



Walk 92. Holford and West Quantoxhead.

- 7.5 miles, ascents and descents of 400 metres. 3 hours 10 minutes constant walking, allow 4-4½ hours.

Terrain: Mainly paths and tracks; several streams to splash across.

Access: Park in the 'Bowling Green' car park in Holford (ST 154 411, TA5 1SA). Approach the start by turning off the A39 at the Plough Inn, following the signs towards Combe House Hotel. Look out for a turning to the right signposted to the car park and Alfoxton. Alternatively start the walk from the Windmill Inn in West Quantoxhead or park further up in Staple Plain car park (ST 117 410, turn into Hill Lane at TA4 4DQ). Bus 15 (once daily, weekdays in college term time) starts in Minehead, stopping at Holford and West Quantoxhead.

Map: Croydecycle 55 Watchet and Quantock North or OS Explorer 140.

Refreshments: In Holford and West Quantoxhead.

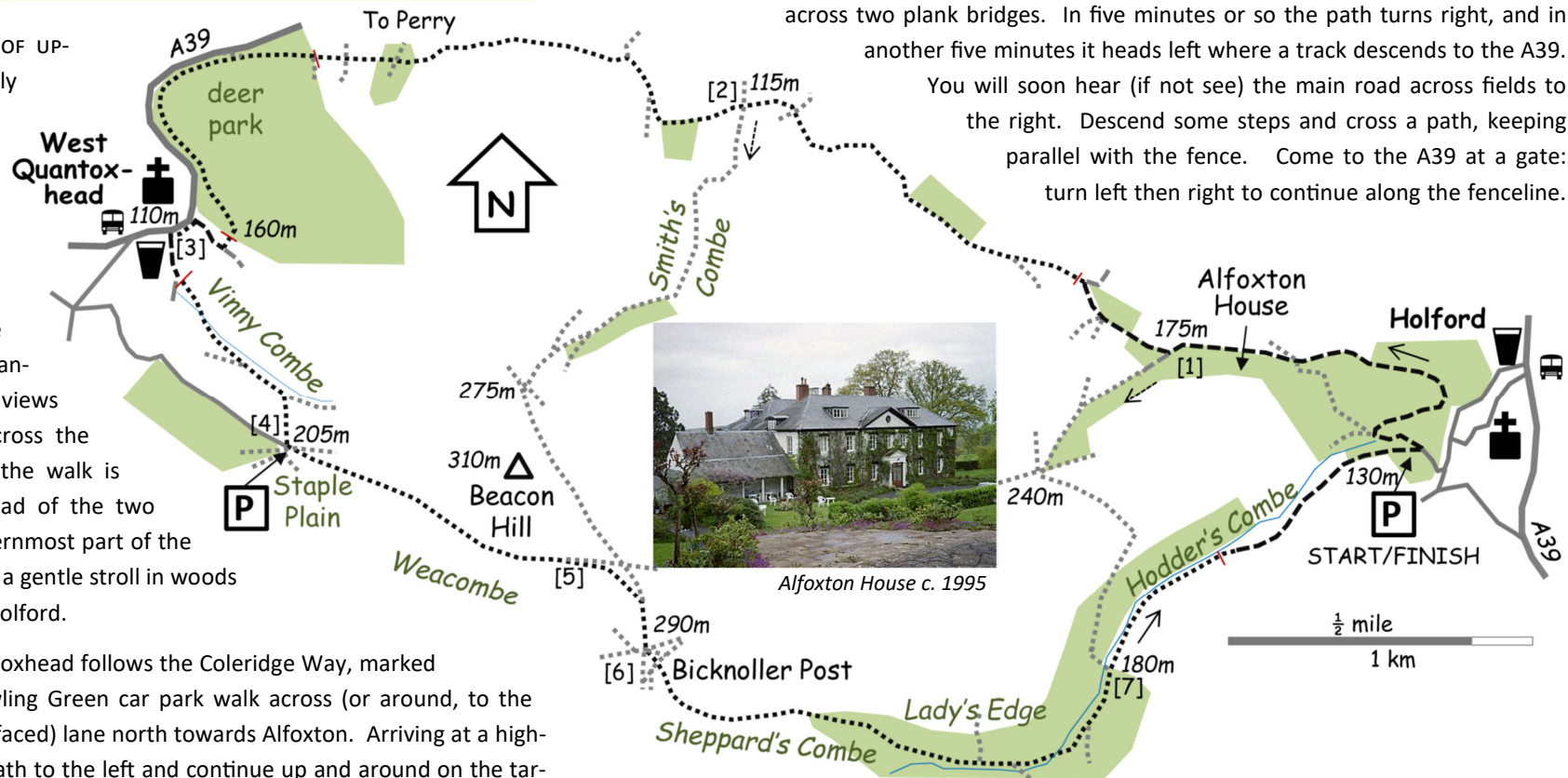
THE QUANTOCK HILLS ARE AN EXPANSE OF UPLAND running in a roughly north-westerly direction from Taunton, with a central ridge and several deep combes descending to either side. This walk explores the northern edge of the Quantocks proper, starting from a secluded spot outside the village of Holford and tracking around the edge of the hills before arriving in West Quantoxhead. A steady ascent provides views down the coast to Minehead and across the Brendon Hills. The highest point of the walk is reached at Bicknoller Post, at the head of the two great combes that divide off the northernmost part of the hills. A fairly steep descent followed by a gentle stroll in woods alongside a stream brings you back to Holford.

Your route from Holford to West Quantoxhead follows the Coleridge Way, marked on signs by a quill pen. From the Bowling Green car park walk across (or around, to the right) the green to follow the main (surfaced) lane north towards Alfoxton. Arriving at a high-walled former dog pound, ignore the path to the left and continue up and around on the tar-

mac road, above a stream to the right. The road swings around to the left, and you catch the first glimpses of the Bristol Channel. Continue across a filled-in cattle grid. A little further on, Alfoxton House is on the left. For a short time the home of William and Dorothy Wordsworth and more recently a country house hotel, it is now being developed as a Buddhist retreat (the picture below faces away from the road). Walking past the house continue uphill then around to the right on the road, ignoring the bridlepath that goes straight ahead (25mins, [1]). Pass some houses on the left, then continue to the right ignoring the paths off to the left. The road soon becomes a stony track ('not suitable for motor vehicles') and drops down to a path junction before bearing right to meet a road. At the path junction turn left through the lower (pedestrian) gate signposted 'Perry', into woodland; keep the fence, that marks the edge of the Quantock Hills, to your right. After splashing through a seasonal stream the path soon leaves the wood, with bracken-covered moorland on the left and views across the Bristol Channel and Kilve to the right.

The path undulates along the northern boundary of the Quantocks. Carry straight on at a signpost ('Perry'), then a couple of minutes later descend into Smith's Combe (50mins, [2]). The shorter walk heads left here up this steep combe, but for the main walk continue ahead across two plank bridges. In five minutes or so the path turns right, and in another five minutes it heads left where a track descends to the A39.

You will soon hear (if not see) the main road across fields to the right. Descend some steps and cross a path, keeping parallel with the fence. Come to the A39 at a gate: turn left then right to continue along the fenceline.



Go through a pedestrian gate and follow the path above the road. When you arrive at a vehicle track, turn right. This brings you back to the A39 at a gate. Turn left on a grass path just before it. Pass a seat on the right with fine views over West Quantoxhead and Minehead. Ignore a path to the left, then shortly after go through a gate on to a lane. Turn right and right again to arrive at the A39; unless you want to visit the church opposite, take the narrow path to the left to avoid walking on the main road. The Windmill Inn is in front of you (1hr40mins, [3]).

Just before the inn turn left up Vinnecombe Lane. Come to a gate as the road bends right; your way on is through the small pedestrian gate next to it. An initially narrow path climbs steadily through an old quarry, with occasional glimpses of rock faces. Go through a gate and pass a path coming in from the right. About four minutes later look for a wide path on the right leading to some steps. Climb up here to come to the Staple Plain car park. Head upwards to the scarp overlooking Weacombe; on the left is an information board about Staple Plain and a wooden post with the map reference ST 117 411 (2hrs, [4]).

Walk straight ahead from the post on the well-defined track (the 'Great Road'). The deep valley of Weacombe is to the right, Beacon Hill to the left, and looking back you will have far-ranging views across to the Brendon Hills and Minehead. As the combe begins to come to a head, look out for a wide fork to the right (2hr20mins, [5]) and follow this to meet another path coming in from the left; the alternative route rejoins here. Bear slightly right to stay on the main path. Several grassy paths cross at a small group of thorn trees; turn left here to arrive at Bicknoller Post (2hr30mins, [6]), then continue ahead and cross a grassy path. Bear to the right and descend steeply into Sheppard's Combe; at times you will share the path with water flowing from a spring. The path descends a little further, then flattens out to run alongside a stream in bracken-floored oak woods. Follow the path downstream, ignoring any side-turnings. Splash through the main stream to walk on its right-hand side, then cross a side-stream. When the stream comes to a fence (2hr50mins, [7]), the path continues to its right. Shortly after a 'round' white house on the left, go through a gate and soon after turn right on to a track. Pass some more houses and arrive back at the Bowling Green.

Shorter walk via Smith's Combe (● 5.5 miles, ascents and descents of 300 metres). From the 50-minute point ([2]), take the left-hand path signposted Smith's Combe. The path meanders upwards through the combe, crossing the stream several times, before bearing right and becoming a straight, unremitting ascent. As you emerge into the open, ignore a track crossing your path, but do look back to admire the views. At a post, turn left and take the right-hand (upper) path, a well-marked bridleway. Continue uphill to come just under the summit of Beacon Hill, marked by a cairn. Cross another bridleway and rejoin the main walk just before the thorn trees at Bicknoller Post, soon after the 2hr20minute point ([5]).

Short walk: Holford and Hodder's Combe (● 3 miles, ascents and descents of 165 metres). Follow the main walk to the 25-minute point ([1]), then take the bridlepath and ascend through a small wooded combe. As the woods run out, come to a five-legged junction. Cross over the main track and start descending into Hodder's Combe: gently at first, then steeply through the woods. Cross the stream and turn left to rejoin the main walk at the 2hr50minute point ([7]).

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