



Walk 32. Around Parracombe.

- 5.1 miles, ascents and descents of 285 metres. 2 hours constant walking, allow around 3 hours.

Terrain: Paths, tracks, fields and roads. Some parts can be very muddy.

Access: Start in Parracombe. There is limited parking in the village; the best option is the small recreation ground car park NE of the village centre, on Parracombe Lane off the A39 (SS 670 450, near EX31 4QL). Alternatively, park in the layby opposite the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway (SS 670 458) and start the walk from the 50min point ([3] on the map). Bus 309/310 runs between Barnstaple and Lynton approximately hourly on Mondays to Saturdays, stopping at the Fox & Goose inn.

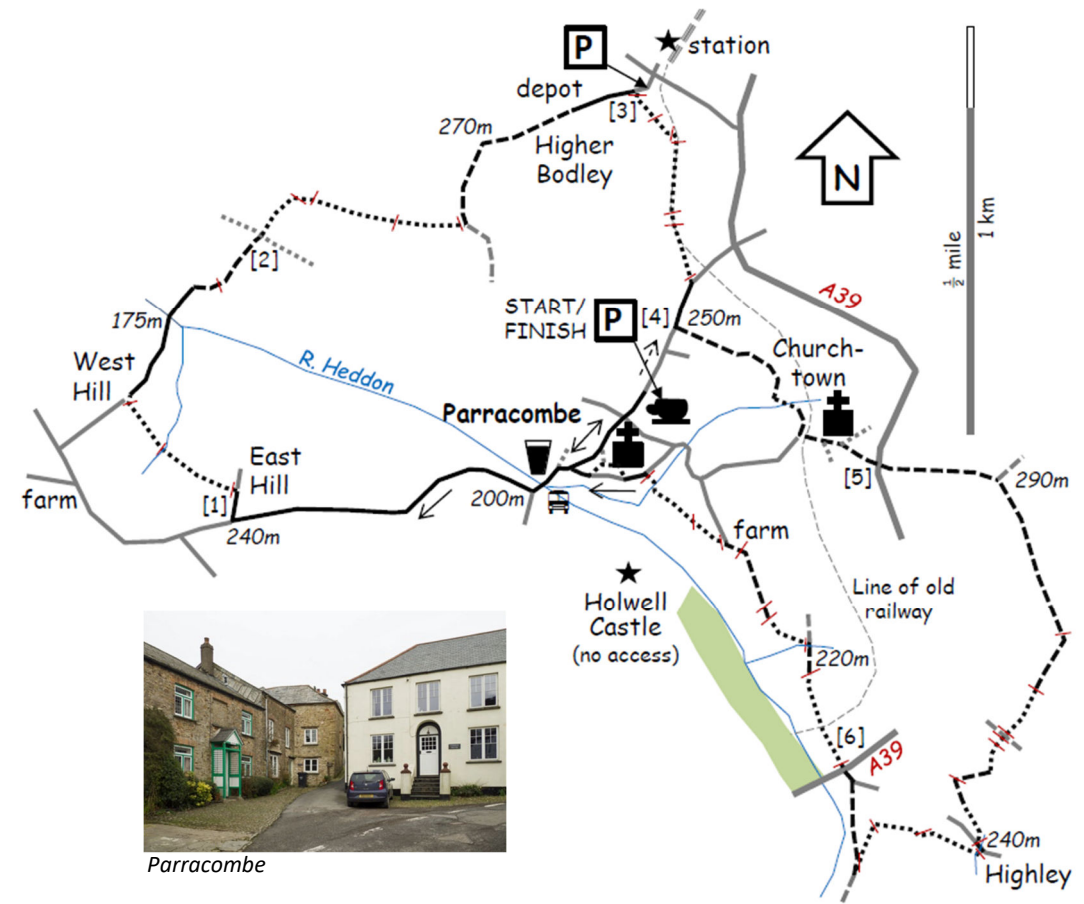
Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor. The village and part of the route is on Croydecycle 54.

Refreshments: Pub and café in Parracombe, seasonal café at Woody Bay Station 1 mile off the route, otherwise Lynton or Lynmouth.

PARRACOMBE IS AN ATTRACTIVE AND TIMELESS VILLAGE tucked away in a fold in the hills on the River Heddon. It was once on the main road and railway from Lynton, but the A39 now skirts around the village on the contour line, and casual passers-by are hardly aware that it exists. The village has a good example of an early Norman motte and bailey castle, on private land but easily seen from the parish church, as well as a largely unused but well-preserved old church with a tower dating from the twelfth century. Railway enthusiasts will appreciate the remnants of the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, which like the modern A39 followed a circuitous route above the village; it is encountered at several points along the walk.

If you have parked in the small car park, turn left to walk down into the village. Cross the bridge and pass the Fox & Goose inn; the bus stops here. Take the first road right, in front of a rough rendered house (Rose Cottage). Head uphill and in ten minutes pass some barns on the right, then turn right on the farm driveway (East Hill; 18mins, [1]).* Before coming to the houses, turn left over a stile hidden in the hedge. Cross the field ahead and go through a line of trees, then aim just to the left of the far corner of the field, where there is a stile beneath tall trees. Cross over, then go around a garden fence on the right (West Hill) to come to a field gate. Turn right on to a narrow lane. This drops down to a stream (the River Heddon) then rises to a stone barn and a house (the official right of way briefly runs parallel on the right). Turn right in front of the house and go through a gate, then uphill on a stony, enclosed

* The next part of the walk can become very waterlogged after prolonged or heavy rain. As an alternative, continue on the road, turning right at each junction. The final turn is a farm lane marked as a bridleway to Parracombe. Re-join the main route as it passes West Hill and drops to the stream.



path. Ignore a signposted crossing path (33mins, [2]), keeping to the bridleway. Go through a gate and head right and through the second gate (marked with blue); keep right in the field. After two more gates turn left and upwards on a track between hedges. At the top of the rise follow this around to the right. Arriving at a highway depot, continue ahead on a surfaced road. Before arriving at a small parking area turn right through a gate on a footpath (50mins, [3]); just beyond is Killington Lane Station, one end of the mile-long working remnant of the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, which has steam trains in season.

From the gate, immediately go through another gate on the right, then head left along the hedge. Follow the signposted path; it goes through a gate at the end of the field, then through a pair of gates to continue along a ridge (the line of the railway) towards a small concrete bunker and across two stiles; in the next field bear very slightly right to come to another stile at a road. Turn right, then in about two minutes turn left on a driveway signposted as a public footpath 1hr, [4]). This heads along a rough avenue of trees; in season the verges will be lined with daffodils. Pass a large house on the right (Heddon Hall) and follow the drive ahead then around to the right. Cross a stream and continue uphill on a footpath, coming to

the hamlet of Churchtown. At the top turn left over a bridge, another remnant of the railway. Parracombe's original church is on the left; it is worth a look inside. After the church continue ahead along the lane (signposted purple as a restricted byway). Cross over the A39 (1hr10mins, [5]) and continue on the track. Where the path splits, fork right on the footpath towards Highley. When you come to a gate go through and bear right to stay on the lane. After a second gate cross the field to the gate in front of you.

Now cross a track, go through another gate, then keep the field edge to your right; there are views to the left across a wooded combe. Come to a gate and follow the path left and downhill between banks. This brings you to a farm, Highley. Go through a gate, bear left over a bridge, then turn immediately right through a gate to splash back across the stream. Head uphill then at a signpost go through a gate on the right and turn left along the field edge. After another gate head left and head gently downhill to a stile next to a track. Turn right here, following the track until it meets the farm road again; turn left, and come back to the A39 (1hr40mins, [6]).

Cross the main road and enter a field. Your route ahead is roughly level. Pass a stone gatepost, crossing the line of the old railway, then bear slightly right towards the corner of the field; you will have a view across Parracombe and its 'new' church. Go through a gate at a stream (not the gate on the right). Briefly follow a closed-in path, turning left through a gate where signposted. Keep right until crossing the stream, then bear slightly left to the far side of the field; follow the boundary left until you come to a gate. Go through, then immediately through a gate on the left to head along an enclosed track to a house. Keep left and cross the farmyard, then take the lane to the right, with a corrugated barn on your left.* Turn left into a field at the far end of the barn, and head slightly right to a gate in the far side. Keep right to walk along the bank, then into the next field; splash across a stream and go through a gate. Turn left on the road. A minute or so further on head right into the churchyard. There are good views across Holwell Castle, the earthworks of a Norman motte and bailey fortification. Descend back to the road and continue into Parracombe; at the junction, turn left for the village centre, pub and bus stop, or right for the car park.

Short walk: south and east of Parracombe (● 2.8 miles, ascents and descents of 135 metres). From the Fox & Goose head over the bridge, through the village centre, and straight on at a crossroads. Pass the car park before turning right to join the main walk at the 1-hour point ([4]). (The right turn is the second one after the car park: the first is a private drive to Heddon Hall). Follow the walk to the end; if you started directly from the car park and missed the centre, turn left after the church and walk down to the bridge and inn before heading back uphill.

* A slight change to the right of way through the farm was pending in 2023, to divert the path left before the barn.

© Stan Lester 2019-23. Last recce 10/2023. Please email editor@exmoorwalker.uk with any updates or comments.

This route description is provided freely and in good faith. You are welcome to use, copy and distribute it for personal and non-profit purposes (attribution—non-commercial—no derivatives). No responsibility is taken for any errors or omissions, or for your navigation or safety on the walk. Introductory and safety information at exmoorwalker.uk.