



Walk 45. Nether Stowey, Dowsborough and Withyman's Pool.

7.8 miles, 3 hours 10 minutes. Ascents and descents of 475 metres.

Terrain: Mainly paths in woods and on moorland. Can be muddy.

Access: Start in Nether Stowey, at the clock tower (ST 192 397, TA5 1NG). There is a small car park next to the library (see the walk description), or there is sometimes parking on the street. Alternatively, start the walk at Dead Woman's Ditch car park on the road between Crowcombe and Nether Stowey (ST 162 382), or nearby Withyman's Pool car park. Bus 15 (from Minehead and Watchet, college days only) and 23B (Watchet and Williton) each stop at Nether Stowey once daily in each direction.

Map: OS Explorer 140 Quantock Hills and Bridgwater.

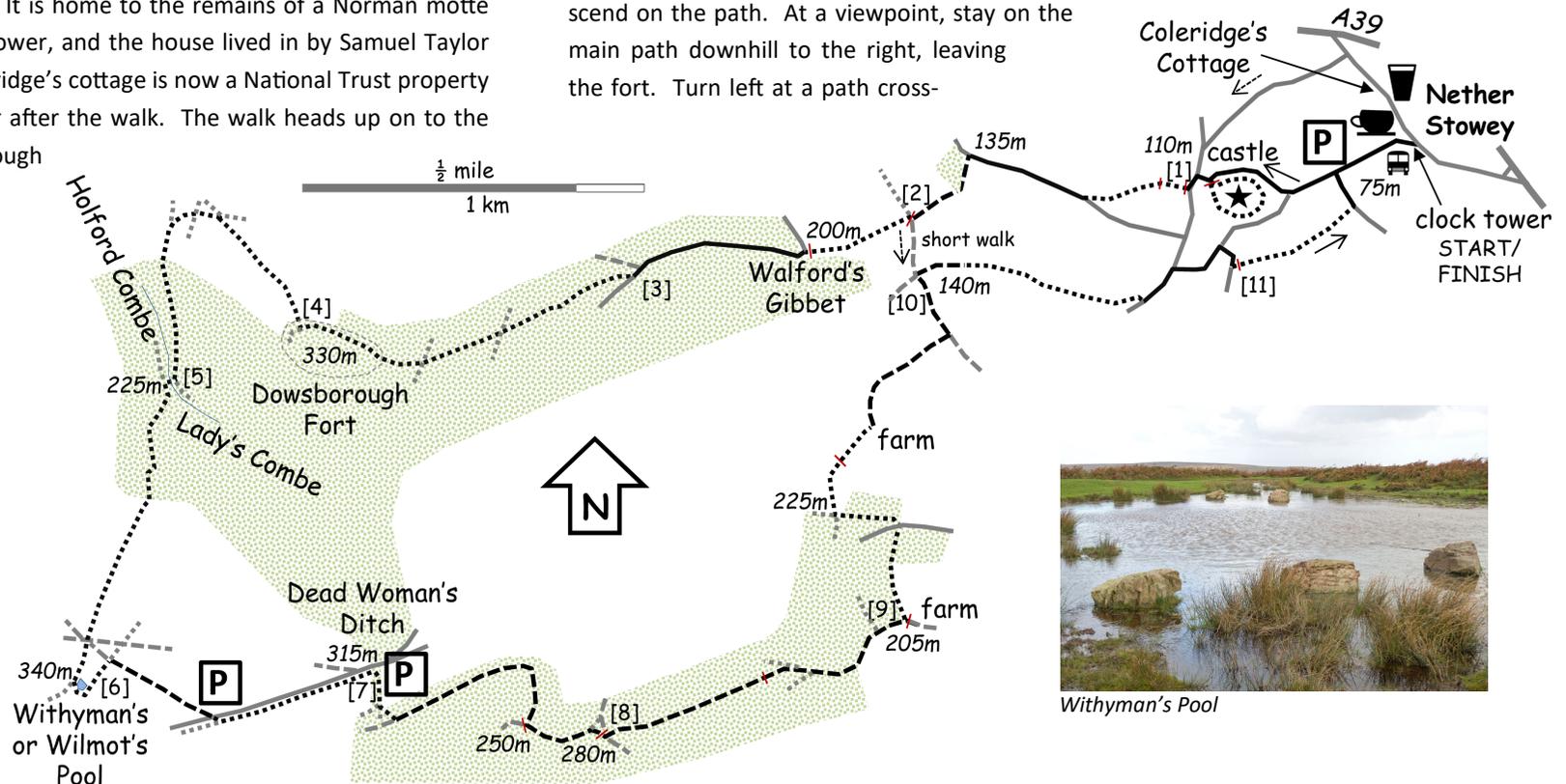
Refreshments: In Nether Stowey.

NETHER STOWEY IS A PLEASANT AND WELL-EQUIPPED LARGE VILLAGE at the foot of the northern Quantocks, just off the A39 north coast road. It is home to the remains of a Norman motte and bailey castle, an unusual Victorian clock tower, and the house lived in by Samuel Taylor Coleridge at the end of the 18th century. Coleridge's cottage is now a National Trust property and is worth a visit if you have time before or after the walk. The walk heads up on to the Quantocks via the castle, continuing through woods and across heathland by way of an impressive (if heavily wooded) Iron Age hill fort and one of the few natural pools on the Quantocks.

Start at the clock tower and walk along Castle Street past the library and adjoining car park. Continue until you come to Butcher's Lane, forking right on this narrow road signed 'unsuitable for motor vehicles'. Views open up to the right across Nether Stowey, Hinkley Point power station and the Mendip Hills. As you come to some houses go up steps to the left and through a metal kissing gate. Continue uphill and walk around what remains of the castle. The stone keep was demolished in the 15th century, but its footings are easy

to make out. Return to the lane, come to a T-junction with a road (20mins, [1]), turn left, then go up some steps on the right to join a footpath that crosses a field. Continue ahead alongside a wire fence, through another kissing gate, and along a path between two fields. Turn right when the path comes to a road. The road starts to descend; as it bends right, take a muddy vehicle track to the left. At a junction (35mins, [2]), go through a gate on the right then take the left-hand path uphill.

Follow the path to a line of trees and go through a gate, taking the left-hand branch of the road. This is Walford's Gibbet, where local charcoal-burner John Walford was hanged in 1789 for murdering his newly-wed wife Jane. After five or six minutes the road bends left, and a public bridleway sign is on the right. Ignore the first turn but take an unmarked path to the right about 50m after (50mins, [3]); it starts in a slight gully next to an oak tree. Follow this well-defined path through the woods, then alongside a row of beech trees on a bank; ignore crossing paths. When the bank turns left, continue on the path bearing slightly right. You soon enter Dowsborough Camp or Fort, an Iron Age hill fort; keep the ditch to your right. Come to a path leading downhill to the right (1hr10mins, [4]), with a viewpoint just beyond: after taking in the view over the north edge of the Quantocks and the Bristol Channel, descend on the path. At a viewpoint, stay on the main path downhill to the right, leaving the fort. Turn left at a path cross-



Withyman's Pool

ing, taking the one path that isn't signposted. The path becomes stony, and starts bearing left back into woodland. Ignore a path to the left and another coming in from the right. Holford Combe is to your right. When the path meets the stream (1hr25mins, [5]), cross it and turn left, heading uphill. The path works its way upwards and comes on to open heath. Carry on to the top of the hill and cross a track. In another minute or so come to a rain-fed pond, Wilmot's Pool or Withyman's Pool (1hr45mins, [6]); in summer it may be almost dry, but it is marked by seven stones arranged in not quite a circle.

Walk anticlockwise three-quarters of the way around the pool, then head almost back the way you came – about 30° off your inward route – on a broad grassy path. At a wider track, turn right and come to a parking area with a post for Withyman's Pool. Turn left and walk along the road (or the path on the far side of it if you prefer); this is thought to be part of a herepath or Saxon military road. Turn right into the car park at Dead Woman's Ditch (2hrs, [7]). The site is often associated with the discovery of Jane Walford's body, but she was thought to have been found a few miles away and the name was already in use several years before her death. Walk beside the oak-topped bank on the right, following the path gradually around to the left. Go through a gap in another bank ahead of you, turning left to walk next to a wire fence on a wide forest track.

After a long straight section the path bends right and downhill, then left and up again. At the top of the climb bear right, go through one of a pair of gates (2hr15mins, [8]), and immediately turn left alongside the bank, heading downhill. Continue ahead at the next gate. A little later come alongside a field on the right, then arrive at a gate in front of a (not very visible) farm (2hr25mins, [9]). Turn left in front of the gate to walk uphill at the edge of the woods. Follow the path across a road, then two or three minutes further on turn right at a bridleway crossroads marked by a post. Go through a gate into a field. Keep to the right-hand side of the field, then join a farm driveway to head downhill. Cross a cattle grid and turn left on a lane. Splash through a shallow ford and turn right behind a cottage signposted towards Nether Stowey (2hr45mins, [10]; the short walk rejoins here). Arriving at a road, turn left, then right at a junction to pass a white thatched house. Walk uphill and turn right between two houses into Hockpits Lane, then as the houses come to an end turn left over a stile into a field (3hrs, [11]). Turn left when you reach a road, then right at a T-junction to return to the car park and clock tower.

Short walk around Nether Stowey (● 2.8 miles, ascents and descents of 100 metres). From the clock tower, walk along Lime Street and pass Coleridge's Cottage (NT, seasonal opening; tea room). Just before meeting the main road, turn left into Mill Lane (signposted Bincombe). Follow the road left into Jackson's Lane then, immediately before the speed derestriction signs, turn left into a narrow lane. Go over a cattle grid, turn right up some steps and through

a metal kissing gate. The path heads upwards to Nether Stowey Castle. After exploring the castle, retrace your steps but turn left at the road to join the main walk at the 20-minute point ([1]). At the 35-minute point ([2]) don't go through the gate but turn left on the track; a couple of minutes later, come to the crossroads at the cottage and turn left to rejoin the main walk at the 2hr45min point ([10]) and return to the start.

Shorter version: Dowsborough and Withyman's Pool (● 5.3 miles, ascents and descents of 380 metres). This shorter walk misses out Nether Stowey. Start at Dead Woman's Ditch or the Withyman's Pool car park and follow the main walk to the 2hr45min point ([10]). Don't turn left at the cottage, but continue straight ahead uphill. In around three minutes come to a junction on a corner (point [2]) and turn left, using the main walk instructions to return to your starting-point.

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