



### Walk 23. Porlock, Hawk Combe and Porlock Weir.

- 8.4 miles, ascents and descents of 600 metres. 3 hours 50 minutes of constant walking, allow up to 5 hours.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and short sections of road. Slightly uneven and potentially muddy in places, streams to splash across. Some steep ascents.

Access: By car, park in Porlock: there may be a space next to the church (SS 886 466, near TA24 8LA) or further up Parson's Street towards Hawkcombe, or park in the long-stay car park (SS 885 469, TA24 8PH, £) and walk back. Alternatively, park in Porlock Weir (SS 864 479, TA24 8PD, £) and start from there. By bus use service 10 from Minehead to Porlock (Monday-Saturday) or the Exmoor Coaster from Lynmouth or Minehead.

Map: Croydecycle O2 Porlock plus O3 Horner and Dunkery; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

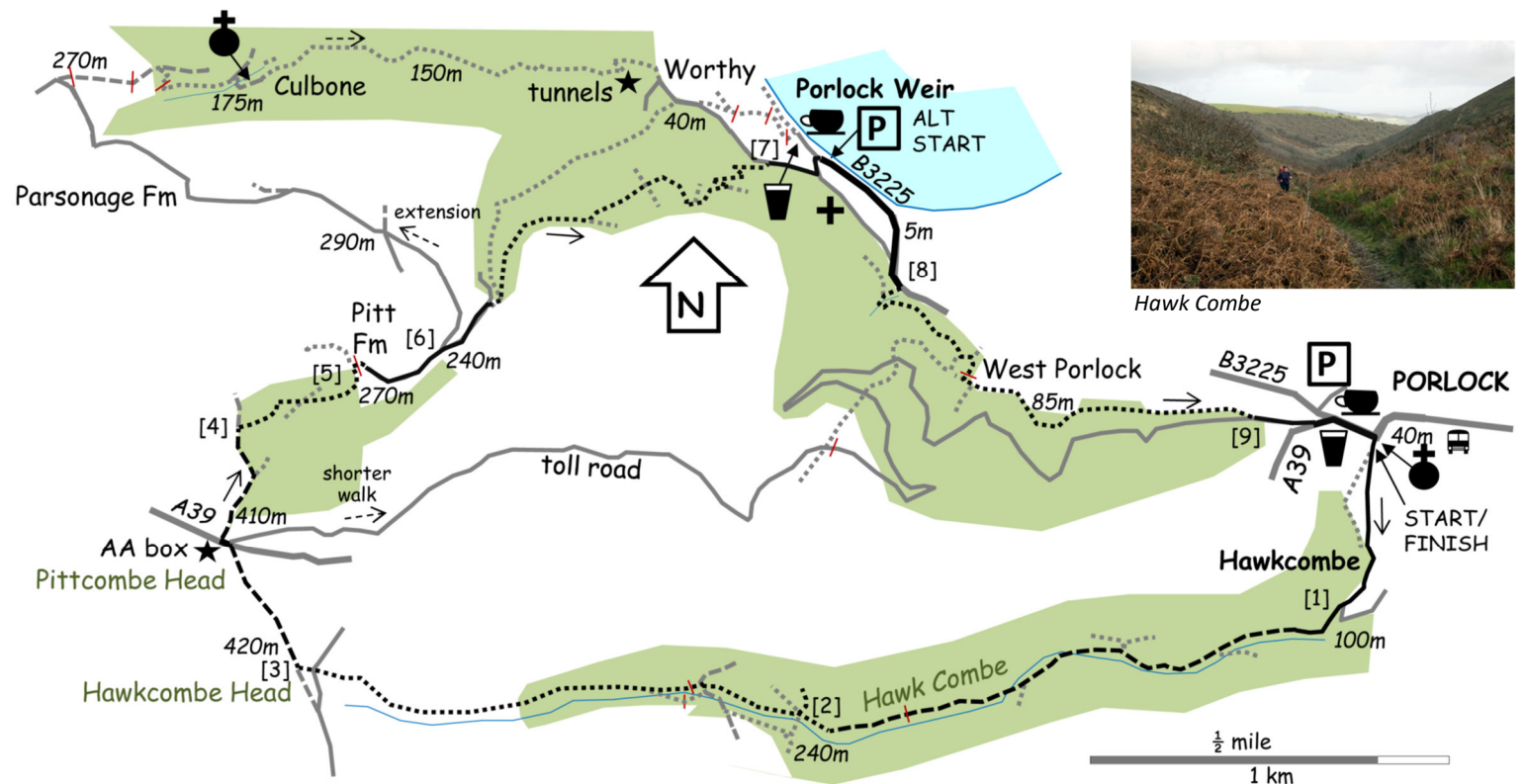
Refreshments: In Porlock and Porlock Weir.

THIS IS A SUPERB IF SLIGHTLY STRENUOUS WALK that takes in an attractive and bustling large village, one of Exmoor's most delightful combes, open moorland and far-reaching views, along with a busy mini-resort. The walk is fairly long and a steady climb is involved through the first combe (motor traffic has to ascend the infamous Porlock Hill to reach the same point), but the views are well worth it and there's a good choice of refreshments back in Porlock (or Porlock Weir, if you can't wait).

In Porlock start from St. Dubricius' church, recognised by its unusual truncated, wooden-shingled spire. Walk along Parson's Street, past a recreation ground, a disused red telephone box, and on the left the arched entrance to a cemetery; ignore any paths to right or left. Continue straight ahead at a 'no through road' sign (15mins, [1]). The houses gradually thin out as you come into Hawk Combe. The road soon becomes a rough track and leaves habitation behind as it ascends the combe. Follow what is now a path along the combe bottom, cross the stream, ignore a fork to the left, then a little later cross back again. Go through a gate, ignoring paths that ford the stream until you come to a sign for

Hawkcombe Head; turn left here to splash across a side-stream (1hr, [2]; usually passable with boots even in wet periods). Continue with the main stream on your left. When a wide track crosses continue ahead on a narrow path slightly to the right (the main path goes through two fords). Go through a pedestrian gate, cross a small stream and then rejoin the main path. Continue on the path, first among lichen-clad trees then in the open as the path climbs away from the stream. Half an hour from the crossing track come to a signpost at the head of the combe; cross the road and head for a gate slightly to the left, turning right parallel with the hedgeline when you meet a rough vehicle track (1hr50mins, [3]).

Follow the track until it meets the A39. Turn left here then immediately right across the road at an AA telephone box. Go through the pedestrian gate and follow the blue waymarks, ignoring the signposted toll road back to Porlock (this is used for the shorter route described opposite). Ignore the first (grassy) track descending to the right. Little more than five minutes later take the signposted bridleway downhill to the right (2hr5mins, [4]; straight ahead is a private forestry track). Follow it around to the right, initially alongside a fence. Continue ahead (fork right and downhill) where a path crosses diagonally. Soon come above a house and its well-kept garden; turn right through a gate on a track ([5]), ignoring the sign for Culbone via Smallacombe. Join a surfaced road, which in around five minutes comes to an oxbow junction (2hr20mins, [6]). Take the right fork ('toll road'). In about three minutes



Hawk Combe

turn right on a bridleway, ignoring the narrow path on the left that runs parallel with the road. Nearly ten minutes further on turn left on a narrow woodland path. Cross a broader track, later joining it to follow it around a sharp left turn; ignore the first path to the left, but in another 3-4 minutes turn left on a signposted narrow path. Zigzag downhill carefully on this stony path until you reach a road (2hr45mins, [7]). Turn right, then take the next turn left to arrive at the little seaside village of Porlock Weir. After exploring the village and harbour continue on coast road towards Porlock. Follow the road inland and pass the toll road, then an entrance drive, on your right. Just after the driveway turn right on a path (3hrs, [8]), following it across a lane and over a stream. Keep to the left-hand path at each of two forks, ignore a crossing path five minutes later, go through one wooden barrier then another, ignore a turn to Porlock Hill and keep the fence on your left. Bear right at a fork where the fence runs out. Follow this path until it reaches a road at the edge of Porlock (3hr35mins, [9]); turn left past the village hall, left again at the Ship Inn, and return past shops and tea rooms to the church.

**Extension to Culbone** (● 10.8 miles with ascents and descents of 750 metres). This extended version of the walk continues to Culbone church and follows the Coast Path back to Porlock Weir (see walk 22). Follow the main walk to the 2hr20min point ([6]). Take the left fork and ascend steeply. At the next junction, a crossroads where the main road bears left, continue straight on to a narrow road signposted to Ash Farm. The road climbs a little more before levelling out. Pass the entrance to Ash Farm, taking the left fork past Parsonage Farm.

Soon come to a sharp left bend with views over the coast. Ten minutes later turn right on a track signposted to Culbone: go through a gate and a little later a second gate. After the second gate look out for a small sign for Culbone Church. Turn right here and descend into the woods on a narrow, often slippery path. After a gate the path turns to the left and follows a valley down to the rather picturesque Culbone Mill. Walk under the bridge and turn left into the churchyard. The church of St Beuno (a seventh-century Welsh saint) reputedly is claimed to be the smallest church in England that is still in use. After exploring the churchyard (and church if it is open), leave via some steps (on the left as you face the front of the church). Turn left and go over the bridge, now with the mill on your right. The original, lower coast path has been partly eroded; you are now on the replacement upper path, which takes you through the woods (with occasional sea views) back in the direction of Porlock. Even this path has been diverted several times but it is well signposted; keep to the left where there are free choices and follow any diversion signs.

Eventually the path descends steeply on a zig-zag, goes through an arch and then a short tunnel, part of the 'back entrance' to Ashley Combe, the demolished summer home of pioneering 19th-century mathematician Ada Lovelace. After the tunnel it emerges in the hamlet of Worthy. Follow the road for less than five minutes then take the coast path continuation on your left. You will soon have views over the shingly beach and creek at Porlock Weir. Following the path along the edge of a field, look out for an almost hidden sign for a path to the left: go down some steps here to Porlock Weir. Rejoin the main walk instructions to return to Porlock.

**Shorter version: Porlock, Hawk Combe and the toll road** (● 7.3 miles, ascents and descents of 540 metres). This version misses out Porlock Weir. Follow the main walk to Pittcombe Head (the 1hr45min point), then cross the A39 and take the toll road to the right. Walk along this quiet and scenic road for 35 minutes or so, then just before a cattle grid turn left on a bridleway signposted to Porlock. Cross a road, descend through woods, then turn right on the next road (the path continues to Porlock, but the views are better from the road). Around 30 minutes later turn left on to the A39 and arrive back in Porlock.

**Alternative linear walk: Porlock to County Gate** (● 10.8 miles, ascents of 990 metres and descents of 710 metres). Follow the main walk to the 2hr35min point and go through the two gates, but ignore the turn-off right to Culbone Church; continue ahead to join the Coast Path. Follow the instructions in **walk 21** to County Gate, using the bus or a prearranged lift or taxi to return.

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