



Walk 43A. Wiveliscombe and Brompton Ralph.

- 8.3 miles with ascents and descents of 385 metres. 3 hours 20 minutes constant walking, allow 4½ hours.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and fields. Some paths will be very muddy and slippery outside of summer, particularly during forestry operations. Lots of stiles to negotiate.

Access: By car, park in the free town car park off the B3227 in Wiveliscombe (ST 080 277, near TA4 2BF). If it is full there is an alternative car park in North Street (ST 080 280). By bus, no. 25 runs Monday to Saturday between Taunton and Dulverton via Wiveliscombe.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

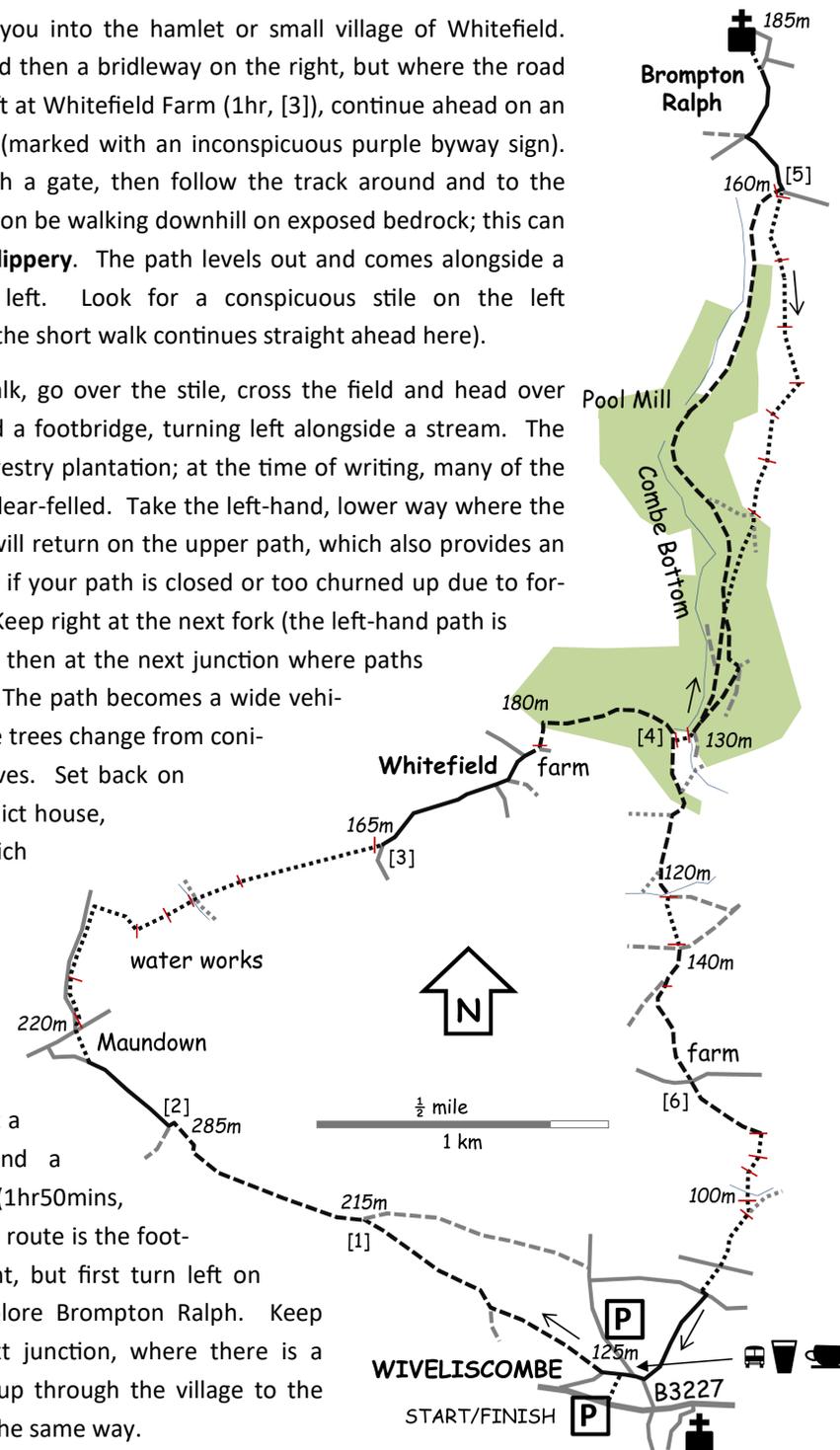
Refreshments: In Wiveliscombe; tea and coffee may also be available at the post office shop in Brompton Ralph on weekday and Saturday mornings.

THIS SECOND WALK FROM WIVELISCOMBE explores the rolling country to the north of the town. The route starts off as for Walk 43, then it diverts across fields to Whitefield before entering Combe Bottom, a quiet wooded valley. A short extension to the north explores Brompton Ralph, nestling peacefully in a fold in the hills, before returning via fields, woods and green lanes to Wiveliscombe. A conspicuous feature towards the end of the walk is the former Hancock's brewery with its tall chimney; it operated from 1807 to 1959. Modern Exmoor Ales sits behind in a much more modest building.

From the car park head up the steps past the community centre. Turn left when you meet a road with shops. Opposite a garage, turn right into a narrow lane between the signs for West Street and West Road. Follow the road uphill until, in about five minutes, it turns left: continue ahead on a bridleway, which ascends steeply between banks. Ignore a bridleway joining from the right (20mins, [1] on map) and continue uphill. Come to a sharp left-hand bend (35mins, [2]) and then a junction: keep right on a roughly-surfaced road ('potholes'). In four minutes turn right on a path marked by two wooden posts. This becomes a track between houses, and meets a surfaced road. Cross over and start along the lane, then turn right through a gate into a field, keeping the boundary to your left. Go over a stile; the Maundown water treatment works, which processes water from Clatworthy and Wimbleball reservoirs, is to your right. Pass a gate on the left, then about halfway to a large barn turn right across the field to go through a gate. After an enclosed section of path, continue into a field with the boundary on your left. Soon after the next gate is a crossing path at a small stream; continue ahead here, through the next gate, then cross the field aiming just to the right of some houses on the far side. Go through a gate here to meet a lane, keeping ahead and left.

The lane brings you into the hamlet or small village of Whitefield. Ignore a road and then a bridleway on the right, but where the road bends sharply left at Whitefield Farm (1hr, [3]), continue ahead on an unsurfaced lane (marked with an inconspicuous purple byway sign). Keep left through a gate, then follow the track around and to the right. You will soon be walking downhill on exposed bedrock; this can be **diabolically slippery**. The path levels out and comes alongside a stream on the left. Look for a conspicuous stile on the left (1hr20mins, [4]; the short walk continues straight ahead here).

For the main walk, go over the stile, cross the field and head over another stile and a footbridge, turning left alongside a stream. The path enters a forestry plantation; at the time of writing, many of the trees had been clear-felled. Take the left-hand, lower way where the path forks; you will return on the upper path, which also provides an alternative route if your path is closed or too churned up due to forest operations. Keep right at the next fork (the left-hand path is a forestry track), then at the next junction where paths cross, keep left. The path becomes a wide vehicle track, and the trees change from conifers to broadleaves. Set back on the left is a derelict house, Pool Mill, which was in use during most of the nineteenth century. Ten to fifteen minutes later, the track ends at a road just beyond a vehicle barrier (1hr50mins, [5]). Your return route is the footpath on the right, but first turn left on the road to explore Brompton Ralph. Keep right at the next junction, where there is a shop, and walk up through the village to the church. Return the same way.



At the junction with the vehicle barrier (2hr10mins, [5]), go through a gate on the waymarked footpath (West Deane Way). Turn left alongside the field boundary, taking the right-hand of the two gates at the end. At the next gate continue ahead across the field to a gate in the far side. Cross another field, then head downwards parallel with the left-hand field edge to go through a gate back into the woods. Turn briefly left, then right and downhill on a signposted path. This will bring you back to the path crossing encountered on the outward route; keep left. When the track bends right, take the lower, right-hand fork. This brings you back to the stream: cross the bridge on the right, over a stile, across the field and over another stile, then turn left on the track to continue the circular part of the walk (2hr40mins, [4]). Follow this track for eight minutes or so until you face a small footbridge over a stream. Cross it, and the low stile, heading upwards and to the right across the field to its corner where there is another stile by a holly tree. Continue ahead, across one track to join another; you will soon have a view over Wiveliscombe.

In under two minutes take the left-hand fork through a gate, and follow the track around to the left and down to a farmyard (3hrs, [6]). Cross the road and continue ahead. Go over a stile into a field and turn right, over two more stiles, diagonally left across a marshy area and a stream, and finally over a stile. Just beyond on the right is yet another stile; this takes you on to an enclosed footpath, which continues alongside a stone wall. Come to a small estate of modern houses; cross the road and continue along a narrow footpath, come to another road, turn left, then turn right into Golden Hill. This takes you downhill past the old brewery back into the centre of Wiveliscombe. Just before the end of the road there is also a plaque on the right commemorating former celebrity chef Keith Floyd, who grew up in the town. Turn right in to the main square, where there are several refreshment options, including (in shop hours) a café in the back of the intriguing former court house building. The path back to the car park is just beyond, on the left.



Brompton Ralph

Shorter walk: Wiveliscombe and Whitefield. At the 1hr20min point ([4]), continue straight ahead picking up the instructions at 2hr40mins (● 4.9 miles, ascents and descents of 260 metres).

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