



Walk 25. Exford to Dulverton via Withypool and Hawkridge.

- 13 miles, ascents of 600 metres and descents of 715 metres. 5 hours constant walking, allow 6½-7 hours.

Terrain: Mainly paths and tracks, some uneven walking on rocks and over tree roots; about a mile on a narrow road. The stretch between Withypool and Tarr Steps is prone to flooding after prolonged rain, when footpaths may be closed. Check the Exmoor National Park web site for details.

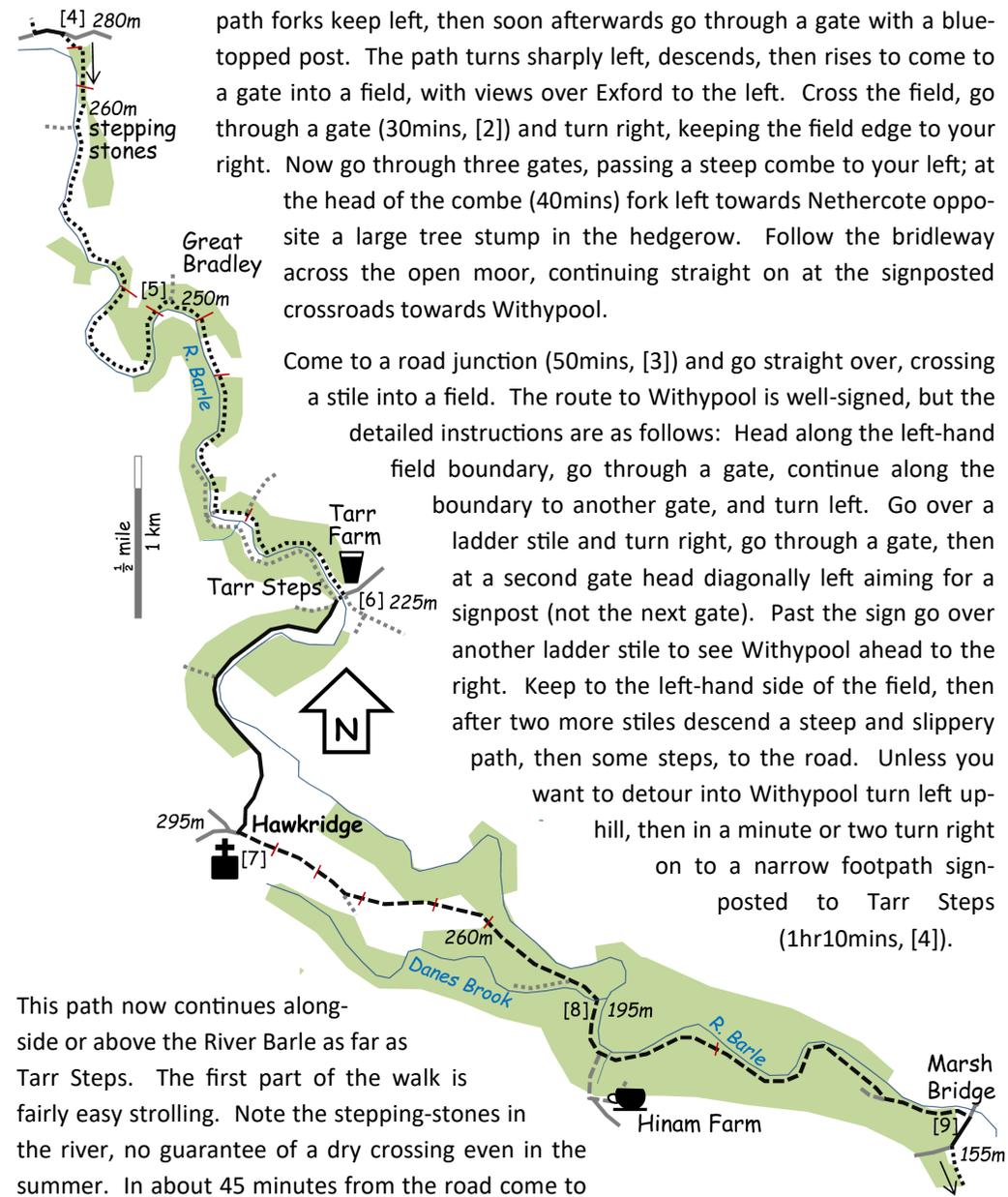
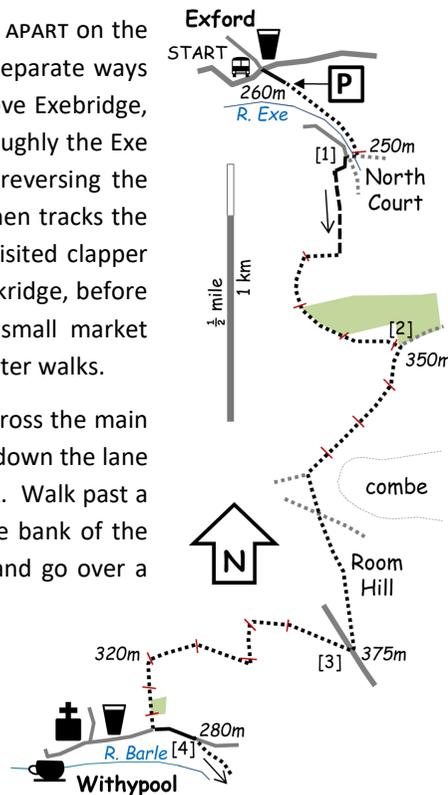
Access: By car, park in Dulverton and take the morning bus 198 to Exford. To park in Exford (SS 854 384, near TA24 7PP) you will need to arrange transport back as there is no afternoon bus from Dulverton to Exford. By bus, the 198 connects Exford with Dulverton and Minehead twice a day except Sundays.

Map: Croydecycle 53 Exford and 56 Dulverton and Tarr Steps, or OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: In Exford, Withypool, at Tarr Steps and Hinam Farm, and a wide choice in Dulverton. Pub and seasonal tea room in Winsford for the alternative walk.

THE RIVERS BARLE AND EXE RISE LESS THAN TWO MILES APART on the high plateau known as the Chains. They go their separate ways for over twenty miles before joining forces just above Exebridge, a few miles beyond Dulverton. This walk follows roughly the Exe Valley Way, starting on the Exe at Exford before reversing the second half of walk 23 to come to Withypool. It then tracks the Barle for nearly half its length, passing the much-visited clapper bridge at Tarr Steps and the remote hamlet of Hawkridge, before continuing into the attractive and well-equipped small market town of Dulverton, which is explored more fully in later walks.

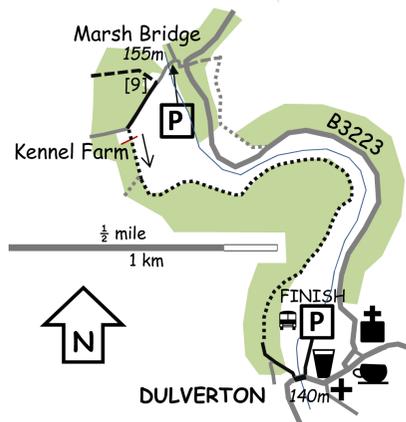
The bus stops outside the Crown Hotel in Exford. Cross the main road (the B3224) in front of the hotel and continue down the lane opposite, past the school to the signposted car park. Walk past a wood-clad workshop and follow the path along the bank of the river. At the first junction (7mins, [1]) turn right and go over a bridge, then keep right and almost immediately come to a T-junction at Court Farm. Turn left here on to a bridleway signposted Room Hill, initially a surfaced access road. The track turns sharply right then left, then through a gate, before starting to rise on to the hills above the River Exe. Where the



path forks keep left, then soon afterwards go through a gate with a blue-topped post. The path turns sharply left, descends, then rises to come to a gate into a field, with views over Exford to the left. Cross the field, go through a gate (30mins, [2]) and turn right, keeping the field edge to your right. Now go through three gates, passing a steep combe to your left; at the head of the combe (40mins) fork left towards Nethercote opposite a large tree stump in the hedgerow. Follow the bridleway across the open moor, continuing straight on at the signposted crossroads towards Withypool.

Come to a road junction (50mins, [3]) and go straight over, crossing a stile into a field. The route to Withypool is well-signed, but the detailed instructions are as follows: Head along the left-hand field boundary, go through a gate, continue along the boundary to another gate, and turn left. Go over a ladder stile and turn right, go through a gate, then at a second gate head diagonally left aiming for a signpost (not the next gate). Past the sign go over another ladder stile to see Withypool ahead to the right. Keep to the left-hand side of the field, then after two more stiles descend a steep and slippery path, then some steps, to the road. Unless you want to detour into Withypool turn left uphill, then in a minute or two turn right on to a narrow footpath signposted to Tarr Steps (1hr10mins, [4]).

This path now continues along-side or above the River Barle as far as Tarr Steps. The first part of the walk is fairly easy strolling. Note the stepping-stones in the river, no guarantee of a dry crossing even in the summer. In about 45 minutes from the road come to a T-junction and turn right (1hr55mins, [5]). The path is now intermittently uneven with tree roots and rocks, and prone to flooding; in places there is a choice of route, beside the river (more difficult and likely to flood) or higher up. Cross two side-streams, then about twelve minutes after the second a footbridge crosses the river; ignore it, unless Tarr Steps have been breached, when it provides a convenient link to the onward route to Hawkridge. Arriving at Tarr Steps (2hr30mins, [6]), the pub is to the left; the walk continues over the clapper bridge



(a simple structure with flat stones laid between low piers). At the end of the bridge turn left on a narrow road, which tracks alongside the River Barle; keep a look out for vehicles. After a steep (20%) hill, the road comes to Hawkridge Church (3hr5mins, [7]); there are views beyond to the Anstey ridge, partly explored in walk 17. Turn left at the church, passing a cottage to join a broad lane (restricted byway) to Dulverton.

The final section of the walk is shared with walk 28. The lane heads alongside a field, left through a fenced-off section and then across another field before coming to a gate into woods; ignore any right turns. Go

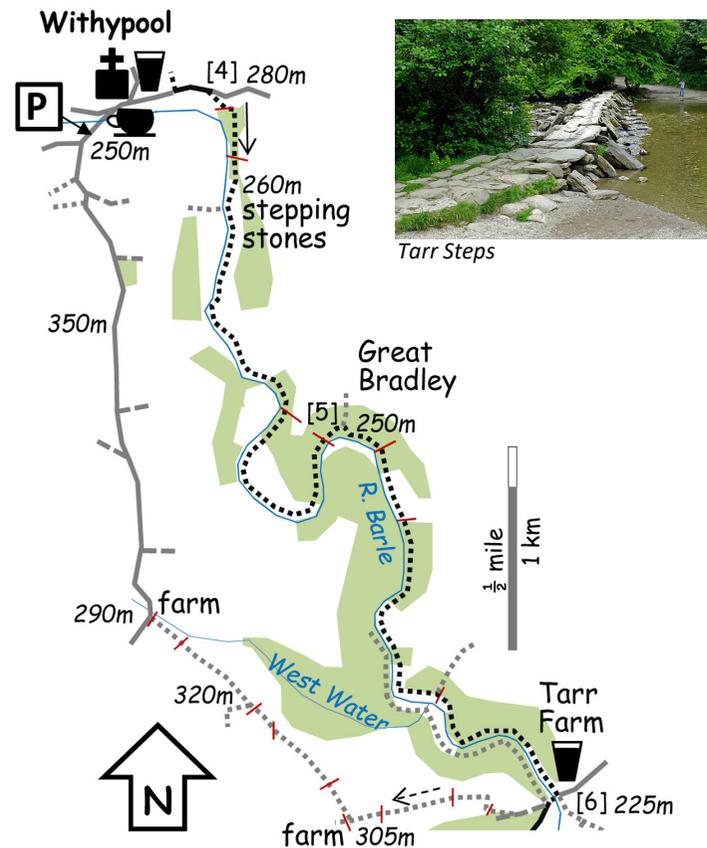
through the gate, and note a young tree on the left growing from the stump of an older one. The track now descends towards the Barle, on the left, with Danes Brook on the right. Two Iron Age forts sit on the wooded hilltops: Brewer's Castle to the left, and Mounsey Castle ahead. Cross a stone bridge on the right (3hr40mins, [8]), and follow the track towards Dulverton. A little further on, a right turn detours to Hinam Farm; a helpful sign indicates whether the tea rooms are open. After splashing through a stream, the walk continues ahead, parallel with the river. After 30 minutes or so you will come to a large white house. Bear left on to a wider track just beyond it. Follow the river as far as a house on the right, at the junction with a road (4hr20mins, [9]). Turn right here, then in three minutes or so turn left on a sign-posted footpath through a farm. Go through a kissing gate, then two or three minutes further on keep left at a path junction. The path undulates, keeping roughly parallel with the river. After a final ascent with glimpses across Dulverton, join a tarmac drive, keep left down to the road, and turn left over the bridge into the town centre.

Shorter walk: Withypool to Dulverton (● 10.5 miles, ascents of 470 metres and descents of 590 metres). Although this walk is still fairly long, it avoids the initial ascent of Room Hill. Start from the car park in Withypool (SS 844 354, TA24 7RA; arrange your own transport). Cross the bridge and walk past the tea room, post office and Royal Oak inn. Continue uphill, passing a path up steps to the left to Exford: just beyond, turn right on the path that runs alongside the River Barle, joining the main walk at the 1hr10min-point ([4]).

Circular walk: Withypool and Tarr Steps (● 7.3 miles, ascents and descents of 350 metres; map opposite). Start from the car park in Withypool as above, join the main walk and follow it to Tarr Steps. Cross the river and head upwards on a surfaced track straight ahead, sign-posted as the Two Moors Way (M over W) towards Parsonage and Westwater Farms. Soon bear right and uphill on an enclosed bridleway. Go through a gate and follow the track right, then left at the field corner. The path becomes less steep and goes through a gate. Cross the next two fields, then turn right at a signpost in front of Parsonage Farm. Go through a gate

and follow the path ahead: the next gate is on the left, then keep right and go through another gate and straight on at a path junction. The path eventually brings you to a road at a small bridge over a stream. Turn right and follow the road back to Withypool.

Longer circular walk: Exford, Tarr Steps and Winsford (● 16.6 miles, ascents and descents of 870 metres). Follow the main walk as far as Tarr Steps, then return along the Barle to join walk 27 at its 2-hour point ([6]) and head to Winsford via the Punchbowl. From Winsford, pick up the return half of walk 26. If you want to miss out the return from Winsford to Exford (making for an 11.2 mile walk with 515 metres of ascent), park in Winsford and take the morning bus to the start; there is no afternoon bus from Winsford to Exford.



Tarr Steps

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