

Beautiful Walks from the Blue Ball Inn

Walk No. 2

WINSTONS WALK

Countisbury, Wind Hill, Watersmeet, Ash Bridge and Winston's path.

5 Miles approx.

Walking time- Two and a half hours approx. (Not including Breaks)

OS 1:25,000 Sheet 64/74 Lynton and Lynmouth.

General Information

This walk is named after Winston, the National Trust Warden for the area and is on either defined rights of way or permissive paths. (Routes where the owner has given permission for people to pass over their land). All of this route is on land belonging to the National Trust and is within Exmoor National Park. The first half of the walk travels along a level path around the side of Wind Hill and then drops down a steep zigzag path to the edge of the East Lyn river; continuing alongside the river upstream to Watersmeet House. (One and a quarter hours approx). All paths that go down must, unfortunately, go up again! The second half of this route therefore involves a steady climb back up to Countisbury. Starting on the level path curving around the contour of the hillside back to the Blue Ball Inn. The effort of the climb is rewarded by the views from the final stretch of the route!

The route

Starting at The Blue Ball Inn. (Grid reference 747496). Turn left on leaving the inn and walk, with care, down the road towards Lynmouth. After passing the National Trust Exmoor Base Camp continue for a further short distance to a gate on the left hand side of the road with the "Watersmeet estate" sign on it. Go through this gate and take the path to the right signed "Lynmouth 1 ½ miles" which follows a wide grassy track circling around the base of the iron age fortress of Arx Cynuit on Wind

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Hill. Continue along this track, with a stone wall on the right hand side and pass a further sign to “Lynmouth”. As the path curves around to the left there is a good view up the East Lyn valley towards Watersmeet.

The woodland cladding the steep sides of the valley, mainly composed of sessile oak but also including some rare Devon Whitebeam, is considered to be one of the best examples of “hanging woodlands” in England. The whole area is designated as a site of Special Scientific Interest. On a parallel promontory on the further side of the river can be seen the remains of another ancient fortifications.

Pass through the hunting gate and continue ahead with, on the left, steep woodland descending to the East Lyn river below. At a junction beside a bench there is a signpost; follow the higher of the paths, signed- “alternative route to Lynmouth” and continue, close to the stone wall, as the path curves around to the right.

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The route continues ahead, beginning to descend gently and at the point where it enters an area of scrubby thorn and holly a very large and extensive badger sett will be seen on the left of the path.

As the route continues ahead the view opens up to encompass Lynmouth and its harbour with the little town of Lynton perched high above. At one time this area was called “little Switzerland”!

After a short distance the path divides and there are two signposts. Turn left following the sign – “sparrows walk”; this goes steeply downhill zigzagging its way towards the rivers edge in a series of hairpin bends. (can be tough on the knees). On reaching the edge of the East Lyn River turn left and follow the riverside walk upstream to Watersmeet House.

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The route from this point until Watersmeet House is a well known and popular walk from Lynmouth and there may be a number of people using this track. Hopefully the popularity of this section of the walk will not detract from the enjoyment of the scenery of the river valley with its steep wooded sides, fast moving water (particularly in the spring and autumn) and deep pools. Among the birds that may be seen is the delightful Dippers with its white throat and distinctive “bobbing” action.

The route follows the left bank to start with and then crosses a footbridge to the other side and continues upstream on the right bank.

Walking time from Countisbury to the bridge – approximately one hour.

Along the way, just before a short flight of steps, there will be seen a plaque and an old bottle set into the wall on the right hand side of the path. These commemorate the Lyn Rock Mineral Water Company who bottled the mineral water coming out of the rock at this point.

Shortly after this Myrtleberry Cottage will be passed. This building, in its attractive garden on the bend of the river, was fortunately not destroyed in the august 1952 flood which caused such damage to Lynmouth. The arched stone bridge a short way up further on did have to be rebuilt however. Cross over this bridge and continue for a short way up the left hand side of the river again until coming to Watersmeet, where the waters of the East Lyn River meet the combined streams of Hoar Oak and Farley waters. (grid reference 744486).

This is one of the so called “honeypots” on Exmoor – places that are well known and popular with visitors. This one understandably so with its mixture of trees, rivers and waterfalls. The very attractive Watersmeet House, now owned by the National Trust, was originally constructed in 1830 as a fishing and hunting lodge for the Halliday family of the Glenthorne estate. It marks the halfway point in the walk and is a good stopping place for something to eat and drink. There is a gift shop in the house and loos just behind it, (with the rare provision of baby-changing facilities in the mens!).

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Walk No. 2 Continued...

The route continues upstream, past the side of Watersmeet House, on the left hand bank of the East Lyn River. It is signed just past the house –“Fisherman’s Path to Rockford” .

The path becomes narrower and is less used as it continues ahead until meeting a sign-“Countisbury” pointing uphill to the left. Here a decision may be made to either take a shortcut and go up this very steep path to a junction of paths at the top or to continue along the river bank upstream and take a less steep path up through the woods to the same junction. The latter route is approximately half a mile longer but is a pleasant walk along the river and through the woods and is easier on the legs! Following the latter route continue along the river bank.

As the path rises, look down to see the restored remains of two lime kilns on the further bank. Limestone for these kilns would have been shipped to Lynmouth from South Wales and then transported up to this point.

Walking time to this point approximately one and a half hours

The path crosses an area of rough stone “scree” and the character of the river changes as the gradient becomes less steep; it is now a quieter, tamer, water making its way through the woods. After passing Crook pond, where the river takes an S bend, there is a footbridge, Ash Bridge. (grid reference 753488). Just before this bridge turn left and follow the sign to “Countisbury”. The route climbs steadily up through the trees, passes a further signpost to “Countisbury”, turns left around a corner and then climbs a flight of steps to continue ahead following the contour of the hill. Shortly after another signpost to “Countisbury” is passed the track emerges briefly from the wood to go through a grassy area around the top of a combe, turns left through a gap in a stone wall and continues uphill through the trees. (There is no right of way through the hunting gate in the new fence on the right hand side).

Walking time from the start of the walk-approximately two hours.

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Continue up the track until it emerges into a grassed area at the top of the hill where there is a junction of ways, a signpost and a most welcome bench to sit on! This is the point where the short cut from Watersmeet, mentioned earlier, joins this route. Follow the sign to “Countisbury”. The track passes through another stretch of woodland and then climbs a further flight of steps with a stile half way up. Having reached the top of the steps the effort of climbing up the valley side from the river is well rewarded by the views to be seen from this point. As the path continues the track used at the beginning of this walk can be clearly seen on Wind Hill.

This last stretch of the route is called “Winston’s walk” named after the hardworking and charming National Trust warden who maintains this area so magnificently.

Keep following the track until it ends at the same gate beside the road in Countisbury that the walk started from. Turn right and walk up the road to the welcome comfort of The Blue Ball Inn Walking time taken – approximately two and a half hours

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