



## Walk 18. Simonsbath, Pinkery Pond and Cornham Ford.

- 11.5 miles, 5 hours . Ascents and descents of 400 metres.

**Terrain:** A lot of walking on moorland and across bog (a compass is useful), with a few 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 heavy rain some of the more boggy sections may be impassable. The height gain is only moderate but the terrain can make this a very tiring walk, hence the 'black' classification.

**Access:** By car, 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.

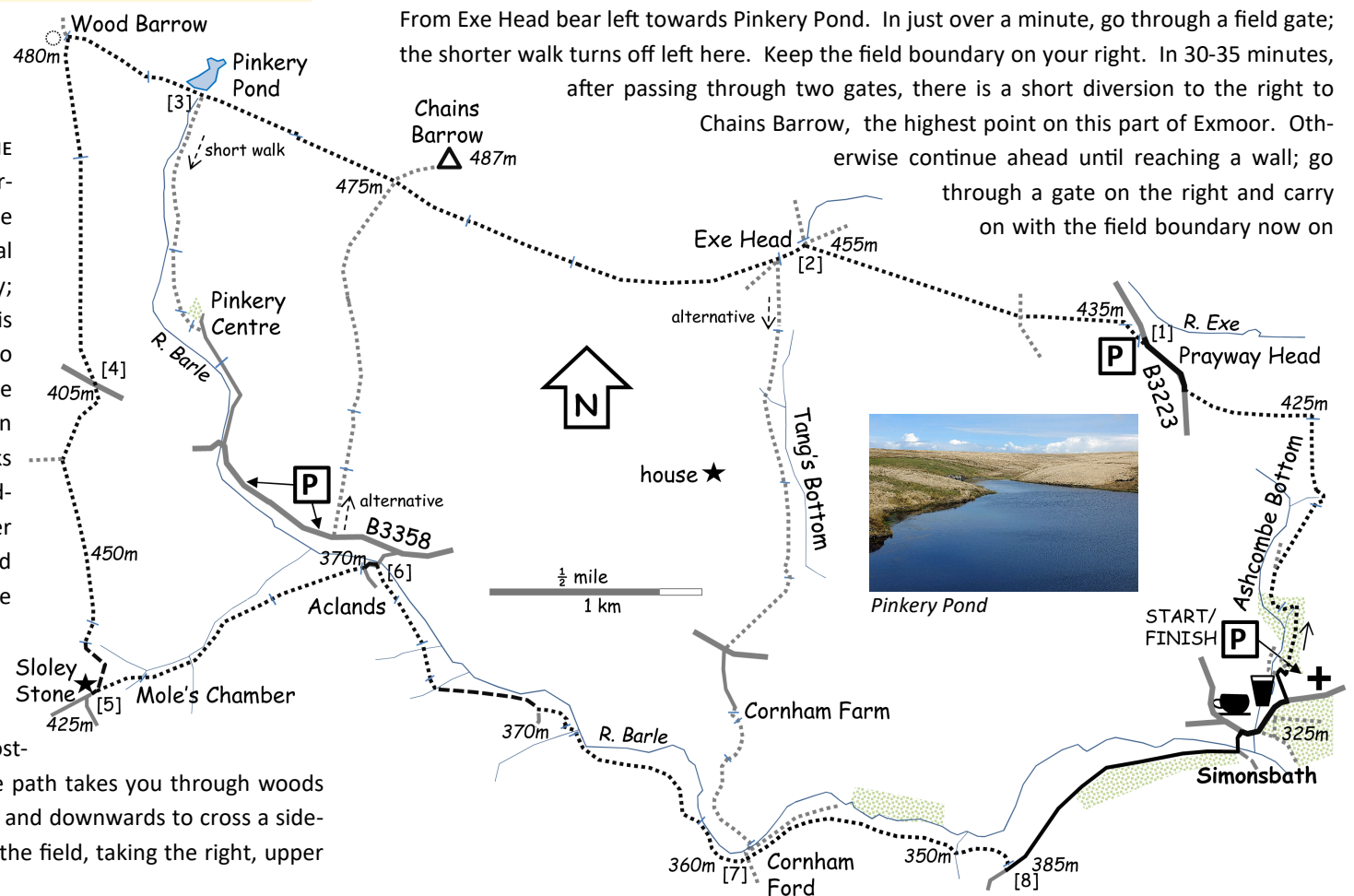
**Refreshments:** Tea room and inn in Simonsbath.

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 was the seat of the Knight family, former industrialists who became the principal landowners in the area during the early nineteenth century; their manor, built in the 17th century for 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 Walk 19, and the area to the east of the village (and more relics of the Knight era) in Walk 22.

Start from the car park in Simonsbath. From the lower parking area, take the driveway towards the upper car park, then at the top of the rise turn left on a footpath signposted to Prayway Head. Ignore the small path on the left. The path takes you through woods high above a stream. In front of a fence, follow the path left and downwards to cross a side-stream and ascend to a gate (10mins). Follow the path into the field, taking the right, upper

fork when it splits. This brings you to another gate: go through and to the right, then bear left around the head of the valley via a plank bridge. The path now heads into a field: aim just to the right of a line of trees. Your route will be marked by the occasional yellow-topped post. Beyond the trees it may be very boggy, so pick your way carefully. You are heading for a pair of field gates; go through the one ahead of you (35mins), 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 (45mins, [1]) close to Prayway Head. Go through a gate here; keep right, go through another gate, then turn left to walk alongside the field edge. At the field corner continue ahead (signposted to Exe Head), heading very slightly to the right (the compass bearing is 290°). Crest a slight rise, and head for two stony paths. This brings you to Exe Head, the source of the River Exe, where there is a stout signpost (1hr15mins, [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; the shorter walk turns off left here. Keep the field boundary on your right. In 30-35 minutes, after passing through two gates, there is a short diversion to the right to Chains Barrow, the highest point on this part of Exmoor. Otherwise continue ahead until reaching a wall; go through a gate on the right and carry on with the field boundary now on



Pinkery Pond

your left. Pinkery Pond soon appears in a hollow; on a sunny day this is a tranquil spot for a break or some gentle exploring (2hrs, [3]). Past the pond, go through a gate on to open moorland, and follow a vague grassy path slightly to the right (the bearing is 300°). Come to a barrow (burial mound), with a fence and lone thorn tree in front. Turn left here, and keep the field boundary on your right to arrive at the main road in 30 minutes or so (2hr40mins, [4]; the gate is to the left of some sheep pens).

Cross the road and go through two gates, then along the path to a line of trees. At the signpost, carry on towards Mole's Chamber; keep close to the wire fence on your right. A blue-topped post confirms your route ahead at the end of the field. At a fence go through the rightmost of two pedestrian gates, then shortly afterwards through another gate to continue on a 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 (3hr5mins, [5]). Turn left here on to a signposted bridleway which descends gradually into the valley, splashing across a stream to go through a gate. The path takes you above Great Vintcombe before coming to a field gate. Continue ahead to cross the field, gradually losing height to arrive at another gate. Turn left on the farm drive. If you have started from the layby, return to the main road and turn left; otherwise turn right before the bridge on to a permissive path (3hr25mins, [6]).

(To start the walk from the layby, head towards Simonsbath and turn first right on a farm driveway, crossing a bridge before turning left to join the permissive path). Now keep parallel with but well above the river to come to a stile over a wire fence. Cross it, and head across tussocky grassland to another stile. Cross a small stream then head slightly right to a third stile; join a stony track, cross another small stream and head around the hillside. As the track starts to swing right, head to the left, then curve gradually right to lose height and come to a stile at river level. Cross the stile and a stream, and go through a gate with a faded National Park sign. Pick your way carefully along the river bank, then join an obvious stony path 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 a stream running into the River Barle. A convenient path takes you down to the stream. Ford it (or leap across) and head for the river junction, where a log catcher - a comblike device for catching driftwood - spans the Barle. 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 (4hr10mins, [7]).

Carry on ahead; in the summer you may be able to follow the river close to its bank, but after wet weather the meadows become waterlogged, and there is a very boggy patch maybe a quarter of a mile ahead that will necessitate scrambling up the hillside. An intermittent path follows the contour about fifteen metres or so above the valley floor, and although this also requires care it is the better option. After passing a group of pines on the left-hand bank of the river, cross a stream joining from the right; the best place to do this is to the right of a

small rocky knoll. Another driftwood catcher is ahead, with a hedge rising steeply upwards to the right until it meets a road. It may be possible to continue ahead here when the ground is dry, but otherwise make your way up the steep and uneven hillside; about 100 metres before the hedge, come to a gate on to the road (4hr40mins, [8]). Turn left on the road and walk back into Simonsbath. After crossing the Barle bridge, turn left for the tea room or right for the Exmoor Forest inn and the car park.

**Shorter 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 and 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 4hr10min-point ([7]).

**Shorter 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 3hr25min-point ([6]) and return to the layby.

**Short walk to Pinkery Pond** (● 3.3 miles, ascents and descents of 100 metres). Follow short walk B as far as Pinkery Pond, then 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.

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