



### Walk 38. Simonsbath, Pinkery Pond and Cornham Ford.

●/● 10 miles, ascents and descents of 315 metres. 4 hours 20 minutes constant walking, allow 6 hours.

Terrain: ! Open moorland and bog (a compass is useful), plus paths and some sections on possibly busy roads. Several streams to cross. Even in summer parts of the walk will be muddy, and in the winter or after periods of rain some of the more boggy sections may be impassable, particularly along the River Barle east of Aclands; walks 37 or 41 are better options in these conditions. Make sure you have good kit, and be prepared to turn back or use one of the alternative routes if needed. The height gain is only moderate but the terrain can make this a challenging walk, hence the classification.

Access: Park in Simonsbath (SS 774 394, near TA24 7SH, donation). Alternatively (not for the short walk) park in the layby on the B3358 where the Macmillan Way crosses (SS 728 401); from Simonsbath this is a large unmarked layby on the right, 2.8 miles west of the village. No bus service.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

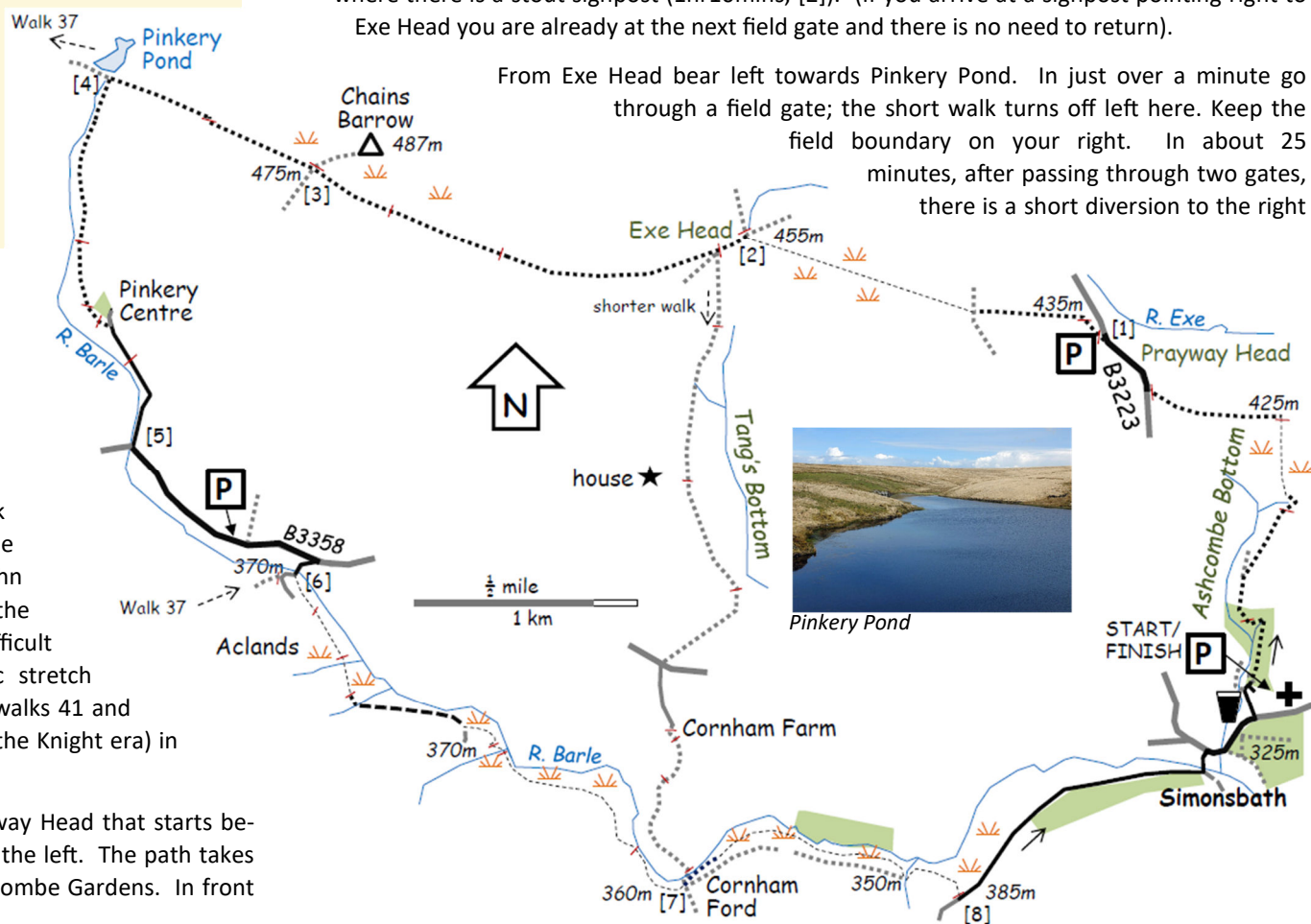
Refreshments: Inn in Simonsbath.

ALTHOUGH SIMONSBATH APPEARS TO BE TUCKED COSILY INTO THE BARLE VALLEY it is the highest village on Exmoor, with an average elevation of 325 metres. The village (pronounced 'Simmons bath', probably from 'Sigmund's pool') was largely created by the Knight family, industrialists who became the principal landowners in the area during the early nineteenth century. The Knights' manor, built in the 17th century for the former warden of the Royal Forest of Exmoor, James Boevey, is now the Simonsbath House Hotel. This walk leads up on to the high moor to the north, visiting the source of the River Exe, followed by Pinkery Pond, a small reservoir created by John Knight just below the head of the River Barle. The return follows the upper reaches of the river back to Simonsbath. It includes some difficult paths across moorland, the compensation being the photogenic stretch around Cornham Ford. The Barle below Simonsbath is explored in walks 41 and 42 and the area to the north-east of the village (with more relics of the Knight era) in walk 43.

Start from the car park in Simonsbath, taking the footpath to Prayway Head that starts between the upper and lower parking areas. Ignore the small path on the left. The path takes you through woods high above a stream in the now overgrown Ashcombe Gardens. In front

of a fence, follow the path left and downwards to cross a side-stream and then ascend to a gate on the right (10mins). Follow the path into the field, passing a yellow-topped post and taking the right-hand (upper) fork when it splits (don't descent to the second post). This brings you to another gate: go through and to the right, then bear left around the head of the valley on a plank bridge. Turn right over a small bridge into a field and aim just to the right of a line of trees. Your route will be marked by the occasional yellow-topped post or hurdle. Beyond the trees it may be very boggy, so pick your way carefully. You are heading for a pair of field gates with a signpost; go through the one ahead of you (30mins), then turn left to follow the field boundary. On arriving at a road (the B3223), turn right and follow it until you come to a parking area on the left (40mins, [1]) close to Prayway Head. Go through the gate at the far end of the layby; keep right, go through a field gate, then turn left to walk alongside the field edge. At the field corner head very slightly to the right (signposted to Exe Head; the compass bearing is 290°). Walk across a large area of tussocks, then after cresting a slight rise head for a pair of stony paths. This brings you to Exe Head, the source of the River Exe, where there is a stout signpost (1hr10mins, [2]). (If you arrive at a signpost pointing right to Exe Head you are already at the next field gate and there is no need to return).

From Exe Head bear left towards Pinkery Pond. In just over a minute go through a field gate; the short walk turns off left here. Keep the field boundary on your right. In about 25 minutes, after passing through two gates, there is a short diversion to the right



to Chains Barrow, the highest point on this part of Exmoor (1hr40mins, [3]). The Chains are notoriously boggy; keep to the path. On a clear day you will have views to South Wales, Bideford Bay and Dunkery Beacon. Otherwise continue ahead until reaching a wall; go through a gate on the right and carry on with the field boundary on your left. Pinkery Pond soon appears in a hollow (1hr50mins without the diversion, [4]). On a sunny day this is a tranquil spot for a break or some gentle exploring. Depending on the water level in the pond it is sometimes possible to walk through a rough tunnel underneath the dam.

To continue your route turn left just before the pond, going through a gate on a path signposted to Goat Hill Bridge. This takes you alongside the Barle and through a gate in a tree-topped bank. Cross the field, keeping just right of the wind turbine, then follow the path below the Pinkery Centre. Turn right on to its drive to come to the B3358, turning left on the road (2hr15mins, [5]). Five minutes beyond the second layby (the alternative start) turn right into a farm drive. Go through a gate and cross a bridge over the River Barle, then turn left on to a permissive path to Cornham Ford (2hr30mins, [6]).

The route, now on permissive paths and access land, continues with only intermittent paths or tracks. Now head a little to the right parallel with but well above the river (the Barle) to come to a stile over a wire fence. Cross it, and head across tussocky grassland to another stile, halfway between the river and a farm (Aclands). Cross a small stream then head over the hill and through a gate; join a stony track, cross another small stream and head around the hillside. The track bends right and soon starts to blend into the grass. Head left here over the grass, making for a gate next to the river. Cross a stile, splash through a side-stream and go through the gate. Pick your way carefully along the river bank, then join an obvious stony way uphill to the right. When it disappears in moorland, head slightly left on a roughly level course. Soon you will come above a combe with another side-stream. A convenient path takes you down to the stream near where it joins the Barle. Splash across and head for a log catcher - a comblike device across the river for catching driftwood. Clamber over it and pick your way along the river bank. Keep to the right of a reed bed, then take a narrow path around the hillside to come to Cornham Ford and its footbridge (3hr25mins, [7]).

Cross the stream in front of the footbridge, and continue along the right-hand bank of the river. In summer you should be able to follow the river close to its bank, but when the low ground is waterlogged you will need to stay on the hillside. There is a path about 15 metres up that continues intermittently as until you come opposite a group of pines on the far bank. Just past here cross a stream joining from the right; the best place to do this is to the right of a small rocky knoll. Round the hill ahead of you, then head diagonally right up the steep and uneven hillside. You are looking for a gate on the right-hand side of a small area of scrub, about 100 metres to the right of a line of trees. This brings you to a road (4hrs, [8]). Turn left here and walk back into Simonsbath; after crossing the Barle bridge, turn right for the inn and the car park, left for the tea room.

**Shorter walk: Simonsbath, Exe Head and Cornham Ford** (●/● 6.7 miles, ascents and descents of 250 metres). Follow the main walk to Exe Head, then go through the next gate but turn immediately left to follow the field boundary. The ground can be boggy here; it is often

drier 30m or so out from the fence. Go through the gate at the end of the field. Tang's Bottom, a deep combe, is directly ahead of you. Follow a faint path diagonally to the right, descending gradually and heading towards an isolated house. This will bring you to a yellow-topped post above a rocky stream bed. Cross the stream then head for a gate about midway between the house and the combe. Go through the gate, then head for another gate on the far side of the field slightly to the left, in the middle of a row of trees. The path becomes a stony track as you approach. Go through, and bear slightly right to follow the yellow pointer to a gate on to the B3358. Cross the road and continue on a farm driveway signposted to Cornham Ford. At the farm, go through the right-hand gate and continue ahead (the fourth gate counting anticlockwise) to enter a field. Follow a rough vehicle track as it curves right to another field gate, with a purple paint mark indicating a restricted byway; head through and to the left to come above the River Barle. This well-made path gradually descends to a gate, with Cornham Ford ahead; cross the footbridge a short distance to the right, then turn left to rejoin the main walk at the 4hr5min point ([7]).

**Extension to Mole's Chamber** (● 11.5 miles, ascents and descents of 400 metres). This extended version of the main walk uses part of **walk 37** to continue to Wood Barrow, the Sloley Stone and Mole's Chamber. At Pinkery Pond ([4]) continue ahead and join walk 37 at its 45 minute point. At its 2hr5min point do not cross the bridge but turn right on a permissive path to Cornham Ford, rejoining this walk at the 2hr30min point ([6]).

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