

Beautiful Walks from the Blue Ball Inn

Walk no. 1

AROUND AND ABOUT WIND HILL

Countisbury, wind hill and beacon tor

2.5 miles approx.

Walking time – One and a half hours approx.

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

General information

This is a short walk and apart from brief stretches of roadway is entirely on land belonging to the National Trust. The walk encircles Wind Hill, the large iron age fort just West of Countisbury following paths that contain a mixture of level walking with some steep but steady ascents and descents. There are panoramic views to be seen on the route and from the heights of Beacon Tor. Two return routes are given, one back over the top of Wind Hill, the other using the costal path on the cliff side of Countisbury Hill Road. Sturdy footwear is recommended, although most of the route is on grassy paths these can become slippery particularly in wet weather.

The Route:

Starting at the Blue Ball Inn (Grid reference 747496) turn left and walk, with care, down the road towards Lynmouth. After passing the Exmoor Base camp take the second gateway on the left with the National Trust "Watersmeet Estate" sign on it. Go through this gate and take the right hand path signed "Lynmouth 1 ½ miles". This grassy path circles around the base of Wind Hill which can be seen above on the right.

The Iron Age fort is thought to have later been used by the Saxons when defending this coast against Danish invasion and is probably the place known as "Arx Cynuit". The steep sides of the fort made it easily defensible but it was probably only used as a refuge on a sort term basis as it suffered from a major problem of lack of water!

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Beautiful Walks from the Blue Ball Inn

Continue along the track, keeping to the stone wall on the right hand side and passing a further sign to “Lynmouth”. Shortly there are good views to the left up the east Lyn valley towards Watersmeet. Go through a hunting gate and continue ahead with steep woodland on the left dropping down to the river below.

Note the woodland clinging to the sides of the valley. These woods are considered to be some of the finest examples of “hanging woodlands” in England. They mostly consist of sessile oaks but also include other species such as the rare Devon Whitebeam. This is an area of Special Scientific Interest.

Where the route being followed divides into two beside a wooden bench, take the upper path signposted – “Alternative path to Lynmouth” and continue ahead along this path as it runs close to a stone wall on the right hand side. The route continues, curving around to the right and as it begins to descend look across to the opposite side of the valley where another small

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Iron Age fort can be seen. As the path enters an area of scrubby thorn and holly trees there is an extensive Badger sett on the left hand side along the edge of an old wall. This sett is known to have been occupied for many years and new “dwellings” can be seen to have been developed on the right of the path as well.

Continue walking along the path until it again divides into two. Take the higher route going straight ahead following the sign to “Coastpath via Beacon Tor”. The route goes up a flight of steps, through a hunting gate and along the top of the ridge towards the top of Beacon Tor. Just before the Tor is reached there is a signpost indicating “Watersmeet estate” in the direction just covered and with the second arm missing.

This should indicate the Tor up to the left and the continuation of the route to join the coastal path down to the right. Before continuing this walk which will turn right and travel down towards the road spare the time to go up to the Tor to see the view.

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Beautiful Walks from the Blue Ball Inn

From here can be seen Lynmouth, Lynton and Hollerday Hill. Across the valley:

Countisbury Head up the coast in the opposite direction and Sillery Sands down below. Running inland from Lynmouth can be seen the valley of the East Lyn river running up towards Watersmeet and on the further side of the valley the rocky outcrop of Oxen Tor.

Having viewed the surroundings return to the signpost with the missing arm and continue down the grassy track towards the road and the Coastal path. The path goes around a hairpin bend to the left passing a new signpost – “Countisbury via Wind Hill” and “Beacon Tor and Watersmeet”.

Here a choice of return routes to Countisbury may be made.

Return route 1.

Turn right and follow the path to the right, signed “Countisbury”. This travels uphill and goes through the approximately two thousand year old fortifications of Countisbury castle on the top of Wind Hill. The route is easy to follow; it rises steadily up on a grassy track, passes through a hunting gate and reaches the top of the hill just before the surprisingly large old fortified bank. Go through a wooden gate and follow the track ahead as it runs downhill between stone walls back to the edge of the road just below Countisbury. By turning right here and walking up the side of the road the Blue ball Inn will be reached within a few minutes. Although this stretch of road walking is fairly short it is a busy and narrow road with no footpath, only a strip of grass verge at the side.

Return route 2.

The alternative route from below the Beacon Tor may therefore be preferred. This continues downhill to the left from the hairpin bend and goes through the hunting gate at the edge of the Countisbury hill road. Cross the road with care to the lay-by on the other side and then take the “coastal” sign on the right and return to Countisbury up the coastal path. Follow the path as it runs on the left hand side of the wall at the edge of the road and continue uphill on a

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grassy track. There is a very steep, unfenced drop on the left of the path down to Sillery Sands hundreds of feet below. Near the top of the hill the path runs close to a stone wall, and then turns right up a flight of steps to a signpost at the top. Continue up the coast path to the left with a stone wall to the right to a further signpost- "Coastpath, Coastpath".

Continue around the corner of the wall to the right until the tower of Countisbury Church appears over the hill. As the route reaches the church a gate will be seen on the right going into the churchyard. Go through the gate and follow the path around the tower and down the path to the church gate. Through this and then it is only a few yards down the road to the pub's car park opposite the Blue Ball Inn.

Walking Time - approx one and a half hours.

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