follow the main walk to the 1hr point ([2]), then before the cattle grid turn right on to an unsurfaced vehicle track. Turn right at a T-junction then in two minutes follow the lane around to the left. Go through gates at Brimblecombe Farm, turn right to join a sunken lane, and head straight on at a signposted bridleway. Cross the stream and turn right at the 2hr55min-point ([8]) to rejoin the main walk.



*Above Danes Brook*

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