



Walk 54. Wheddon Cross and Dunkery Beacon.

- 10.6 miles, ascents and descents of 700 metres. 4 hours 30 minutes constant walking, allow 5½-6 hours.

Terrain: A mixture of surfaced and unsurfaced lanes, stony tracks, paths and a few fields. Some paths are very muddy in winter and after periods of rainfall. There are several streams to splash through and one deeper ford (see walk 55 or the notes below for alternative routes to Dunkery Gate).

Access: Start at Wheddon Cross car park next to the Rest and Be Thankful inn (SS 924 388, TA24 7DR). By bus, route 396 connects Wheddon Cross with Minehead, Dunster and Dulverton on weekdays and Saturdays, stopping outside the inn.

Map: OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor; the first half of the walk as far as Ford is also on Croydecycle 03 Horner and Dunkery.

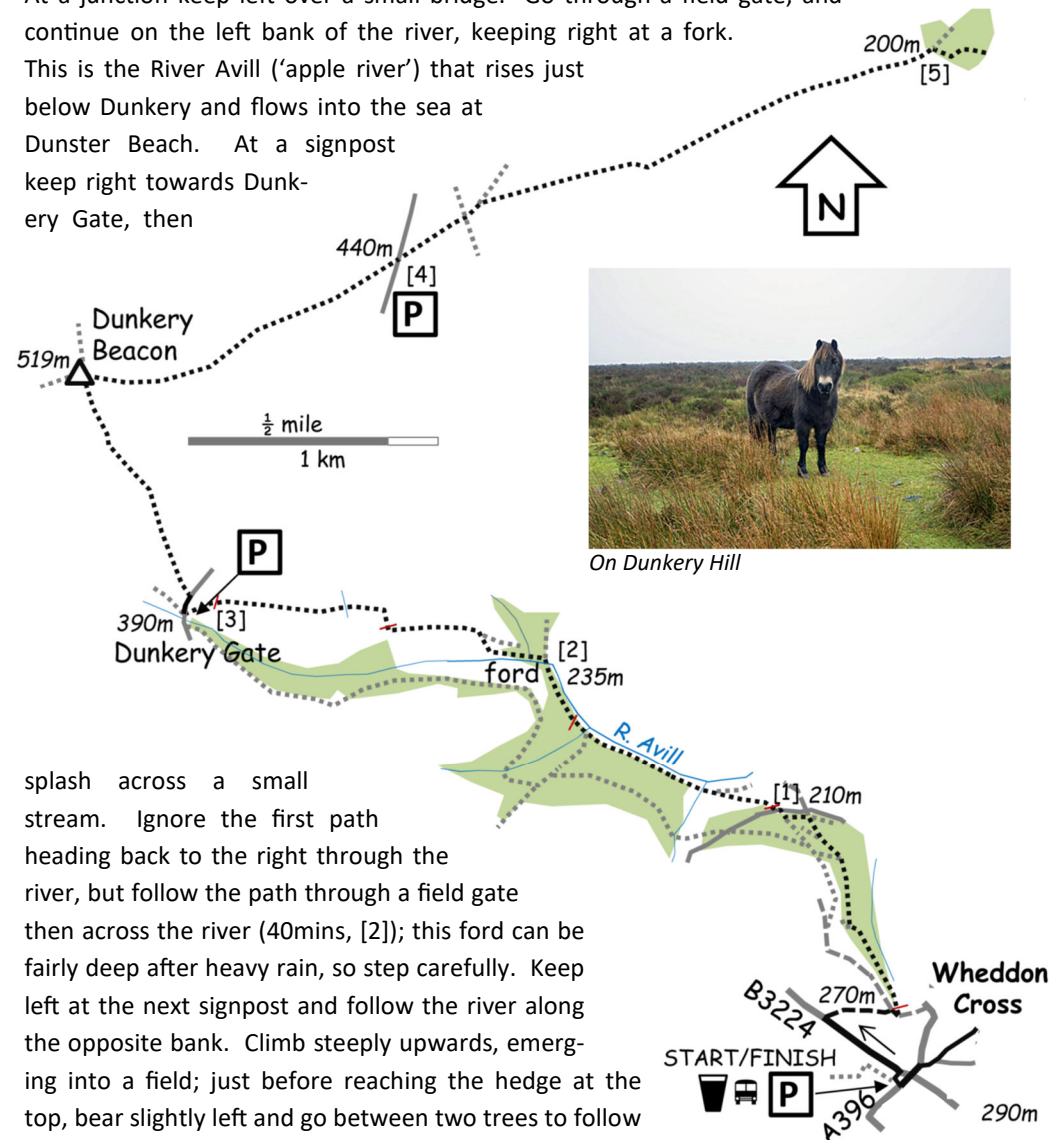
Refreshments: Pub and shop with take-away drinks in Wheddon Cross.

THIS SOMEWHAT STRENUOUS BUT HIGHLY VARIED CIRCUIT FROM WHEDDON CROSS takes in hanging woods, deep stream valleys and open moorland, approaching Dunkery Beacon from the south-east. Although you will join people strolling up to Exmoor’s highest point from the car park at Dunkery Gate, this is a less well-followed Dunkery walk than the various routes from Horner and the north. Your efforts will be rewarded with far-reaching views (weather permitting) and intricate landscapes on the way out and back.

The first part of this walk beside the River Avill can be wet in winter and after prolonged rainfall. Walk 55 provides an alternative route to Dunkery Gate via Luckwell Bridge, or it is possible to walk along the edge of Blagdon Wood, Langham Wood and Mansley Plantation. The details are not described here but it is fairly easy to follow with the Croydecycle map.

Unless you are doing the ‘walk 55’ start, from the car park in Wheddon Cross walk behind the inn and turn left on the road. Pass the petrol station and continue just beyond the 40mph signs. Turn right into Steadway Farm, taking the left-hand track; this passes a house and heads downhill. Ignore the path on the left to Dunkery Beacon (this is the alternative route shown in grey on the map opposite). At a wider track turn right, then turn sharply left through a pedestrian gate signposted Draper’s Way. Follow the path above the valley. Go through a gate then the path swings right then left. Continue above the now steep, densely-wooded Avill valley. At the next fork keep right. Just before arriving at a road, turn left at a barrier, through a second barrier, and finally cross the road: take the gated bridleway diagonally to the left towards Dunkery Gate (20mins, [1]).

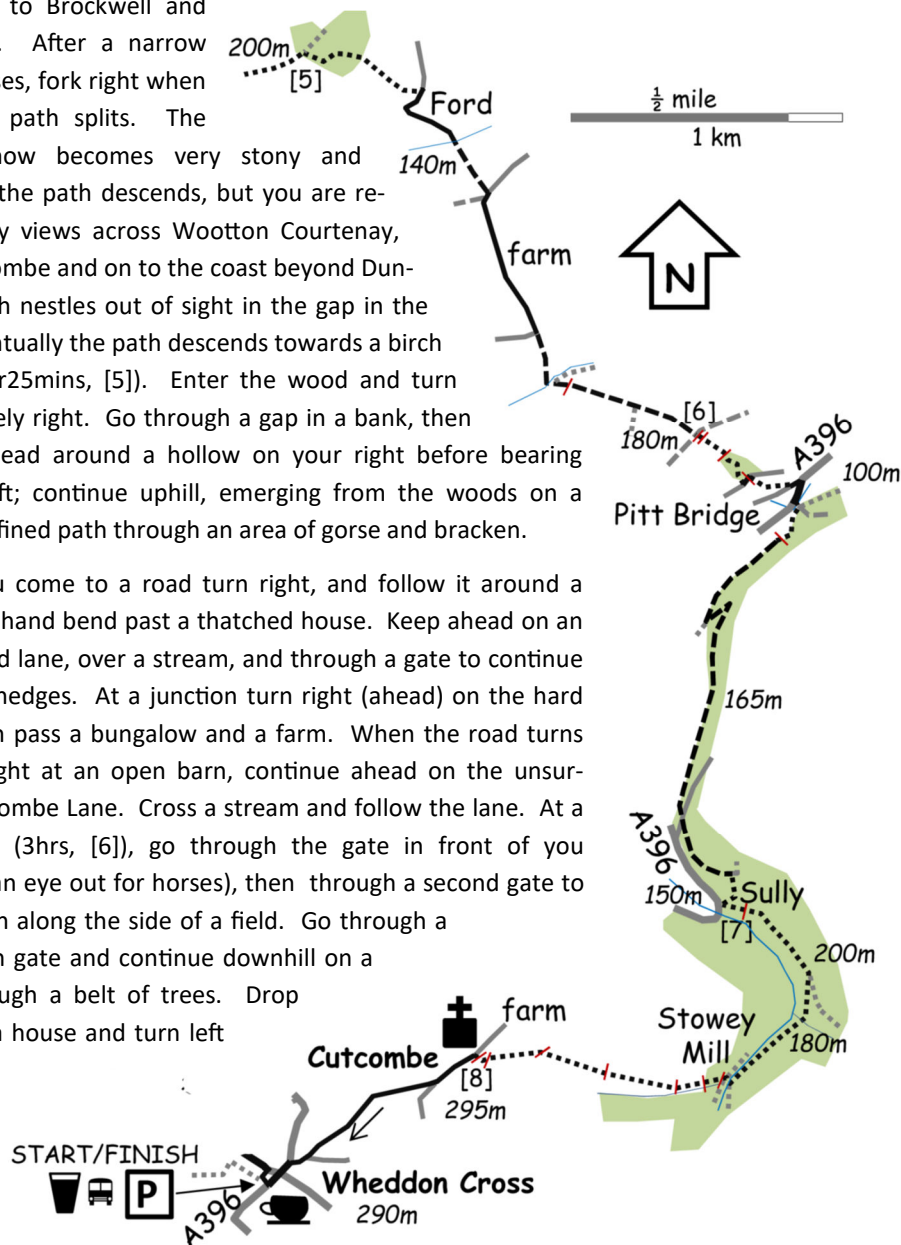
At a junction keep left over a small bridge. Go through a field gate, and continue on the left bank of the river, keeping right at a fork. This is the River Avill (‘apple river’) that rises just below Dunkery and flows into the sea at Dunster Beach. At a signpost keep right towards Dunkery Gate, then



splash across a small stream. Ignore the first path heading back to the right through the river, but follow the path through a field gate then across the river (40mins, [2]); this ford can be fairly deep after heavy rain, so step carefully. Keep left at the next signpost and follow the river along the opposite bank. Climb steeply upwards, emerging into a field; just before reaching the hedge at the top, bear slightly left and go between two trees to follow the path alongside a hedge on the right. At the end of the field go through a pedestrian gate set back on the right and head uphill to some clumps of gorse and a confirming blue-topped post. Bear left at a second post and follow the path to go through a gap in a line of tall trees marked by more posts. Cross a small stream and continue ahead across the field. Go through a gap in the bank, and bear slightly left to cross a scrubby field and come to a field gate. Go through, and in a couple more minutes arrive at a small parking area by a road; this is Dunkery Gate (1hr15mins, [3]).

Turn right on the road for a minute or so, then take a path to the left signposted to Dunkery Beacon. The climb to the top is steady, but not too steep; the cairn marking the summit comes into view only at the end (about 20 minutes from Dunkery Gate). You may have magnificent views in all directions, or be blanketed in rain or cloud. A toposcope shows bearings to points of interest; your onwards route is immediately beyond it to the right. After about 20 minutes on this well-defined track come to a road (1hr55mins, [4]); continue ahead on the bridleway to Brockwell and Huntscott. After a narrow path crosses, fork right when the main path splits. The surface now becomes very stony and rutted as the path descends, but you are rewarded by views across Wootton Courtenay, Timberscombe and on to the coast beyond Dunster, which nestles out of sight in the gap in the hills. Eventually the path descends towards a birch wood (2hr25mins, [5]). Enter the wood and turn immediately right. Go through a gap in a bank, then start to head around a hollow on your right before bearing slightly left; continue uphill, emerging from the woods on a clearly-defined path through an area of gorse and bracken.

When you come to a road turn right, and follow it around a sharp left-hand bend past a thatched house. Keep ahead on an unsurfaced lane, over a stream, and through a gate to continue between hedges. At a junction turn right (ahead) on the hard road, then pass a bungalow and a farm. When the road turns sharply right at an open barn, continue ahead on the unsurfaced Elscombe Lane. Cross a stream and follow the lane. At a T-junction (3hrs, [6]), go through the gate in front of you (keeping an eye out for horses), then through a second gate to join a path along the side of a field. Go through a pedestrian gate and continue downhill on a path through a belt of trees. Drop down to a house and turn left



on the drive to pass it; immediately after its gate, turn right as signposted on to a narrow path. Turn left when you meet a road, and arrive at the A396.

Turn right briefly on the main road, then left on a rough track to cross back over the River Avill. Turn right past a barn and go through a pedestrian gateway on a path signposted as the bridleway to Sully. After a steep climb go through a gate on to a more level path. At a junction follow the main path sharply to the left and uphill, then to the right again at a hairpin bend to follow a wide path above the main road. Go past a barrier and cross a descending road, passing another barrier and heading gradually upwards. In three minutes or so the path bends sharply left; just before it does, turn right on the signposted bridleway (a narrow track through woods) and head downhill.

As you arrive back at the A396 (3hr40mins, [7]), turn sharply left on a narrow path signposted to Stowey Wood, ascending again past the stone house (Sully) and through a gate. Continue upwards for four or five minutes, then fork right on a path signposted to Kersham Farm. This takes you above a fast-flowing stream and through a small tributary, before heading uphill through woods; bending to the right you will soon rejoin the main stream, now with a path on the opposite bank. At a path junction, turn right over the stream towards Cutcombe; come in front of the derelict and atmospheric Stowey Mill, recorded as disused in 1904. Turn right over a narrow bridge then immediately left at the side of the mill on a slippery footpath that doubles as a stream bed or 'splat', and go through a gate. A second gate brings you past some gorse and into a field. Walk down to the stream and through a field gate. Now head slightly uphill to the right, to go through the left-hand of two field gates and walk upwards along the right-hand side of the field. At the top go through a metal field gate and bear left to head diagonally across the field towards Cutcombe church. Cross a stile in the corner of the field, then turn right over a second stile; this leads on to the road in front of the church (4hr20mins, [8]). Turn left here, then keep right when the road forks to walk back into Wheddon Cross. Turn left at the main road to return to the inn.

Alternative walk: Wheddon Cross to Dunster via Dunkery Beacon (● 11 miles, ascents of 565 metres and descents of 815 metres). Follow the main walk to Dunkery Beacon, then use the instructions for **walk 50** to continue to Dunster. Bus 198 returns to Wheddon Cross (three buses daily, Monday to Saturday).

Shorter walks: see walk 53 for shorter walks around Wheddon Cross.

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