



Walk 71. Around Watchet.

● 5.5 miles, ascents and descents of 120 metres. 2 hours continuous walking, allow 3-3½ hours.

! **Tidal section.** The tide needs to be out to cross Helwell Bay. Time the walk so that you start the tidal section between 3-4 hours before and 1 hour after low water. It is possible to walk along the road to Doniford, but there is no verge or pavement on this potentially busy route; an alternative is to explore the harbour and Splash Point then do the short walk.

Terrain: Paths (some potentially muddy), pavement and shingle beach; some road walking.

Access: By car, park in the main (Harbour Road) car park (ST 072 433, TA23 0AQ). The West Somerset Railway connects Minehead, Dunster, Blue Anchor and Watchet in season, while frequent daily bus 28 runs between Minehead and Taunton via Watchet. The bus stop is next to the car park.

Maps: Croydecycle 55 Watchet & Quantock North or OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor.

Refreshments: Several options in Watchet, café at Doniford.

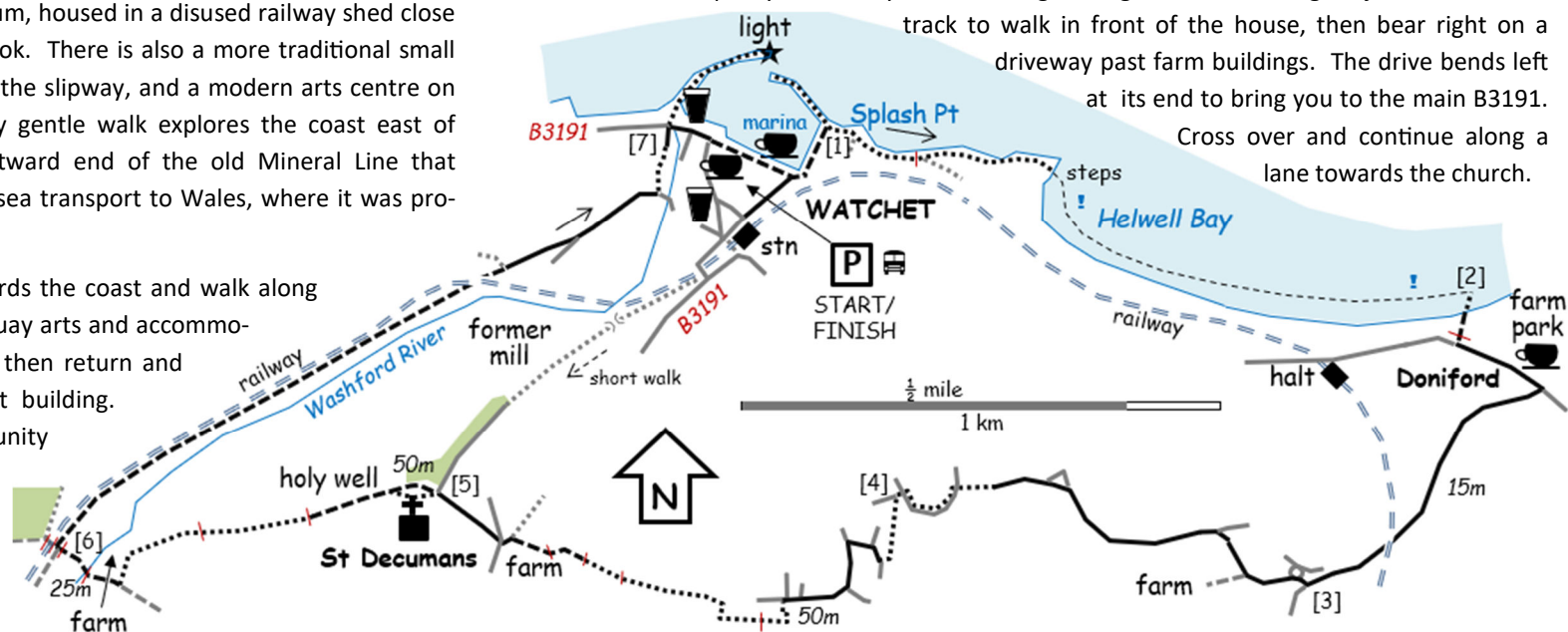
WATCHET IS AN ANCIENT HARBOUR TOWN ON THE BRISTOL CHANNEL, once the main gateway for trade between Somerset and South Wales. Now that commercial traffic has declined, the addition of a lock gate has allowed the creation of a marina for leisure craft. Watchet is interesting to explore; the visitor centre and boat museum, housed in a disused railway shed close to the start of the walk, are particularly worth a look. There is also a more traditional small museum on the opposite side of the harbour near the slipway, and a modern arts centre on the East Quay. As well as the harbour this fairly gentle walk explores the coast east of Watchet, inland to St. Decuman's, and the coastward end of the old Mineral Line that brought iron ore off the Brendon Hills for onward sea transport to Wales, where it was processed into iron and steel.

From the car park or station follow the road towards the coast and walk along the right-hand side of the harbour, past the East Quay arts and accommodation complex. Explore the eastern breakwater, then return and head up steps towards the flagpole and lookout building.

Come to Splash Point (7mins, [1]), a small community park, formerly a Victorian pleasure ground, with a viewpoint over the harbour. Walk the length of the park away from the harbour. Continue down and up alongside the railway line, then go through

a gate and keep left, parallel with the cliff edge. Pass an English Coast Path sign and come to some steps heading downwards to the beach. Descend them carefully: they may be slippery. This is Helwell Bay. Provided that the tide is out follow the shore around the bay, keeping an eye out for fossils. Pass (or walk over) mudstone 'pavement'. The cliffs reduce in height and become an earth bank. Pass a small headland protected by loose rocks, then at a second headland clamber up on to a concrete ramp with metal hand rails (30mins, [2]). This brings you to a former car park next to an old lime kiln. Go through a gate and arrive at a road. Turn left here.

Pass a bus stop then turn right on the road to Williton; take care on this potentially busy road. Walk under the railway bridge and take the first right, Alamein Avenue (45mins, [3]). The housing was once part of RAF Doniford. Keep left at the roundabout and follow the road, with houses on the right and fields on the left. Enter Cherry Tree Way, a small private estate, keeping left at a green. The road soon runs out and a footpath continues ahead. Follow it to a crossing road and join another path on the far side. When this rejoins the road, cross over into Ingrams Meadow and immediately turn left on a footpath (55mins, [4]). Continue to its end, turning right when you meet a residential street. Turn left at a T-junction. Stay on this road for four or five minutes as it heads uphill and around to the right. Pass Stoate Close then after the next road on the right turn left into a narrow pedestrian alley. At its end go through a hedge and turn right to walk along the edge of the field. Go over a stile then walk around the field boundary to the far right-hand corner, heading for the church tower. Keep to the right in the next field, then go through a gate and head just to the right of a house that is partly hidden by trees. Going through the left-hand gate join a fenced-off track to walk in front of the house, then bear right on a driveway past farm buildings. The drive bends left at its end to bring you to the main B3191. Cross over and continue along a lane towards the church.



St. Decuman's Church as it now stands was built between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries; it is worth a look inside. Decuman himself crossed from Pembrokeshire to Dunster in the seventh century on a raft with his cow, and lived as a hermit and healer in Watchet when it was still part of a Celtic kingdom. He was said to have been beheaded by an unbeliever. He calmly picked his head up, washed it in a nearby holy well and put it back on, after which the local people helped him build a church.

As the lane turns right (1hr15mins, [5]), keep ahead on a track. Start to head downhill; you will shortly pass St. Decuman's Well in a small garden on your right. (An alternative is to walk through the churchyard, leaving next to the tower and descending a path with a handrail). The track brings you to a gate into a field. Cross the field; initially the way is obvious, then head for a stile just to the left of the field gate in front of you. In the next field walk alongside the fence, pass a farmhouse and come to the farm drive. Turn right here, walk over a small bridge over the Washford River, and head up to a gate (1hr25mins, [6]). In front of you is the West Somerset Railway; turn right in front of it to walk along a well-made path, the old track bed of the parallel Mineral Line that once brought iron ore down from the Brendon Hills to the harbour at Watchet (see walks 76 and 77). This path runs between the railway and the river; it takes you first past fields then alongside the site of the former Wansborough Mill, a paper mill that operated from the fifteenth century until 2015. There are currently plans to use the site for housing and light industry. At the end of the path keep right to join a residential lane. Bear left when you meet a larger road. When the road bends right, just before it goes over a bridge, turn left on a footpath. This takes you back alongside the river, past the Star Inn and to the main road in Watchet (1hr50mins, [7]). Cross over and head through the car park to walk along the western breakwater of Watchet Harbour. Return to the road and turn left to walk to the town centre, harbourside promenade and the car park.

Short walk: Watchet and St. Decuman's (● 2.6 miles, ascents and descents of 80 metres). Walk away from the coast past the railway station, crossing the railway line on the road bridge. Turn right, almost immediately heading right again down a narrow footpath in front of a small electricity substation. This takes you through a short tunnel and, after a gate, alongside Wansborough Mill. Pass some houses and come to St Decuman's church; turn right to join the main walk at the 1hr15min point ([5]).

Linked coastal walks. Walk 90 starts at Kilve and finishes at Watchet, while walk 72 connects Watchet and Minehead.

© Stan Lester & Philippa Taylor 2022-3. Last recce 5/2023. Please email editor@exmoorwalker.uk with any updates or comments.

This route description is provided freely and in good faith. You are welcome to use, copy and distribute it for personal and non-profit purposes (attribution—non-commercial—no derivatives). No responsibility is taken for any errors or omissions, or for your navigation or safety on the walk. Introductory and safety information at exmoorwalker.uk.