



Walk 8. County Gate, Oare and Culbone.

- 9.1 miles, 4 hours. Ascents and descents of 790 metres.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and some roads, with some steep and uneven sections. Shallow streams to ford. There is a narrow path above a steep hillside after leaving Oare, which can be avoided using an alternative route.

Access: By car, park in the County Gate car park (SS 793 486, near to EX35 6NQ). The walk (but not the short version) can also be started from Robbers Bridge (SS 821 465, no post code). By bus, seasonal service 300 from Lynmouth or Minehead stops at County Gate during the school summer holidays; check the timetable as it varies from year to year.

Map: Croydecycle 04 Lynton, Lynmouth & Doone Valley plus 02 Porlock; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

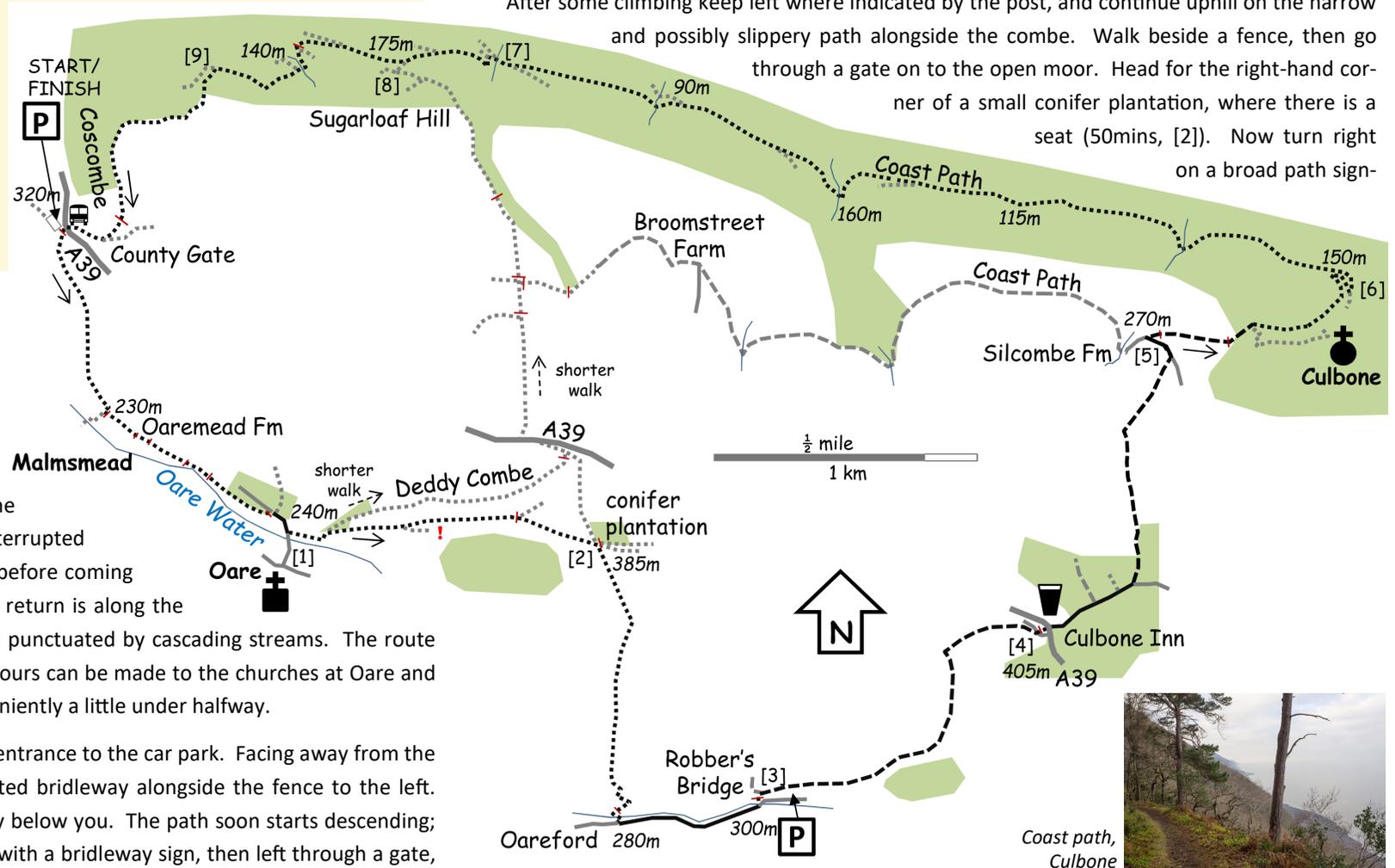
Refreshments: Inn on the A39 near Culbone. Otherwise in Porlock or Lynmouth, or pubs in Countisbury or Malmsmead. There is no longer a café at County Gate.

THIS VARIED AND QUITE STRENUOUS WALK takes in two very different types of landscape. The outward route follows the Oare Water, a tributary of the East Lyn River, for much of its length and explores the deep combes, rounded hillsides and open heath typical of inland Exmoor. The route then skirts Culbone Hill, which is reputed to have the highest uninterrupted descent into the sea of anywhere in England, before coming above the diminutive church at Culbone. The return is along the coast path, shaded by hanging oak woods and punctuated by cascading streams. The route avoids villages and even hamlets, although detours can be made to the churches at Oare and Culbone, and the Culbone Inn is situated conveniently a little under halfway.

Start from the County Gate bus shelter, at the entrance to the car park. Facing away from the road, go through a gate and follow a signposted bridleway alongside the fence to the left. The small village of Malmsmead is immediately below you. The path soon starts descending; keep right and downhill. Turn right at a fence with a bridleway sign, then left through a gate,

going through five further gates to pass a farm and come to a river. Walk alongside the river for a short way before climbing gently upwards and to the left on a slight ridge. Go through a gate and turn right on to the road, soon coming to a bridge (25mins, [1]). A short detour across the bridge brings you to Oare church; this somewhat boxy but pleasing 15th-century church is the location of the wedding scene in *Lorna Doone*. Otherwise turn left on a foot-path immediately before the bridge. Splash through a small stream, then turn left on a grassy path. Almost immediately come to a signposted junction and turn right towards North Common (the short walk continues ahead here). (The main path, to the side of Deddy Combe, is narrow and possibly slippery above a steep hillside. To avoid it, take the left fork as for the short walk, but turn right at the top away from the main road to rejoin the main walk at the corner of the woods.)

After some climbing keep left where indicated by the post, and continue uphill on the narrow and possibly slippery path alongside the combe. Walk beside a fence, then go through a gate on to the open moor. Head for the right-hand corner of a small conifer plantation, where there is a seat (50mins, [2]). Now turn right on a broad path sign-



Coast path, Culbone

posted 'Oareford 1'. When the path starts to lose definition, head for the right-hand side of a group of trees. These are arranged in a square; walk along its right-hand side until you come to a post with a blue arrow on it. Keep right here to descend on a narrow zigzag path back to Oare Water. At the bottom turn right through a pedestrian gate, cross the river, and turn left on the road. In a little over five minutes you will come to Robber's Bridge (1hr10mins, [3]). Cross the bridge and leave the road by going straight ahead on a bridleway signposted to Culbone Inn. Go through the gate and turn immediately right on a broad track to climb gradually above the river valley. The track curves around the hillside to the left. Arriving in front of a large white house, the Culbone Inn, go through the first gate then keep to the right of the inn on a bridleway (1hr35mins, [4]). Cross the A39 (with care, as you are on a bend) and continue on a minor road for another five minutes or so, passing a farm road and a footpath (Culbone Stone only) on the left. Turn left on a second farm road that doubles as a permitted footpath to Culbone Church. The character of the walk now changes, with sea and coastal views soon opening up.

At a junction keep left for Culbone Church, then in another minute or so (1hr55mins, [5]) turn right, again towards the church. (If the coast path is closed for any reason, the 'inland' coast path continues straight ahead through Silcombe Farm). Go through two gates, then ignore the path to the right signposted to the church (to continue to Porlock, take this path then follow the instructions in Walk 8). The path descends more steeply then turns through a sharp right-hand bend. Turn left at the signpost ('permitted path to Lynmouth') (2hr10mins, [6]). For nearly an hour, follow the footpath signs including any diversions, ignoring any tracks to the right or left. You will have occasional views down to the sea through the trees, although you are more likely to hear waves on the shore than to see them. Five fast-flowing, cascading streams cross the path before you turn off to County Gate.

Between the second and third streams the path forks at a not particularly helpful acorn sign; keep left, coming soon afterwards to the third stream. After the fourth stream (3hrs, [7]) turn left and uphill. Ignore the sign to Culbone Church on the left (both the short walk and the inland coast path rejoin the route here: 3hr10mins, [8]). After passing some boulders where there is a view over the sea, take the next fork upwards to the left. Go through a gap in a wall (the gate has broken away), keep right on the coast path, descend into a combe then cross the fifth stream. Continue onwards and upwards on the coast path and County Gate nature trail, ignoring the Glenthorne Beach turn to the right (unless you want to make the steep descent and return). Climb up to a clearing (3hr30mins, [9]) and turn left to County Gate (the coast path to Lynmouth continues straight on). You now have a steep but steady ascent, with Coscombe on your right. Go through a gate and bear right at the top of the combe, cross the A39, and arrive back at the bus shelter and car park (4hrs).

Short walk: County Gate – Oare – Sugarloaf Hill (● 4.2 miles, ascents and descents of 390 metres). At the derelict shack after the 25-minute point take the left fork ('A39 ³/₄') to ascend Deddy Combe. Turn left at the top. Briefly turn left on the A39, then take a signposted bridleway to the right, keeping to the right-hand field boundary. Cross into a field, then continue straight ahead into a second field on a footpath. The path now descends gently on the right-hand edge of Wheatham Combe. As the path swings left, look out for a right turn into the woods. A minute or so later turn right again, then turn left to rejoin the main walk at the 3hr10min point ([8]).

Alternative walk: County Gate to Porlock (● 9.2 miles, ascents of 440 metres and descents 720 metres). Follow the main walk to the 1hr55min point, turn right and pass through the two gates, then take the narrow path to the right to Culbone Church. Follow the return half of Walk 9 from Culbone Church to Porlock. Note that the bus to return to County Gate only runs as outlined in the 'Access' notes above.



Culbone church

© Stan Lester 2018-20. Last recce 5/2020. 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.