



Walk 7. County Gate, Watersmeet and Countisbury.

- 10.3 miles, 4 hours 30 minutes. Ascents and descents of 950 metres.

Terrain: Mostly on paths, often narrow and uneven. ! There are several narrow sections above steep hillsides or rocky river banks.

Access: By car, park in the County Gate car park (SS 793 486, near to EX35 6NQ). The walk can also be started from Brendon (SS 765 481), just west of the Staghunters Inn (£), or Watersmeet (SS 744 487), where there is a parking area on the A39 above the house (£). By bus, seasonal service 300 from Lynmouth or Minehead stops at County Gate and Countisbury in the school summer holidays.

Map: Croydecycle 04 Lynton, Lynmouth & Doone Valley; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

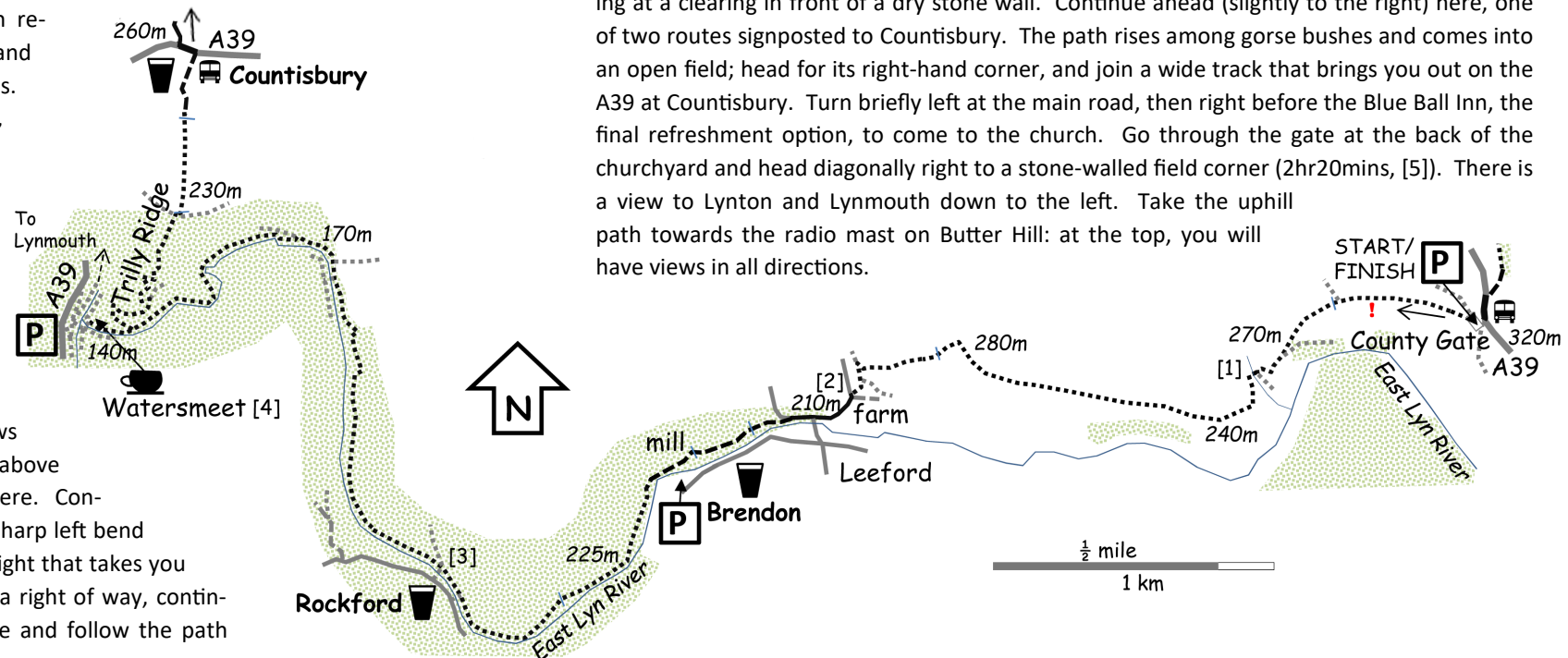
Refreshments: Seasonal café at Watersmeet, pubs at Brendon, Rockford and Countisbury.

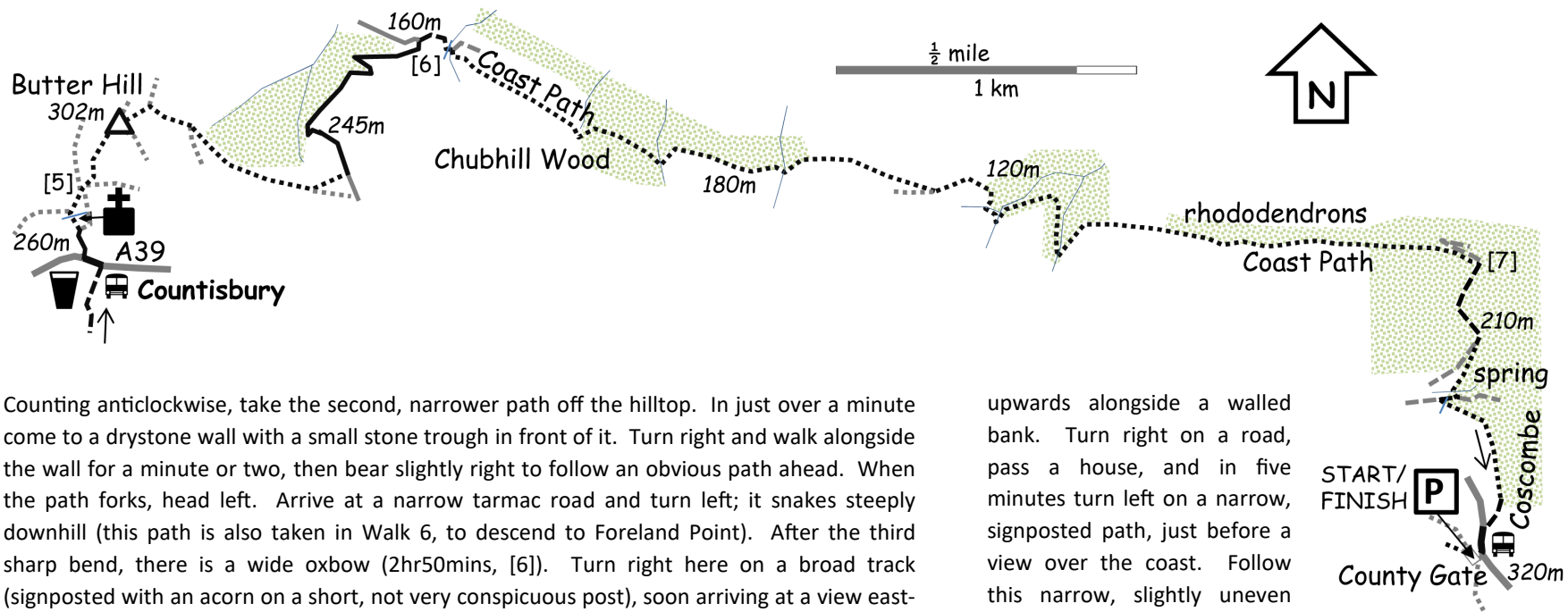
THIS IS ANOTHER SUPERB IF STRENUOUS WALK combining high moors, a deep, wooded river valley, coastal views and Atlantic rainforest. The outward route heads down the East Lyn valley through the small villages of Brendon and Rockford, then follows the river into a wooded gorge and to its junction with cascading Hoarok Water at Watersmeet. It then reverses part of Walk 6 to Countisbury and Butter Hill, with breathtaking coastal views. The return route follows the undulating, wooded coast path back to County Gate. Note that there are no refreshments after Countisbury, and there is no longer a café at County Gate.

Start from the County Gate car park. Looking across the valley, head for the right-hand corner where there is a viewpoint board. Take a narrow footpath signposted 'Brendon 1³/₄'. This follows the contour around a steep hillside, high above the East Lyn valley: watch your footing here. Continue ahead through a gate, then after a sharp left bend look out for a wooden footbridge to the right that takes you over a stream (the main path, no longer a right of way, continues ahead) (13mins, [1]). Go over a stile and follow the path

above the wide river valley. Ignore a crossing path and continue as indicated by the yellow-topped posts. The settlements of Leeford and Brendon come into view. The path follows a fence; arriving at a gate, go through and keep the fence on your right, initially staying roughly level. Begin to head downhill, then turn sharply left at a hairpin bend (a minor path continues ahead). Bear right at a spreading oak tree, picking the path up again as it descends some wooden steps. Arrive at a road and turn left; you may spot an emu or two at the farm (40mins, [2]). Come to a stone bridge. The Staghunters Inn at Brendon is on the other side; otherwise continue ahead along the road for a minute or so.

After passing a small stone footbridge, take a lane to the left signposted Rockford and Watersmeet. Go through a gate marked 'Countisbury Mill', then through another gate past a farm. The path takes you down to the East Lyn, past a National Trust sign, and through a gate. Follow the path towards Watersmeet; a convenient footbridge allows a diversion to Rockford and its inn on the other side of the river if you are in need of sustenance (1hr10mins, [3]). The valley begins to take on the character of a gorge, and as it approaches Watersmeet the path becomes narrow and uneven. Watersmeet House (at the confluence of the East Lyn and Hoarok Water) is a former fishing lodge, now an atmospheric National Trust tea garden: even if closed it makes a good setting for a picnic. Retrace your steps from Watersmeet for two or three minutes, taking the first path left towards Countisbury. This zigzags up through the gorge; you will soon be able to see back down the East Lyn valley. Soon after, keep left at a path junction. The path continues upwards along Trilly Ridge, arriving at a clearing in front of a dry stone wall. Continue ahead (slightly to the right) here, one of two routes signposted to Countisbury. The path rises among gorse bushes and comes into an open field; head for its right-hand corner, and join a wide track that brings you out on the A39 at Countisbury. Turn briefly left at the main road, then right before the Blue Ball Inn, the final refreshment option, to come to the church. Go through the gate at the back of the churchyard and head diagonally right to a stone-walled field corner (2hr20mins, [5]). There is a view to Lynton and Lynmouth down to the left. Take the uphill path towards the radio mast on Butter Hill: at the top, you will have views in all directions.





Butter Hill

Counting anticlockwise, take the second, narrower path off the hilltop. In just over a minute come to a drystone wall with a small stone trough in front of it. Turn right and walk alongside the wall for a minute or two, then bear slightly right to follow an obvious path ahead. When the path forks, head left. Arrive at a narrow tarmac road and turn left; it snakes steeply downhill (this path is also taken in Walk 6, to descend to Foreland Point). After the third sharp bend, there is a wide oxbow (2hr50mins, [6]). Turn right here on a broad track (signposted with an acorn on a short, not very conspicuous post), soon arriving at a view eastwards along the coast. Cross over a stile and turn right on to the Coast Path, which soon swings back left and heads high above the coast through a mixture of Atlantic rainforest and rhododendron clumps. There is little navigation to do for the next 2½ miles: take care above the steep drops, and admire the occasional sea views. Eventually the path meets a vehicle track: turn right (4hr10mins, [7]). Pass a cottage and come to a pair of stone gateposts. Turn left here to continue on the Coast Path. Arriving at a spring marked by a stone cross (the Sisters' Fountain), go up some steps and turn right on a broad track (the Coast Path continues to the left, meeting up with Walk 8). Within a minute, turn sharp left through a gate, signposted County Gate. A steep uphill path leads to another gate: go through, and arrive at the A39. Turn left for 'Somerset', the car park and bus stop.

Two **shorter linear walks** can be done between County Gate and Lynmouth using two cars, a taxi, or in July or August the Minehead to Lynmouth bus. The classic **riverside** route, very popular in season, is to continue from Watersmeet to Lynmouth along the river (● 6.4 miles, ascents of 290 metres and descents of 595 metres; see Walk 6). Alternatively, just follow the main walk to Countisbury (● 5.6 miles, ascents of 360 metres and descents of 420 metres). The **coastal route** roughly involves reversing the second part of this walk and the coastal part of Walk 6 (● 6.4 miles, ascents of 535 metres and descents 840 metres). The instructions are:

From County Gate, briefly head back towards Lynmouth, turn right on a path within a minute, then right through a gate to head downhill. After a second gate turn right, then almost immediately left on a narrow path signposted Coast Path. At a stone cross bear right to continue

upwards alongside a walled bank. Turn right on a road, pass a house, and in five minutes turn left on a narrow, signposted path, just before a view over the coast. Follow this narrow, slightly uneven path for the next two and a half miles, ignoring a right fork for Countisbury. You are in woodland much of the time, with intermittent coastal views in both directions. When you reach a field gate, join an unsurfaced lane to go through it; shortly after, turn right on a tarmac lane. Descend to a bridge, then turn left to head upwards on a grassy footpath. Follow the path around the hillside and alongside a valley, then turn left where it meets a crossing path. Views soon open up down the coast to Lynmouth and beyond. Keep right, beneath Butter Hill, then as the top of the church tower comes into view look out for a path on the right that will keep you above the cliffs. Follow the path to the corner of a wall, then continue ahead between the road and the cliffs. After a small concrete shelter ignore two paths to the left. Come to the road and walk along it for the length of the layby, then join the path to the right. After walking alongside the road, this heads down into Lynmouth.

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