



Walk 46. The central Quantock woods and combes.

- 8.6 miles, 3 hours 30 minutes. Ascents and descents of 550 metres.

Terrain: Woodland paths and tracks, steep in places. Expect some mud particularly on the first part of the walk.

Access: Start at Dead Woman's Ditch car park, on the road between Crowcombe and Nether Stowey (ST 162 382). Alternative start at the first car park in Great Wood (£, ST 173 373, [2] on the map): from the Nether Stowey to Kingston St Mary road turn off opposite Over Stowey Cricket Club and follow the signs to Rams Combe down a narrow lane. Both car parks can become full on busy days. No access by bus.

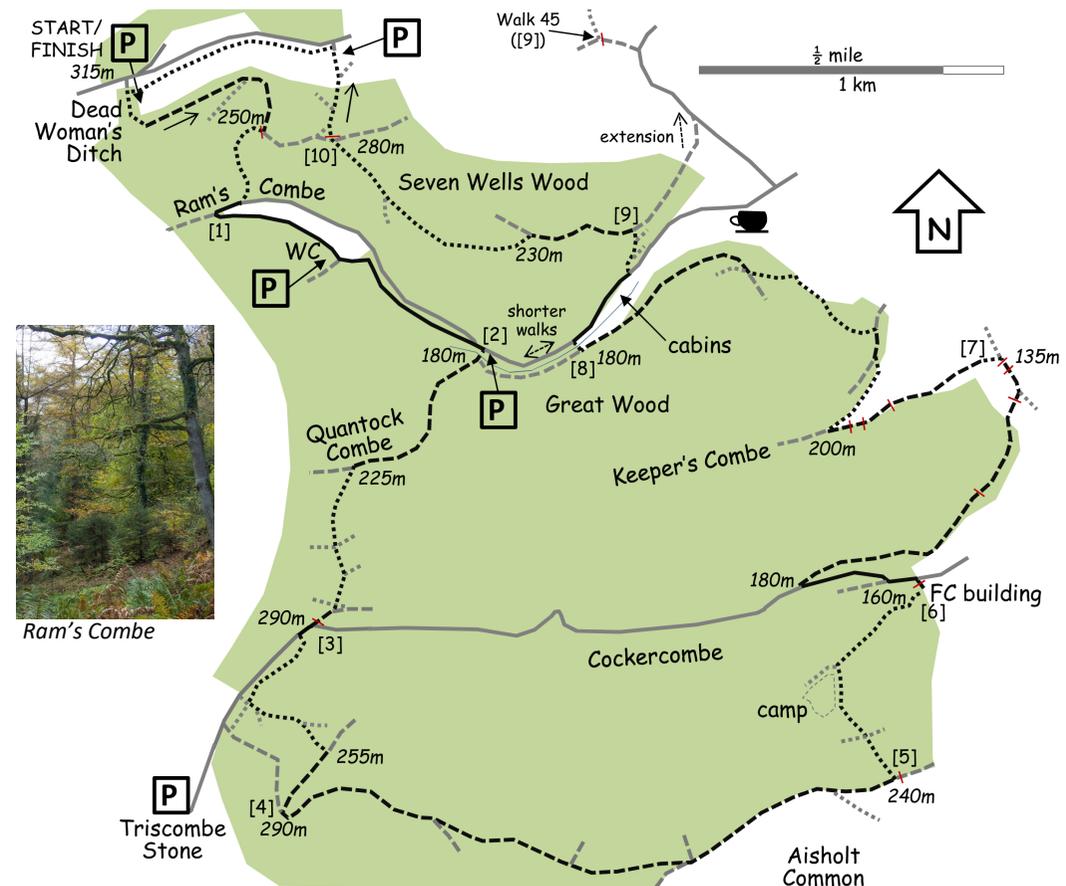
Map: OS Explorer 140 Quantock Hills and Bridgwater.

Refreshments: Just off the route at Adscombe Farm, or in nearby Crowcombe and Nether Stowey.

THE CENTRAL PART OF THE QUANTOCK HILLS has miles of paths and tracks that can be used to wander endlessly along and between wooded combes. This route strikes a balance between exploring enough of the large block of woods between the Crowcombe-Stowey road and Aisholt Common, without becoming too much of a switchback or involving constant ascents and descents. It is nevertheless quite hilly, and there are some steep gradients both up and down. They are balanced by pleasant strolling on broad tracks and paths.

Start at Dead Woman's Ditch car park. Walk south away from the road with an oak bank to your right, following the path gradually around to the left. Go through a conspicuous 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 steeply downhill. Where it bends sharply left to head up again (10mins), turn right through a gate and follow the path through the woods. Arrive at a forest road (15mins, [1]); turn right, then before a vehicle barrier follow the road around the bend to the left. Pass a wooden cabin with public toilets, where there is a small car park. Follow the road until it comes to a second car park, just after a solitary house (30mins, [2]). Turn right before the car park to head upwards on a broad track. In ten minutes arrive at a post, with wooden railings either side of the road; turn left on a track here, and follow it uphill through the woods. Cross another track, then at the top of the hill turn right and pass a vehicle barrier (50mins, [3]) to join a hard road. In less than a minute, go through a gap in some wooden railings on the left to join a path that runs parallel with the road.

After four or five minutes look on the left for a spreading beech tree with a post just beyond it; take the path to the left here, then fork left to head steeply downhill through the woods. Your path may be shared with mountain bikes: keep an eye out for them and be prepared to step off the path if necessary. As the path starts to level out, bear slightly right where you have a choice, coming to an unsurfaced road. Turn right uphill. At a T-junction, turn left signposted 'Aisholt Common' (1hr10mins, [4]). You will follow this woodland road for nearly a mile and a half. Fork left at a wide clearing. A view to the Mendip Hills opens up through the treetops to the left. When a track comes in from the right, the route continues alongside a wire fence. Keep straight ahead and start to descend. Just before a vehicle barrier turn 90° left (1hr40mins, [5]). This wide track rises gently at first, then levels out. Cross another track, then come to the bank of a ring fort or settlement on the left, which appears as a broad arena if you climb up. Keep to the right of the bank and where it curves left, turn right and head downhill on a grassy path. The path narrows and steepens, eventually arriving at a working area with a Forestry Commission building on the left (1hr50mins, [6]). Turn left here into a parking area, then left again on to the road.



Follow the road right over a small stream, pass a house on the left, then just before another house down in the valley turn right on a blue-signed bridleway. This becomes a broad, pleasant track running level along the contour. Go through a gate; the Somerset Levels and Mendip Hills are ahead. After another gate head left alongside a fence. Go through two more gates then turn left and go over a cattle grid on a driveway (2hr10mins, [7]). Head upwards, through a gate, and come to a house; go through two more gates and turn sharply right opposite a second house on to a green-waymarked path (Quantock Greenway). Turn right at a T-junction, then take the next green-marked path to the left in under a minute. The path first skirts around the edge of the woods next to a fence, then bends left and inwards. Turn right on to a crossing woodland road (2hr40mins). Come to some log cabins, Great Wood Camp, to your right. About three minutes past the entrance to the camp, look out for an initially unsigned path on the right (2hr45mins, [8]). Follow this over a footbridge, then turn right on a broad road.

Arriving back at the log cabins, turn left on to a path. Ignore a grassy track to the right, then fork left again uphill to come to a wide track (2hr55mins, [9]). Turn left here to climb into Seven Wells Wood (for the longer alternative walk, turn right). At a fork, keep left and upwards on the woodland path. A little later a track joins from the left. When you arrive at a gate (3hr15mins, [10]), go through it and continue ahead (the wider path slightly to the right) into the woods. Ignore a vague path forking left, then follow the main path along the side of an open area to come to a small car park, then the road. Don't join the road but turn left and walk along parallel with it on a well-defined path; in ten minutes or so you will come back to Dead Woman's Ditch (3hr30mins).

Shorter walk A: Seven Wells Wood (● 3.2 miles, ascents and descents of 190 metres). Follow the main walk to the 30-minute point ([2]), but continue on the road past the car park rather than turning right. This brings you above the Great Wood cabins (just beyond [8]); turn left opposite them as described in the main walk, and follow the instructions back to the finish.

Shorter walk B: Great Wood and Cockercombe (● 5.6 miles, ascents and descents of 360 metres). Start at the Great Wood car park ([2] on the map). Follow the main walk to the 2hr45-minute point ([8]), but instead of turning right continue on the track until it comes to a T-junction. Turn right here, and the car park will be on your right.

Extended walk: Dowsborough and the central Quantock woods (● 11.9 miles, with ascents and descents of 800 metres). This longer walk combines most of the walk described above with part of Walk 45. Follow the main walk to the 2 hour 55-minute point ([9]), but turn right rather than left. Follow the track to a road, turn left and walk along it for three or four minutes, then turn left on a signposted bridleway. Go through a gate and turn immediately right to join Walk 45 at its 2hr25min point ([9]). At the cottage by the ford, continue straight ahead to rejoin Walk 45 at the 35-minute point ([2]), following it until you return to Dead Woman's Ditch.

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