



Walk 43. Exford to Simonsbath via Larkbarrow.

- 11.5 miles, ascents of 440 metres and descents of 365 metres. 4 hours 30 minutes constant walking, allow 6 hours in total.

Terrain: ! Open moorland, not suitable after prolonged rain. Paths and tracks, some road walking, potentially boggy moorland, and streams to ford. Little shade or shelter on the whole walk. A compass is useful in case of poor visibility.

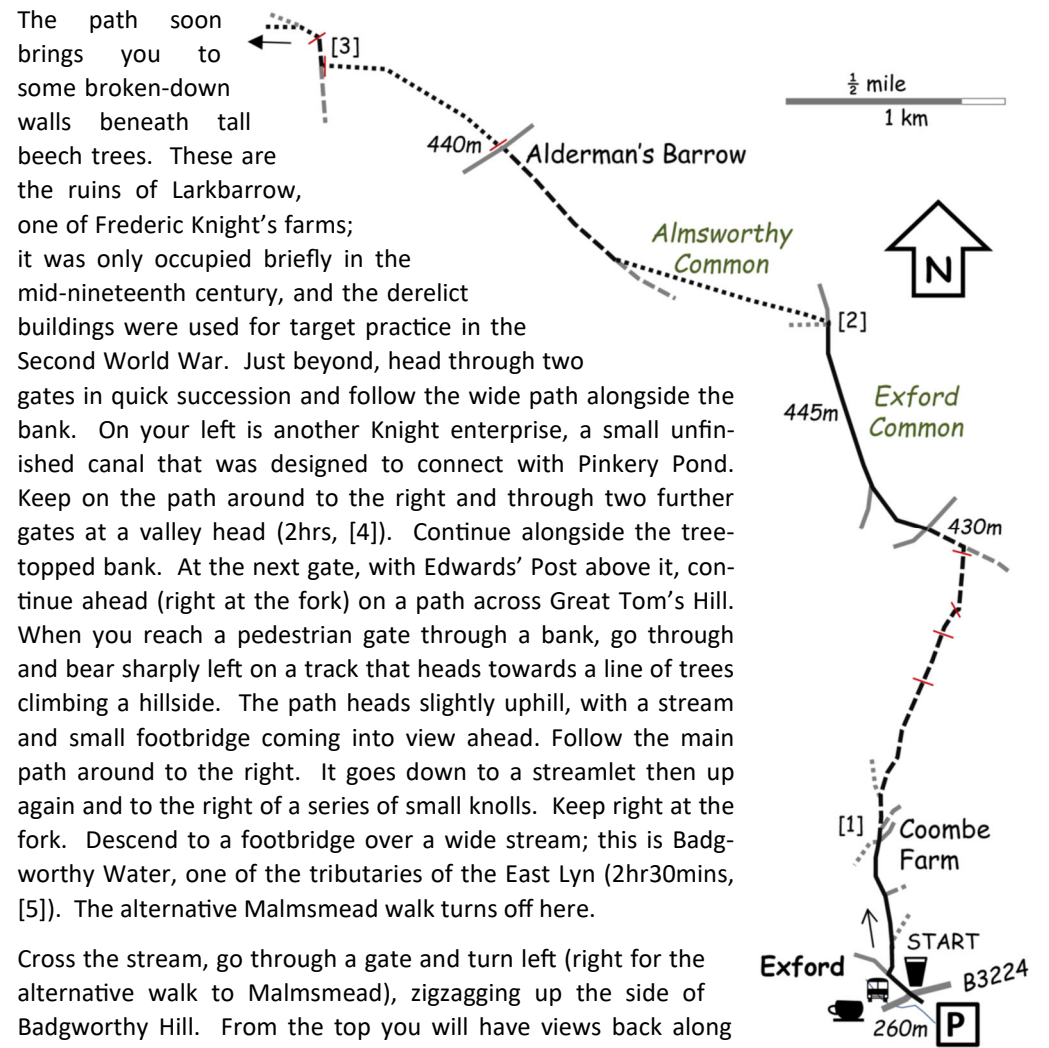
Access: Park in Simonsbath (SS 774 394, near TA24 7SH, donation), or Malmsmead for the alternative walk and arrange transport back to Exford. Or, with a dawn start or an overnight stay in Simonsbath, park in Exford (SS 854 383, near TA24 7PP) and return using walk 42. Exford is served by Dulverton to Minehead bus 198/467, but there are no buses to Simonsbath.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Pubs and seasonal tea rooms in Simonsbath and Exford.

THIS IS THE LINEAR VERSION OF WALK 39 AROUND THE LARKBARROW AND LANACOMBE AREA high on Exmoor. It connects Exford, the modern 'heart of Exmoor', with Simonsbath, the former administrative centre of the ancient Royal Forest and later the great estate owned by the Knight family. Much of it crosses the open moorland of high Exmoor, with short sections of field either end and a small woodland garden to explore before coming in to Simonsbath. An alternative route to Malmsmead can be done by turning off along Badgworthy Water to join walk 29, and the route can also be connected with walk 42 for a long day or two-day circular walk of 21 miles.

Start the walk from the village green in Exford outside the Crown Hotel (the car park is down a side-road past the school). Walk uphill past the post office shop, then turn right into Combe Lane opposite the top of the green. Continue uphill past Combe Farm (15mins, [1]). The surface gradually deteriorates to a stony track. Go through two field gates; when you are faced with two gates either side of a bank, the track continues through the right-hand one. Go through a gate in a tree-topped bank (45mins) and turn left; in about two minutes go straight on at a crossroads, then bear right at a T-junction. Follow the road for about ten minutes. When the bank on the left ends (1hr, [2]) turn left on a track across the moor at a slight angle from the hedge line. You are heading for a path on the hill ahead, which in 15 minutes or so converges with the hedge. Bear right here to join a wider track alongside the hedge. In a few minutes cross a tarmac lane and go through a gate on a bridleway towards Malmsmead. At the next gate turn briefly right on a wide track, then go through a field gate and turn immediately left on a grassy path [1hr40mins, [3]].



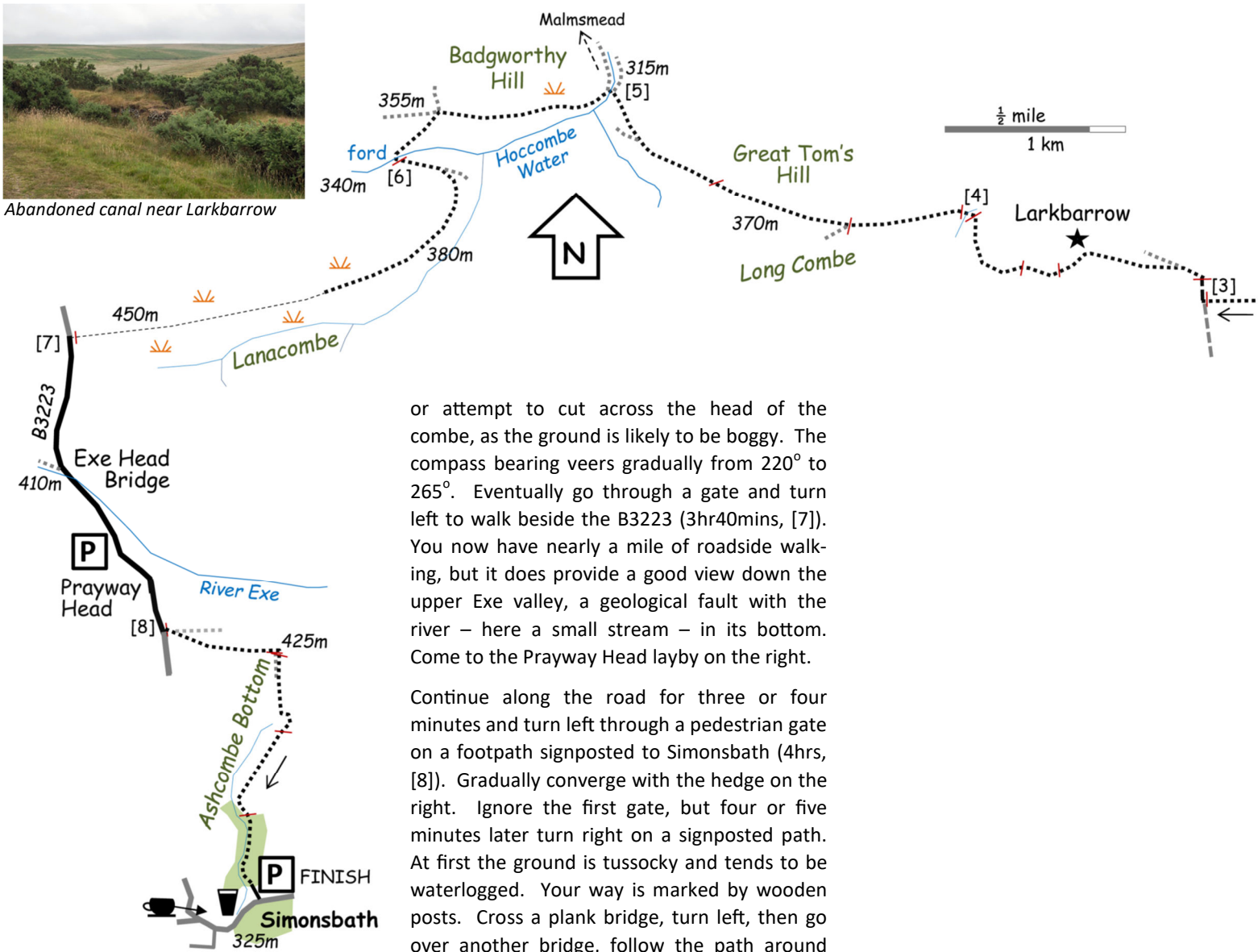
The path soon brings you to some broken-down walls beneath tall beech trees. These are the ruins of Larkbarrow, one of Frederic Knight's farms; it was only occupied briefly in the mid-nineteenth century, and the derelict buildings were used for target practice in the Second World War. Just beyond, head through two gates in quick succession and follow the wide path alongside the bank. On your left is another Knight enterprise, a small unfinished canal that was designed to connect with Pinkery Pond. Keep on the path around to the right and through two further gates at a valley head (2hrs, [4]). Continue alongside the tree-topped bank. At the next gate, with Edwards' Post above it, continue ahead (right at the fork) on a path across Great Tom's Hill. When you reach a pedestrian gate through a bank, go through and bear sharply left on a track that heads towards a line of trees climbing a hillside. The path heads slightly uphill, with a stream and small footbridge coming into view ahead. Follow the main path around to the right. It goes down to a streamlet then up again and to the right of a series of small knolls. Keep right at the fork. Descend to a footbridge over a wide stream; this is Badgworthy Water, one of the tributaries of the East Lyn (2hr30mins, [5]). The alternative Malmsmead walk turns off here.

Cross the stream, go through a gate and turn left (right for the alternative walk to Malmsmead), zigzagging up the side of Badgworthy Hill. From the top you will have views back along your outward route, and further around to the left South Wales will be visible on a clear day. 12-15 minutes from the top of the zigzag there is a fold in the landscape where the path starts heading uphill*. A path crosses here; on the left there are two branches, one directly left and the second one at an angle. Take the angled path and descend to Hoccombe Water; you are aiming to meet the path that descends diagonally down the hill. Ford the stream and go through a gate (2hr50mins, [6]). The stone wall marks the boundary of the old Royal Forest of Exmoor, part of a 29-mile long perimeter created by John Knight. Head uphill and follow the path gradually around to the right; where it divides, take the wider, right-hand branch. You now have a little over half an hour of walking on vague tracks over open moorland. Keep parallel with Lanacombe on your left, but don't lose height

* Continuing ahead here you will come in 1.4 miles to Brendon Two Gates, a better option in wet conditions. Turn left on the road, arriving at the Prayway Head parking area in another mile and a half.



Abandoned canal near Larkbarrow



or attempt to cut across the head of the combe, as the ground is likely to be boggy. The compass bearing veers gradually from 220° to 265°. Eventually go through a gate and turn left to walk beside the B3223 (3hr40mins, [7]). You now have nearly a mile of roadside walking, but it does provide a good view down the upper Exe valley, a geological fault with the river – here a small stream – in its bottom. Come to the Prayway Head layby on the right.

Continue along the road for three or four minutes and turn left through a pedestrian gate on a footpath signposted to Simonsbath (4hrs, [8]). Gradually converge with the hedge on the right. Ignore the first gate, but four or five minutes later turn right on a signposted path. At first the ground is tussocky and tends to be waterlogged. Your way is marked by wooden posts. Cross a plank bridge, turn left, then go over another bridge, follow the path around the head of a small combe, and go through a

gate. Head diagonally right towards a telegraph pole. The path bears left here; follow it through a gate into woods. Cross a small stream, then turn right to walk beside it. This is Ashcombe, John Knight's landscape garden laid out in the 1820s in the 'Picturesque' style. The path is narrow, winding and may be overgrown. It leads to the far end of the car park in Simonsbath. To continue to the village head along the access lane then turn right on the main road. The Simonsbath House Hotel further along the road was built in 1652 for James Boevey, the Warden of Exmoor Forest, later becoming the Knights' principal residence.

Alternative linear walk: Exford to Malsmead
 (●/● 9 miles to Malsmead, ascents of 330m and descents of 350m). Follow the instructions for main walk as far as the 2hr30min point ([5]), then after crossing the footbridge turn right to walk beside Badgworthy Water to Malsmead (see **walk 29**). From here you can continue to the A39 at County Gate, just under a mile and another 100 metres of ascent, or follow the East Lyn river to Lynmouth, 16 miles in all.