



Walk 36. Challacombe and the Long Stone.

- 8.2 miles, ascents and descents of 325 metres. 3 hours 20 minutes constant walking, allow around 4½ hours.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and a long stretch of moorland. ! Open moorland: the moor is tussocky and uneven, and it can be boggy in winter and after heavy rain. A compass is useful particularly in poor visibility. The height gain is only moderate, but the terrain can be tiring hence the blue classification.

Access: By car, park in Challacombe in the layby opposite the post office/shop/tea garden (not in the Black Venus car park) (SS 693 410, EX31 4TT). No bus service.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

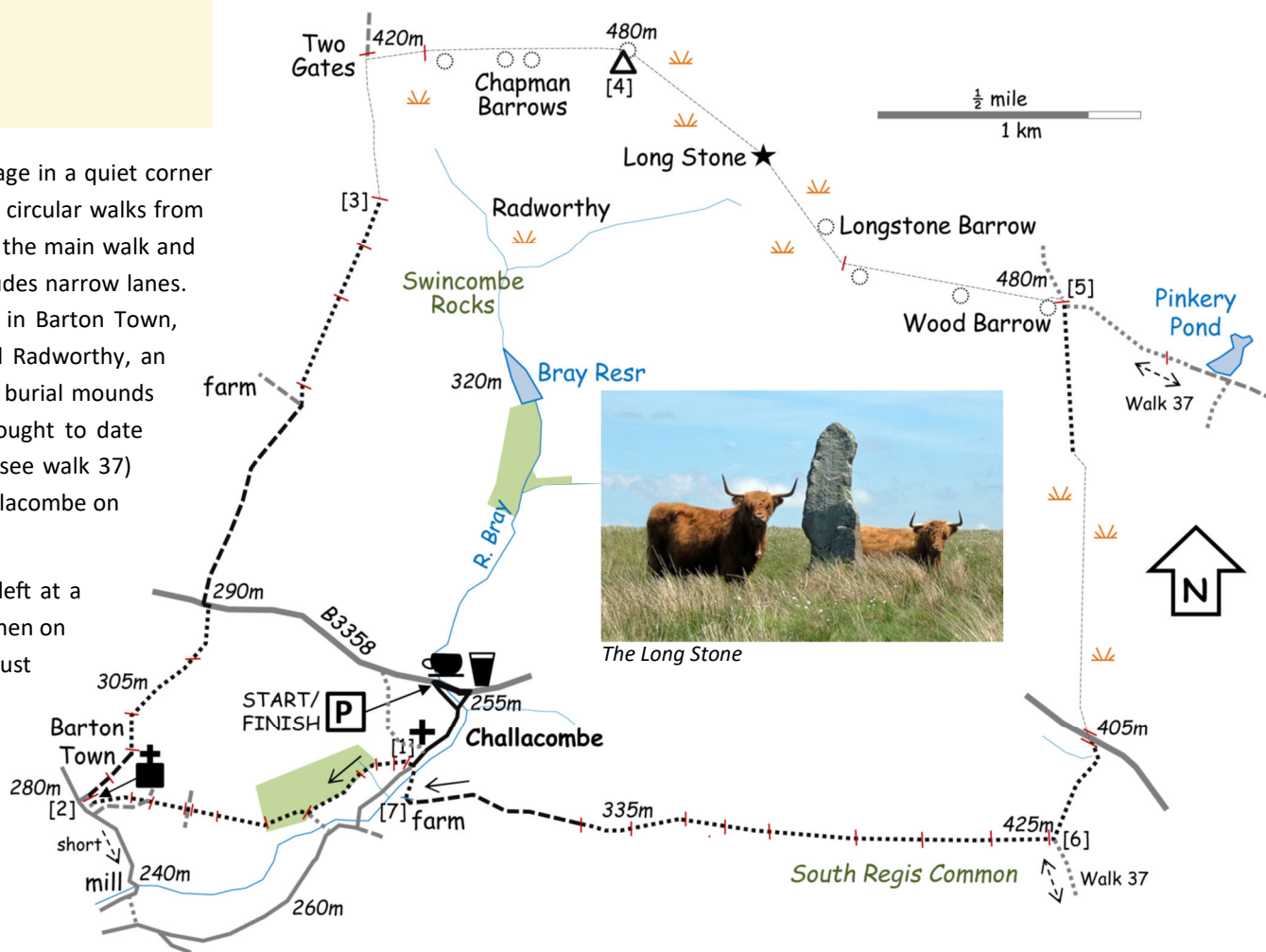
Refreshments: Pub and seasonal tea garden at Challacombe.

CHALLACOMBE IS AN ATTRACTIVE, UNDEVELOPED and spread-out small village in a quiet corner of western Exmoor. Unfortunately it is difficult to make up very many circular walks from the village without using the B3358, which can be fast and busy. Both the main walk and the short walk here avoid the main road, although the short walk includes narrow lanes. The main walk starts by heading to Challacombe's 'detached' church in Barton Town, then continues north on to the open moor above Bray Reservoir and Radworthy, an abandoned medieval village. The moors are studded with Bronze Age burial mounds (c. 3-4,000 years old) along with Exmoor's tallest standing stone, thought to date from the same era. The return route heads almost to Pinkery Pond (see walk 37) then along the Devon/Somerset boundary, before heading back to Challacombe on the high ground of South Regis Common.

From the post office walk west downhill, go over a bridge then turn left at a signpost on a road alongside a stream, the River Bray. Pass a ford and then on the right a small chapel; ignore the first footpath to the right, then just before a bridge turn right initially on a driveway to take a public footpath towards Challacombe church (7mins, [1]). Go through first a field gate then a pedestrian gate, the second on the right. Follow the path through another gate, over a stream and along the edge of a wood. At a signpost, turn right through a gate into the wood, heading upwards between beech trees. When you reach the end of the woods, continue ahead and very slightly to the right across a field.

A gate leads into a second field. Continuing in the same direction come to another gate and cross a farm track. Head towards a barn roof, then the church. Enter the churchyard and walk around the front of the church and through a farm gate (25mins, [2]). Turn right to join a farm track, soon afterwards going through a second field gate. At the next gate bear left on to a signposted bridleway, with the hedge on your left. In the next field head slightly to the right to join an old grassy track, between two low banks. Cross into another field, walk along the right-hand hedge, and arrive at a road.

Opposite and slightly to the left, join a farm lane signposted as a bridleway to Two Gates. Pass a farm over to your left, then continue straight ahead at the next three gates, keeping the field boundary on your left. At the fourth you come onto the open moor (1hr10mins, [3]), sometimes grazed by Highland cattle. This is access land; it is possible to explore around



Radworthy, to Swincombe Rocks and down to Bray (or Challacombe) Reservoir (the track from here back to Challacombe is private). To continue the walk, as you enter the moor bear very slightly left (the bearing is 353°) to stay on the high ground, joining a track that comes to a gate; this is 'Two Gates'. Don't go through the gate, but turn right and follow the line of the bank. In three minutes or so cross another bank on a ladder stile, then pass a series of barrows (earth mounds). On the last of these, about ten minutes from the stile, is a trig point at 480 metres (1hr35mins, [4]). Climb it for views along the north Devon coastal hills and across to south Wales. Looking to the right of the direction you have been walking (compass bearing 128°) you should be able to make out the Long Stone, an isolated, thin slate standing stone less than half a mile away, about half as tall again as a person. Make a note of which clump of trees to aim for on the horizon, as you will lose sight of it when you descend.

You should arrive at the Long Stone after ten minutes or so of picking your way across boggy, tussocky ground. Now alter your course fractionally to the right (145°), coming in about five minutes to the Longstone Barrow. A couple of minutes beyond on the same bearing there is a field gate with a ladder stile. Go through, then keeping parallel with the right-hand bank pass two more mounds. A little over ten minutes later come to a larger one (Wood Barrow). Walk to its far side then turn right through a gate signposted to the B3358 (2hr10mins, [5]; heading left here brings you in a few minutes to Pinkery Pond). At first a well-defined path heads close to the bank, then after going through an ungated gap in a line of trees it becomes more broken. The best route is about 50 metres left of the boundary, where there is a vague track that avoids any areas of bog. In less than 15 minutes you will come to a gap in the hedge in front of you, where there are sheep pens and a gate on to the main road.

Carefully cross the road and go through a gate, following a wide track towards Moles Chamber (see walk 37). Head uphill; take the second gate on the right, at a line of trees (2hr40mins, [6]). Walk as signposted towards Challacombe, keeping close to the bank. When it runs out drop down slightly on a stony path to a gate. Continuing in the same direction keep to the left of the ditch-and-bank. Go through a gate at its end and walk along a row of beech trees. Continue ahead across two more fields, then join a more defined track and follow it to a farmyard. Turn right here through a gate on to a hedged-in bridleway, down and to the left of the farm track (3hr10mins, [7]). Cross a narrow stone bridge and turn right on a road to rejoin your outward route. Go over another bridge at a ford, then turn left at the main road to return to the post office and layby.

Stroll around Challacombe (● 2.6 miles, ascents and descents of 90 metres). Follow the main walk as far as the church ([2]). Leave the churchyard through the main gate and turn left on the road. Pass the former Challacombe Mill and go over a bridge. Shortly after, turn left on a signposted footpath, keeping the field edge to your left. Cross a stile and turn left on to a

lane. This now returns to Challacombe via the old school house, chapel, and ford: go over the bridge next to the ford to come to the Black Venus inn, turning right for the post office and layby.

Linked walk: Challacombe, Pinkery Pond and Mole's Chamber. This walk can be linked with **walk 37** to take in Pinkery Pond, Chains Barrow and Great Vintcombe leading down to Moles Chamber and the Sloley Stone. The logical way to do this involves reversing the instructions for walk 37 by continuing ahead at the 2hr10min point ([5]), walking past Pinkery Pond to Chains Barrow, then down to the B3358 and Mole's Chamber. Rejoin the walk at the 2hr40min point ([6]; total ● 11 miles with ascents and descents of 400 metres). Alternatively if you prefer to follow the instructions as written complete a figure-of-eight by following this walk to the 2hr40min point ([6]) and continuing on walk 37 via Mole's Chamber. Follow it back past Pinkery Pond and to the B3358, repeating part of this route, then turn right at the 2hr40min point to finish the walk (● 13.7 miles, 510 metres).

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