



Walk 39. Wimbleball Lake.

- 8.2 miles, ascents and descents of 275 metres. 3 hours constant walking, allow 4-4½ hours overall.

Terrain: Generally well-kept paths and tracks; the north-eastern side of the lake can be muddy and slippery after wet weather. Undulating, but no steep climbs.

Access: Park in the signposted pay and display car park on the western side of the lake (SS 965 308, close to TA22 9NU). Access is from the road between Brompton Regis and Ralegh's Cross. There is no direct access to the main car park from the south, but Haddon Hill (SS 969 285) on the B3190 can be used instead (adds approximately a mile to the walk; see walk 39A). Alternatively park at Bessom Bridge (SS 975 318, currently free) where the causeway crosses the northern end of the reservoir and join the walk there. No buses.

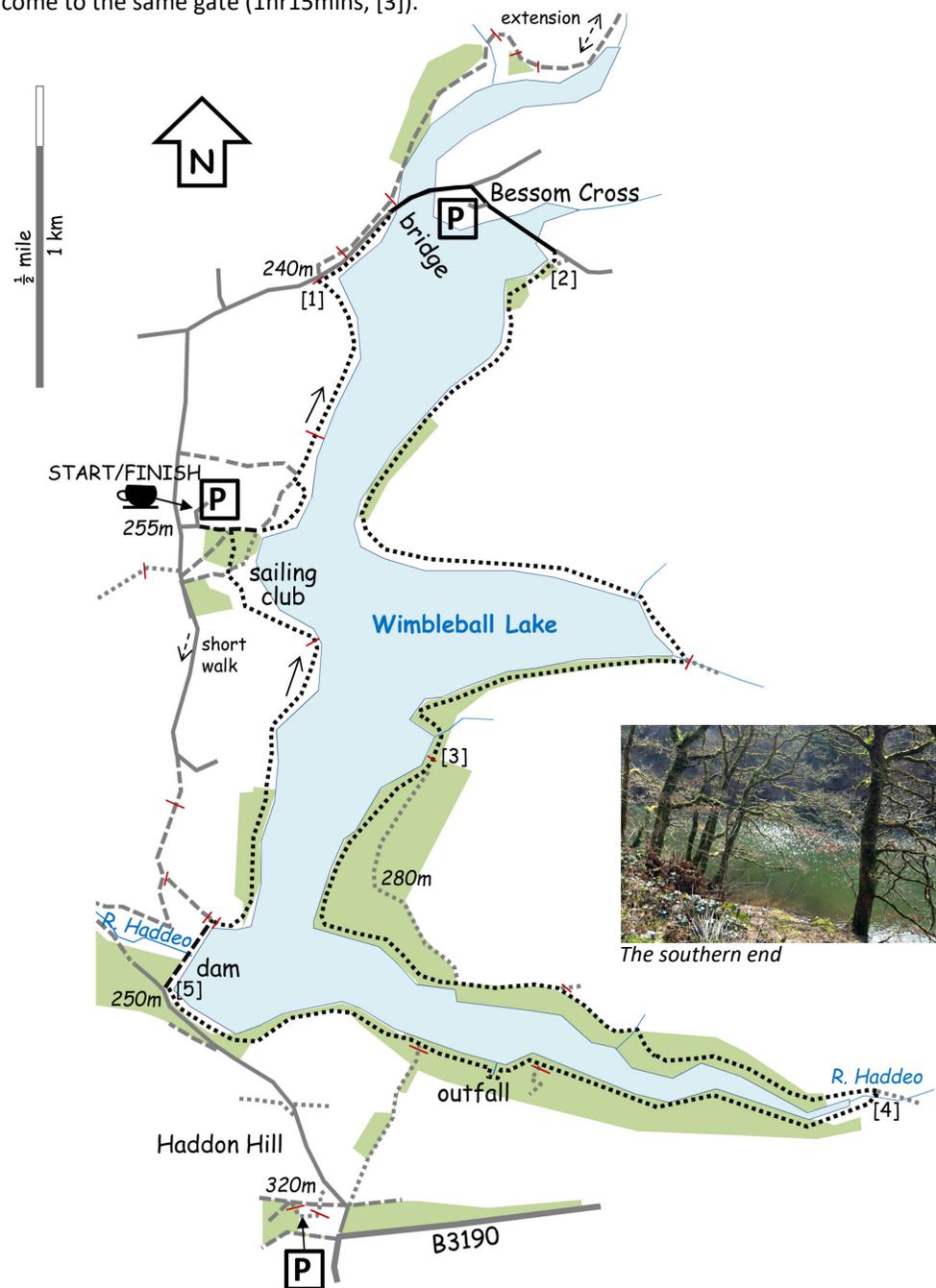
Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Seasonal cafés at the lakeside car park and on the road to Brompton Regis.

WIMBLEBALL LAKE IS THE LARGER AND BUSIER of the two reservoirs in the southern part of the Brendon Hills. Created in the 1970s by damming the valley of the River Haddeo, a tributary of the Exe, it is 50 metres deep and holds 21 million cubic metres of water, making it the largest lake in Somerset by volume. This walk starts from the 'hub' car park and café and circles the lake, with an optional extension to the little-visited northern tip and on to Withiel Florey. The instructions below will take you around in a clockwise direction.

Starting in front of the café, head downhill on the path to the water's edge, then turn left. Pass the small watersports centre, turn right on a wider path, and immediately continue straight ahead signposted Bessom Bridge. Arrive at a gate leading on to the road (15mins, [1]). You can make a detour here to visit the northern end of the lake and Withiel Florey (see overleaf). Otherwise turn right before the gate and follow the path parallel with the road. Join the road and cross the bridge, then turn right on another road. Bessom Bridge car park is hidden away on your right. Follow the road (a causeway across another part of the lake), then at a small parking area (30mins, [2]) turn right on a footpath ('lakeside circular walk'). This takes you across a small wooden footbridge and, turning right, past a bird hide. Follow the path above the shore; you will soon come opposite your starting-point (and the very conspicuous sailing club) (45mins), then the path curves left to follow an 'arm' of the lake. After a period of dry weather, and provided the water-level is fairly low, it is possible to walk along the shore all the way around the 'arm', but you will need to jump across a fairly deep stream at its head; if in doubt keep to the path. If you have taken the shore route, follow it around a

headland where the 'arm' rejoins the main part of the lake; at a small stream make your way up through the bracken and join the path at a gate ('Upton and dam'). Taking the path, keep right to follow the bank all the way around the 'arm' and into the bay beyond it until you come to the same gate (1hr15mins, [3]).



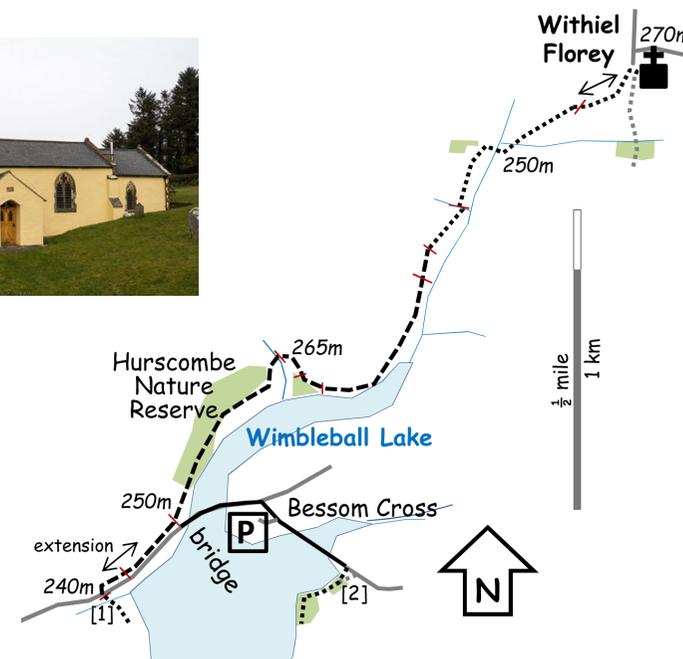
A couple of minutes after the gate you have another choice: the 'rugged lakeside path' to the right is not difficult but it is narrow and can be slippery. It doesn't quite descend to the lakeside (there is a short there-and-back detour to the shore), but it passes through woods of young oak with frequent glimpses of the water beyond. The paths soon join up to continue along the southern 'leg' of the reservoir, over a mile in length. At the 'toe' of the lake look out for a permitted footpath to the right, signposted to the dam, which takes you over a wooden footbridge (1hr55mins, [4]). The path now tracks along the southern shore, with one small interruption to pass around an outflow. A little further on, a path leaves to the left next to a gate and parallel with a line of trees; this can be used to return to the Haddon Hill car park, if you have started from there. Otherwise, continue on the lakeside path until the rather plain concrete dam appears quite suddenly in front of you. There is a good picnic spot here, with several flat stones set in an area of grass (2hr30mins, [5]). The track from Haddon Hill joins from the left.

Turn right to go over the dam, then at the end right again and through a gate (the short walk joins here). Follow the footpath along the lakeside; this is a well-surfaced, accessible path. At first most signs of human activity are hidden from view unless there are boats out on the lake, but after passing a wooden race hut the path rounds a headland and leads behind the sailing club. Cross an access drive and follow the signs past an adventure play area and across a camp site to return to the café and car park (3hrs).

Extension to Withiel Florey (complete walk ● 11.5 miles, ascents and descents of 405 metres). This there-and-back extension can be followed to the quiet northern end of the lake, or all the way to Withiel Florey church. At the 15-minute point ([1]) cross the road and turn right on a track that runs parallel with it. This soon brings you above Bessom Bridge. Continue on the track above the lake and through woods. This permissive path is well-signposted with yellow and blue markers and posts; please keep to the indicated route. After crossing a stream and turning right, you will soon come to the head of the lake. Go through a gate, head uphill, then at the next gate bear slightly to the right to come almost to the stream. Just to the left splash through a side-stream and go through a gate in the bank. Opposite a circle of beech trees, turn right over a footbridge, then left through another side-stream. Head uphill and along a slight prominence: come to a marker post, then aim for the cream tower of Withiel Florey church. Just before the end of the field go through a gate on the right. Turn left along the field edge, heading through the gate and then right at the farm and into the churchyard. The small, simple and peaceful church dates back to the eleventh century. Head over a stile back into the field, and retrace your outward route back to Bessom Bridge. Turn left down some steps here to arrive at the road, crossing the bridge to continue the main walk.



Withiel Florey



Short walk: To the dam ● 2.1 miles, ascents and descents of 90 metres). From the café car park, return to the lane and turn left. Be careful of traffic going to and from the sailing club and camp site. In about half a mile, the road bends left: continue ahead on a signposted bridleway that goes past a farm building then through a gate. In a quarter of a mile take the track on the left, signposted to the dam. This brings you to its northern end. Keep left through a gate to rejoin the main walk and return to the café and car park.

Walk 39A continues to Hartford and Bury and returns via Haddon Hill.

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