



Walk 46. Landacre, Sherdon Water and Cow Castle.

- 9.3 miles, ascents and descents of 450 metres. 3 hours 45 minutes constant walking, allow around 5 hours.

Terrain: Roads, paths and tracks, plus short stretches of open moorland, possibly boggy in winter (the worst of these can be avoided). A compass is useful at Horsen Hill.

Access: Start at Landacre Bridge car park (SS 8155 3605) on the Exford to North Molton road. (The nearest postcode is TA24 7SD, but it will point either to Lanacre or somewhere on the road). If the car park is full, there is often space at another parking area further uphill on the right. No buses.

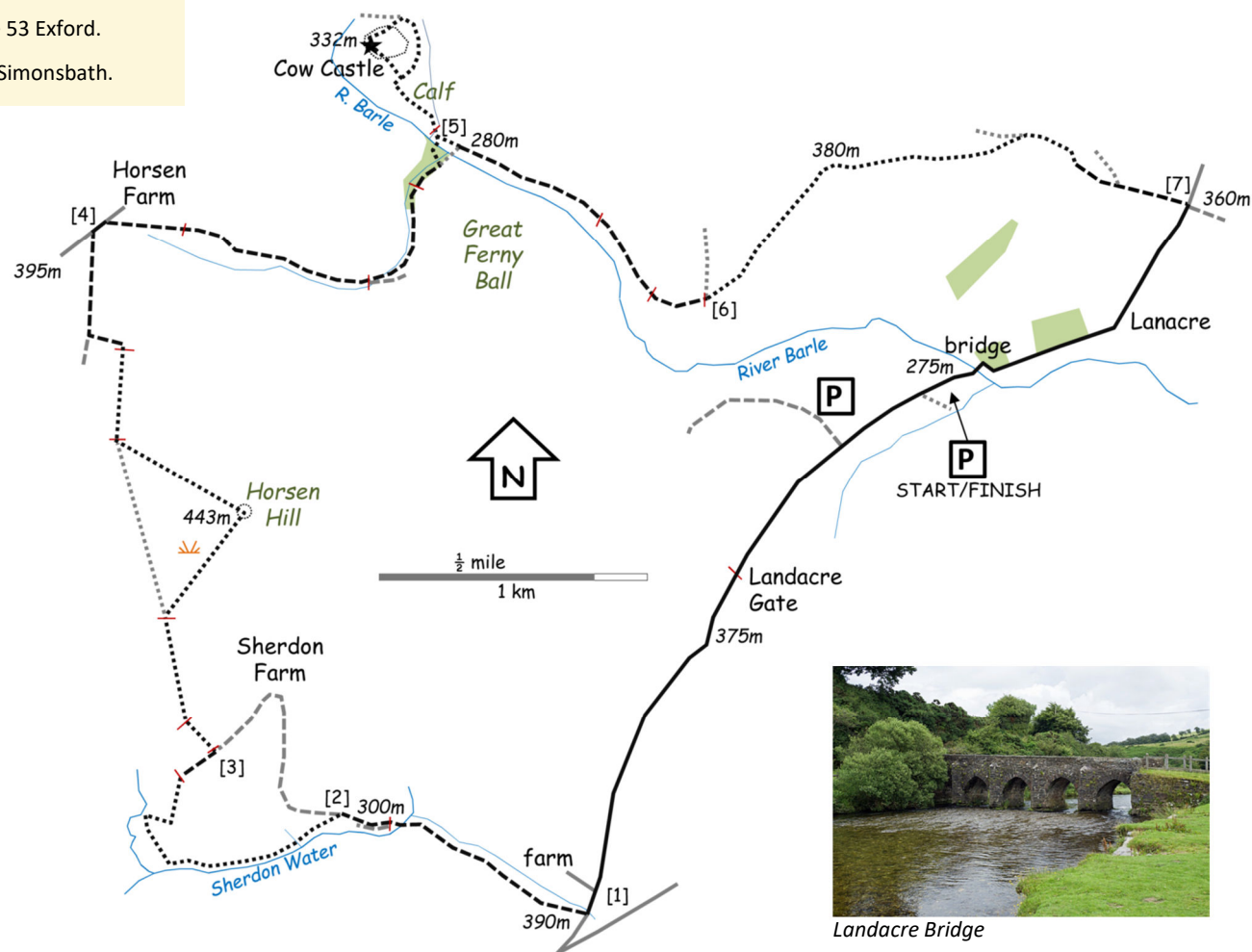
Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor. The return from Cow Castle is on Croydecycle 53 Exford.

Refreshments: None on the route. The nearest are in Withypool, Exford and Simonsbath.

Cow Castle has been introduced in walk 41, and Landacre ('Lanacre') Bridge in walk 45. This walk links them together and explores the area to the south down to Sherdon Water. The first part of the walk uses the Exford to North Molton road, which though it means keeping a watch for traffic is not all bad as it provides views over the Barle, Brightworthy Hill and Dillacombe. More views, an all-round panorama, open up from the top of Horsen Hill. Cow Castle (thought to be from the Celtic *caer*, a fort) is an impressive example of an Iron Age hill fort, though it sits slightly below the surrounding hills and appears as an island between rivers (it isn't, quite). After a rewarding walk alongside the Barle and up onto moorland, the final feature is the six-arched, stone Landacre Bridge, where the Barle widens to provide a popular sunbathing (and bathing) spot in the summer.

From the car park turn left away from the river and follow the road uphill. A little way up, where a minor road turns off to the right, is the alternative parking area. A remote letterbox is on the left followed by views over Dillacombe. Nearing the top of the rise come to a line of trees, where the road continues over a cattle grid. Nearly twenty minutes further on pass a farm road on the right, at a telegraph pole (40mins, [1]), then in another minute turn right on a farm track signposted as a bridleway to Horsen via Sherdon Farm. Follow this track downhill until it arrives at a bridge over Sherdon Water. Cross over, turning left and going through the right-hand gate (the only one not marked 'private'). You will shortly come above a

cottage (55mins, [2]); in winter or when the ground is waterlogged continue on the bridleway (see below), otherwise take the path on the left that descends gradually to Sherdon Water. Follow the stream, go through a gap at the end of a line of trees, then continue along the field boundary ignoring the gates on the left (the OS map shows the path closer to the stream). A confirming yellow-topped post marks your route. Turn right just before a line of trees with exposed roots, following them upwards and turning left immediately before a gate. Now keep the field edge to your right. At the end go through the right-hand gate to join a green lane. After an opening to the right, turn left on the signposted bridleway (1hr20mins, [3]; the bridleway route passes the dilapidated Sherdon Farmhouse, joins the green lane from the other end, then turns right on to the bridleway where signposted). Continue along the side of the field then through the next gate and alongside the post-and-wire fence on your right. A gate at a small pen takes you on to Horsen Hill.



Landacre Bridge

Turn diagonally right here to head for the high ground (the compass bearing is 038°). Horsen Hill may look unpromising from below, but in around ten minutes you will come to a hollow-topped tumulus with views in all directions. The bearing to return is 300°; you should be heading for two conspicuous houses in the distance just to the right of the neighbouring hill, then (after crossing a grassy path) down to the right-hand end of a clump (actually a line) of trees. In poor conditions, continuing ahead at the gate - on 345° - will bring you to the same point. Turn right through the gate and walk along the field edge on a stony track.

At the end of the field turn left through the gate on another stony track, following it right at the field corner and arriving at a road (2hrs, [4]; again this differs slightly from the map). Turn right then almost immediately right again on a wide stony track. Go through a gate and follow the track above a valley; you will soon hear a stream in its bottom. Come to a gate, go through and cross the stream (if it is deep there is a footbridge on the right), then take the left-hand fork to continue next to it. The hillside above you is Great Ferny Ball. Keep left through the next gate, then in a minute or so turn left over the stream on a footbridge and shortly afterwards right on another over the Barle. Turn right to shorten the walk (missing out the next paragraph) or left to visit Cow Castle (2hr25mins, [5]).

For Cow Castle cross a small stream via ford or bridge and go through a kissing gate. The small knoll called the Calf is on your right; just after, pass some assorted rocks and head left off the main path to ascend the Cow. There is a narrow path through the bracken although it may be difficult to find at first. Pass an obvious rampart before coming to the top of the hill. The far side of the summit makes an ideal picnic spot, with rocks for seats and the view (and sound) of the Barle as it comes down from Simonsbath (see walk 19). Now head downwards to the escarpment, and walk about an eighth-circle to the right to find another narrow path heading down. When it meets a wider path, turn right; rejoin your outward route to pass the Calf and cross the stream (2hr45mins, [5]).

Your path becomes a wide track, part of the Two Moors Way. On the left is a former wood, clear felled and replanted in 2017; unfortunately the beech trees on the bank to the right were felled at the same time. Coming to the sole remaining beech, go through a gate. The path now begins to gain height, bringing you to another gate: cross the field or meadow and go through a third gate (3hrs, [6]), where your onward route - slightly to the left of the direction indicated on the signpost - becomes a well-defined grassy track. You will soon see Landacre Bridge down to the right. The path however continues upwards to the rim of the landscape, with views over your outward route beyond the Barle. The mix of heath, gorse and grass here is idyllic, at least in summer. Join a vehicle track to continue alongside a hedge bank, pass a barn and some conifers, then a little later turn right on a surfaced road (3hr30mins, [7]). Keep an eye out for traffic on this narrow and steep lane, which will take you past Lanacre farm to the bridge and parking area.

Longer walk: from Withypool (● 12.3 miles, ascents and descents of 550 metres). Start by following the first part of **walk 45** as far as Landacre Bridge, then join the main walk. At the 3hr30min point ([7]) continue across on the unsurfaced track; in about five minutes this becomes a surfaced lane. In another five minutes pass Kitridge Farm on the right, then ten or twelve minutes further on there is a wide tarmac drive, again on the right; immediately beyond it turn right over a stile signposted 'Withypool'. Cross the field straight ahead. The path becomes increasingly well-defined before joining a surfaced track at some houses. Turn left at the T-junction just beyond and walk down into Withypool.

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