



## Walk 29. Malmsmead and Badgworthy.

- 6.1 miles, ascents and descents of 340 metres (7.7 miles and 470 metres starting from County Gate). 2 hours 35 minutes constant walking, allow 3½ hours.

Terrain: Mostly on paths and tracks, possibly muddy. Open moorland, but with reasonably well-defined paths. Two or three streams to splash through. The descent and re-ascent of Lank Combe on the main walk is steep and uneven.

Access: Start from Lorna Doone Farm in Malmsmead, down narrow lanes (SS 792 478, near EX35 6NU, £/NT members free). The Exmoor Coaster bus stops at the County Gate car park, just under a mile from the start and 80m higher up (SS 793 486, near to EX35 6NQ).

Map: Croydecycle 04 Lynton Lynmouth & Doone Valley; OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Tea room and garden in Malmsmead (National Trust).

R. D. BLACKMORE'S CELEBRATED NOVEL *LORNA DOONE* is set in a recognisable Exmoor landscape, with the Badgworthy ('Badgery') and Oare area at the centre of the story. 'Doone Country' is marked on the map between Lank Combe and Badgworthy, but the location of Doone Valley is debated. The 'water-slide' in the book is an exaggerated version of the cascade at the end of Lank Combe, though Hoccombe Combe, with Badgworthy at its mouth, is a more likely candidate for the valley. Literary associations apart, this is a rewarding area of Exmoor to explore, with partly-wooded combes descending from the open moor to the Badgworthy valley. This walk takes in Badgworthy Water and the surrounding hills, including the abandoned village of Badgworthy, before returning to the hamlet of Malmsmead with its National Trust café. It is a *relatively* gentle introduction to upland Exmoor.

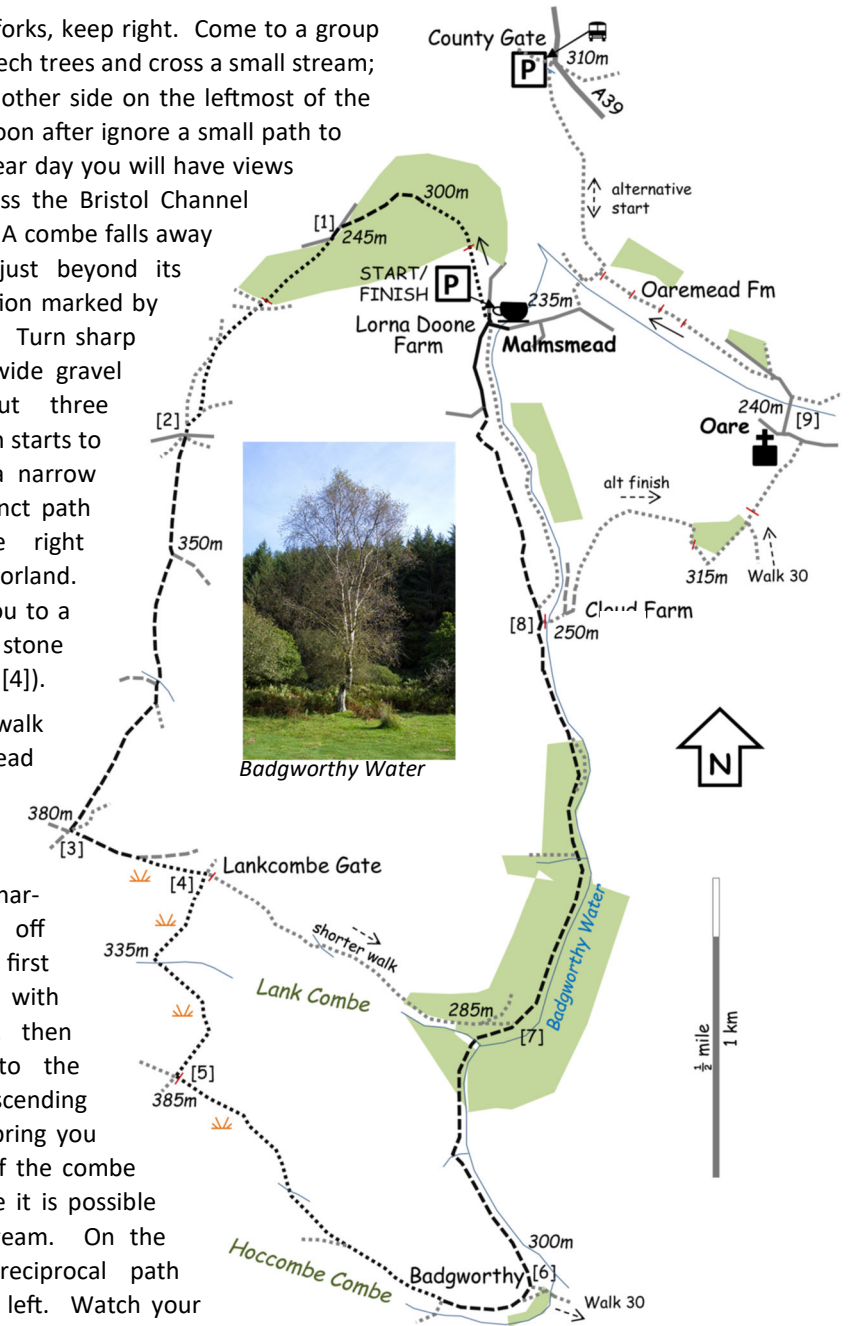
If you are starting from County Gate, from the bus shelter face away from the road, go through a gate and follow a signposted bridleway alongside the fence to the left. Malmsmead is immediately below you. The path soon starts descending. At a bridleway sign turn right then go over a bridge. Turn right when you meet a road: this will soon bring you to Malmsmead Bridge and Lorna Doone Farm.

Otherwise start the walk from the car park next to Lorna Doone Farm. Cross the road and go through a field gate with a sign marked 'public bridleway to Southern Wood'. Follow the path uphill, through another gate, then crest the hill as the path bends to the left. The path, now quite a wide track, descends through woods and arrives at a road (20mins, [1]). Bear left, taking the first path on the left (signposted to Brendon Common). Follow the path uphill through the woods and go through a gate on to open moorland; go straight ahead where a path crosses. Keep slightly left and uphill where two paths come in from the right. Where the path forks at a blue-topped marker post, either option will bring you to a gate (40mins, [2]). Go through, cross a road, and continue straight ahead on a well-defined broad track.

When the track forks, keep right. Come to a group of windswept beech trees and cross a small stream; continue up the other side on the leftmost of the two paths, but soon after ignore a small path to the left. On a clear day you will have views behind you across the Bristol Channel to South Wales. A combe falls away to your right; just beyond its head is a T-junction marked by a post (1hr, [3]). Turn sharp left here on a wide gravel track. In about three minutes this path starts to veer left; take a narrow and fairly indistinct path forking to the right across the moorland. This will bring you to a field gate at a stone wall (1hr10mins, [4]).

The shorter walk continues ahead here, through the gate. Otherwise just before the gate a narrow path heads off to the right, at first almost parallel with the stone wall, then bearing away to the right and descending steeply. It will bring you to the bottom of the combe at a point where it is possible to cross the stream. On the other side a reciprocal path heads up to the left. Watch your footing here as the way is steep and uneven.

Continue upwards and slightly to the left, until you arrive at the continuation of the wall; it is now a low bank with a wire fence on top. Follow the wall to the right, then turn left through a field gate (1hr25mins, [5]) and take the signposted path straight ahead. Splash through a



shallow stream, bear slightly left on a wide grassy path, then pass a blue-topped marker post on the left. A little way beyond go through a gap in a stone wall. This is the entrance to Badgworthy, or what remains of it; nowadays it is populated only by sheep. Continue past a mound of rubble, the ruins of a cottage. Follow the well-defined path ahead and then around to the left to come above Badgworthy Water (1hr45mins, [6]). (Turning right to cross the side-stream here will link to walk 30: see below). Carry on above the river, then cross the stream coming down from Lank Combe at the bottom of a small cascade (take care here as the rocks can be slippery), then go over a second stream via a footbridge. The path from Lank Combe joins from the left at a wide grassy area (2hrs, [7]).

Continue alongside Badgworthy Water beneath oak trees. Go through a field gate, then a little later look out for a large stone on the left with a plaque commemorating R. D. Blackmore. Soon afterwards you will see a camp site on the opposite bank, and come to a footbridge on the right (2hr20mins, [8]). The alternative finish turns right here for Oare, otherwise continue ahead on the track. Join a road and continue parallel with the river to return to Malmsmead and the car park.

**Shorter walk: Malmsmead and Lank Combe** (● 4.8 miles, ascents and descents of 285 metres). Although you will miss out Badgworthy, the descent of Lank Combe is well worth doing. At the 1hr10min point ([4]) go through the gate and follow the path downhill into Lank Combe. Cross a small stream, then continue downhill until the path meets Badgworthy Water at a wide grassy area ([7]). Turn left to rejoin the main walk.

**Alternative finish via Oare** (● 7.4 miles, ascents and descents of 430 metres). At the 2hr20min point ([8]) cross over and come to Cloud Farm. Keep straight ahead with the farmhouse on your right, and take the path diagonally left and upwards towards Oare (the left-hand path returns directly to Malmsmead). This is at first a small lane then it runs along the edge of a field. Turn right at a field corner where the gate is signposted 'private', then left through the next gate. Follow the path around to the left, then down to the road. Oare church is on the left (2hr45mins, [9]); take a moment to explore the interior, where there is another plaque commemorating R. D. Blackmore. Opposite the church, head down to the road bridge and cross the river. Turn left on a signposted bridleway and follow it towards a smart farmhouse, going through gates to keep to the right of the house. At a T-junction turn left down a muddy path (right to return to County Gate), cross a footbridge, continue along the lane and then turn right on the road to return to Lorna Doone Farm and, beyond it to the right, the car park.

**Malmsmead, Badgworthy, Great Tom's Hill and Oare (walks 29 and 30:** ● 9.1 miles, ascents and descents of 430 metres). Follow this walk to Badgworthy (the 1hr45min point, [6]). Turn right here to descend to a side stream, crossing it on a plank bridge. Now follow walk 30 back to the finish.

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