



Walk 33. Watchet to Minehead.

- 7.7 miles, ascents and descents of 165 metres. 2 hours 45 minutes continuous walking, allow 3½-4 hours.

Note: Three routes are given between Watchet and Blue Anchor. The main walk is always accessible, but makes use of a permissive path. The alternative coast path route is sometimes closed due to landslips (including at the last recce in July 2020). The beach route is only accessible near low water: check the tide times, and do not set out on a rising tide.

Terrain: Paths (potentially muddy), pavement and shingle beach; some road walking. The alternative start beneath the cliffs includes patches of slippery rock and deep sticky mud. The route may be briefly closed by the tide just after Blue Anchor.

Access: By car, park anywhere in Minehead and walk to the station (SS 974 463, TA24 5BG) for the train or bus to Watchet (the bus stops outside the station, not on the seaward side of the road as you might expect). The West Somerset Railway connects Minehead, Dunster, Blue Anchor and Watchet in season, while bus 28 runs from Taunton and stops at Watchet, Dunster and Minehead, but not Blue Anchor.

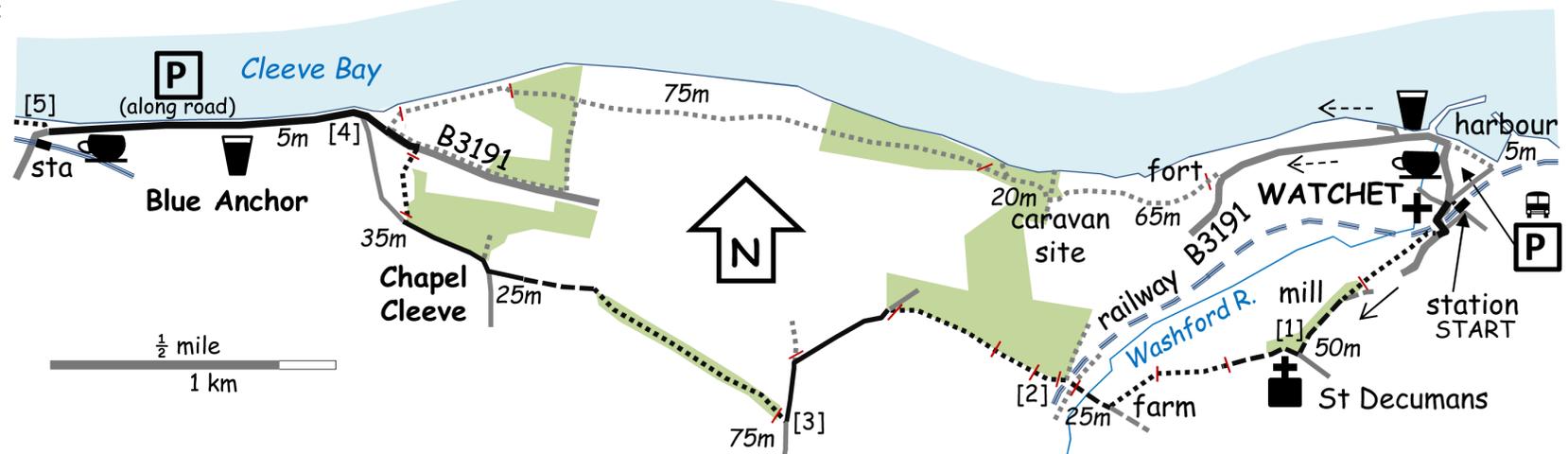
Map: Croydecycle 55 Watchet & Quantock North plus 01 Minehead Dunster Selworthy; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

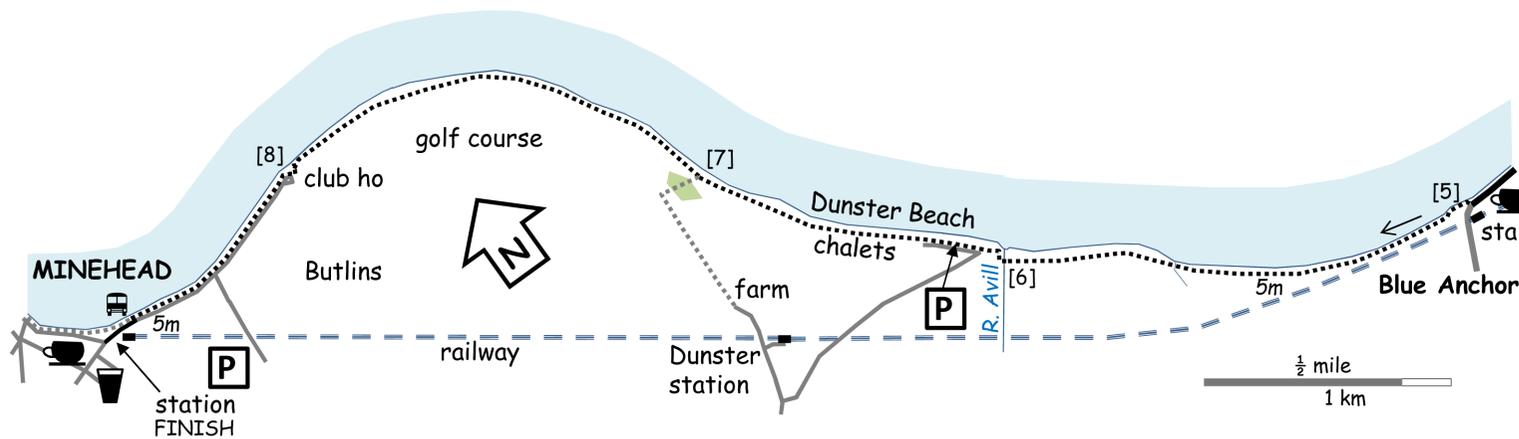
Refreshments: Minehead, Blue Anchor and Watchet are all well-provisioned; buffet on the West Somerset Railway.

WATCHET IS AN ANCIENT HARBOUR TOWN ON THE BRISTOL CHANNEL, once the main gateway for trade between Somerset and South Wales. Now commercial traffic has declined, the addition of a lock gate has allowed the creation of a marina for leisure craft. Watchet is interesting to explore; the visitor centre and boat museum, housed in a disused railway shed, are particularly worth a look. The coast here has one of the largest tidal ranges in the world. At low water, the sea blends in to the wide expanse of mud and rock with the distant coast of south Wales as a backdrop; but as the tide returns the water races across the flats, a danger to the unwary. This fairly gentle walk divides into two halves, with at the Watchet end a choice of routes depending on tides and the state of the coast

path. From Blue Anchor onwards the coast is low-lying, with promenades connected by rough paths alongside (and on) the stony beach. Watchet and Minehead are linked by the West Somerset Railway, plied in season by four or five steam trains a day; this makes a practical and enjoyable way of connecting the start and finish.

Start from the railway station in Watchet. For the **inland route**, cross the railway line on the road bridge and turn right, almost immediately heading right again down a narrow footpath in front of a small electricity substation. This takes you through a short tunnel and, after a gate, alongside the former Wansborough Mill, a paper mill that operated from the fifteenth century until 2015. There are currently plans to use the site for housing and light industry. Just beyond is St Decuman's church (12mins, [1]); turn right here. On the right is a gate that leads to a holy well in a secluded garden. Continuing along the path, go through a gate and cross the field, then over a stile and along the edge of a second field. Turn right into a farmyard and cross Washford River on two flat concrete bridges. The path now crosses first the old mineral line (see Walk 36), now a shady footpath between Watchet and Washford, then the West Somerset Railway (25mins, [2]). Continue on a sunken path. In about ten minutes come to a lane and turn left. Pass a pair of gates on the right at a bend, then in another couple of minutes as the road comes to some trees, turn right on a narrow unmarked path at the back of a pull-in for vehicles (45mins, [3]). The path follows a belt of trees for about half a mile, then joins a farm track which soon becomes an unsurfaced lane, passing houses. Turn right on to the road at a T-junction: take care here. After a bend you will be walking beside a wooded area on the right. When it ends, turn right on a footpath. Go through a gate, across a field, then through another gate to come to the B3191. Turn left, again taking care on this possibly busy road, and come to the sea wall just beyond the former Blue Anchor inn, a casualty of coastal erosion (1hr10mins, [4]).





Minehead

For the **coast path route** from Watchet, first head to the harbour. Turn left on the pedestrian promenade, then pass the vehicle barrier and continue along the road. On the left is the head of the former West Somerset Mineral Railway, with the station house on its left and goods shed (now an Indian restaurant) on the right. After a row of terraced houses, a turning on the right heads down to West Beach: this is the starting-point for the shore walk. Continue along the B3191, taking care when the pavement runs out. After a viewpoint on the right, the road bends left (18mins); turn right here on a path towards Blue Anchor. Enter a field (Daws Castle, a Saxon fort), noting the lime kilns on the left, and keep to the right to walk above the cliff. At a caravan park, the path drops into a gully then meets a concrete path heading down to the beach (30mins); more lime kilns nestle in the hillside opposite. The way on is across the concrete path slightly to the right, signposted towards Blue Anchor. The path continues alongside the cliffs, joining a trail through woods. Around 25 minutes after the caravan site, ignore a permissive path to the left (this may be called into use as a diversion if needed). The path crosses a stream before coming to a kissing gate: turn right into a field. This takes you to a former pub car park. Cross it and turn right on to the road to arrive at the sea front (1hr10mins, [4]).

The **shore route** can be followed when the tide is out: be sure to leave before it turns, as the water comes up to the cliffs and apart from the path to the caravan park (not easy to spot from seaward) there is no way up. The safest times to leave are between three and five-and-a-half hours after high water. After you have crossed the stony section near Watchet the first half is easy going on hard sand. The second part is more difficult and involves picking your way over rock, avoiding slippery seaweed and thick sucking mud. At the Blue Anchor end, if the slipway (close to [4]) is closed walk just beyond it to steps leading up to the promenade.

To **continue to Minehead**, follow the long promenade as far as the station (1hr25mins, [5]). Unless you are finishing the walk here, the path continues briefly along the shingle beach (at

high water you may have to wait for the tide to turn; the 1930s Driftwood Café is conveniently positioned just before the station). In five minutes or so join a more comfortable path. This takes you over two foot bridges: the second one crosses the canalised River Avill, coming in from Dunster (1hr50mins, [6]). Continue through Dunster Beach car park, then keep to the seaward side of a long line of chalets, walking on grass. At the end of the chalets, a path turns inland to Dunster station (2hr5mins, [7]). Ignore this and continue along the edge of a golf course past two wartime pillboxes. Either continue along a narrow path, always keeping close to the edge of the course, or head down to the beach. You will soon arrive at the club house and the eastern end of Minehead promenade (2hr30mins, [8]), which will take you back to the station and bus stop. If you haven't visited Minehead before, an extra half-mile along the promenade will bring you to the small harbour tucked picturesquely beneath a steep hill.

Shorter walks: Several short walks can be made up using any of the stations or bus stops on the route. A particularly convenient place to break the walk when the railway is running is Blue Anchor (Watchet to Blue Anchor using the inland route ● 3.8 miles, ascents and descents of 130 metres; Blue Anchor to Minehead Station ● 3.9 miles, ascents and descents 35 metres).

© Stan Lester 2018-20. Last recce 7/2020. Please email editor@exmoorwalker.uk with any updates or comments.

This route description is provided freely and in good faith. You are welcome to use, copy and distribute it for personal and non-profit purposes (attribution—non-commercial—no derivatives). No responsibility is taken for any errors or omissions, or for your navigation or safety on the walk. Introductory and safety information at exmoorwalker.uk.