



Walk 28. Dulverton, Hawkridge and the River Barle.

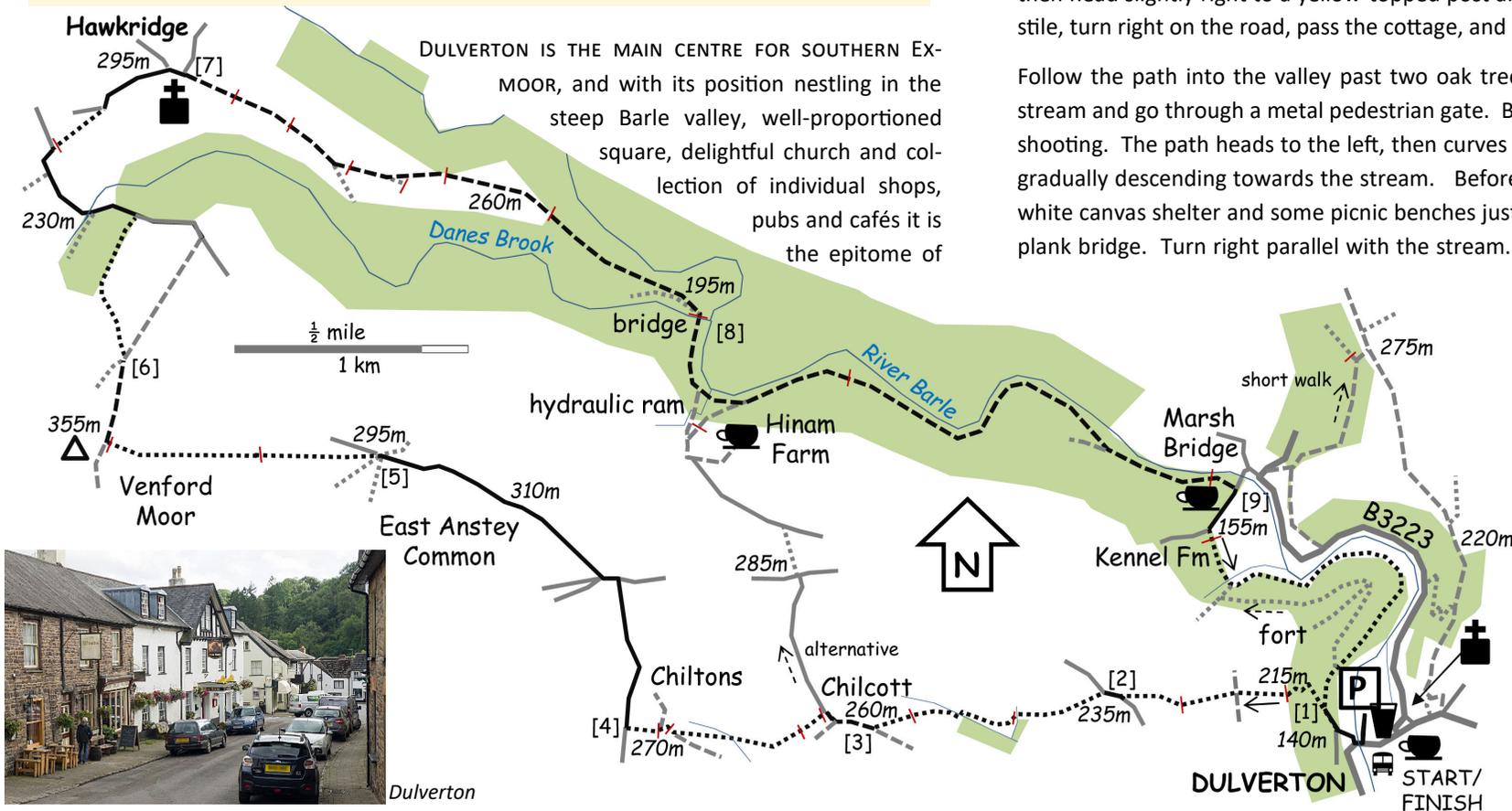
- 10.7 miles, ascents and descents of 550 metres. 4 hours 15 minutes constant walking, allow around 5½ hours.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and fields, muddy in places, two small streams to cross. Some road walking and a short easy stretch of open moorland.

Access: By car, park in the long-stay car park next to Exmoor House (SS 912 280, TA22 9HL, £). Dulverton is served by bus 25 from Taunton and Bampton, 198 from Minehead and 398 from Tiverton and Bampton.

Map: Croydecycle 56 Dulverton and Tarr Steps or OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor (a small part of the outward route is on 114 Exeter and the Exe Valley).

Refreshments: Plenty of options in Dulverton; seasonal tea room at Hinam Farm and garden at Marsh Bridge.



a small West Country market town. Starting with a blank canvas it would be difficult to design anything better, other than maybe reinstating the railway line to nearby Brushford. Dulverton is also the home of the National Park Authority, based in the old Victorian workhouse, and there is an excellent display about life in times past in a small museum at the back of the information centre. Several walks start or finish here; this one explores some of the high ground between Dulverton and Anstey Common, with a return route along the River Barle.

From the car park, walk past the statue of Lorna Doone to the Bridge Inn, then turn right over the Barle bridge. Turn immediately right on a minor road, and in less than a minute continue straight ahead as the road bends left. Again in less than a minute keep right at a fork, following the small purple arrow and sign to Horner Cottage. Immediately after the cottage (7mins, [1]) fork left on a narrow path signposted to Beech Tree Cross. Ascend steeply on this stony, slippery path; in winter you will have views over Dulverton to the right. The path eventually levels out and comes to a T-junction: turn left, then go through a gate into a field. Initially keeping the hedge to your right, continue to a large farm building and cross the farm road into another field. Cross the field and go through a gate. Keep the line of trees to your left, then head slightly right to a yellow-topped post and an isolated cottage. Leave the field via a stile, turn right on the road, pass the cottage, and turn left through a gate (25mins, [2]).

Follow the path into the valley past two oak trees. At the bottom, splash through a small stream and go through a metal pedestrian gate. Be careful as this field is used for clay pigeon shooting. The path heads to the left, then curves right around the shoulder of the hill before gradually descending towards the stream. Before arriving at a tall ash tree – possibly with a white canvas shelter and some picnic benches just beyond – cross the stream to the left on a plank bridge. Turn right parallel with the stream. The official path heads diagonally left at a yellow marker post, but depending on the height of the bracken it can be easier to continue to the corner of the field and turn left on the grass there. Go through a vehicle gate, then immediately right through a pedestrian gate. Your way ahead is now diagonally to the left, to a gate at the corner of the field, not to the first gate that you can see. Go through this second gate and turn right on to a stone track (45mins, [3]). Pass the farm houses and continue ahead on a surfaced road, soon passing two vehicle tracks on the left; shortly afterwards turn left on a signposted footpath.

Keep to the left-hand edge of the field. Go through a gate, and when you come to some scrub head right as signposted on a track through a plantation of young trees, with a rather grand house (Chiltons) ahead of you. Cross a stream, then turn right at the field edge; go through a gate then immediately turn left through successive gates. Keep to the right-hand side of the field, then turn right on to the road (1hr, [4]). Arriving at a T-junction, turn left to enter Devon, then first right towards Hawkridge and Tarr Steps. In a little under fifteen minutes the road heads downhill and around a gentle bend. A little further on, look for a signposted bridleway (1hr30mins, [5]). Turn left, but take the rightmost of the three paths, heading almost parallel with the road. Pass two clumps of gorse and a footpath sign, then go through a pedestrian gate ahead of you. The path becomes a stony track and starts to head uphill. Passing between more gorse, head for a gate ahead and slightly to the right, where the taller trees end. Go through and turn right on a wide track (a public bridleway). In about five minutes, turn left on a signposted permissive footpath (1hr50mins, [6]). This is vague at first, but head downhill slightly to the left of the cluster of houses (Hawkridge) on the hillside in front of you. The path soon becomes better-defined, and passes a stone ('Venford', difficult to make out) where there are views down the valley of Dane's Brook. It soon narrows and bends gradually right, arriving at a road. Turn left here, heading steeply downhill to cross Dane's Brook (and return to Somerset).

An equally steep road heads uphill. Pass a stone farm building, then when the road bends sharply left go through the gate ahead of you. Head in the direction indicated on the bridleway sign, aiming to the left of the roof of a house. Turn right on the road and follow it through Hawkridge to the church (2hr20mins, [7]). Continue ahead here past a cottage on a lane (restricted byway) signposted to Dulverton. 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 (2hr55mins, [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 (3hr40mins, [9]). Turn right here, then in three minutes or so turn left on a signposted 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 to return to Dulverton.

Shorter walk: Dulverton and the River Barle (● 6 miles, ascents and descents of 350 metres). Follow the main walk to the 50-minute point ([3]) and pass the farm buildings, but continue ahead on the road until it comes to a T-junction. Cross over and go through a kissing gate. Keep the field boundary to your right, then go through another gate, down some steps, and turn left on a narrow road. Where this turns sharp right to Hinam Farm, continue ahead on a rough track ('unsuitable for motors'). Start to follow the track downhill, then take the right fork and pass a gate. Rejoin the main walk where a narrow path comes in from the left, shortly after the 2hr55min-point ([8]).

Short walk: Dulverton and Marsh Bridge (● 3.7 miles, ascents and descents of 250 metres). At the 7-minute point [1], continue ahead and follow the path above the River Barle. This lower path will take you to Kennel Farm, but instead take the next turn left (Middle Path). Detour to the left to Oldberry Castle, an Iron Age hillfort, returning the same way. Continuing left along Middle Path, come to a T-junction and turn right. At the bottom, turn left to rejoin the lower path and splash through a stream, then go through a gate to arrive at Kennel Farm. Turn right on to the road; in four minutes or so cross a bridge and turn right into a small parking area, then go over a stone footbridge. Cross the road in front of you and walk up a steep tarmac slope, then cross the next road to join a byway heading up and to the left ('restricted byway to Court Down and North Combe'). Ignore a track to the right and head steeply uphill to a T-junction, with a seat almost opposite. Turn right here; this stony, sometimes muddy track descends into Dulverton, after some twists and turns coming out next to the church. Continue ahead into the centre and (if you can avoid the temptation of the shops, pubs and cafés) back to the car park.

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