



### Walk 31. Dunster and the Brendon Forest.

- 8.6 miles, 3 hours 30 minutes. Ascents and descents of 540 metres.

Terrain: Paths and tracks. Some forest paths are steep and uneven with tree roots.

Access: By car, park in the main Dunster car park (SS 993 439, TA24 6AS, £), off the A396 soon after the turn-off from the A39. National Trust members may prefer to park in the castle car park (SS 993 437), accessed directly from the A39 (free with membership card), but check when it closes. Alternatively use the small pay and display car park at Gallox Ford (SS 990 433, TA24 6SP, £). Bus 28 (Taunton to Minehead) stops on the A39 immediately north of the village, while 198 (Minehead to Dulverton) also stops in the high street.

Map: Croydecycle 00 Dunster (not Dunster and Minehead); OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Plenty of choice in Dunster.

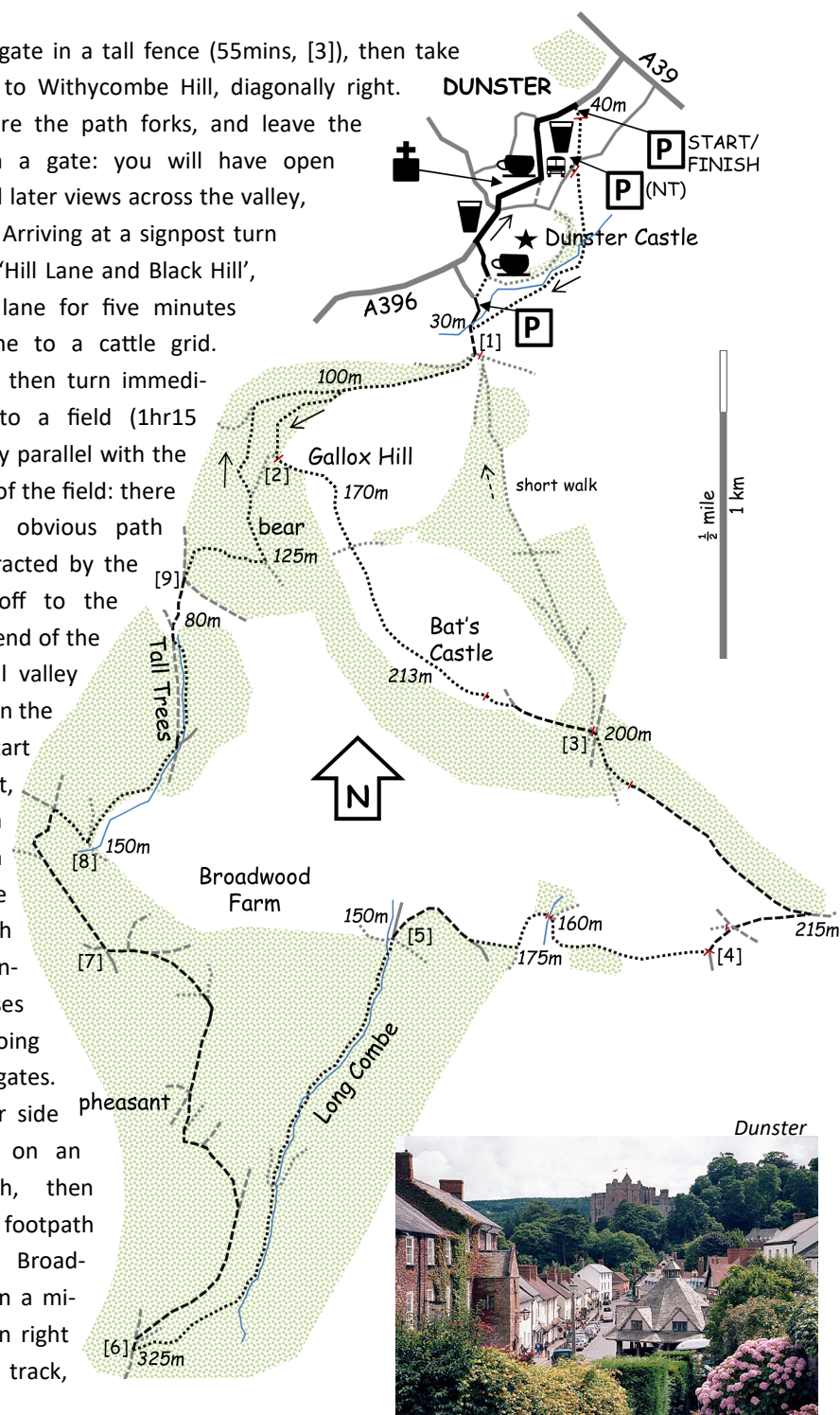
THE WELL-PRESERVED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE OF DUNSTER is a gem, although it becomes extremely busy in season. It was once the most important settlement in the area, a small market town before the rise of Minehead and even Dulverton. The most obvious feature is the National Trust castle that dominates the village, although it also has a homely fifteenth-century church, a seventeenth-century yarn market, a working watermill, and several other fine old buildings. Dunster itself is explored more thoroughly in Walk 32, while this walk explores the extensive woodlands south of the village, heading out by way of an Iron Age hillfort and returning past some of the tallest trees in England.

Leave the car park by the gate next to the Rohan shop, and walk across the field towards the castle ('permissive path to Gallox Bridge'). At the National Trust car park cross the drive and go through an iron kissing gate, walking first beside a fence and then across the field down to the River Avill (the name means apple valley). Cross over on an ornamental stone bridge, and follow the path alongside the river. After crossing a stream on a small wooden bridge turn left to a thatched cottage. (If you have parked at the Gallox Ford car park, turn left out of the car park, cross the bridge, and join the walk here). Just beyond the cottage at a sign board (15mins, [1]) take the middle of the three routes, to the right ('bridleway to Bat's Castle'). Keep left and upwards at the fork. At a signpost, go left through a pedestrian gate in a high fence (30mins, [2]), and continue ahead uphill. The path soon emerges into the open and levels out on Gallox Hill. Continue upwards to the summit of Bat's Castle, a Celtic hill fort; views open up in all directions. Follow the path off the top of the hill through a gap in a fence and go gently downwards, joining a wider track heading towards a coniferous wood.

Go through a gate in a tall fence (55mins, [3]), then take the bridleway to Withycombe Hill, diagonally right. Keep left where the path forks, and leave the wood through a gate: you will have open heathland, and later views across the valley, to your right. Arriving at a signpost turn sharp right to 'Hill Lane and Black Hill', following the lane for five minutes until you come to a cattle grid.

Cross the grid then turn immediately right into a field (1hr15 mins, [4]). Stay parallel with the left-hand side of the field: there isn't a single obvious path (don't be distracted by the grassy track off to the right). At the end of the field is a small valley with a stream in the bottom: start turning right, but look for a narrow path down to the left which comes to a signpost and crosses the stream, going through two gates. Ascend the far side of the valley on an enclosed path, then turn right on a footpath signposted to Broadwood Farm. In a minute or so turn right on a broad track,

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then at the next junction (1hr30mins, [5]) take the second left, the footpath to Long Combe. Follow a babbling stream steadily uphill through the combe for around half an hour. The path gradually gets narrower and steeper (beware slippery tree roots), and eventually climbs to the right away from the stream through conifer woods. Come to a broad track, the highest and southernmost point of the walk (2hr05mins, [6]).

At the track turn right, then take the right fork (ignoring a small path downwards to the right). On coming to a fork, take the left-hand, upward path. Ignore a path off to the right; shortly afterwards the track curves around to the right. At the next junction, where there is a carved pheasant in a hawklike pose on a log, keep right. The track soon bends left; ignore the three marked paths off to the right. At the T-junction (2hr30mins, [7]), turn right, then in a little over five minutes come to a crossroads. Turn right here on to a bridleway. Head downhill, ignore the first turn to the left, but before coming to a stream turn left on a footpath to Nutcombe, taking the lower path closest to the stream (2hr40mins, [8]). This path leads to a surfaced lane: turn left here, then in a minute or so join the parallel path on the right, the Tall Trees Trail. A little way along is reputedly the tallest tree in England, a Douglas fir ('Dunster Douglas), which tops out at over 60m (around 200 feet). At the end of the trail rejoin the main lane, then in three minutes take a wide footpath that forks right and upwards ahead of you (ignoring the byway directly to the right; 2hr50mins, [9]).

Head uphill, then turn left at the T-junction and come to a bear on the right. A couple of minutes beyond the bear, keep left. Join a path coming in from the left, continuing gradually downwards. Your outward route joins from the right. Arrive at the sign board (3hr15mins, [1]) and turn left past the thatched cottage. You can retrace your steps to the right of the river, but to stroll back through Dunster cross the stone bridge and turn right to pass the small car park. Head along a pedestrian lane, then turn left on a road alongside a small rill or leat (turn right for the National Trust tea garden). Coming to the main road, turn right and follow it this way and that through the village; if you can resist the church, castle, yarn market and multiple tea shops and hosteleries you will eventually arrive back at the car park just beyond a small shopping precinct, set back on the right (a gate at the back takes you through to the castle drive and National Trust car park).

**Short walk: Gallox Hill and Bats Castle** (● 3.6 miles, ascents and descents of 235 metres). Follow the outward part of the walk until just before the 55-minute point [3], then turn left on a bridleway before the high fence: this path will take you back to the junction just above the thatched cottage. Pick up the return part of the walk at the 3 hour 15-minute point [1].

**Note.** The Forestry Commission has taken over management of the Dunster estate (including much of the woodland covered in this walk) from the Crown Estates. This should not affect access to the walk, but some trails, signposts and gates may be changed.

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