



Walk 44. Holford and West Quantoxhead.

- 7.5 miles, 3 hours. Ascents and descents of 400 metres.

Terrain: Mainly paths and tracks; shallow fords, and can be muddy.

Access: Access: By car, park in the 'Bowling Green' car park in Holford (ST 154 411, TA5 1SA). Approach the start by turning off the A39 at the Plough Inn, following the signs towards Combe House Hotel. Look out for a turning to the right signposted to the car park and Alfoxton. Alternatively start the walk from the Windmill Inn in West Quantoxhead, or park further up in Staple Plain car park (ST 117 410, turn into Hill Lane at TA4 4DQ) – both are on the route – returning from Holford. Bus 15 (once daily, weekdays in college term time) starts in Minehead, stopping at both Holford and West Quantoxhead.

Map: Croydecycle 55 Watchet and Quantock North or OS Explorer 140.

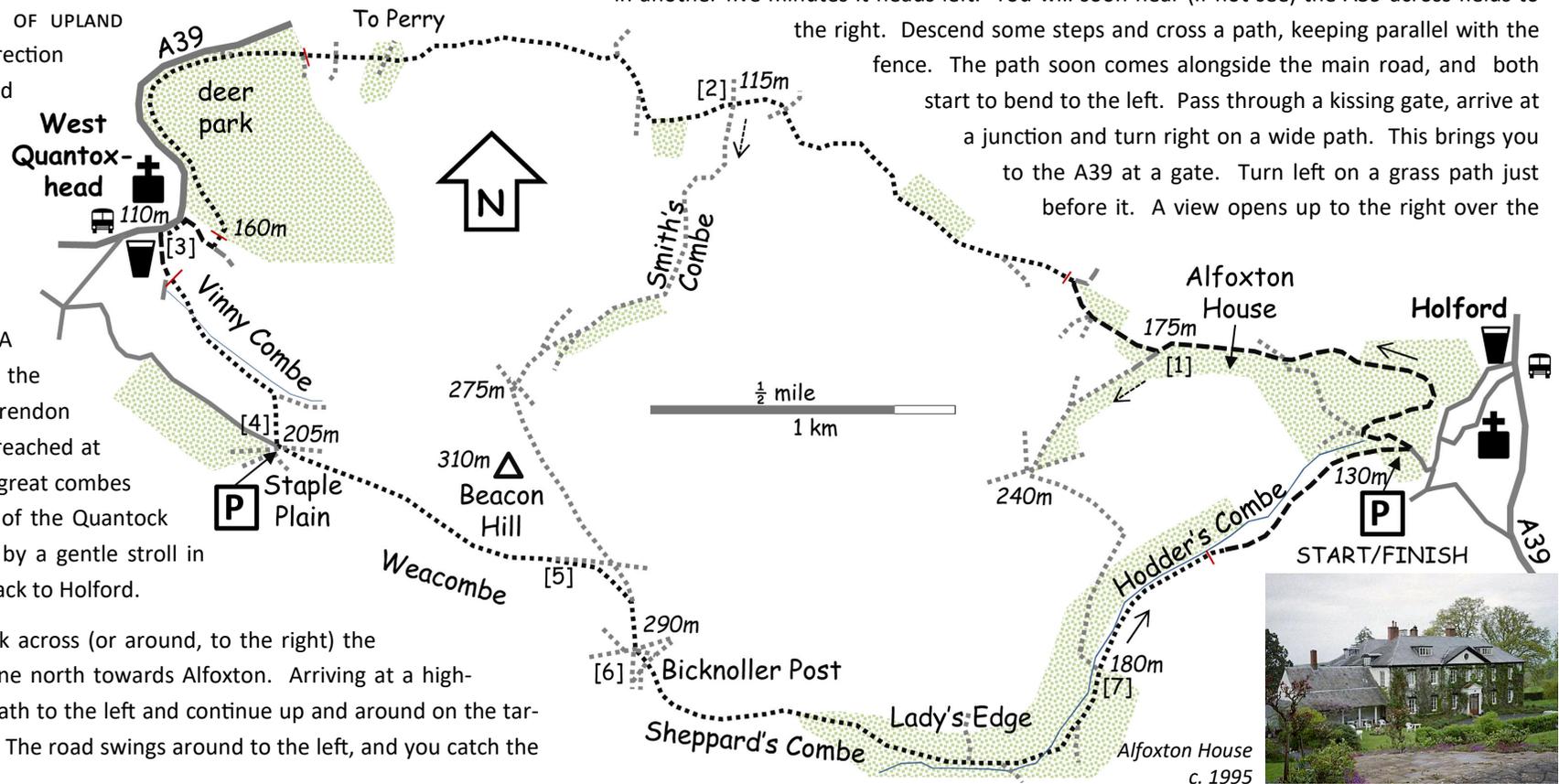
Refreshments: In Holford and West Quantoxhead.

THE QUANTOCK HILLS ARE AN EXPANSE OF UPLAND running in a roughly north-westerly direction from Taunton, with a central ridge and several deep combes descending to either side. This walk explores the northern edge of the Quantocks proper, starting from a secluded spot outside the village of Holford and tracking around the edge of the hills before arriving in West Quantoxhead. A steady ascent provides views down the coast to Minehead and across the Brendon Hills. The highest point of the walk is reached at Bicknoller Post, at the head of the two great combes that divide off the northernmost part of the Quantock Hills. A fairly steep descent followed by a gentle stroll in woods alongside a stream brings you back to Holford.

From the Bowling Green car park, walk across (or around, to the right) the green to follow the main (surfaced) lane north towards Alfoxton. Arriving at a high-walled former dog pound, ignore the path to the left and continue up and around on the tarmac road, above a stream to the right. The road swings around to the left, and you catch the

first glimpses of the Bristol Channel. Continue across a filled-in cattle grid. A little further on, Alfoxton House is on the left; it was for a short time the home of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, and in the 1990s a country house hotel (the picture below faces away from the road; at the time of writing the building looked in need of renovation). Walking past the house, continue around to the right on the road, ignoring the bridlepath that goes straight ahead (25mins, [1]). Pass some houses on the left, then continue to the right ignoring the paths off to the left. The road soon becomes a stony track ('not suitable for motor vehicles') and drops down to a path junction before bearing right to meet a road. At the path junction turn left through a pedestrian gate signposted 'Perry', into woodland; keep the fence, that marks the edge of the Quantock Hills, to your right. The path soon emerges from the wood, with bracken-covered moorland on the left and views across the Bristol Channel and Kilve to the right.

The path crosses a combe then tracks around the northern boundary of the Quantocks. Carry straight on at a signpost ('Perry'), then a couple of minutes later descend into Smith's Combe (50mins, [2]). The shorter walk heads left here up this steep combe, but for the main walk continue ahead across two plank bridges. In five minutes or so the path turns right, and in another five minutes it heads left. You will soon hear (if not see) the A39 across fields to the right. Descend some steps and cross a path, keeping parallel with the fence. The path soon comes alongside the main road, and both start to bend to the left. Pass through a kissing gate, arrive at a junction and turn right on a wide path. This brings you to the A39 at a gate. Turn left on a grass path just before it. A view opens up to the right over the



village. Ignore a path to the left, then shortly after go through a gate on to a lane. Turn right and right again to arrive at the A39; unless you want to visit the church opposite, take the narrow path to the left to avoid walking on the main road. The Windmill Inn is in front of you (1hr30mins, [3]).

Just before the inn turn left up Vinnecombe Lane. Come to a gate as the road bends right; your way on is through the small pedestrian gate just to the right of it. An initially narrow path climbs steadily, widening out into a broad grassy track. About fifteen minutes from the gate, look out for a wide path to the right leading to some steps. Climb up here to come to the Staple Plain car park. Head upwards to the scarp overlooking Weacombe; on the left is an information board about Staple Plain and a wooden post with the map reference ST 117 411 (1hr50mins, [4]).

Walk straight ahead from the post on the well-defined track (the 'Great Road'). The deep valley of Weacombe is to the right, Beacon Hill to the left, and looking back you will have far-ranging views across to the Brendon Hills and Minehead. As the combe begins to come to a head, look out for a fork to the right (2hr10mins, [5]) and follow this to meet another path coming in from the left; the alternative route rejoins here. Several grassy paths cross at a small group of thorn trees; turn left here to arrive at Bicknoller Post ([6]), then continue ahead and cross a grassy path. Bear to the right and descend steeply into Sheppard's Combe; at times you will share the path with water flowing from a spring. The path descends a little further, then flattens out to run alongside a stream in bracken-floored oak woods. Follow the path downstream, ignoring any side-turnings. Splash through the main stream to walk on its right-hand side, then cross a side-stream. When the main stream comes to a fence (2hr40mins, [7]), the path continues on its right. Shortly after a 'round' white house on the left, go through a gate and soon after turn right on to a track. Pass some more houses and arrive back at the Bowling Green.

Shorter walk via Smith's Combe (● 5.5 miles, ascents and descents of 300 metres). From the 45-minute point ([2]), take the left-hand path signposted Smith's Combe. The path meanders upwards through the combe, crossing the stream several times, before bearing right and becoming a straight, unremitting ascent. As you emerge into the open, ignore a track crossing your path, but do look back to admire the views. At a post, turn left and take the right-hand (upper) path, a well-marked bridleway. Continue uphill to come just under the summit of Beacon Hill, marked by a cairn. Cross another bridleway and rejoin the main walk just before the thorn trees at Bicknoller Post, soon after the 2hr10minute point ([5]).

Short walk: Holford and Hodder's Combe (● 3 miles, ascents and descents of 165 metres). Follow the main walk to the 25-minute point ([1]), then take the bridlepath and ascend through a small wooded combe. As the woods run out, come to a five-legged junction. Cross over the main track and start descending into Hodder's Combe: gently at first, then steeply through the woods. Cross the stream and turn left to rejoin the main walk at the 2hr40minute point ([7]).

© Stan Lester 2018-19. Last recce 12/2019. 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.