

Beautiful Walks from the Blue Ball Inn

Walk No. 4

THREE FORT WALK

Countisbury, Myrtleberry Cleave, Hillsford bridge, Horner's Neck Wood

3.5 MILES APPROX.

Walking time- Two to two and a half hours

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

General information

This walk is on either defined rights of way or on permissive paths (routes where the owner has given permission for walkers to pass over their land but at their own risk). All of this walk is on land belonging to the National Trust and is within Exmoor National Park. The first part of this walk uses the same route as the last part of walk 3 but in reverse- walking down Chisel Combe to Watersmeet, across the river and then up to the top of Myrtleberry Cleave via Myrtleberry North camp (and iron age fort). This takes approximately one hour. The second part of the route continues along the top of the Cleave, through Myrtle berry South Camp, to Hillsford Bridge and then returns to Watersmeet along the edge of Hoar Oak Waters passing two waterfalls on the way. Time taken for this part will be approx three quarters of an hour. The final part of the walk takes a very steep path up to another small promontory settlement at the top of Horner's Neck Wood and then returns across fields to Countisbury. This takes approximately three quarters of an hour.

Walks numbers 3 and 4 can be easily combined to create a longer circular route around the valleys of the East Lyn River and the Hoar Oak Water. To do this take walk no 3 via Lynmouth and Oxen Tor as far as the turning down to Watersmeet at grid reference 740485 where, instead of turning left continue ahead along the top of the valley meeting walk no. 4 within a short distance at a signpost (grid reference 742483). Continue ahead, as on walk 4 following the sign- "Hillsford Bridge 1/4 ". This route goes down to Hillsford Bridge and back down the river to Watersmeet. (Grid reference 744486). From Watersmeet the finishing part of either walk no. 3 or 4 may be chosen- returning to Countisbury via Chisel Combe or, (should the legs be willing and the heart strong!) via a steep path up through Horner's Neck Wood. This route is approx.6.5 to 7 miles with a walking time of approx. three and a half to four hours.

The route

Starting as for walk no. 3 leave The Blue Ball Inn (grid reference 747496) and turn left outside the front door and walk down the road towards Lynmouth. After passing the National Trust Exmoor Base Camp the pavement ends; continue, with care, ahead for a short way down the edge of the road to the second gate on the left which has the National Trust Watersmeet estate sign on it. Go through this gate and take the path running downhill directly ahead signed "Watersmeet". The route goes down the

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centre of the valley, Chisel Combe, on a wide grassy track, passing through a hunting gate near the bottom of the valley and then joining up with the path that runs alongside the East Lyn River. (grid reference 743491). Turn left here and walk upstream towards Watersmeet passing the stone arched Chisel Combe Bridge on the right.

This was one of the bridges that had to be rebuilt following 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!

Turn right by Watersmeet House and cross over the two footbridges across, firstly, the East Lyn River and secondly, Hoar oak Water. This is the meeting of the waters from which the place derives its name. From the second footbridge a good view can be had of the waterfall as Hoar Oak water drops down to meet the East Lyn. On reaching the far side of the footbridges take the path to the right and at the first bend continue uphill to the left. Within a few yards there is another path entering take this signed: "Lynton over the Cleaves and county road A39" and continue up to the road at the top. The path ends by climbing up a few steps to a lay-by at the edge of the road which is the National Trust staff car park. Here there is a sign – "Lynmouth and Lynton 3, via the Cleaves" pointing across the road to a track easily visible climbing steeply upwards through the trees on the other side of the road. Cross the road and go up this steep track which, after climbing through the woodland, comes out into the open in a grassy area where a sign will be seen on the left indicating that this is Myrtle Berry North Camp, of Iron Age origin. The first of the three forts!

Walking time approx. one hour from Countisbury.

Much work has been done by the National Trust to clear this ancient settlement area so that the outline design of the banks etc that formed the camp can be appreciated.

The route crosses over the centre of the camp and continues uphill via a short flight of steps (22). At the top of these the path levels out and just before the second, much longer and steeper flight of steps turn left to take the unsigned grassy track sloping gently uphill through woodland. (grid reference 742488).

Before turning off onto this track pause to admire the view. To the left Lynton can be seen in the distance with Hollerday Hill behind; Ahead and below the grassy track down Chisel Combe walked earlier; and all around the promontory the wooded valley of the East Lyn river and Hoar Oak water.

Continue up the grassy track until it joins a path at the top of the valley side by a signpost. Turn left here following the sign to "Hillsford Bridge ¼" (grid reference 744486). Almost immediately on the right is a notice indicating that the route is now passing through Myrtleberry South Camp (Iron Age) the second of the three forts!

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Again the National Trust has done a good job in keeping the bracken etc at bay so that the outline of the old settlement is still visible.

After passing South Camp the route continues going gradually downhill to pass through a wooden gate and then join the road just above Hillsford Bridge. Turn left and walk carefully downhill around the steep bend in the road to the junction of roads at the bottom by the bridge.

Cross the road with care and then cross over the bridge taking the road signed to Simonsbath. It is just above this bridge, which Hoar oak and Farley water meet. Immediately after crossing the bridge turn left through the wooden gate following the sign- "footpath to Watersmeet $\frac{3}{4}$ ". The walk continues ahead along this path passing a very informative National Trust display board on the Watersmeet and Countisbury Estate and travelling downstream beside the Hoar oak water towards Watersmeet.

The river here flows swiftly over the rocks and a further half mile down stream it drops through a narrow gap in the rocks to form quite a dramatic waterfall. This can be seen from a viewpoint to the left of the path. A further $\frac{1}{4}$ mile on and the route has returned to Watersmeet house.

Walking time approx. one and a half to two hours from Countisbury.

Cross over the footbridge to Watersmeet house and instead of returning to Countisbury by the same route as the outward journey turn right past the back of the house and the loos and take the path following the east Lyn river upstream and signed- "Fisherman's path to Rockford". The path becomes narrower and shortly a sign is seen- "Countisbury" pointing uphill to the left. Follow this sign up a steep path that winds its way slowly up to the top of another promontory in Horner's Neck Wood with the remains of a further settlement- fort no. 3! These remains are not so visible as the previous two but are scattered along the top of the ridge. The path follows the line of the ridge to the end at a four way signpost near a most welcome bench.

The route continues ahead through a hunting gate following the sign to "Barna Barrow car park". Follow the line indicated by the sign and walk uphill through gorse covered grassland and as the path ascends the next signpost will be seen on the top of the hill. Aim for this sign and then continue to follow the route across the open field in the direction indicated to a gate in the corner where there is a further sign to "Barna Barrow car park". The gate leads into an old walled track running downhill to another gate at the edge of Countisbury/ Porlock road. Turn left and back the short remaining distance to The Blue Ball Inn, taking care as this section of the road is narrow and there is no footpath.

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