



## Walk 22. The upper Exe valley, Larkbarrow and Lanacombe.

- 11.1 miles, 4 hours 10 minutes. Ascents and descents of 345 metres.

**Terrain:** ! Open moorland. Paths and tracks, some road walking, potentially boggy moorland, and one stream to ford. Little shade or shelter on the whole walk. The section beyond Badgworthy Hill is not recommended after prolonged rain. A compass is useful in case of poor visibility.

**Access:** Park at Prayway Head layby on the B3223 north of Simonsbath (SS 767 410). No buses. For the linear walks park at Simonsbath or Malmsmead and arrange transport back to Exford. An alternative is to do the alternative walk from Exford to Simonsbath, stay overnight, and return using walk 22A. Exford is served by bus 198/467.

**Map:** OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

**Refreshments:** Pubs in Simonsbath and Exford, seasonal tea room in Exford.

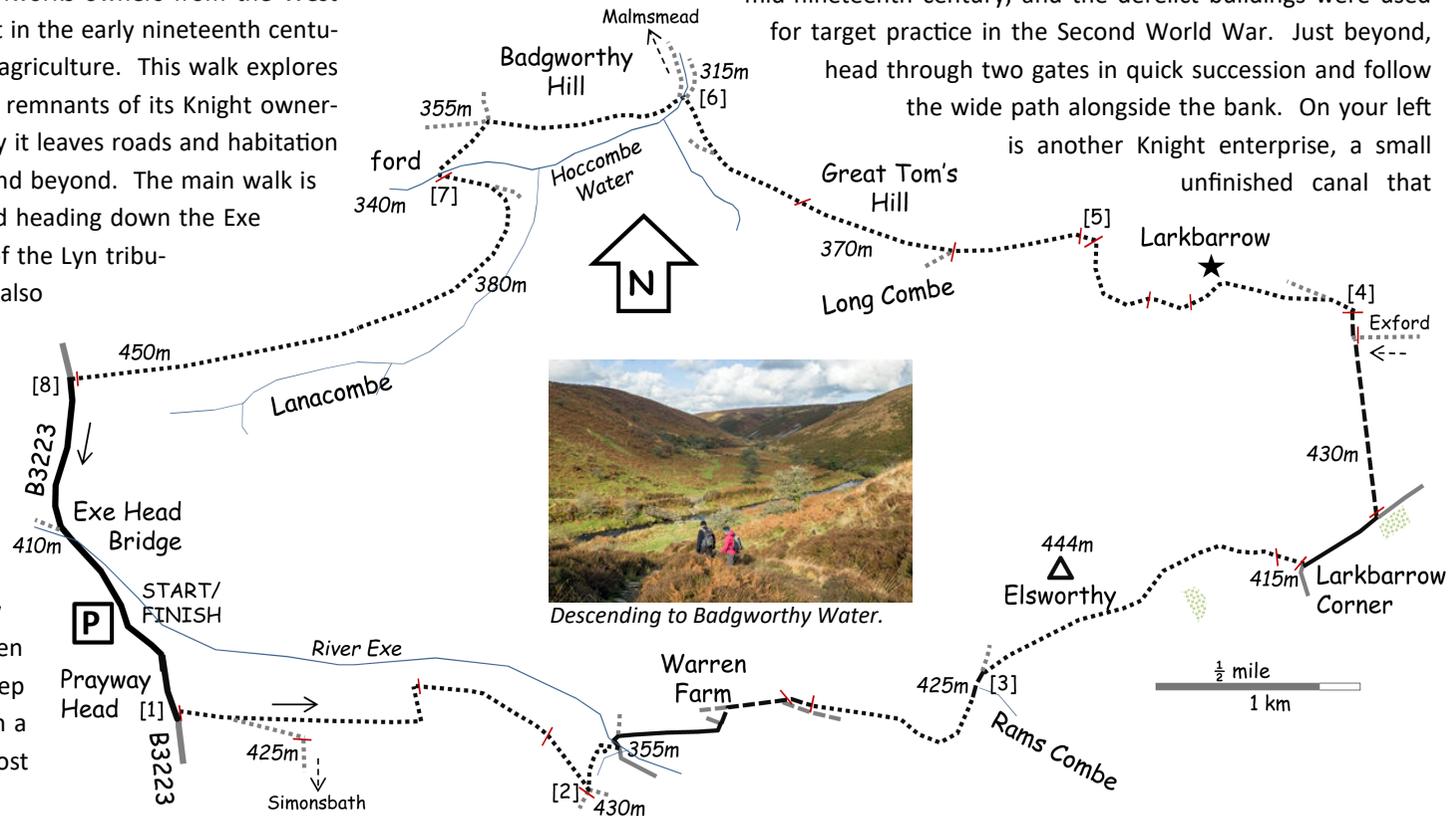
SIMONSBATH WAS THE SEAT OF THE KNIGHT FAMILY, former ironworks owners from the West Midlands. John Knight bought much of the old Exmoor Forest in the early nineteenth century, and he and his son Frederic attempted to 'improve' it for agriculture. This walk explores the moors north of Exford and Simonsbath, including several remnants of its Knight ownership (Pinkery Pond is visited in Walk 18). For much of the way it leaves roads and habitation far behind, with views across the upland Exmoor landscape and beyond. The main walk is circular, starting from Prayway Head north of Simonsbath and heading down the Exe valley, before heading north to Great Tom's Hill, across two of the Lyn tributaries, and back up Lanacombe. Alternative linear routes are also described from Exford, to Simonsbath and Malmsmead.

Start from the layby at Prayway Head (SS 767 410). Turn right and walk towards Simonsbath on the road; in three or four minutes turn left through a pedestrian gate on a footpath signposted to Simonsbath ([1]). Walk parallel with the hedge on the right, keeping on high ground. In about 15 minutes turn left at the field boundary, then go through the first gate on the right just as you begin to descend (for a view over the Exe valley, first continue down to a grassy knoll then return to the gate). Ignore the second pedestrian gate and keep the field edge to your right. In about ten minutes go through a field gate, then four or five minutes later come to a signpost

(35mins, [2]). Turn left here on a narrow path along the left-hand side of a deep gully. The going is easy at first, then steep and slippery as it descends to the road. Turn left at the road: this takes you over a bridge and uphill to a farm.

When the road bears left into the farm, take a track through a gate to the right. Turn right at a T-junction shortly after. Head up an incline, then when the track forks go through the gate so that the field boundary is on your right. Continue through a second gate, keeping the boundary to your right for another 12 minutes or so. It ends abruptly at a line of trees (1hr10mins, [3]); continue ahead on a well-defined track. This soon forks; keep right (bearing 050°), heading just to the left of a group of conifers. The track narrows but is still fairly distinct; after passing the conifers, the field boundaries will funnel you into a corner. Go through the gate here and take the right-hand path, and in another three minutes go through a gate on to a tarmac lane (Larkbarrow Corner). Turn left here. In about five minutes turn left through a gate on a broad track. When you come to a gate, go through and turn immediately left on a grassy path (1hr50mins, [4]).

The path soon brings you to some broken-down walls beneath tall beech trees. These are the ruins of Larkbarrow, one of Frederic Knight's farms; it was only occupied briefly in the mid-nineteenth century, and the derelict buildings were used for target practice in the Second World War. Just beyond, head through two gates in quick succession and follow the wide path alongside the bank. On your left is another Knight enterprise, a small unfinished canal that



Descending to Badgworthy Water.

was designed to connect with Pinkery Pond. Follow the path around to the right and through two further gates (2hr10mins, [5]). At the next gate, with Edwards' Post above it, continue ahead on a path across Great Tom's Hill. When you reach a pedestrian gate through a bank, go through and bear sharply left on a track that heads towards a line of trees on a hill. The path heads slightly uphill, with a stream and small footbridge coming into view ahead. Follow the main path around to the right. It goes over a small knoll, then another stream comes into view; this is Badgworthy Water, one of the tributaries of the East Lyn. Descend to the footbridge and cross over (2hr40mins, [6]).

Go through a gate and turn left (right for the alternative walk to Malmsmead), zigzagging up the side of Badgworthy Hill. From the top you will have views back along your outward route, and further around to the left South Wales will be visible on a clear day. The onward path now becomes straight, wide and level. It descends slightly to a small dip, where there is a narrower crossing path\*. Turn diagonally left here, heading downwards to Hoccombe Water. Ford the stream and go through a gate (3hrs, [7]). The stone wall marks the boundary of the old Royal Forest of Exmoor; it is part of a 29-mile long perimeter created by John Knight. Head uphill and follow the path gradually around to the right; where it divides, take the wider, right-hand branch. You now have a little over half an hour of walking on vague tracks over open moorland; keep parallel with Lanacombe on your left, but don't lose height or attempt to cut across the head of the combe, as the ground is likely to be boggy. The compass bearing veers gradually from 220° to 265°. Eventually go through a gate and turn left to walk beside the B3223 (3hr50mins, [8]). You now have nearly a mile of roadside walking, but it does provide a good view down the upper Exe valley, a geological fault with the river – here a small stream – in its bottom. Arrive back at the Prayway Head layby on the right.

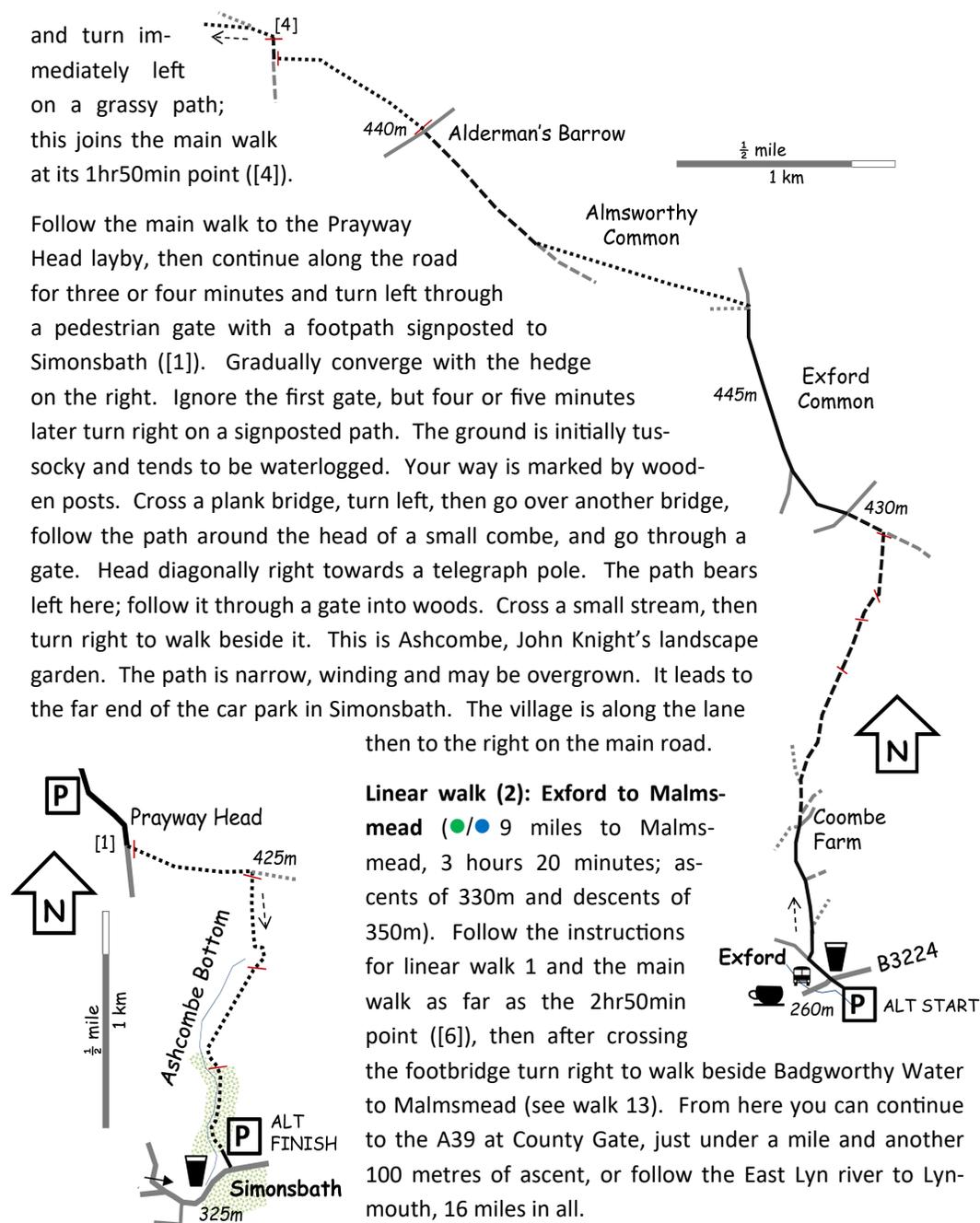
**Linear walk (1): Exford to Simonsbath** (● 11.5 miles, 4 hours 20 minutes; ascents of 440m and descents of 365m). Start the walk from the village green in Exford, where the bus stops; the car park is down a side-road past the school. Walk uphill past the post office shop, then turn right into Combe Lane opposite the top of the green. Continue uphill past Coombe Farm (15mins). The surface gradually deteriorates to a stony track. Go through two field gates; when you are faced with two gates either side of a bank, the track continues through the right-hand one. Go through a gate in a tree-topped bank (40mins) and turn left; in about two minutes go straight on at a crossroads, then bear right at a T-junction. Follow the road for about ten minutes. When the bank on the left ends, turn left on a track across the moor at a slight angle from the hedge line. You are heading for a path on the hill ahead, which in 15 minutes or so converges with the hedge. Bear right here to join a wider track alongside the hedge. In a few minutes cross a tarmac lane and go through a gate on a bridleway towards Malmsmead. At the next gate turn briefly right on a wide track, then go through a field gate

\* The main track continues for 1.4 miles to Brendon Two Gates, a better option in wet conditions. Turn left on the road here, arriving back at the Prayway Head parking area in another mile and a half.

and turn immediately left on a grassy path; this joins the main walk at its 1hr50min point ([4]).

Follow the main walk to the Prayway Head layby, then continue along the road for three or four minutes and turn left through a pedestrian gate with a footpath signposted to Simonsbath ([1]). Gradually converge with the hedge on the right. Ignore the first gate, but four or five minutes later turn right on a signposted path. The ground is initially tussocky and tends to be waterlogged. Your way is marked by wooden posts. Cross a plank bridge, turn left, then go over another bridge, follow the path around the head of a small combe, and go through a gate. Head diagonally right towards a telegraph pole. The path bears left here; follow it through a gate into woods. Cross a small stream, then turn right to walk beside it. This is Ashcombe, John Knight's landscape garden. The path is narrow, winding and may be overgrown. It leads to the far end of the car park in Simonsbath. The village is along the lane then to the right on the main road.

**Linear walk (2): Exford to Malmsmead** (●/● 9 miles to Malmsmead, 3 hours 20 minutes; ascents of 330m and descents of 350m). Follow the instructions for linear walk 1 and the main walk as far as the 2hr50min point ([6]), then after crossing the footbridge turn right to walk beside Badgworthy Water to Malmsmead (see walk 13). From here you can continue to the A39 at County Gate, just under a mile and another 100 metres of ascent, or follow the East Lyn river to Lynmouth, 16 miles in all.



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