



Walk 27. Winsford, Tarr Steps and the Punchbowl.

- 9.2 miles, 3 hours 35 minutes. Ascents and descents of 450 metres.

Terrain: Mainly on paths and tracks and across fields. Paths can be stony and sometimes steep; muddy in places.

Access: By car, park in Winsford opposite the garage (SS 906 349, close to TA24 7JG). It is also possible to start and finish at Tarr Steps (SS 872 324, £), although the car park gets busy in summer. By bus, service 198 between Minehead and Dulverton calls at Winsford twice daily except Sundays.

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

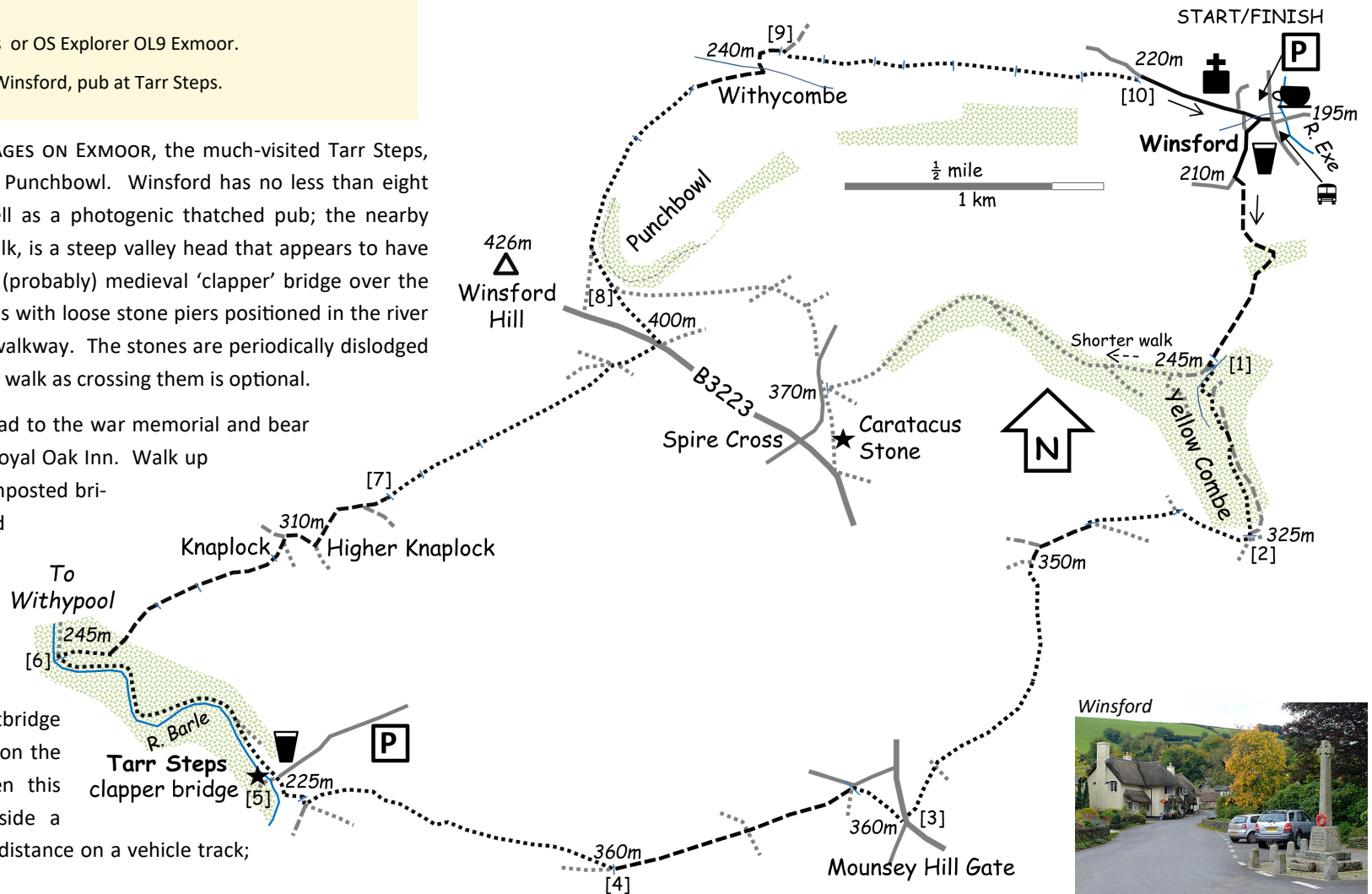
Refreshments: Pub and seasonal tea room in Winsford, pub at Tarr Steps.

THIS WALK TAKES IN ONE OF THE PRETTIEST VILLAGES ON EXMOOR, the much-visited Tarr Steps, and the geological puzzle known as Winsford Punchbowl. Winsford has no less than eight bridges over the rivers Winn and Exe, as well as a photogenic thatched pub; the nearby Punchbowl, passed towards the end of the walk, is a steep valley head that appears to have been carved out by a glacier. Tarr Steps is a (probably) medieval 'clapper' bridge over the River Barle, one of the simplest kinds of bridges with loose stone piers positioned in the river and flat stones laid on top of them to form a walkway. The stones are periodically dislodged by flood water, but that's not a concern on this walk as crossing them is optional.

Starting from the car park or the bus stop, head to the war memorial and bear left past the thatched (and very photogenic) Royal Oak Inn. Walk up the hill past the houses, then turn left at a signposted bridleway to Dulverton, Tarr Steps and Winsford Hill. After an initial steep climb on a stony path, the way levels out and becomes quite muddy. Go through a gate (22mins, [1]); the shorter walk keeps right here, past an isolated cottage, but the for the main walk head left down to a stream: go over a stile and footbridge (or splash through the stream), and continue on the bridleway to Summerway. Turn right when this meets a wider track, and climb uphill beside a stream. At a T-junction, turn right for a short distance on a vehicle track;

as the track curves left, branch off to the right on a signposted bridleway. A steep and possibly slippery climb through bracken and scrub brings you to the head of Yellow Combe, and back to the track (40mins, [2]).

Cross the track, go through a gate, and turn right. Walk parallel with the right-hand side of the field, but bear left slightly to go through a field gate. Turn left, signposted Tarr Steps and Spire Cross, and keep the field boundary on your left. Go through the next gate on the left, and turn right on a wide track signposted Winsford Hill. Follow it around to the left towards Mounsey Hill Gate, then in a minute or so keep left next to the hedge; you will soon see a confirming sign for Mounsey Hill Gate. In 20 minutes come to a road junction with cattle grids (1hr10mins, [3]). Cross the road, and turn right alongside a bank. The bank shortly



heads left: continue straight ahead on a grassy path, towards a particularly dome-headed tree. This brings you to another road at a cattle grid. Cross the grid, and turn left on a stony track across the moorland (not the sharp left along the field boundary). Follow this track to a stony bank topped by some rather sparse trees (1hr25mins, [4]); go through the gate and continue across the moor on what is initially a broad grassy path. The path gradually works its way down the hillside; a large farm is on the right, then hidden in the trees the Tarr Steps car park. A final steep section brings you to a junction and, on the right, a gate. Go through the gate, downhill on a stony track, and come to the River Barle. Turn right and cross a small stream to arrive at Tarr Steps and the Tarr Farm Inn, a convenient if normally busy halfway stop (1hr40mins, [5]).

Pass below the inn and stroll along the bank of the river for twenty minutes or so. Cross a stream, go through a gate (2hrs, [6]), then turn immediately right and uphill on a grassy footpath. Go through a wooden gate, a metal gate, and another wooden gate to arrive at a farm. Just past the farm continue ahead at a crossroads on a track marked 'Bridleway to Winsford Hill'. At the next farm follow the track to the left, ignoring the footpath straight ahead. This track swings right, then again right; at the second bend, turn left on a bridleway marked 'Winsford Hill $\frac{1}{2}$ '. For the moment this is still a substantial track. Come to a cul-de-sac with four gates (2hr27mins, [7]); go through the third from the left (a wooden gate with a redundant metal gatepost in front of it), and keep uphill to the left of the field. Go through two more gates, the second bringing you on to open moor with a bank to your left. When the bank turns away leftwards, your onward path ('Bridleway to Winsford') continues straight ahead (it starts slightly to the right). The open moor feels remote, miles from habitation. Ignore a fork to the right, and soon arrive at a road (2hr50mins).

Cross the road and bear left ('Withycombe 1'). This path is initially easy to follow, then becomes vaguer as it crosses the heather and bracken. If you are in any doubt, Dunkery Beacon soon comes into view, the highest of the hills in the distance; head towards its summit, crowned by a small cairn (the compass bearing from the road is 325°). When your track joins a wide grassy path (2hr55mins, [8]), turn left and come to the head of Winsford Punchbowl. Keep the Punchbowl to your right and head around its rim; you are making for a white farmhouse in the valley bottom. Enter a field and continue downhill, then through a gate on the right to continue your descent on a farm track; the rim of the Punchbowl is outlined against the sky to your right. Follow the track through the farm and through its front gate (3hr10mins, [9]), turning right here on a footpath signposted to Winsford. This takes you along the edge of the field. Continue straight ahead across fields, looking for the occasional confirming yellow mark. Eventually come to a kissing gate, which takes you on to a narrow, enclosed path leading to a road (3hr30mins, [10]). Turn right here and stroll back into the centre of Winsford.

Shorter walk: Winsford Hill and the Punchbowl (● 4.7 miles, ascents and descents of 250 metres). At the 22-minute point ([1]), take the right fork and ascend gradually through a wooded combe. In 30 minutes or so of steady climb the path comes to a gate where it is joined by a bridleway; the sign proclaims that you have walked a mile and a half from Winsford. Go through the gate. A short detour to the left will bring you to a small shelter built over the Caratacus Stone, a sixth-century memorial or boundary stone proclaiming 'Cara.aci Nepus' (thought to refer to a descendent of the first-century king Caratacus or Caradoc). Otherwise turn right, then right again on to a narrow road. At telegraph pole opposite a house ('Folly'), turn left off the road on an unmarked path, following it at first almost parallel with the road, then upwards and more to the left. Ignore a minor path to the right, then cross a grassy path and head between bracken and gorse; your path becomes more stony for a while, before rejoining the main walk at the 2hr55min-point ([8]).

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