

## A. Nether Stowey to Alfoxton

**Distance:** 4¾ miles

**Total Ascent:** 205 metres

**Walk Summary:** A steep climb from Nether Stowey, then a steadier ascent to the top of Woodlands Hill. Downhill through heath and woodland to Holford and along the level tarmac drive to Alfoxton. Much of this section also follows a route signed the Quantock Greenway.

**1** Coming out of **Coleridge Cottage**, turn right and walk down Lime Street, turning right again on Castle Street. At the **clock tower** bear right to continue ahead along Castle Street and then Castle Hill.

**2** Carry on down the other side of Castle Hill, past the site of **Nether Stowey Castle**, to walk to the T-junction at the bottom of the hill. Turn left here.

**3** About 150 yards ahead, a lane leaves on the right. Turn right onto this lane and follow it alongside the stream for about half a mile, bearing right over the steps when the bridleway bears left into the stream.

**4** Reaching the crossroads by the cottage at **Broomsquires**, turn right and follow the lane steeply uphill for about 150 yards, to where it flattens out and turns abruptly away, to the right.

**5** Leave the lane here, going through the gate into the field on your left and walking steeply uphill alongside the left-hand hedge. When the hedge turns sharp left, carry on ahead, passing a little to the left of the quarry pit in the field. (The quarry pits and spoils heaps were associated with the 18th-19th century **Dodington copper mines**).

**6** Go through the gate at the top of the field and out onto the road at **Walford's Gibbet**, turning left to walk for about a quarter of a mile through the trees.

**7** The road turns left and then right, and a lane leaves on the right. Turn right onto this lane, climbing steeply at first and then rising and falling gently as it travels through the woods for about three quarters of a mile. Carry on past the bridleway heading steeply uphill to the left, unless you want an energetic diversion to the **Dowsborough Iron Age Hillfort** (an additional quarter of a mile and about 190m of ascent).

**8** The path pulls out of the trees and onto open heathland, ascending slightly before it joins a bridleway heading down from Dowsborough hillfort. Ignore the small path beyond the junction dropping steeply downhill into **Holford Combe**.

**9** Turn right on the main bridleway and follow it, gently downhill at first, to where another bridleway joins from Holford Combe on the left. Carry on along

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the main track, climbing very slightly to the stone cairn marking the highest point of the path.

**10** Ignoring the bridleway to the right, by the marker cairn, bear left along the main track, heading steeply downhill and into the trees on **Woodlands Hill**

**11** In the woods the path forks. Bear left to stay on the main track, still descending steeply through the trees. Carry on past the side path that goes through a gate on the left a little further on as well.

**12** Coming out onto a small road just before the A39, turn left to follow it over the crest of a small hill and down into Holford.

**13** Detour right to visit the church, with its 13th-century churchyard cross, and the site of the **Huguenot silk mill** (used in a video by singer Bryan Adams). Otherwise pass to the right of 'The Triangle' and take the lane immediately opposite, dropping downhill past the thatched cottage. Turn left on the road at the bottom, crossing the bridge and carrying on past the car park and the bridleways before and after it. Keep following the road around past the Holford Bowling Green until you come to the **Dog Pound**.

**14** Ignoring the Coleridge Way bridle path to the left of the Dog Pound, carry on along the road as it turns sharp right and goes through the Alfoxton entrance to become its drive. Curving to the left around the edge of Alfoxton Wood it comes to the former hotel at **Alfoxton**.

In St Mary Street, Coleridge often spent time in The Old House, owned by his friend and sponsor **Thomas Poole**, who arranged for the poet to use Coleridge Cottage. Poole owned the nearby tannery and was a noted local businessman and philanthropist.

In 1789 convicted murderer **John Walford** was given a last mug of ale at the Globe Inn on his way to the gallows, and his tragic (and pregnant) mistress Ann climbed sobbing into the cart with him and had to be removed by the Peace Officers.

Hanged on a 30-foot gibbet for the murder of his wife (also pregnant by him), Walford's body was left suspended in a cage here as an example to other miscreants. After a year and a day, it is said to have fallen to the ground, and he was buried where he fell.

## B. Alfoxton to Bicknoller

**Distance:** 5 miles

**Total Ascent:** 230 metres

**Walk Summary:** Climbing from Alfoxton, the route passes through woodland, descending to open heathland. Rollercoasting into the deer park it descends to West Quantoxhead along a green pathway before heading out of the village on another woodland path to Bicknoller.

**15** Ignoring the bridleway to the right, cross the cattle grid and carry on past the hotel, climbing steeply as the drive bears to the left beyond it.

**16** Also ignoring the bridleway ahead at the sharp right-hand bend, carry on along the road, continuing past another track to the right to stay with the road as it veers left again. Now walking along Pardlestone Lane, a favourite haunt of the **Wordsworths**, continue past the houses on your left. Pass the two bridleways on your left after the houses and carry on along the road as it drops sharply to the right and becomes a rough track.

**17** As the track veers right, there is a bridleway on the left. Turn left onto the path immediately below it, signed to **Perry**, and follow it alongside the fence bounding the open access land. The path drops steeply to a small stream which you will need to ford before ascending equally steeply on the far side of it. There is another very small stream to cross a little further on, and then the path rollercoasters around the edge of Broom Ball, with open moorland on the left and rolling green pastureland on the right.

**18** After about three quarters of a mile the path reaches an open area where another bridleway crosses it, heading from the A39 on the right to the top of Longstone Hill on the left. Carry straight on ahead, descending steeply to Smith's Combe.

**19** Another bridleway crosses yours at the bottom of the valley. Carry on past it, crossing two small footbridges and pulling sharply uphill out of the valley along the lane at the bottom of Smith's Knap. Continue past the stand of trees on the left, bearing right with the path beyond them as another bridleway joins from the left.

**20** When a track leaves on the right, heading for the A39, continue around the boundary above the fields. Travelling around the bottom of the hill, the fields between the path and the road narrow, and at Perry Combe a bridleway heads steeply downhill to the road, while your path curves towards the road too.

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**21** As the route approaches the road it curves to the left and climbs a little again, following a permissive path through the trees, just above the road.

**22** The path comes out at a T-junction on a forest track. Turn right here and follow the track to the layby beside the A39. Do not go out onto the road, but carry on uphill on the track as it turns into a green lane and sweeps around the lower edge of the deer park, high above **St Etheldreda's Church**.

**23** Above the Old Rectory the path comes out on a lane heading downhill to the A39. Turn right onto this lane.

**24** Just before you reach the main road, turn left onto the small footpath running behind the hedge. Carry on across the grass verge to The Avenue, on the left.

**25** Turn left onto The Avenue and follow it gently uphill to the crossroads by Staple Farm.

**26** Carry straight on ahead at the crossroads, past the speed limit sign on the left, descending gently.

**27** At Pitt Cottage a lane leads uphill to the left, signed as a 'no through road'. Turn left onto this lane, going through the gate at the top to the woodland path. Follow this path through the beech wood at the edge of Staple Plantation. When the path forks, some distance ahead, take the right-hand fork heading downhill.

**28** The path descends steeply at the far side of the hill, going through a gate to come out on another bridleway. Turn right here and follow the path down to Weacombe.

**29** Turn left after the houses, crossing the stream on the footbridge and going through the gate to climb steeply on another woodland path.

**30** A path crosses yours, descending steeply through the combe to your left and heading away downhill to your right. Take a few steps to the left to carry on ahead up the steep path past more mounds, with further extensive views right across the valley to Exmoor and the coast.

**31** Once more the path descends steeply on the far side of the hill, coming out at another T-junction in a combe. Turn right to join the Macmillan Way West as it heads down off **Bicknoller Hill** towards the village of Bicknoller itself. Unless you want to detour to the **Trendle Ring Iron Age hillfort**, ignore the bridleway on the left and instead descend Hill Lane to the road in the village of Bicknoller.

## C. Bicknoller to Monksilver

**Distance:** 4¾ miles

**Total Ascent:** 113 metres

**Walk Summary:** A gentler section, crossing the main A358 road and then the West Somerset Railway line, continuing on quiet country roads and through fields to Sampford Brett. From here there is a steady climb, followed by an ancient green lane and a field footpath into Monksilver.

**32** In Bicknoller cross the road to carry on ahead along Dashwoods Lane, signed to Williton and Crowcombe, with the shop and the village hall to your right. Most of Bicknoller's charming thatched cottages date from the fifteenth or sixteenth century, and many of them are listed buildings. Carry on past Combe Close to follow the road right down to the main A358.

**33** Cross the main road carefully, carrying straight on ahead through the gate, to follow the lane right and then left, travelling downhill to the railway line.

**34** Cross the **West Somerset Railway** line and follow the waymarked path into the field on your right, staying by the left-hand hedge to go through the gate at the bottom of the field. Carry on ahead through the next field, following the fence around to the left halfway down to go through the gate and out onto a lane. Turn right on the lane and walk a short distance to the road.

**35** On the road turn left and walk to the T-junction on the far side of the bridge.

**36** Turn right at the T-junction, towards Capton and Sampford Brett, and walk a few yards to the barns. Take the path to the right, between the barns, and follow the farm lane for about 250 yards, to where the path goes through the gate by a pylon.

**37** Turn right on the footpath and follow it straight across the field to the gate in the far hedge. Going through the gate, take the footpath around the side of the hill, climbing through the trees and then dropping to follow the stream into Sampford Brett.

**38** Turn left at the end of the lane, going through two gates and carrying straight on ahead beyond them, towards the fourteenth-century church.

**39** At the church turn left and walk through the village, past the Old Rectory, to the junction where the road veers left and another leads off to the right.

**40** Turn right here, bearing left a moment later to carry on ahead along the road marked as a 'no through road'. Follow it as it curves left and starts to ascend.

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**41** At Manor Farm there is a footpath signed to **Aller Farm**. Turn right and follow it through the farmyard and along the lane ahead at the far end. The path turns right at the end of the lane to carry on between the field and the trees, turning right at the end of the field to cross the footbridge. From here it turns left to continue along a lane between the stream and the right-hand field. Heading into the woods, the narrow path winds uphill through the trees.

**42** Coming to a T-junction in the woods, turn left to continue through the trees on the high path, crossing a footbridge shortly before coming out beside the Elizabethan buildings at Aller Farm, built on the site of a twelfth-century house and chapel.

**43** Going onto the farm drive, turn right to walk uphill between the farmhouse and a number of barns and outbuildings.

**44** At the T-junction at the top of the drive, turn left to walk along the lane past the big barns. Follow the lane around to the right, carrying on along the track ahead around the right-hand edge of the big field beyond.

**45** When the track turns right into the field above, turn right with it to climb steeply to the top of this higher field.

**46** At the top of the field follow the track left, staying beside the left-hand hedge through a couple more fields to come out on a lane.

**47** Turn left on the lane and then turn right with it almost immediately, ignoring the paths to right and left. Carry on ahead along the green lane.

**48** Coming out on the road at Beech Tree Cross, carry straight on along the road ahead.

**49** When the road bears left, leave it to take the path along the green lane straight ahead.

**50** After about 150 yards a path crosses the lane, with a set of steps to the left and a gate to the right. Turn right through the gate and follow the footpath downhill along the edge of the fields, bearing left in the last to come out on the road in Monksilver.

In Bicknoller, detour left along Gatchells Lane to visit the church of St George's, remodelled in the fifteenth/sixteenth century from a twelfth-century building and restored in 1871. The churchyard features several Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including a fourteenth-century cross, the village stocks from Coleridge's time, and two chest tombs, one dating from the seventeenth century.

## D. Monksilver to Roadwater

**Distance:** 4¼ miles

**Total Ascent:** 206 metres

**Walk Summary:** The path climbs steeply out of Monksilver, following an ancient lane to the top of Bird's Hill, with views between the trees. It then descends to travel above the Roadwater Valley, continuing through forest and woodland to a delightful hamlet with some fascinating buildings.

**51** Turn right on the road into **Monksilver**, bearing immediately right to carry on ahead, following the stream into the village. At the junction, with the Notley Arms down the road to your right, bear left to continue ahead as the road climbs to the left of the church on the hill above.

**52** A path leaves on the left-hand side almost opposite the church. Turn left onto this path, signed to Colton Cross, and follow it uphill by the brook.

**53** Ignore the footpath downhill on your right and carry on up the northern flank of Bird's Hill. The path heads through woodland for about half a mile before finally coming out on open heathland at the top of the hill. There are smaller paths and tracks through the woodland: look out for the blue markers on the trees if you are unsure where the main path goes. When the path forks at the top of the wood, follow the path marked to Colton Cross.

**54** Reaching the road at Colton Cross, ignore the roads and tracks to left and right, carrying straight on ahead along the road. Ignore the 'permitted path to viewpoint', on the right, and the track beyond it.

**55** Shortly after the track there is a bridleway signed across a field on the right. Go through the gate to take the path straight across the field to the gate in the corner opposite. Going through the gate, follow the path down the northern side of Beacon Hill.

**56** When the path forks, near the bottom of the hill, carry on ahead along the track, towards Roadwater.

**57** When you come to the main road at the end of the track, turn right to walk steeply downhill. There are no pavements and drivers' visibility is limited by the sharp bends, so take particular care here.

**58** Walk past the minor road on your left but turn left onto the lane just after it, by the gate to Chidgley Hill Farm. Follow the lane downhill to the junction at the bottom.

**59** Go through the gate into the field on your left, following the sign for the Roadwater Valley Route. The path travels alongside the bank topped with beech trees, curving around to the right above the valley. Across Exmoor National Park these **beech-**

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**topped boundary banks** are a distinctive and important part of the landscape.

**60** Go through the gate into Pit Wood, continuing along the path. Fork left a moment later to descend into coniferous woodland. At the next fork stay on the lower path, signed to Roadwater.

**61** Carry on past the footpath heading left into the valley and signed to the Mineral Line.

**62** Coming out of Pit Wood, carry on along the path ahead beneath the beech avenue and out onto the open ground above the fields, ignoring the small gate to your left a short while afterwards.

**63** When the path forks again, ignore the track climbing to your right and continue along the lower path. A moment later a footpath crosses your path from Lower Hayne, in the valley below, to Woodadvent Farm, above. Ignore it and carry on along the bridleway into the woodland ahead.

**64** As you leave the woods through another small gate, the path heads over a footbridge and across the field to a gate leading into another area of woodland (Erridge Wood). Stay on the upper path this time when you reach the next fork, following the blue squares through the trees to come out on a grassy path heading downhill into Roadwater.

**65** Reaching the road, turn left, ignoring the mineral line signed along the lane below. Cross the bridge and follow the lane to the road into the village.

The manor named in the Domesday Book as 'Selvre' was not known as Monksilver until the fourteenth century, when it belonged to Goldcliff Priory in Monmouthshire. The name is thought to come from either the Latin 'silva' for 'wood', or the Saxon 'sulphere', referring to the silvery stream flowing beside you as you walk into the village.

Parts of the church date back to the twelfth century, and it was the venue for the 1583 wedding of explorer Sir Francis Drake to his second wife, Elizabeth Sydenham, of nearby **Combe Sydenham**.

Signed to the left on Beacon Hill is a path to **Raleigh's Cross**, the location of one of the **Brendon Hills Mines** developed in the 1850s by the Ebbw Vale Company. The **West Somerset Mineral Railway** transported the iron ore from the mines to Watchet, on its way to the company's smelting works in South Wales.



## E. Roadwater to Luxborough

**Distance:** 3¼ miles

**Total Ascent:** 199 metres

**Walk Summary:** Level road through a wooded valley shaded by steep hills, then a long climb through woodland. Steep ascent out of the woodland through high fields to the road near Treborough. Field footpath to a lane, with a long descent to Kingsbridge (Luxborough).

**66** Turn left on the road and walk through Roadwater, passing the pub on the right.

**67** Fork right after the private road to Vale House, climbing above the fishery on the road signed to Luxborough. (Take care not to miss the sign, which is high in the hedge).

**68** Ignoring the footpath to the left at Treborough Cottage, carry on down to the bridge to take the next turning on the left, signed to Treborough Lane. The path ascends through Langridge Wood for the next three quarters of a mile. Continue past the track joining from the right and ignore the very small path leading to the left shortly afterwards, instead following the quill waymarker ahead.

**69** Detour briefly left to visit the **Langridge Wood cist** and then continue uphill through the trees.



**70** Joining a track at the top of the wood, turn left, following the fingerpost for Higher Court Farm. Passing the barn, climb steeply through the field ahead, staying by the right-hand hedge. Carry on along the right-hand hedge through the next three fields, coming out on the road to Higher Court Farm.

**71** Pick up the footpath into the field on your right as you reach the road, bearing left in the field to go

through the hedge. Go into the left-hand field a moment later and follow its left-hand hedge, carrying straight on ahead in the next field to come out on by the farm buildings.

**72** Passing to the right of the farm buildings, carry on ahead along the lane and then follow the hedge in the field beyond, to where the footpath turns into a lane again. Follow the lane downhill into the part of Luxborough known as Kingsbridge, coming out opposite the car park by the village hall.

The **West Somerset Mineral Railway** station still stands at Roadwater, although today it is a private dwelling. A stretch of platform remains on either side of the house, but it has since been grassed over. There was a goods yard with sheds to the west of the station, and this site was used as a market garden for some time before being finally abandoned.

Some distance to the south of Tacker Street, and once sited by Comberow Station, are the remains of the Mineral Railway's Incline. Two railway lines about 1km long ascended 245 metres between Brendon Hill and Comberow, and this section of the railway was cable-operated to achieve this. The winding house contained two cast iron drums, with brake gear consisting of steel bands, and it was controlled by a wheel in a hut above. The engineer lived beside it, and the brakeman was housed nearby.

People have been living in the area since prehistoric times. A Neolithic (Late Stone Age) flint axe on display in Taunton Museum was found being used as a decorative stone in a flower bed in a Roadwater garden. Four later Bronze Age axes were found in nearby Hayne, and they are also housed in the museum in Taunton Castle.

Running above Treborough and along Brendon Hill is the **Hare Path (herpath)**, an Anglo Saxon military road once leading from Bridgwater into the heart of Exmoor. The track is still visible in places and now forms the parish boundary.

The red brick hut above Vale House was a pillbox during the Second World War, when there was auxiliary unit operational base in Roadwater.

## F. Luxborough to Cutcombe

**Distance:** 4¾ miles

**Total Ascent:** 248 metres

**Walk Summary:** A short steep road followed by a level farm drive, with a further protracted climb from the farmyard out onto the moor. Briefly joining the ancient lane to Lype Common from Churchtown, the route climbs to the top of Lype Hill then drops gently to the church at Cutcombe.

**73** Coming out in Kingsbridge, turn left on the road and follow it around to the bridge at Pooltown.

**74** Take the right-hand road, signed to Dunster, and follow it steeply uphill.

**75** Carry on past the lane to the left, downhill, and keep climbing, following the road around the corner at **Chargot House** and on to the junction beyond.

**76** Fork left and follow the bridleway signed along the drive to Newcombe Farm.

**77** Ignoring the footpaths to right and left, carry on through the farmyard, to the right of the barns. Ignore the bridleway to the right, too, and take the steep track ahead, uphill. Continue ahead through the gate at the top to a T-junction with a bridleway.

**78** Turn left on the bridleway and follow it up the **Churchtown** congregation's ancient route, along an avenue of tall beeches, to the gate at the end.

**79** Going through the gate, turn right onto Colly Hill. Take a bearing due west and follow this up to the top of the hill, following the quill waymarkers and the blue squares. (Don't take too much notice of where the map says the field boundaries should be around you). A series of well-marked gates will lead you to the trig point at the top of Lype Hill, and the **Lype Hill barrow** beside it. Before these come into sight, aim well to the right of the forest plantation by the mast, and when three telegraph poles come into view, head for the middle one.

**80** The path passes to the right - north - of the trig point. Take another compass bearing and keep heading due west, to where a gate will take you out onto the road.

**81** Cross the road and take the bridleway through the gate opposite, signed to Wheddon Cross. Once more head due west, to the stand of trees in the far left-hand corner of the field. The path passes through the gate to the right of the trees and carries on in a westerly direction to a small gate about halfway down the left-hand fence of the next field.

**82** Going through the gate, turn right to follow the fence downhill to the gate facing you, slightly to the left, at the bottom of the field. Going through it, stay beside the right-hand fence of this field and the left-

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hand hedge of the next to cross the top of Symm's Combe and come out by the buildings at Pitleigh.

**83** Ignoring the drive to the left, go through the gates ahead to carry on along the green lane. At the end of the lane go through the gate on your left, turning right to continue along the right-hand hedge of this field and the next.

**84** Going through the gate, carry on down the green lane ahead, taking special care on the bedrock surface, which can be very slippery when wet.

**85** Reaching the crossroads at the bottom of the lane, at Cutcome Cross, carry straight on along the road ahead to where it forks in Cutcombe.

Luxborough, too, had a station on the Mineral Line, to transport the iron ore that was mined here. In the nineteenth century the village school (which closed in 1971) had 200 pupils from the families of the **Brendon Hills Mineworkers**.

Kingsbridge and Pooltown are two of the three hamlets which together comprise Luxborough, all within the space of a mile. In Churchtown, to the west, parts of St Mary's Church date back to the thirteenth century, with a restored preaching cross from the same time, although the graveyard is thought to be older.

As you turn onto the Dunster Road, to the left in Pooltown is the picturesque Gothic-style **Chargot Lodge**, built around 1879; and as you round the next bend you come to Chargot House itself. Built half a century earlier for Sir John Lethbridge of Sandhill Park, it incorporated parts of an earlier dwelling and appeared on the tithe map as Chargott Lodge. Internal features included an early eighteenth-century staircase and dado from a Withiel Florey farmhouse and a decorative mantel from a house in Wiltshire.

In the valley below, the Forestry Commission's Chargot Wood was the site of the Langham Engine House and the Bearland Ventilation Flue. Built in 1866 to accommodate a secondhand steam-powered beam engine from Wales, the engine house was abandoned twelve years later when the machinery was moved to Burrow Farm, a couple of miles away. The ventilation flue (the only one in south west England) was constructed to remove poisonous gases from the mine.

## G. Cutcombe to Brockwell

**Distance:** 4 miles

**Total Ascent:** 201 metres

**Walk Summary:** From Cutcombe road, steep field path to hotel drive. Woodland footpath, climbing gently, crosses road. More woodland, streams to cross, onto edge of open moorland. Route exposed and remote from here: stay by right-hand boundary until woodland at Brockwell.

**86** Detour right to visit the thirteenth-century **Cutcombe Church**, but otherwise fork left and walk to the left-hand bend about 200 yards ahead.

**87** Turn right onto the bridleway, following the field's right-hand hedge to the main road below.

**88** Cross the road and continue ahead along the lane signed to Raleigh Manor. Passing a track on the right, carry on over the stream, taking the bridleway signed for Dunkery (not the one signed to Draper's Way), and walk a short distance uphill towards Raleigh Manor.

**89** Turn right on the bridleway signed to Dunkery, crossing the cattle grid and following the Raleigh Manor drive for about a quarter of a mile.

**90** At the fingerpost turn right to continue along the bridleway signed to Dunkery. The path follows the right-hand hedge and passes below the manor house before descending into the woods.

**91** Fork left along 'Tom's Path' when the bridleway and footpath split, heading towards Dunkery via Draper's Way. The path begins to climb through the woods, curving westwards to come out on a minor road (Draper's Way).

**92** Cross the road to take the bridleway through the gate opposite, signed to Dunkery Gate. The path descends to a stream, climbing out the other side to carry on through Blagdon Wood. Ignore the smaller paths to left and right, staying on the main bridleway as indicated by the blue squares on the trees.

**93** At the waymarker fork right to head steeply downhill and cross the small stream flowing from your left.

**94** Fork left a moment later, carrying on around the bottom of the hill above the **River Avill**.

**95** At Mansley Combe the path drops steeply to the river, which it crosses before forking. Ignoring the path joining from the right beside the stream, carry on ahead along the bridleway, ignoring the tracks to left and right as you continue through the trees, climbing steeply above the stream. The path emerges on the open moor at Dunkery Errish, still climbing as it continues due north alongside the hedge. When the hedge turns abruptly right to head

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gently downhill, turn with it to keep following the path beside it.

**96** When the path flattens out and curves gently to the left, ignore the bridleway crossing it and carry on near the hedge as the path starts to climb again.

**97** At the junction a moment later, ignore the many paths leading away up Dunkery Hill and the bridleways heading off to the right through the hedge. Carry on ahead towards Brockwell, descending steeply to the left of the trees surrounding the stream in Spangate Grove.

**98** At the junction fork left along the path signed to Brockwell, descending steeply to cross the small stream at the bottom of Hanny Combe. On the other side of the water it climbs back up, running alongside the hedge as another path joins from the left.

**99** Take care not to miss the waymarker pointing left towards Brockwell at the top of the hill. Fork left to follow the rough track downhill over the heathland and towards the trees at **Higher Brockwell**.

**100** Bear right at the junction as you enter the trees, following the bridleway signed for Brockwell.

There was a church in Cutcombe at the time of the Domesday Book, when Cutcombe manor belonged to the Mohuns of Dunster. It was given to Bruton Priory in the twelfth century. The tower and the north aisle of the church that stands today date from the thirteenth century, although the east wall of the north aisle was rebuilt in 1713. The building was extensively restored in 1862, when the south aisle, south chapel and south porch were all added. In the churchyard, a fourteenth-century cross was restored in 1898..

The River Avill rises on the eastern slopes of Dunkery Beacon and flows north through Timberscombe before joining the Bristol Channel at Dunster, where there was once a harbour. 'The purple-headed mountain, the river running by,' in the hymn 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' is said to be the River Avill running past Grabbist Hill in Dunster. The hymn may have been inspired by a verse from Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner': 'He prayeth best, who loveth best All things great and small; For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all.'

## H. Higher Brockwell to Porlock

**Distance:** 4¼ miles

**Total Ascent:** 90 metres

**Walk Summary:** From Higher Brockwell the route follows the Dunster Path around the base of Dunkery Hill, climbing to the viewpoint car park at Webber's Post. From here it descends through woodland to Horner, crosses the packhorse bridge and meanders gently into Porlock.

**101** At the crossroads in the wood take the left-hand path towards Webber's Post, following the Dunster Path around the northeastern flank of Dunkery Hill.

**102** When a bridleway leaves on the right, signed to Brockwell, carry on ahead along the Dunster Path towards Webber's Post, ignoring a further two bridleways heading downhill to the right and marked with blue squares. Continue along the main path, climbing gently, until it flattens out as it approaches the woodland around Webber's Post.

**103** At the waymarker, fork right to drop downhill to the road at Webber's Post.

**104** Cross the road, continuing straight ahead to cross the second road too.

**105** Follow the waymarker into the car park and make your way across the near right-hand corner to take the waymarked bridleway running parallel to the easy access trail.

**106** Carry straight on ahead when the bridleway between **Priestway** and Stoke Pero crosses your path.

**107** When the easy access trail turns away to loop back on itself, bear left to follow the bridleway signed towards Horner. The path crosses a grassy area in front of the Jubilee Hut and heads towards the trees.

**108** Fork left as you go into the woodland, and descend gently through the trees.

**109** When Windsor Walk joins from the left, bear right on the path signed for Horner. Ignore the small path dropping steeply to the left a moment later and carry on ahead.

**110** At the crossroads go straight across His Honour's Path between Luccombe and Horner, to take the path signed for **Chapel Cross**.

**111** At the next crossroads turn left towards Horner. Follow the path downhill through the woods, ignoring the lower path joining from the right towards the bottom and going through the gate ahead. Ignore the Horner Mill Path on the left after the gate and carry straight on down to the road.

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**112** On the road turn left, following it past the farm and the mill. Ignore the path on the right to the car park, and the one on the left to Horner Woods. Carry on around the corner, past Horner Green.

**113** Take the bridleway on the left, signed to Porlock, and follow it over the **packhorse bridge** to climb steeply through the woods, above the stream.

**114** At the waymarker ignore the permitted path towards Ley Hill to continue through the woods on the bridleway signed to Luckbarrow.

**115** Going through the gate, ignore the next small path to the left, too, crossing a very small stream to continue along the path through the woods above the caravan park.

**116** At the waymarker where Granny's Ride joins from the left, carry straight on ahead along the road signed towards Porlock, ignoring the road on the left that climbs to Ley Hill. Pulling uphill on the road past Luckbarrow Cottage, descend the other side to cross the cattle grid marking the boundary of the National Trust's **Holnicote Estate**.

**117** Stay on the road past the bridleway to the left, and drop steeply past Doverhay Knap and on to the three-way road junction beyond.

**118** Fork right towards Porlock and carry on past Orchard Rise on the left and a footpath and Hawkcombe View on the right.

**119** Turn left on Coach Road, carrying on ahead along the footpath. When the footpath divides, fork left along **The Drang** to come out in Porlock beside **St Dubricius Church**.

Despite its name, there is no evidence of Dunkery having been used as a beacon. There are tremendous views in all directions from its summit, however, and a Bronze Age cemetery of round cairns on its slopes. Chief among these are the Robin How and Joaney How cairns, said to be named after Robin Hood and Little John.

The earthworks in the wood at Higher Brockwell may relate to an old opencast haematite mine that was worked in the nineteenth century to produce iron. There is also an old quarry pit, thought to have been associated with a nearby limekiln, where limestone was burnt to make fertiliser.

In the sixteenth century there was an 'iron hammer mill' by Horner Water. A dam across the valley provided water power. There were also charcoal platforms, possibly from the same time.

## I. Porlock to Ash Farm

**Distance:** 4¾ miles

**Total Ascent:** 473 metres

**Walk Summary:** Woodland walking above beach and marshes, with some gentle ascent, followed by the most strenuous section of the entire route. More woodland walking, with prolonged ascent, some of it steep. The high lane at the top of the hill rollercoasters through a series of combs.

**120** Turn left on the High Street and walk to the junction with the B3225. The Porlock Visitor Centre is on your right (they are always keen to welcome Coleridge Way Walkers); but to continue the route bear left briefly to continue along the main A39 heading up Porlock Hill. Carry on past the **Ship Inn** to the next road on your right, beside the village hall.

**121** Turn right on this road (New Road, signed in a moment as the Woodland Toll Road) and follow it uphill for about 250 yards, to where a rough lane leaves on the right, signed to Porlock Weir.

**122** Turn right on this lane and follow it along the edge of the woodland.

**123** Ignoring the small path leading uphill opposite Greencombe Gardens, carry on ahead along the main path.

**124** The path passes another lane heading right, and then it bears left to cross the stream in Allerpark Combe, bearing right again to continue along the edge of the woodland above the fields.

**125** Crossing another stream, ignore the footpath heading uphill beside it, instead bearing right to descend towards the houses at West Porlock.

**126** After the path curves left at the bottom of the hill it continues the left curve to head steeply uphill. Leave it here, bearing right to carry on above West Porlock and ignoring the small paths heading away through the trees.

**127** Curving left again, the path descends to the stream in Hawknest Combe, crossing it to come out at a T-junction. Turn briefly right on the tarmac road to walk past the buildings.

**128** To continue with the route towards Culbone Hill, turn left before you reach the bigger road below, and follow the lane uphill through the woods above Porlock Weir.

**129** Carry on past the small path down to Porlock Weir, still climbing through the woods.

**130** At the very sharp left-hand bend leave the lane and bear right to carry on ahead along the bridleway, ascending steeply.

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**131** Fork left at the waymarker to carry on ahead, climbing more gently now before the path curves left and rises more steeply again. Ignore the small path crossing the bridleway and keep climbing through the woods to a T-junction on the track running along the top of the woods.

**132** Turn right here on the track, still climbing, to come out at the top of the **Worthy Manor toll road** near Yearnor Mill Bridge.

**133** Turn left on the road (the Worthy toll road) and walk past the small lane on your right a moment later, to carry on uphill along Pitt Lane.

**134** At the junction turn sharp right, signed towards Countisbury and Lynmouth, and follow the road, downhill at first and then up again, to the junction by Yarnor Farm.

**135** Leave the Countisbury/Lynton road here to continue straight ahead past the farm drive. Again the road rises briefly and then it descends to **Ash Farm**.

Schedule a rest day in Porlock before this strenuous section. It is a glorious place for a day off, with a wealth of wildlife on the shingle beach and in the marshes behind, and a fascinating history on display in its picturesque buildings.

In 1996, winter storms scoured the beach and uncovered the bones of the famous Porlock Aurochs, a mammoth ox which roamed the area in 1500 BC. The breach of the barrier also flooded the marsh behind it, creating an environment which is of international importance in the study of coastal geomorphology and hosts some unusual species, including rare lichens and marsh plants, and migratory birds. Look out for herons and egrets.

Coleridge's friend and fellow poet **Robert Southey** spent time in Porlock in 1799, staying in the Ship Inn, where he composed his sonnet 'To Porlock', commenting that 'If only beauty of landscape were to influence me in choice of residence, I should at once fix on Porlock.'

Ash Farm is said to be where Coleridge was staying in 1797 when the flow of his composition of 'Kubla Khan' was famously interrupted by 'The Person from Porlock'. It has been suggested that the visitor was his physician, bringing the opium that led biographer Richard Holmes to refer to Coleridge as a 'lyrical smackhead'.

## J. Ash Farm to Oare

**Distance:** 4¼ miles

**Total Ascent:** 225 metres

**Walk Summary:** More ups and downs between several combes on a remote road. Joins the South West Coast Path along a green lane through the last combe. Quiet road pulling steeply uphill to County Road; field footpath descending steeply through heathland to quiet country road.

**136** Fork left to carry on past Ash Farm drive, ascending once more before dropping to the stream in Culbone Combe.

**137** Crossing the stream, the road turns sharply to the right, passing Parsonage Farm beneath the plantation on the top of Culbone Hill. Again it pulls uphill above the combe, bearing left and carrying on between high hedges before opening out again and contouring around the hill to the next stream at Withy Combe.

**138** Follow the road sharply to the right, ignoring the small path on the corner, and carry on slightly uphill to where a track arrives from the left, by a caravan.

**139** Carry straight on, past the track to the left, descending to the junction by Silcombe Farm.

### OPTIONAL DETOUR TO CULBONE CHURCH:

Detour right along the South West Coast Path at 140 to visit Culbone Church. After about 400 yards a path leaves on the right, signed to the church. Take this path downhill through the woods, bearing left past the track to carry on beside the stream to the church. Retrace your steps to 140 afterwards and turn right to continue.

**140** If you have not taken the detour to Culbone Church, carry on ahead past Silcombe Farm, following the inland (alternative) route of the **South West Coast Path** to the right in front of the big barn and continuing ahead with the farmhouse on your right. Continue ahead when the road narrows and becomes a dirt track, climbing gently into the next combe at Holmer's Combe.

**141** The lane crosses the stream and doglegs to the right before carrying on around the side of the hill a short distance to the next combe at **Twitchin**.

**142** Once more it crosses the stream and turns sharply right. This time it descends to join the road to Broomstreet Farm.

**143** Turn left on the road, leaving the Coast Path and climbing steeply to the main A39 Lynmouth-Porlock Road.

**144** Cross this fast road carefully and take the public footpath opposite, signed to Oare and

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Oareford, heading through the field on the right-hand-side of the private drive to Lilycombe.

**145** At the end of the field turn right to follow the track straight ahead through the next field, and alongside a small conifer plantation.

**146** As you emerge from the trees take the path ahead, bearing slightly right and descending into the valley below, gently at first and then more steeply as it pulls away from a hedge alongside and drops to the trees at the bottom of the hill.

**147** At the valley bottom turn left and then bear right to follow the grassy lane alongside the stream to the road.

**148** Detour left to visit **Oare Church**; also the village of Malmsmead, which is about a mile along the next road to the right; but otherwise turn right on the road and walk to the corner, where a footpath leaves on the right, signed to Yenworthy, and the route follows a bridleway on the left through a field.

Claiming to be England's smallest church still in use, Culbone Church seats just 40 parishioners, who have to walk two miles along the Coast Path to reach it. The original building, thought to date from Saxon times, was constructed on the site of a fifth-century monastery or hermitage. It was the location for Lorna Doone's wedding in the TV adaptation of R D Blackmore's novel of the same name; but in the novel itself the wedding took place in Oare Church, where Blackmore's grandfather was Rector. Born in Oxfordshire, Blackmore was from a Parracombe family and he later returned to the area with his wife to research the novel, writing it in 1867/8. The real-life Doune brothers – a band of brigands who terrorised travellers on this remote part of Exmoor – arrived here in the seventeenth century after being driven out of Scotland by Ensor Doune's brother, the 'Bonny' Earl of Moray.

Exmoor's 34-mile coastline boasts mainland Britain's highest seacliff at Great Hangman, which reaches 318 metres, with a 250-metre-high rock face. It features the most remote and hazardous seacliff traverse in the UK, taking climbers 3 days to complete with no way out except by sea. The woodland between Porlock and Foreland Point is also Britain's longest stretch of coastal woodland.

## K. Oare to Watersmeet

**Distance:** 5½ miles

**Total Ascent:** 195 metres

**Walk Summary:** A riverside path beneath looming hills, then prolonged ascent, some of it steep, through woodland then heathland. High path with views, followed by a steep descent to Brendon. Green lane then undulating riverside path, rough in places, through woodland.

- 149** Turn left into the field and follow the right-hand hedge into the trees at the far end. Continue ahead and into the field beyond, towards Oaremead Farm.
- 150** Ignore the farm drive that heads left towards the river. Carry straight on, to the right of the buildings, crossing the field to the hedge beyond.
- 151** Immediately beyond the hedge turn left and follow the bridleway down to the river.
- 152** Do not cross the bridge (unless you want a detour to Malmsmead), but continue and follow the riverside path through the valley to Glebe Farm.
- 153** Ignoring the bridge, carry on past the farm to go through the small gate beside it, continuing alongside the river. Stay by the river as you cross the field at the end.
- 154** Going through the gate, bear left to follow the footpath into Ashton Cleave, climbing steeply through the trees and emerging onto open ground high above the valley.
- 155** When a path joins on the right from County Gate, carry on along the path signed for Brendon. Going through the gate and passing another small path, marked as 'no right of way,' cross the stream and bear left on the path beyond the footbridge. Continue through the gate and down the steps, still travelling high above the valley.
- 156** Stay high when the path splits, following the yellow markers as you pass through some trees and then head to the right around the top of a small combe. The path curves left again on the far side and makes its way across open ground to a small gate in the fence.
- 157** From here the path starts to descend towards Leeford and Brendon, in the valley below, getting steeper as it heads right, towards the road.
- 158** As you reach the field before the road, the path turns abruptly left, running parallel to the road as it plunges downhill. Passing behind the gorse bushes it goes down a set of wooden steps and comes out on the road above Hall Farm.
- 159** Turn left on the road and walk past the farm to the junction by Mill Cottage.

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**160** Ignoring the bridge (unless you want to visit Brendon), carry on along the road signed to Porlock, Lynmouth and Lynton, passing an older cobbled bridge a little further on.

**161** As the road starts to climb around a right-hand bend, take the drive on the left, signed to Rockford and Watersmeet, and follow it along beside river. (Note. If the river is very high this path floods and you will need to follow the road to Rockford and cross the bridge there to rejoin the route.) The Path passes Countisbury Mill and continues into the woods, following the river southwest and then bearing right with it to the footbridge across to the Rockford Inn. Cross the bridge for refreshment; but otherwise carry on along the path signed to Watersmeet, Countisbury and Lynmouth.

**162** Ignoring the steep path uphill towards Countisbury via Wilsham (known as '**Church Path**'), just after the footbridge, carry on along the riverside path as it starts to head north, towards Watersmeet.

**163** Ignore the path to County Gate and carry on towards Watersmeet.

**164** Continue along the main path, ignoring the footbridge on the left and the path uphill to Countisbury on the right.

**165** As you approach **Watersmeet House**, another path leads uphill towards Countisbury. Carry on along the path signed to Lynmouth.

Exmoor's deep combes are cut by its eight main rivers and their many tributaries. At Malmsmead, Oare Water is joined by Badgworthy Water to become the East Lyn River, which flows swiftly through this valley on its way to the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth.

On the summit of Cosgate Hill, earthworks mark the site of **Old Burrow**, a Roman fortlet, built sometime around AD 50 to keep an eye on the powerful Silurian tribe based across the Bristol Channel on the Welsh coast. 65–80 soldiers were stationed here in tents; but the site was quickly found to be too exposed, and the camp was shifted a few miles down the coast, to Martinhoe.

Below Old Burrow, **Glenthorne** was founded by Victorian landowner and Coleridge fan, **Reverend Walter Halliday**, who inherited the family fortune on condition that he set up an estate outside his native Scotland.

## L. Watersmeet to Lynmouth

**Distance:** 2 miles

**Total Ascent:** 35 metres

**Walk Summary:** Rough and undulating woodland path through steep-sided valley, as before, but no prolonged ascent or descent. Riverside walk on good surface as you approach Lynmouth. Quiet road and pavements through the village to journey's end at the Pavilion.

**166** Passing **Watersmeet House**, ignore the footbridge across the river to the car park, (unless you don't relish a climb, in which case follow the alternative lower Riverside Walk to Lynmouth). Instead pick up the road until it veers left over a stone bridge. Leave the road and continue straight ahead on the east bank of the river.

**167** In Horner's Neck Wood, shortly after the river turns west again, ignore another path towards Countisbury, and the nearby footbridge. Carry on ahead towards Lynmouth, past the small paths which lead to footbridges across the river.

**168** In Wester Wood continue alongside the river, ignoring the paths climbing to Countisbury.

**169** Carry on past the steep path uphill as the river bears left, and the footbridge shortly afterwards. Stay on the riverside path at the end of Tors Road, passing a parking area to continue above the water.

**170** Carry on along the north bank of the river (ignore another footbridge that crosses the river), and walk to the main A39 road.

**171** Crossing the road, carry straight on ahead along the same riverbank to the footbridge by the hotel.

**172** Take the footbridge across the river here, turning right on Riverside Road and bearing left onto the Esplanade when you reach the pier. The Exmoor National Park Visitor Centre in the Pavilion on the left-hand side of the Esplanade marks journey's end...

... or carry on up to Poets Corner in the stunning Valley of Rocks above:

### OPTIONAL ROUTE EXTENSION:

Pick up the South West Coast Path to the right of the Pavilion, following it through the archway to zigzag upgill over the cliff railway and come out on North Walk Hill. Turn right here and follow the Coast Path along North Walk and into woodland, carrying on ahead around the front of Hollerday Hill. Reaching a path to the left, turn off here and follow it through The Warren to the shelter at Poets Corner in the Valley of Rocks.

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At Watersmeet the East Lyn is joined by Hoar Oak Water and Farley Water, which both rise on The Chains, high on the moor, and meet a little way upstream from here. In August 1952, nine inches of rain fell on the high ground in just 24 hours, resulting in catastrophic flooding in and around Lynmouth. Large boulders and rocks were swept through the valley by the torrent of water, and houses, roads and bridges were destroyed. In all 34 people lost their lives.

This is one of the largest areas of ancient oak woodland in south west England, and a number of different whitebeams grow here, including one variety found only on the Exmoor coast. Another of Watersmeet's rare plant species is the euphorbia hybema, or Irish splurge, which is found in only one other site in mainland Britain.

The woodland is also noted for its wide diversity of breeding birds, including ravens, dippers, herons, woodpeckers, redstarts, pied flycatchers, ravens and various birds of prey. There are trout and salmon in the river, and sometimes an otter can be seen on the bank. Look out for deer, too.

