

Beautiful Walks from the Blue Ball Inn

Walk No. 5

RIVER VALLEYS AND MOOR

Countisbury, Watersmeet, Hillsford Bridge, Cheriton, Shilstone Hill, Rockford and Chiselcombe.

8.5 MILES APPROX.

Walking time – four and a half hours approx.

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

General information

This walk is on either defined rights of way or permissive paths, (routes where the owner has given permission for walkers to pass over their land but at their own risk). The first and last part of the route is on land in the ownership of the National Trust and all of it is within Exmoor National Park. The walk starts by descending down to the East Lyn River and walking upstream to Watersmeet; then changing rivers and continuing up the side of Hoar Oak Water to Hillsford Bridge. Here the route of the Two Moors Way is followed pass Smallcombe Bridge and on to Cheriton. The route then leaves the Two Moors way to drop down to Bridge Ball, and following the line of Farley Water, climb up to Brendon Common and the top of Shilstone Hill. From here the return journey to Countisbury is mostly a downhill run; through Shilstone to Rockford on the East Lyn River and then downstream to Watersmeet, leaving only a short climb back to The Blue Ball Inn. Walking boots are recommended for this route as are normal sensible precautions for crossing open moorland such as carrying of waterproofs, compass, map, emergency rations, whistle etc.

To create an all day walk this route may be joined onto those of walk 3 and walk 4 – the route would then start by going down to Lynmouth and up via Myrtleberry Cleave to Hillsford Bridge and continue on to Cheriton, Shilstone and Rockford. Walking time a good six hours.

The Route:

Starting from The Blue Ball Inn (grid reference 747496) turn left outside the front door and walk down the road towards Lynmouth. After passing the National Trust Base Camp the pavement ends; continue with care, ahead for a short way down the edge of the road to the gate on the left which has the National Trust sign on it. Go through this gate and take the path running directly ahead signed Watersmeet. The route goes down the centre of the valley Chiselcombe, on a wide grassy track, passing through a hunting gate near the bottom of the valley and then joining up the path that runs alongside the East Lyn River. (grid reference 743491). Turn left here and walk upstream to Watersmeet passing the stone arched Chiselcombe Bridge on the right.

This was one of the bridges that had to be rebuilt after the August 1952 Lynmouth flood. Shortly after passing the bridge Watersmeet House will be seen on the left hand side, a handy spot to stop for a quick cuppa if needed!

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Turn right by Watersmeet House and cross over the East Lyn River by the first of the two footbridges. (The second bridge crosses Hoar Oak Water and it is the meeting of these two waters from which the place derives its name). Between the two footbridges a small path will be seen on the left hand side leading up a steep flight of steps. The route takes this path following the sign to Hillsford Bridge. Continue up the left bank of Hoar Oak Water passing two waterfalls on the way, one near Watersmeet and the other higher up the river.

On reaching Hillsford Bridge go through the gate leading to the road, cross over the road with care, walk across the bridge and take the road on the left signed to Bridge Ball and Cheriton.

Almost immediately after turning into this road turn right into the entrance gates of Combe Park House and a National Trust car park and picnic area. (Grid reference 741478)

Walking time from Countisbury – one hour approx.

Here the route joins that of the Two Moors Way to continue ahead along the drive towards the house grounds marked private take the bridle path off to the right and then turn left following the arm to Scorsedown. The path goes around the back of the house. And its old walled vegetable garden crosses another stile and meets a signpost giving a choice of routes to continue along either woodland or riverside. This walk takes the riverside option and continues along to the left along the side of Hoar Oak Water. This is a pleasant wide path which continues upstream through the trees at the side of the water until reaching a five bar gate at the edge of a small road plus a signpost. Turn left following the Two Moors way route to Cheriton Ridge via Scorsedown. Cross over Smallcombe bridge and continue up the road leaving an attractive cottage on the right (grid reference 733470).

The road goes steeply uphill turning right and passing behind the cottage to continue on until reaching Scorsedown Farm. Continue ahead through the farmyard to a junction of tracks and a signpost. Here this walk leaves the of the Two Moors Way and follows the sign to Hillsford Bridge, Cheriton down to the left passing through the little hamlet of Cheriton.

The name Cheriton is derived from church town as this tiny hamlet used to be the site of St. Brendan's Church, the parish church of Brendon. This church was bodily moved to its present site above Brendon during the 18th century.

Continue down the road out of Cheriton to the first turning on the right signed to Bridge Ball and Brendon. Turn right here and pass through the cluster of cottages by the bridge that comprises Bridge Ball. As the road rises on the other side of the bridge take the second gate on the right leading into woodland. (The gates first and third are

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labelled private!) This gate is not signed but the track through the wood on either side is easy to see. (Grid reference 742469). Continue up this very old track as it slowly wends its way up through the trees to the top of the rise and then levels out following along the side of a wall at the edge of the wood with a steep drop to the left to the small Farley Water below. The track ends at the edge of the surfaced drive to Farley Water Farm. (Grid reference 746465).

Walking time from Countisbury – two hours approx.

Turn right and head uphill towards the farm for a short way. The road bends to the left and then bends to the right and begins to drop down to the farm. On the left hand side, at the elbow of this second bend there is a wooden five bar gate leading into a track running between old and broken walls. (Grid reference 746464). Turn left here through the gate passing an old water tank in the corner in the left.

Farley water farm has an historic claim to fame as it was here that Major Wade hid and was then captured following the failure of the Monmouth rebellion in 1685.

Follow the old track, which is a definitive right of way, as it runs uphill towards Brendon Common ahead. There is a gate at the top of the track, go through this and cross over the field to the next gate ahead. Do not go through this gate but bear to the left keeping the fence and the line of old gorse filled track on the right hand side.

Continue following this until a little further on when the broken walls of the old track are visible again, keep to the left of these as it is impossible to walk up the centre, until a metal five bar gate is seen on the further side of the track. (Grid reference 750461). Cross to this gate and go through it onto the moorland of Brendon Common.

Turn left and follow the track up to a car park at the edge of the road. Turn right here and walk along the edge of this unfenced road for just over half a mile.

There are sweeping moorland views from this road with The Chains in the distance, Cheriton ridge in the mid distance and the highpoints of the coastline between Lynton and Combe Martin in the far distance to the North West. (Views strictly dependant on good weather!).

After passing a car park on the left hand side the road bends and there is a bridge over a dry creek aptly named Dry Bridge. (Grid reference 759455). Take the footpath on the left just before the bridge, signed “Shilstone” and waymarked red. Follow the easily seen track as it rises uphill to the top of Shilstone Hill where there is an old trig point and from there, there are panoramic views.

The coast beyond Lynton can be seen to the North West; The Chains to the South West; Brendon common running over to the East towards the Doone Valley; The coast of Exmoor towards Minehead to the North East and straight ahead, to the North, Foreland Point above Countisbury.

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Having enjoyed the view, mist permitting; continue following the path ahead in a Northwards direction. It becomes narrower but is well signed by a yellow waymarked posts as it runs downhill through the heather. After a short distance there is a junction of rough tracks, continue ahead downhill keeping an eye open for the yellow marked posts. The route crosses a scoured out gully, an example of the problem of erosion typically encountered on this peaty surface.

The yellow watermarks can be seen on posts or red marks on the stone wall on the left which marks the start of cultivated fields on the edge of the moorland. (Grid reference 760466). The route continues on downhill with this stone wall and a deep old ditch on the left hand side and with the occasional red waymark still showing the way. Just before reaching Shilstone farm the path turns sharply to the right, with a deep Combe on the left hand side, drops down steeply, crosses over a small stream and climbs up the other side to the edge of the farmyard. Turn left into the farmyard going through a metal gate. Continue across the farmyard and leave by another five bar gate on the other side to the right of Shilstone cottage, which leads into a field.

Walking time from Countisbury – three hours approx.

Go straight across the field, the route indicated by a dip in the ground, and aim for a red waymark on a curve of an old wall opposite the gate. Pass through the gap in the wall to the left of the waymark and turn immediately left walking down the side of the field, beside and old wall, to the bottom corner at the edge of the road where there is a red waymarked stile. Climb over this and down a the very steep stone steps in the wall the other side into the road (difficult to see). Here there is a sign post in the hedge on the left; follow the route to “Rockford ½” turning left and walking down the road, passing the entrance to Cranscombe Farm on the left, crossing over a small road bridge and then continuing up the hill for a short way the other side until meeting a signpost on the right hand side.

Turn right here following the sign to “Brendon 1”. The path goes steeply downhill through and old wood beside a stream; a very attractive scene as the stream tumbles down a series of waterfalls. The path ends on the edge of the Brendon/Rockford road near Oaklands. (Grid reference 758475). This path is both very steep and VERY slippery in wet weather! It is covered with a thick coating of old leaves which hides slippery rocks beneath!

On joining the road at the bottom turn left and walk along the road to Rockford. Here there is a pub, The Rockford Inn, which serves bar snacks etc. Just before reaching the pub there is a footbridge across the East Lyn River; cross over this and on the further side turn left following the sign to “Watersmeet”. After passing the last of the cottages on the river bank, Rockford Lodge, the path divides; take the left hand track signed to “Watersmeet 1 ½” and continue along the side of the river passing a very informative National Trust board about the Watersmeet and Countisbury estate.

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The track at this point is wide and level, giving the legs a welcome break from the last few miles of steep terrain! After a while however the path climbs up, still keeping parallel to the river giving good views down onto the water below. A mile from Rockford along the bank the path reaches Ash bridge, a footbridge across the river. (Grid reference 753488). Continue ahead here towards Watersmeet, ignoring the sign to Countisbury on the right. The path goes around Crook Pool, a very deep pool on an s bend in the river. The path has become narrower and stonier as it crosses areas of "scree"- a loose surface of small stones.

After passing the two old but restored lime kilns on the other side of the river the route reaches Watersmeet House, a good resting place where refreshments, a shop and loos are available in the summer season, approximately from April until October. Note there was an old Monterey Pine in the garden of the house, a memory of the time when this was the hunting and shooting lodge of the Glenthorne estate unfortunately this became unstable and was pulled down in 2007 the stump still remains.

Walking time from the start- four hours approx.

Continue on downstream past Watersmeet keeping on the right hand bank and following the National Trust sign to Lynmouth. Here the route has rejoined that taken at the beginning of the walk and all that remains is to retrace this route, turning right opposite Myrtleberry Cottage on the far side of the river and climbing up Chiselcombe to the road at the top and the welcome sight of The Blue Ball Inn

Walking time for whole route – four and a half hours approx.