



Walk 17. Molland and Anstey Common.

- 8.5 miles, 3 hours 40 minutes. Ascents and descents of 430 metres.

Terrain: Stony and sometimes muddy paths, a few roads. On the open moors the paths are often indistinct; take a compass or GPS, and be prepared to spend time finding your way. Some of the terrain after Anstey 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 next to the church (SS 808 284, EX36 3NG). Alternatively, the walk can be started from Anstey Gate (SS 835 298). No bus service.

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

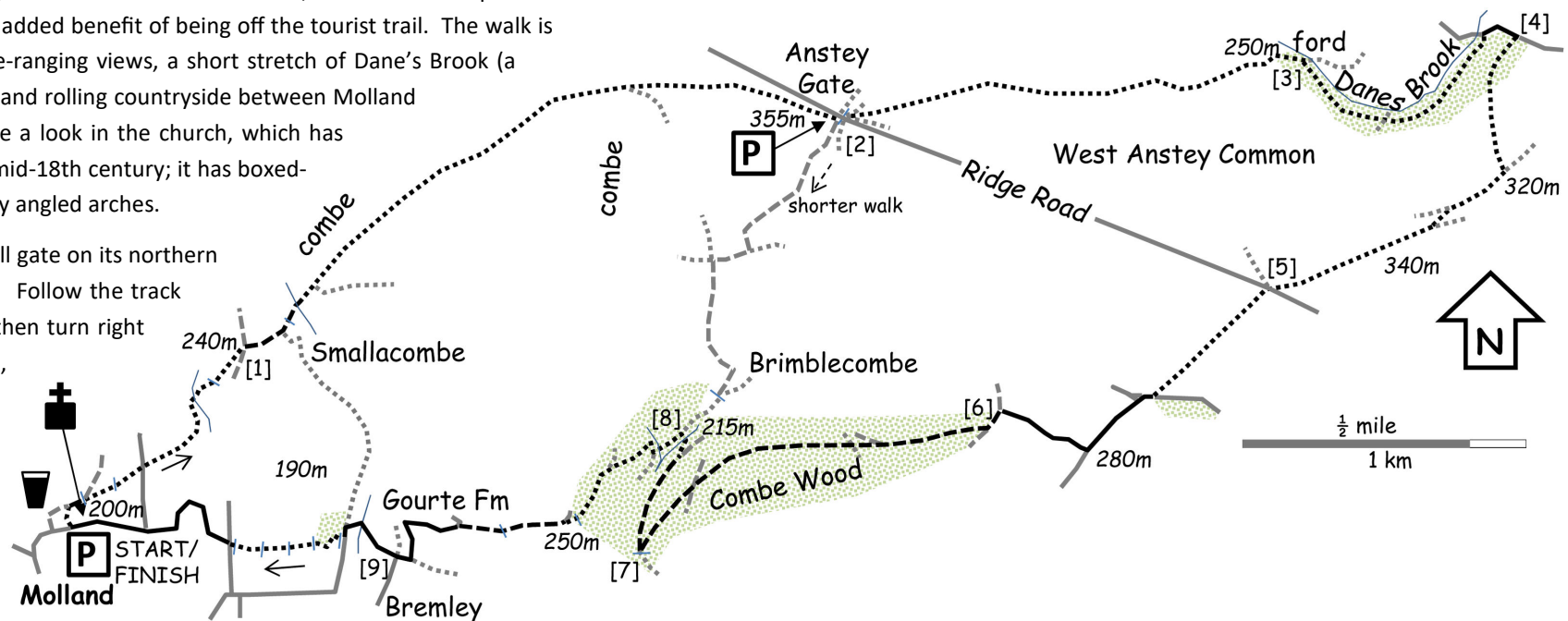
Refreshments: London Inn in Molland (next to the church), closes in the afternoon; Black Cock inn off the route south of Molland.

THIS WALK ON THE LESS FREQUENTED 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 moor with wide-ranging views, a short stretch of Dane's 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, then through a gate on the left. Facing through the gate, head slightly right to come to another gate in the far corner of the field; this brings you to a farm lane at a junction (15mins, [1]). Cross the lane and head towards Smallacombe, as signposted. Go straight ahead, through a gate signposted 'Anstey Gate 1 1/4', and immediately cross a stream on to open moorland. Take the left-hand fork above the side of Smallacombe Combe. Pass three small trees and 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 Anstey Gate (1hr, [2]), an ideal picnic stop.

The short walk turns right here on a vehicle track before the gate. For the main walk, go through the gate, then immediately turn left 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. At a grassy area continue straight ahead: look for a field on the far side of a valley, surrounded by woods (the bearing is now 080°). Join a narrow stony path and



follow it downwards until you come to Dane's Brook (1hr25mins, [3]). Don't cross the stepping-stones, but turn right and take a path that follows the brook, rising gradually above it. Where it meets a crossing path in front of a gully, cross the gully and continue ahead. The path becomes narrow between trees, and it splits and rejoins several times. You may also need to do some easy scrambling if branches have fallen across it. Eventually it will bring you to a tarmac road, just uphill from a bridge. Turn right, ascend steeply for two or three minutes, then turn right on a narrow path marked 'MW' (easy to miss*; 1hr45mins, [4]). This takes you up on to the open moor, with views to the right down the Dane Brook valley. When you come to a T-junction with a well-defined path, turn right and head upwards towards the crest of the hill. Keep to the left and upwards when the path forks, taking a narrower, stony track. Continue ahead and upwards until you come to another well-defined path among clumps of gorse; follow this path to the right, to arrive at a small parking area on the ridge road coming down from Anstey Gate (2hr10mins, [5]).

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, then at a fork follow the main track right into woods. At the second fork keep left and slightly uphill. Continue ahead where a broad path crosses, then descend fairly steeply, coming to a gate (2hr45mins, [7]); don't go through the gate 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 turn left again (2hr55mins, [8]; the short-cut comes in 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, go through a gate, and join a track 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. Go 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 find a yellow-topped post. After some more bracken cross a field diagonally to the right to come to a stile, almost hidden next to a gate. Go over

* If you miss the 'MW' path, continue uphill and take the first track on the right. In about five minutes, fork right on a track to rejoin your original route and head up to the parking area.

the stile and continue with the field boundary on your right. Go through two field gates and finally a pedestrian gate leading on to a road. Go straight 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 Anstey Gate (● 5 miles, ascents and descents of 265 metres). Follow the main walk to Anstey Gate ([2]), then before the cattle grid turn right on to an un-surfaced 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.



Anstey Gate

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