



Walk 33. Wistlandpound Reservoir and Bratton Fleming.

- 8 miles, ascents and descents of 365 metres. 3 hours 15 minutes constant walking, allow 4 hours.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and roads; parts can be marshy or muddy, particularly between North Thorne and Bratton Fleming. Some short steep climbs and descents.

Access: Start from the small parking area near the southern end of the reservoir, at SS 639 416 just as you turn off the road (£). Alternatively start from Bratton Fleming; there is a car park next to the shop (SS 644 376) and a stop here for bus 310 between Lynton and Barnstaple.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

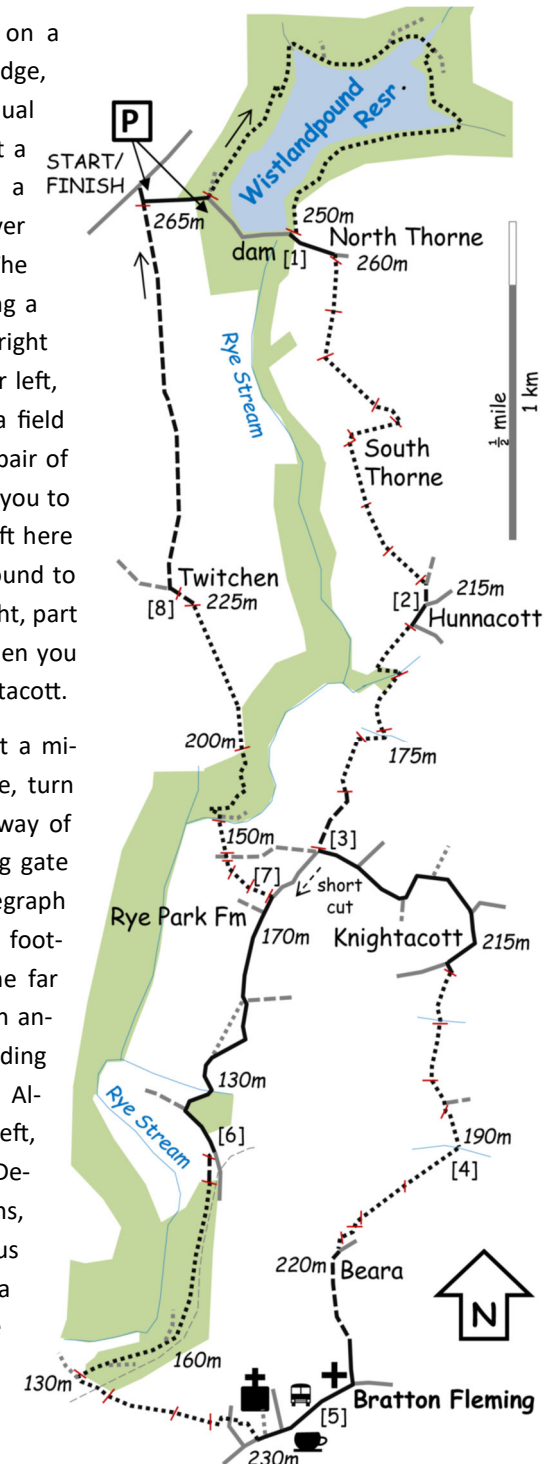
Refreshments: There is a shop with picnic tables selling drinks, snacks and ice-cream in Bratton Fleming. The nearest pub is at Blackmoor Gate, a mile and a half from the start.

WISTLANDPOUND RESERVOIR WAS COMPLETED IN 1956 by damming the Rye Stream, a tributary of the River Yeo. It is secluded, gently scenic, and accessible – of all the bodies of water in the Exmoor area it is the only one that is encircled by a wheelchair-friendly path. This walk starts with a circuit of the reservoir then uses paths across fields to head south to Bratton Fleming, returning through woods and along lanes; the walk is varied, quiet, and intermittently scenic.

From the car park, follow the road down to the lower, lakeside parking area. Turn left through a pedestrian gate, taking the right fork to walk around the reservoir on a broad, well-made path; keep to the inner path. Arriving back at the dam (30mins, [1]), turn left, and follow the drive past a bungalow and a barn, turning right before the farmhouse. Go through a metal gate with a small footpath sign. Just east of here, on private land, is abandoned medieval North Thorne village. Follow an initially sunken path to the far right-hand corner of the field where there is a pond; go through the gate and cross to the far side of the field, to another gate (or gap). Go through and head diagonally left to the corner of the field and through a gate. Follow the path between hedges to an ivy-clad stone barn. Turn right to go through a pedestrian gate then make for a white-painted house. A stile leads into its garden, and a second stile takes you out again over a small plank bridge. Head for the far right-hand corner of the field, through a gate, along the right edge of the field, then through another gate and ahead to a corrugated barn. Go through a gate to cross in front of the barn, bear slightly right (not sharp right) and downhill, then head through two gates and turn right on to a lane (55mins, [2]).

When the lane bends left continue ahead on a signposted footpath into a field. Head for a ridge, then aim for the rightmost of several individual tall trees. Just beyond it turn sharply left at a footpath post to join a path descending to a stream. Cross over on the stone slab, go over the stile and turn right on the footpath. The path soon leaves the stream and heads along a tree-lined bank. Go through a gate and turn right over a small footbridge. Head upwards, bear left, turn left alongside a bank and go through a field gate. At the end of the field go through a pair of gates to join an unsurfaced lane. This brings you to the corner of a road (1hr10mins, [3]); turn left here (right for the short-cut). Follow the road around to the right; note the old railway arch on the right, part of the former Lynton to Barnstaple line. When you come to a T-junction turn right towards Knightcatt.

Keep right at Higher Knightcatt, then about a minute later, before coming to a stone cottage, turn left on a signposted footpath into the driveway of the Old Stables. Turn right through a kissing gate into a field. Stay just to the left of the telegraph poles; descend to a stream, cross it on a footbridge, and go through a gate. Head to the far right-hand corner of the field and go through another gate. Now head diagonally left, descending to a sunken path at the corner of the field. Almost immediately go through a gate on the left, then follow the right-hand side of the field. Descend steps and cross a stream (1hr35mins, [4]), bearing slightly right to join an obvious path heading diagonally upwards. Go over a pair of stiles, and head diagonally across the field, aiming for a point in the opposite side about halfway up the hill. Here you will find two more stiles: go over them, and through



the gate on the left. Pass across the back of a large house and its garden, then through a pedestrian gate to turn right on its driveway. This lane becomes a surfaced road and brings you into Bratton Fleming. Turn right at a T-junction for the centre of the village (1hr50mins, [5]).

Unfortunately the village pub is no more, but there is a shop on the left by the village green, selling hot drinks, snacks and ice-cream. This is the alternative starting-point (if you have arrived by bus head downhill from the stop). Ignore the road on the right and the path to the church, but just beyond turn right on a footpath between houses. Enter a grass area and go through an arch on the left, across the road, through another arch, then follow the path left and take the first right to come to a gate that leads down deep steps into a field. Cross the field straight ahead to a solitary tree, go through the gate and continue ahead. Go through a pedestrian gate on to a sunken, stepped path. Follow it downhill, then at a junction turn right through a gate into a nature reserve run by the Devon Wildlife Trust. The path runs on a ledge through woods, high above Rye Stream on the left. Keep left at the first fork, and later on right at the second. Gradually converge with a stone bank on the right; this is the line of the old Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, also encountered in walk 32. Go through one gate then another, arriving at a road (2hr20mins, [6]).

Turn left here to follow the road for a little over half a mile. In about fifteen minutes, after a continuous climb, note the entrance to Rye Park Farm. Shortly after (2hr35mins, [7]) turn left through a gate on a signed footpath, head across the field, through a gate, then just to the right of a small stone house. Go through gates to cross a track, then head across the field to a gate into woods. Cross a stream, turn left, then follow the path around and to the right as indicated on a marker post. The path rises steeply. It can be indistinct at times; pass to the left of a small hollow, then at a small clearing (bracken-filled in season) the path heads upwards to the right. Go over a stile by a line of beech trees into a field. Continue upwards close to the fence, then bear slightly left towards the right-hand edge of a copse, where a house is almost concealed by the trees. Go through a gate and turn left; this is Twitchen (2hr55mins, [8]). Follow the track through a gate, over a narrow footbridge and right in front of an open-fronted barn. In twenty minutes or so this will bring you back to the parking area at Wistlandpound.

Shorter walks. An easy way to shorten the walk is to turn right (on the surfaced road) rather than left at the 1hr10min point ([3]), then in two or three minutes take the footpath through the gate on the right, rejoining the main walk at the 2hr35min point ([7]) (● 4.8 miles, ascents and descents of 185 metres). Starting from Bratton Fleming, the same short-cut in reverse gives a walk of 3.5 miles (● ascents and descents of 185 metres). Alternatively, the circuit of Wistlandpound makes a pleasant stroll of 1.6 miles from the lower car park.



Wistlandpound

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