



Walk 9. Porlock, Hawk Combe, Culbone and Porlock Weir.

- 10.9 miles, 4 hours 30 minutes. Ascents and descents of 760 metres.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and short sections of road. Slightly uneven and potentially muddy in places. Some steep ascents.

Access: By car, park in Porlock: there may be a space next to the church (SS 886 466, near TA24 8LA) or further up Parson's Lane towards Hawkcombe, or park in the long-stay car park (SS 885 469, TA24 8PH, £) and walk back. Alternatively, park in Porlock Weir (SS 864 479, TA24 8PD, £) and start from there ([9] on the map). By bus, use service 10 from Minehead to Porlock (Monday-Saturday) or 300 from Lynmouth or Minehead (weekdays in summer school holidays only).

Map: Croydecycle 02 Porlock plus 03 Horner and Dunkery; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

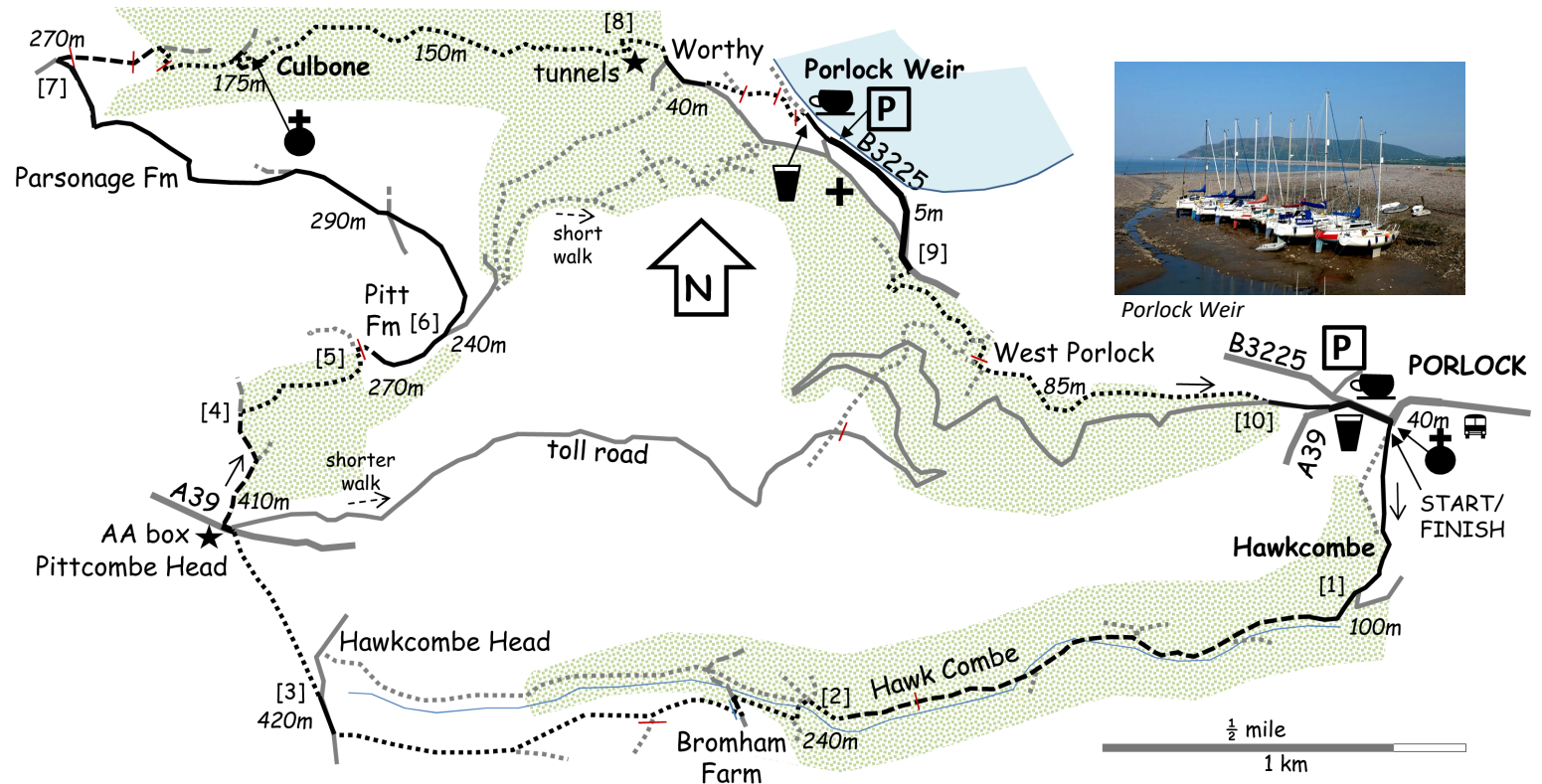
Refreshments: In Porlock and Porlock Weir.

THIS IS A SUPERB IF SLIGHTLY STRENUOUS WALK that takes in an attractive and bustling Exmoor village, wooded combes, open moorland, and far-reaching views, not to mention the smallest church in England in regular use, historic tunnels and a busy mini-resort. The walk is fairly long and a steady climb is involved through the first combe (motor traffic has to ascend the infamous Porlock Hill to reach the same point), but the views are well worth it and there are first-class refreshments back in Porlock (or Porlock Weir, if you can't wait).

In Porlock start from St. Dubricius' church, recognised by its unusual truncated, wooden-shingled spire. Walk along Parson's Lane, past a recreation ground, a disused red telephone box, and on the left the arched entrance to a cemetery. Continue straight ahead at a 'no through road' sign (10mins, [1]). The houses gradually thin out as you come into Hawk Combe. The road soon becomes a rough track and leaves habitation behind as it ascends the combe. Follow what is now a path along the combe

bottom, crossing the stream twice. Go through a gate, then a little way after a wooden barn turn left (signposted 'Hawkcombe Head') to cross a small stream, then left again to ford the main stream ('Bromham Farm'; 50mins, [2]). Head upwards, keeping right where the path splits: look for a blue mark on a tree. Turn right at a fence and follow the narrow path above the combe. Arriving at a wider track, turn left, then turn right on a signposted bridleway just before the entrance to Bromham Farm. Go through a gate and head uphill: as the path levels out you are rewarded by views over the combe, down to the coast and (on a clear day) across to South Wales. Continue along the edge of the combe, keeping to the right of the fence on a permissive path: don't follow the bridleway through the gate. Where the fence turns left, continue straight ahead on a narrow path through heather. This meanders to the left, but soon meets a wider track: turn right here, then right on to the road. In less than five minutes (1hr35mins, [3]) take a broad track that veers to the left, and follow it parallel with the field boundary until it meets the main A39.

Cross the road and turn left. Almost immediately, opposite an AA telephone box strategically placed for motorists coming up Porlock Hill (1hr45mins), take the bridleway to the right: go through the gate and follow the blue waymarks, ignoring the signposted toll road back to



Porlock (this is used for the shorter return route described below). Ignore the first track descending to the right; views across Porlock Vale soon open up to the right. Little more than five minutes later follow the bridleway downhill to the right (2hrs, [4], the 'main' route straight on is a forestry track and is not a right of way). Keep right where a track leads off to the left, following the main way down and then around to the left. Coming above a house and its well-kept garden, turn right on a track ([5], ignoring the sign for Culbone via Smalacombe. Join a surfaced road, which in around five minutes comes to an oxbow junction (2hr10mins, [6]): take the road to the left, and ascend steeply. At the next junction, a cross-roads where the main road bears left, continue straight on to a narrow road signposted to Ash Farm. The road climbs a little more before levelling out. Pass the entrance to Ash Farm, follow the road to the right past Parsonage Farm and its holiday accommodation, then come to a sharp left bend with views along the coast.

Ten minutes later (2hr45mins, [7]), turn right on a track signposted to Culbone: go through a gate, and a little later a second gate. After the second gate look out for a small sign for Culbone Church. Turn right here and descend into the woods on a narrow, often slippery path. The path turns to the left, always downhill, and emerges from the woods at the rather picturesque Culbone Mill. Walk under the bridge and go through the gate to the left into the churchyard. The church of St Beuno (a 7th-century Welsh saint) reputedly dates from Saxon times, and it is claimed to be the smallest church in England that is still in use. After exploring the churchyard (and church if it is open), leave via some steps (on the left as you face the front of the church), turn left, and go over the bridge, now with the mill on your right. The original, lower coast path has been partly eroded; you are now on the replacement upper path, which takes you through the woods (with occasional sea views) back in the direction of Porlock. The path is well signposted; where there are choices, keep to the left.

Eventually the path descends steeply on a zig-zag, goes under an arch and then a short tunnel (3hr20mins, [8], part of the 'back entrance' to Ashley Combe, the now demolished summer home of pioneering 19th-century mathematician Ada Lovelace). After the tunnel it emerges in the hamlet of Worthy. Follow the road for less than five minutes, then take the coast path continuation on your left. You will soon have views over the shingly beach and creek at Porlock Weir. Following the path along the edge of a field, look out for an almost hidden sign for a path to the left: go down some steps here to the little seaside village of Porlock Weir (3hr35mins). Passing the shops and pubs, leave Porlock Weir on the coast road. Follow the road inland and pass the toll road on your right. Shortly after, two paths branch off to the right (3hr50mins, [9]): take the second one, and follow it across a lane and over a stream. Keep to the left-hand path, ignore a crossing path five minutes later, then go through a wooden barrier and turn left above some houses (West Porlock). Follow this path until it reaches a road (4hr20mins, [10]); turn left, pass the Ship Inn, and return to Porlock.

Shorter version: Porlock, Hawk Combe and the toll road (● 7.3 miles, ascents and descents of 540 metres). Follow the main walk to Pittcombe Head (the 1hr45min point), then cross the A39 and take the toll road to the right. Walk along this quiet and scenic road for 35 minutes or so, then just before a cattle grid turn left on a bridleway signposted to Porlock. Cross a road, descend through woods, then turn right on the next road (the path continues to Porlock, but the views are better from the road). Around 30 minutes later turn left on to the A39 and arrive back in Porlock.

Shorter walk: Porlock Weir and Culbone (● 5.2 miles, ascents and descents of 430 metres). This walk reverses part of the main walk, then returns through the woods above Porlock Weir. From Porlock Weir car park head past the harbour shop and to the end of the row of workshops and cafés behind it. Turn left to go up steps between two garages; at the top, turn right on a path. When this meets a rough track, keep left and upwards. Turn right at the road. At the toll cottage, go through the right-hand arch on to the Coast Path. Go under the first tunnel and through an arch ([8]). Over the years the coast path has been eroded by landslips; follow the zig-zags upwards as signposted. After the broken-down entrance to another tunnel, keep right on the coast path towards Culbone, then right at a T-junction. A little way further on there is another zig-zag, then the path begins to level out. When it comes to a bridge with a house attached, cross it and turn right, then right into the churchyard. Keep right, leaving the churchyard through a gate on the left; turn right here and go under the bridge. The path heads upwards through woods; after a sharp right-hand bend, go through a gate then fork left to come to an unsurfaced road. Turn left here towards Silcombe Farm. After the second gate come to a surfaced lane ([7]); turn left, then keep left at the next fork. Ignoring any side-turnings, follow the road for half an hour; keep sharp left at a turn-off for Pitt Farm ([6]), then in about three minutes turn right on a bridleway. Ignore a left turn, but nearly ten minutes further on turn left on a narrower path. Cross a broader track, and follow the bridleway around a sharp left turn; ignore the first path to the left, but in another two minutes turn left on a signposted narrow path. This zigzags downhill to bring you to a road; turn right, then take the next turn left to return to the car park and beach.

Alternative linear walk: Porlock to County Gate (● 10.8 miles, ascents of 990 metres and descents of 710 metres). Follow the main walk to the 2hr35min point and go through the two gates, but ignore the turn-off right to Culbone Church. Follow the instructions in Walk 8 to County Gate, using seasonal bus 300 or a taxi to return.

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