



Walk 24. Exford to Dunster via Dunkery Beacon.

- 11.5 miles, ascents of 495 metres and descents of 715 metres. 4 hours 30 minutes constant walking, allow 5½-6½ hours.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and roads including some narrow and muddy paths above moorland. Two main climbs, one from the start to Dunkery and one after Wootton Courtenay.

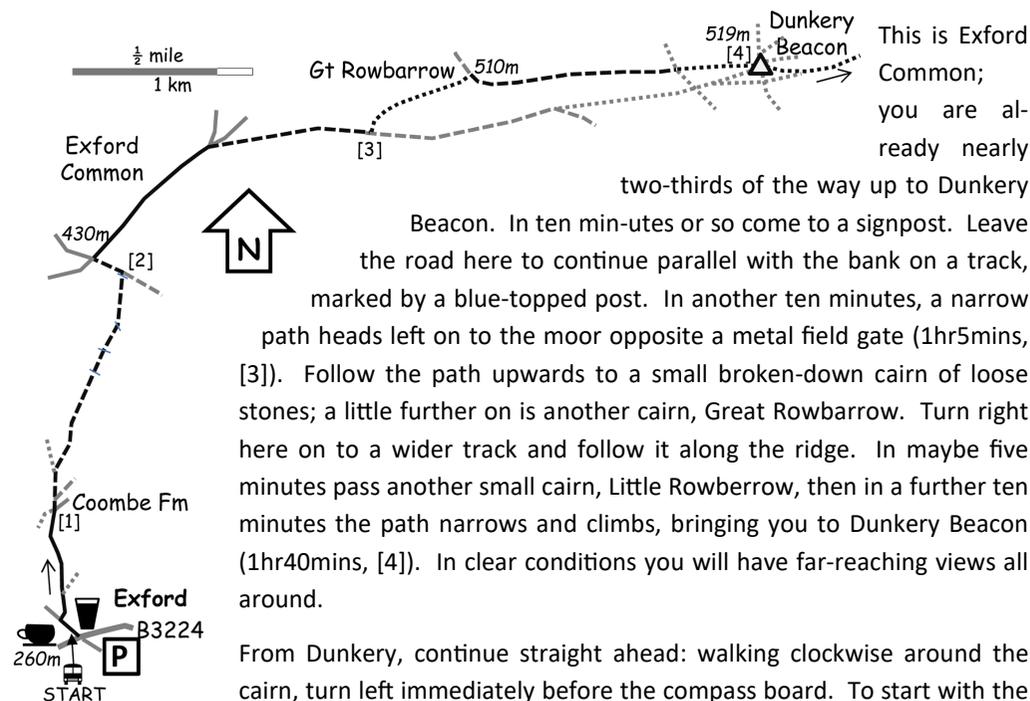
Access: Other than arranging a taxi or a lift there are three main options using Monday to Saturday bus 198 to connect start and finish. (1) Park in the main car park in Dunster (SS 993 439, TA24 6AS, £, or arrive on bus 28) and take the early afternoon bus (from the High Street, outside Jacob's) to Exford (only really feasible in the summer to avoid finishing the walk in the dark). (2) Park in Exford (SS 854 383, near TA24 7PP) and finish the walk early enough to catch the late afternoon bus back. (3) Start from Dulverton, taking the bus to Exford in the morning and returning from Dunster in the afternoon. Whichever option you choose, check the timetables first.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor. The route from Dunkery Beacon onwards is on Croydcycle 03 Horner and Dunkery, then either 00 Dunster for the main walk or 02 Porlock for the alternative finish.

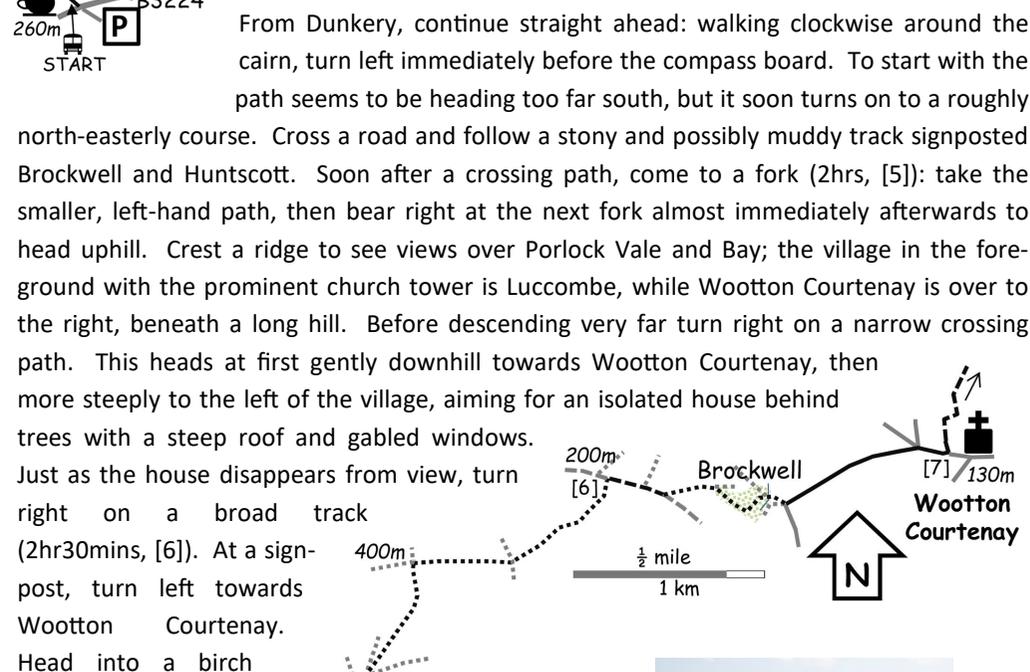
Refreshments: In Exford and Dunster (and Porlock and Minehead for the alternative walks).

THIS SECOND LINEAR WALK FROM EXFORD has the advantage of a bus connection, either between the start and finish or using Winsford, Dulverton or Wheddon Cross as a base. The walk is in two halves. After ascending from Exford, the first stretch is across the highest part of Exmoor to Dunkery Beacon, followed by the descent of Dunkery Hill. On a clear day you will have views across Exmoor, to South Wales, up the Bristol Channel, and south to Dartmoor. The descent heads into the quiet village of Wootton Courtenay, before climbing again on to Wootton Common and the long, partly wooded ridge that ends in Grabbist Hill above Dunster. The character of this second half is quite different, with mixed woods, scrub and clearings, and views over Minehead and later the hills south of Dunster. Dunster itself, a former market town and now a well-preserved, visitor-oriented medieval village, is explored more fully in Walk 32.

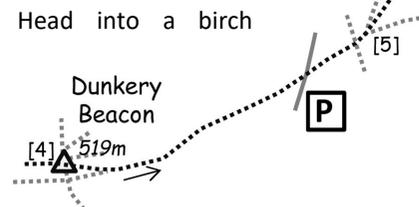
Start the walk from the village green in Exford, where the bus stops. Walk past the post office shop, then turn right into Combe Lane opposite the top of the green. Head uphill past Combe Farm (15mins, [1]). The surface gradually deteriorates to a stony track. Go through two field gates; when you are 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, [2]), and turn left; in about two minutes come to a crossroads, and turn right on a road alongside a beech bank.



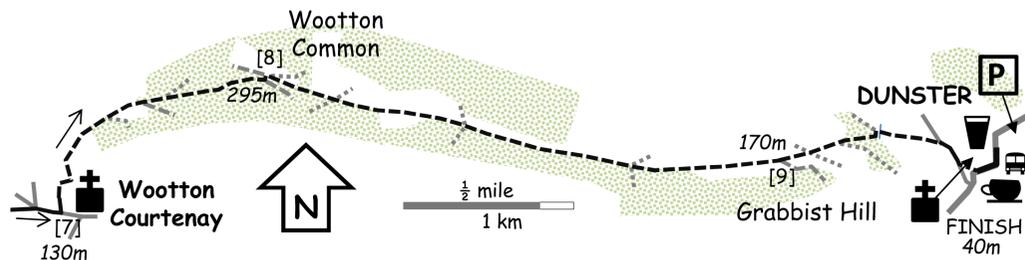
This is Exford Common; you are already nearly two-thirds of the way up to Dunkery Beacon. In ten minutes or so come to a signpost. Leave the road here to continue parallel with the bank on a track, marked by a blue-topped post. In another ten minutes, a narrow path heads left on to the moor opposite a metal field gate (1hr5mins, [3]). Follow the path upwards to a small broken-down cairn of loose stones; a little further on is another cairn, Great Rowbarrow. Turn right here on to a wider track and follow it along the ridge. In maybe five minutes pass another small cairn, Little Rowbarrow, then in a further ten minutes the path narrows and climbs, bringing you to Dunkery Beacon (1hr40mins, [4]). In clear conditions you will have far-reaching views all around.



Above Dunster



From Dunkery, continue straight ahead: walking clockwise around the cairn, turn left immediately before the compass board. To start with the path seems to be heading too far south, but it soon turns on to a roughly north-easterly course. Cross a road and follow a stony and possibly muddy track signposted Brockwell and Huntscott. Soon after a crossing path, come to a fork (2hrs, [5]): take the smaller, left-hand path, then bear right at the next fork almost immediately afterwards to head uphill. Crest a ridge to see views over Porlock Vale and Bay; the village in the foreground with the prominent church tower is Luccombe, while Wootton Courtenay is over to the right, beneath a long hill. Before descending very far turn right on a narrow crossing path. This heads at first gently downhill towards Wootton Courtenay, then more steeply to the left of the village, aiming for an isolated house behind trees with a steep roof and gabled windows. Just as the house disappears from view, turn right on a broad track (2hr30mins, [6]). At a signpost, turn left towards Wootton Courtenay. Head into a birch



wood, then turn left alongside a stone bank. Cross a shallow ford, turning left to come to a thatched house; keep left on the lane to walk in front of it and, seven or eight minutes later, reach the edge of Wootton Courtenay. Now turn right on a wider road, then take the first left, a bridleway (initially an access road) signposted Wootton Hill and Minehead (2hr55mins, [7]). The village centre and church are only a short distance along the road; they are worth a short pause to explore before turning on to the bridleway.

The bridleway continues past the village hall, becoming a dirt track and steepening rapidly. Ignore first a footpath then a wide track to the right. Another bridleway heads left to Periton and then an alternative path from Wootton Courtenay joins from the right. Three or four minutes later, the track splits: turn left then immediately right to keep the trees on your right, signposted Dunster and MAC Way (3hr30mins, [8]). Views open up on the left to North Hill, Minehead, and then to Blue Anchor and beyond. Ignore any crossing paths, keeping the woods to your right. Pass a seat, then come to a National Trust sign for Grabbist Hill. Shortly after, there is a choice of paths to Dunster (4hr10mins, [9]): head left here. Continue ahead at the next junction ('Dunster via Conduit Lane'). The path heads downhill and bends left, arriving at a gate on the right. Go through, and descend a stony track into Dunster. Turn right on to a road, then go through the churchyard and turn left to come to the village centre. Exford and Dulverton buses stop outside Jacob's shop.

Alternative finish 1: Minehead (● 11.5 miles, with ascents of 485m and descents of 735m). Bus 198 starts from Minehead, making the same travel arrangements possible as for the main walk. Immediately after the 3hr30min point ([8]) turn left off the ridge on an unsigned track, marked by a short blue-topped post. Keep right, with the conifers to your left. The path descends steeply and comes to another conifer wood in front of you. Keep ahead (slightly to the left) as you enter it, then bear left and downhill at the next junction. When you meet a T-junction, turn right and stroll down Periton Combe to the A39. Cross this fast road carefully into Periton Lane opposite. A little further on turn left into Whitworth Road, following it almost until it bears right. Fork left on to a footpath beside a small stream at the back of some houses. Turn right at a T-junction and follow the path alongside the stream and through a linear park. At a road turn right then left; the path opens out into another area of park enclosed behind the gardens of houses. At its end follow the path to the right, then turn left on

a road. Turn left at the T-junction, and walk down Minehead's main shopping street to the town centre and sea front. The return bus leaves from the station bus stop.

Alternative finish 2: Porlock (● 8.5 miles, with ascents of 370m and descents of 590m). It is currently possible to use two buses to travel from Porlock to Exford, arriving early afternoon, but not to do the journey in reverse. Follow the main walk to Dunkery Beacon, then join the return half of Walk 14 to come to Horner. Turn left on the road in Horner, then left on to a blue-signed bridleway just before the entrance to the car park. Go over a stone bridge and head right; take the central, larger path. The path climbs up above Horner Water then levels out and bends left. Go through a gate and head right, then take the left, upward fork away from the fence. Join a road to head uphill, then take the right fork signposted Porlock.

Shorter walks from Dunkery Gate: By taxi or with two cars, start the walk from Dunkery Gate (SS 895 406). Take the signposted footpath to Dunkery Beacon to join the main walk there. The length of the walk is reduced by 3 miles, and ascents by 150 metres.

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