



Walk 33. Watchet to Minehead.

- 7.5 miles, 2 hours 40 minutes. Ascents and descents of 185 metres.

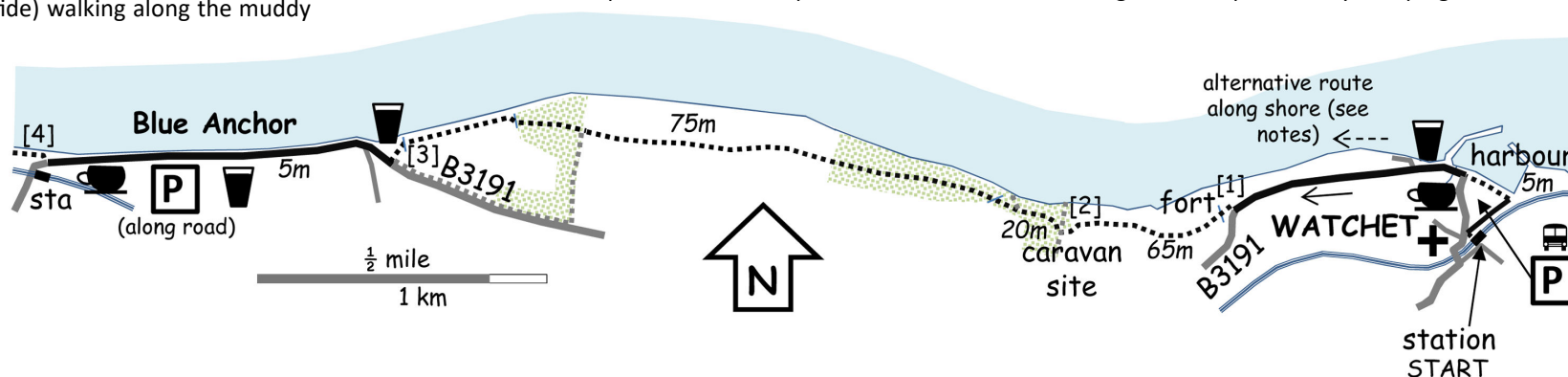
Terrain: Paths (potentially muddy), pavement and shingle beach. The alternative start beneath the cliffs includes patches of slippery rock and deep sticky mud. The route may be briefly closed by the tide just after Blue Anchor, and due to the unstable nature of the cliffs be prepared for diversions on the stretch between Watchet and 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 heading up on to the cliff path or (at low tide) walking along the muddy and rocky shore. 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. Leave the station on the town side, turning right to pass the boat museum and bus shelter (which is where the 28 bus will leave you) and continue 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: at low water it is possible to walk to Blue Anchor from here (see 'Alternative start' below). Otherwise, continue along the B3191, taking care when the pavement runs out. After a viewpoint on the right, the road bends left (18mins, [1]); turn right here on a path towards Blue Anchor. Enter a field (Daws Castle, a former hill 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, [2]); 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 the way ahead becomes eroded away). The path crosses a stream before coming to a kissing gate: turn right into a field. This takes you to the Blue Anchor pub car park (1hr5mins, [3]). Cross it and turn right on to the road.

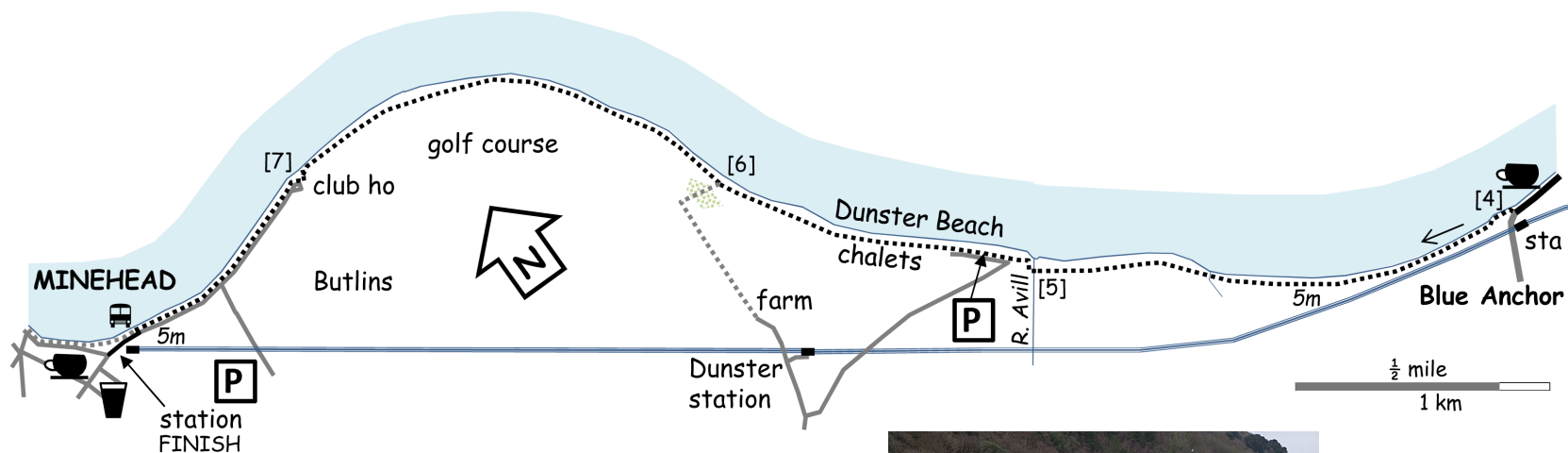
Follow the long promenade as far as Blue Anchor station (1hr25mins, [4]). Unless you are finishing the walk here, the path continues briefly along the shingle beach (at high water you may have to wait for the tide to turn; the 1930s Driftwood Café is conveniently positioned just before the station). 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, [5]). 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, [6]). 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, [7]), 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 the hill.

Alternative start: along the shore to Blue Anchor. From West Beach in Watchet it is possible to walk the 2.3 miles along the shore beneath the cliffs, but only do this if you are certain that you have enough

time before the tide comes in (there is no way up to the cliff path for the last mile and a half). You should be setting out between three and five-and-a-half hours after high water, so that you arrive in Blue Anchor well before the tide returns. Keep fairly close to (but not directly under) the cliffs and pick your path carefully, as there is an abundance of thick, sucking mud as well as slippery rock. At the Blue Anchor end, if the slipway is closed walk just beyond it to steps leading up to the promenade. The circular walk - returning by reversing the route from the 1hr5min point ([3]) - is 5.8 miles with ascents and descents of 180 metres.

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 ● 3.5 miles, ascents and descents of 150 metres; Blue Anchor to Minehead Station ● 3.9 miles, ascents and descents 35 metres).



Minehead