



Walk 18. Simonsbath, Pinkery Pond and Cornham Ford.

- 11.5 miles, ascents and descents of 400 metres. 5 hours constant walking, allow 6-6½ hours.

Terrain: ! Open moorland and bog (a compass is useful), plus paths and some short sections on roads. Several streams to cross. Even in summer parts of the walk will be muddy, and in the winter or after periods of rain some of the more boggy sections may be impassable, particularly along the River Barle east of Aclands; alternative walk B is a better option in these conditions. Make sure you have good kit, and be prepared to turn back or use one of the alternative routes if needed. The height gain is only moderate but the terrain can make this a challenging walk, hence the 'black' classification.

Access: Park in Simonsbath (SS 774 394, near TA24 7SH, donation). Alternatively (and for the Pinkery shorter walks) park in the layby on the B3358 where the Macmillan Way crosses (SS 728 401); from Simonsbath this is a large unmarked layby on the right, 2.8 miles west of the village. No bus service.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

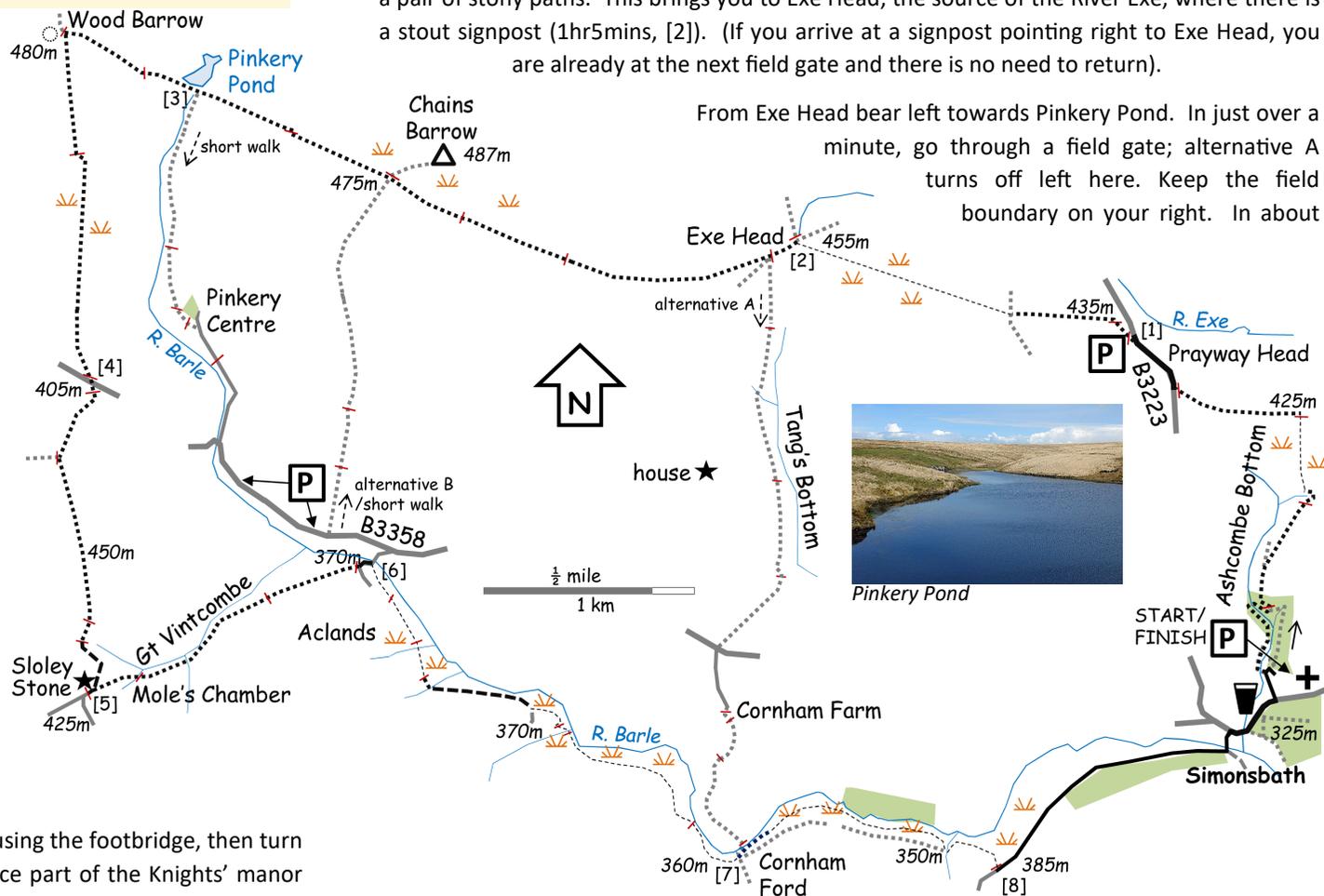
Refreshments: Inn in Simonsbath.

ALTHOUGH SIMONSBATH APPEARS TO BE TUCKED COSILY INTO THE BARLE VALLEY it is the highest village on Exmoor, with an average elevation of 325 metres. The village (pronounced 'Simmons bath', probably from 'Sigmund's pool') was largely created by the Knight family, industrialists who became the principal landowners in the area during the early nineteenth century. The Knights' manor, built in the 17th century for the former warden of the Royal Forest of Exmoor, James Boevey, is now the Simonsbath House Hotel. This walk leads up on to the high moor to the north, visiting the source of the River Exe followed by Pinkery Pond, a small reservoir created by John Knight just below the head of the River Barle. It then tracks the Devon/Somerset border to Mole's Chamber before heading across moorland again to rejoin the photogenic upper reaches of the Barle. The Barle below Simonsbath is explored in walks 19 and 22a, and the area to the east of the village (with more relics of the Knight era) in walk 22.

Start from the lower car park in Simonsbath. Cross the stream using the footbridge, then turn right to follow it up the valley through Ashcombe Gardens, once part of the Knights' manor

and currently being restored. When you can go no further, cross the stream at a small cascade and start back along the other side. Soon come to a gate on the left, signposted Prayway Head (10mins). Follow the path into the field, passing a yellow-topped post and taking the right, upper fork when it splits (don't descent to the second post). This brings you to another gate: go through and to the right, then bear left around the head of the valley on a plank bridge. Turn right over a small bridge into a field, and aim just to the right of a line of trees. Your route will be marked by the occasional yellow-topped post or hurdle. Beyond the trees it may be very boggy, so pick your way carefully. You are heading for a pair of field gates with a signpost; go through the one ahead of you (30mins), then turn left to follow the field boundary. On arriving at a road (the B3223), turn right and follow it until you come to a parking area on the left (40mins, [1]) close to Prayway Head. Go through the gate at the far end of the layby; keep right, go through a field gate, then turn left to walk alongside the field edge. At the field corner head very slightly to the right (signposted to Exe Head; the compass bearing is 290°). Walk across a large area of tussocks, then after cresting a slight rise head for a pair of stony paths. This brings you to Exe Head, the source of the River Exe, where there is a stout signpost (1hr5mins, [2]). (If you arrive at a signpost pointing right to Exe Head, you are already at the next field gate and there is no need to return).

From Exe Head bear left towards Pinkery Pond. In just over a minute, go through a field gate; alternative A turns off left here. Keep the field boundary on your right. In about



25 minutes, after passing through two gates, there is a short diversion to the right to Chains Barrow, by a few metres the highest point on this part of Exmoor (the Chains are notoriously boggy; keep to the path). Otherwise continue ahead until reaching a wall; go through a gate on the right and carry on with the field boundary on your left. Pinkery Pond soon appears in a hollow (1hr50mins, [3]). On a sunny day this is a tranquil spot for a break or some gentle exploring. Past the pond, go through a gate and follow a vague grassy path slightly to the right (the bearing is 300°). Come to a barrow (burial mound) with a gate and lone thorn tree in front. Turn left here, and keep the field boundary on your right for the next 20 minutes or so until you reach a gate on to a road after some sheep pens (2hr20mins, [4]; after the crossing hedge, the best route is about 50 metres left of the boundary, where there is a well-defined track that avoids any areas of bog; this will bring you directly to the gate).

Cross the road carefully and go through a gate, then along the path to a line of trees. Continue uphill; at the signpost, carry on towards Mole's Chamber, keeping close to the wire fence on your right. Descending to a bank, go through the rightmost of two pedestrian gates, then shortly afterwards through another gate to continue on an enclosed track. Just before a road junction note a boundary stone, like a gravestone, on the right; this is the Sloley or Slowly stone, dated 1742 (2hr45mins, [5]). Turn left here on to a signposted bridleway which descends gradually into the valley, splashing across a stream to go through a gate. This stony hill path takes you above Great Vintcombe before coming to a field gate. Continue slightly to the left here, gradually losing height to arrive at another gate. Turn left on the farm drive. If you have started the walk from the layby, return to the main road and turn left; otherwise turn right before the bridge on to a permissive path to Cornham Ford (3hr10mins, [6]).

(To start the walk from the layby, head towards Simonsbath and turn first right on a farm driveway, crossing the bridge before turning left to join the permissive path). The route, now on permissive paths and access land, continues with only intermittent paths or tracks. Now head a little to the right parallel with but well above the river (the Barle) to come to a stile over a wire fence. Cross it, and head across tussocky grassland to another stile, halfway between the river and a farm (Aclands). Cross a small stream then head over the hill and through a gate; join a stony track, cross another small stream and head around the hillside. The track bends right and soon starts to blend into the grass. Head left here over the grass, making for a gate next to the river. Cross a stile, splash through a side-stream, and go through the gate. Pick your way carefully along the river bank, then join an obvious stony way uphill to the right. When it disappears in moorland, head slightly left on a roughly level course. Soon you will come above a combe with another side-stream. A convenient path takes you down to the stream near where it joins the Barle. Splash across and head for a log catcher - a comblike device across the river for catching driftwood. Clamber over it and pick your way along the river bank. Keep to the right of a reed bed, then take a narrow path around the hillside to come to Cornham Ford and its footbridge (4hr5mins, [7]).

Cross the stream in front of the footbridge, and continue along the right-hand bank of the river. In summer you should be able to follow the river close to its bank, but when the low

ground is waterlogged you will need to stay on the hillside. There is a path about 15 metres up that continues intermittently as far as a group of pines on the opposite bank. Just past here cross a stream joining from the right; the best place to do this is to the right of a small rocky knoll. Round the hill ahead of you, then head diagonally right up the steep and uneven hillside. You are looking for a gate on the right-hand side of a small area of scrub, about 100 metres to the right of a line of trees. This brings you to a road (4hr40mins, [8]). Turn left here and walk back into Simonsbath; after crossing the Barle bridge, turn right for the Exmoor Forest Inn and the car park.

Alternative walk A: Simonsbath, Exe Head and Cornham Ford (● 6.7 miles, ascents and descents of 250 metres). Follow the main walk to Exe Head, then go through the next gate but turn immediately left to follow the field boundary. Go through the gate at the end of the field; Tang's Bottom, a deep combe, is directly ahead of you. Initially head to the right, towards an isolated house, then start veering left to arrive at a yellow-topped post above a rocky stream bed. Cross the stream then head for a gate about midway between the house and the combe. Go through the gate, then head for another gate on the far side of the field in the middle of a row of trees. The path becomes a stony track as you approach. Go through, and follow the yellow pointer to come to a gate on to the B3358. Cross the road and continue on a farm driveway signposted to Cornham Ford. At the farm, go through the right-hand gate, cross the yard, then through a second gate to enter a field. Follow a rough vehicle track as it curves right to another field gate, with a yellow paint mark indicating a footpath; head through and to the left to come above the River Barle. This well-made path gradually descends to a gate, with Cornham Ford ahead; cross the footbridge a short distance to the right, then turn left to rejoin the main walk at the 4hr5min point ([7]).

Alternative walk B: Pinkworthy and Mole's Chamber (● 5.9 miles, ascents and descents of 215 metres). Start the walk at the layby on the B3358 (SS 728 401). At the Simonsbath end of the layby, turn left through a gate on a permissive bridleway to the Chains, keeping to the right-hand side of the field. After the second gate continue ahead over the moorland, your way marked by the occasional blue-topped post. Arriving at a gate, turn left and continue along the boundary until reaching a wall; go through a gate on the right and carry on with the field boundary now on your left, soon arriving at Pinkery Pond. Follow the main walk to the 3hr10min point ([6]) and return to the layby.

Short walk to Pinkery Pond (● 3.3 miles, ascents and descents of 100 metres). Start as for alternative B, but at Pinkery Pond turn left through a gate on a path signposted to Goat Hill Bridge. This takes you alongside the Barle and through a gate in a tree-topped bank. Cross the field, keeping just right of the wind turbine, then follow the path below the Pinkery centre. Turn right on to its drive to come to the B3358, then left to return to the layby.

© Stan Lester 2018-21. Last recce 5/2021. Please email editor@exmoorwalker.uk with any updates or comments.

This route description is provided freely and in good faith. You are welcome to use, copy and distribute it for personal and non-profit purposes (attribution—non-commercial—no derivatives). No responsibility is taken for any errors or omissions, or for your navigation or safety on the walk. Introductory and safety information at exmoorwalker.uk.