



Walk 21. Withypool, Landacre Bridge and Porchester's Post.

- 8.2 miles, ascents and descents of 315 metres. 3 hours 20 minutes constant walking, allow around 4½-5 hours.

Terrain: ! Open moorland, paths and tracks. Both the main walk and the shorter alternative involve stretches of boggy, tussocky moor and are not suitable when the ground is waterlogged. A compass is useful.

Access: By car, park in the small car park in Withypool (SS 845 354, TA24 7RA). Alternatively park just west of Landacre Bridge (SS 815 361) and join the walk from there. No bus service.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

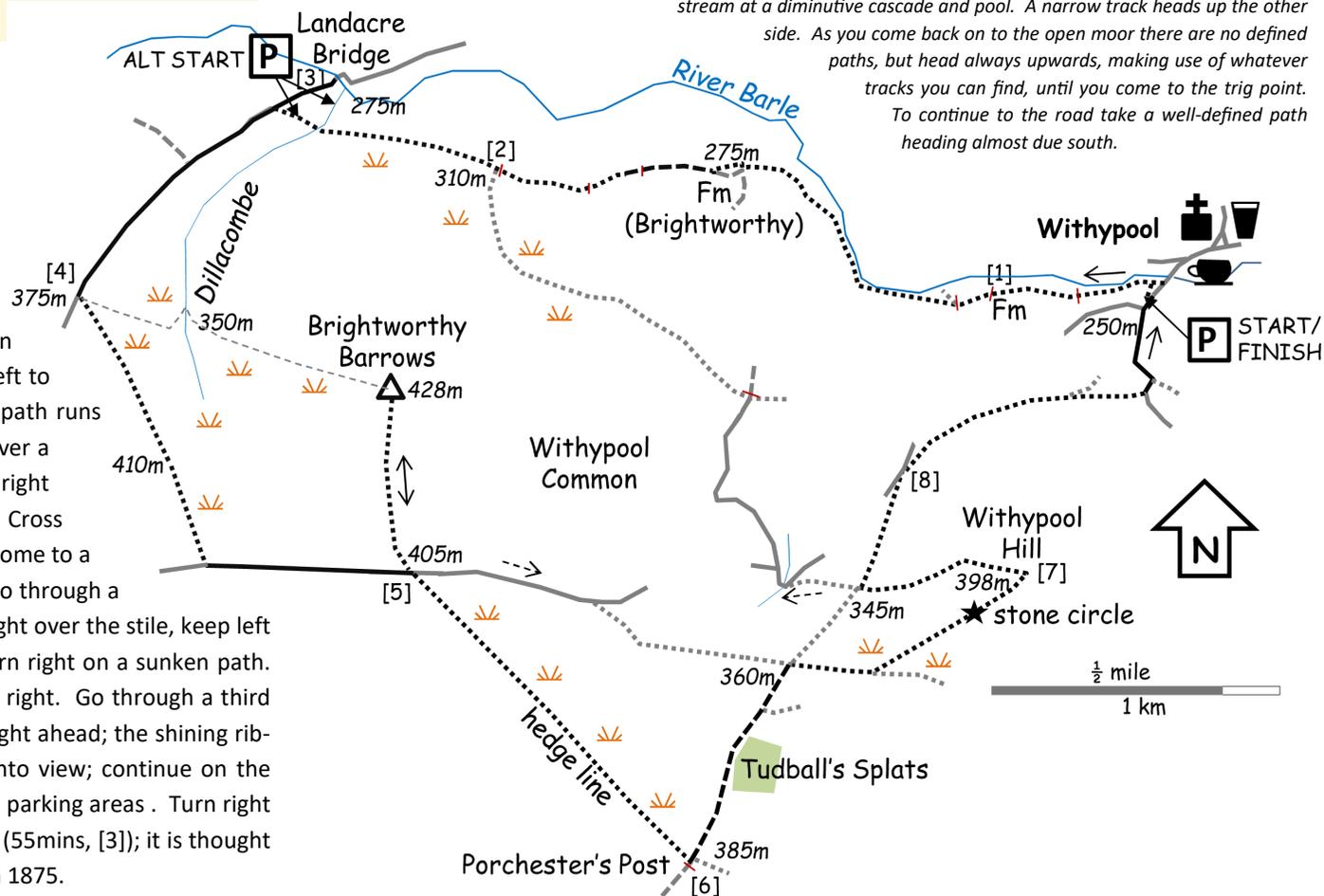
Refreshments: Pub and seasonal tea room in Withypool.

WITHYPOOL IS AN ATTRACTIVE VILLAGE ON THE RIVER BARLE, with a six-arched nineteenth-century bridge, post office shop, seasonal café, pub and church. This walk explores the Barle valley and the high ground to the west of Withypool. Beyond Landacre Bridge (pronounced 'Lanacre' and sometimes so-spelt), much of the walk is on open moorland, contrasting tussocky and sometimes boggy moor with panoramic views from the hilltops.

Start at the small car park in Withypool. Go through the pedestrian gate at the side of the car park, walk towards the river, and turn left to stroll upstream. After passing through gates and over a stile the path runs beside a meadow. Pass a large barn on the left (10mins, [1]), go over a stile, along a boardwalk, then over a second stile to the left; turn right and go through a pedestrian gate to continue on an enclosed path. Cross another stile and a footbridge to walk beside the river. When you come to a footpath sign ('Lanacre') follow it to cross a field towards a farm. Go through a gate (or over a stile) and walk alongside the farm buildings. Turn right over the stile, keep left along the field edge, over a stile on the left, and down steps to turn right on a sunken path. Follow the path through two gates, keeping the field edge to your right. Go through a third gate opening into open moorland (40mins, [2]), and continue straight ahead; the shining ribbon of the Barle is ahead of you. Landacre Bridge soon comes into view; continue on the path, splash through a shallow stream, and arrive at the first of two parking areas. Turn right to visit the five-arched bridge, something of a honeypot for visitors (55mins, [3]); it is thought to date from at least the early 1600s, with restoration carried out in 1875.

Retrace your steps along the road. Stay on it for 20 minutes beyond the parking area, climbing steeply; there are views across the Barle valley behind you. As the road begins to level out, come to a cattle grid (Landacre Gate, 1hr20mins, [4]). Turn left here on a vague track*, keeping alongside the line of trees. In fifteen minutes or so you will arrive at a road. Turn left, and continue until the trees on your right run out (1hr45mins, [5]). Now turn left on a broad path, taking you up to the trig point on Brightworthy Barrows. This shallow-domed hill is the highest point of the walk and has views in all directions. Only one of three original burial mounds remains, the other two (to the west of the hilltop) having been plundered for stone to surface nearby roads.

**Adventurous walkers might want to head directly from Landacre Gate to Brightworthy Barrows, crossing the steep-sided Dillacombe: the route can be difficult to follow, and involves a steep descent and steeper ascent – almost a scramble – on animal tracks. The bearing between the two points is 105°. An initially well-defined path soon disappears, and you will need to pick your way on pony tracks towards the shallow domed hill ahead of you. As you come above the combe, bear left and find a gully that can be used as a downward path, marked by a large stone. Cross the stream at a diminutive cascade and pool. A narrow track heads up the other side. As you come back on to the open moor there are no defined paths, but head always upwards, making use of whatever tracks you can find, until you come to the trig point. To continue to the road take a well-defined path heading almost due south.*



From Brightworthy Barrows retrace your steps to return to the road (2hr5mins, [5]). Cross over and join an indistinct track running alongside a hedge of small trees. Walk across the moor alongside the hedge (boggy, uneven ground); in 20 minutes or so this brings you to a wide, well-maintained track (2hr25mins, [6]). Your route continues to the left on the track; through the gate on the right is Porchester's Post, once marking the boundary of the Carnarvon Estate. In three or four minutes pass a grid of trees on the right marking old field boundaries, called Four Fields or Tudball's Splats. Three minutes or so past the trees, a minor path crosses: turn right here, then after passing an area of tussocky grass strike off to the left on a grassy path, indistinct at first, to head just to the right of the summit of Withypool Hill. You are directed to go around a ring of brushwood that marks the remains of a Bronze Age stone circle, the larger of only two on Exmoor. There were once around 100 small stones here, in a 37m (120') circle; 29 now remain. Behind you views stretch back to Brightworthy Barrows and beyond. Continue to the summit of Withypool Hill (2hr50mins, [7]), where there is a small barrow and makeshift cairn. The easiest way off the hill is to take the narrow but well-defined path westwards (approximately 280°), towards Brightworthy Barrows, and descend back to a wider crossing track. Turn right here, then follow the path gradually downhill until it meets a road (3hr5mins, [8]). Turn right back on to the path, following it around the shoulder of Withypool Hill until it comes to another hard road. Turn left and walk back into Withypool. The tea room is just over the bridge, with tables and vintage petrol pumps outside (in winter when it is closed, there is a tea/coffee machine in the post office opposite). The Royal Oak is a little further along on the left.

Alternative walk: Lanacre, Brightworthy Barrows and Withypool Hill (● 6.2 miles, ascents and descents of 260 metres). Start from Landacre Bridge; if the car parks near the bridge are full, there is usually parking a further 500m uphill on the right. Follow the main walk to Brightworthy Barrows and back to the road ([5]), turning left instead of crossing over towards Porchester's Post. In around ten minutes the road bends left; head right on a signposted bridleway next to a small vehicle pull-in. In two minutes or so the path goes through two small gullies. Bear slightly left here, taking the better-defined, right-hand path, heading for the right-hand side of Withypool Hill (100°). At a crossing path, continue ahead for a couple more minutes, pass an area of tussocky grass, then strike off to the left on an initially poorly-defined grassy path to head just to the right of the summit of Withypool Hill. Divert around the stone circle and continue to the summit. Take the narrow but well-defined path sharp left (approximately 280°) off the hill, towards Brightworthy Barrows, and continue straight ahead at any crossing paths. At the road turn left over a bridge, then fork right on a private road to Knighton and Brightworthy. Follow this lane down and up again; at the gate for Knighton Farm, turn left. Keep roughly parallel with the hedge, switching from well-defined track to rough moor to track to tussocky bog, eventually bearing around to the right until Landacre Bridge comes into sight on the left. Rejoin the main walk at the 40-min point ([2]) where the path emerges from the gate on the right, turning left to return to Landacre Bridge.



Exmoor ponies on Brightworthy Barrows.

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