



SW3. Short walks from Dunster.

Terrain: Paths, tracks and roads. A few steep sections and steps, some slippery when wet.

Access: Park either in the village car park (£) or the National Trust car park for the castle (£, members free). Frequent daily bus 28 runs from Minehead to Dunster and along the A39/A358 to Taunton (stops on the A39), and bus 198 (Mon-Sat, 3 daily) connects Minehead, Dunster, Wheddon Cross and Dulverton (stops in the High Street). The West Somerset Railway also stops in season just outside the village.

Map: Croydecycle 01 Dunster and Minehead or OS Explorer OL9 Exmoor. Online, OpenStreetMap probably shows the paths in this area most accurately.

Refreshments: Tea rooms and inns throughout Dunster.

DUNSTER IS EXMOOR'S BEST-PRESERVED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE and once the most important settlement in the area, a small market town before the rise of Minehead and even Dulverton. Its importance declined when the River Avill silted up, but it retains many fine old buildings including the National Trust castle that dominates the village. These short walks explore different aspects of the village along with the surrounding hills and the nearby sea front. All are described as starting from the main village car park.

To start from the National Trust car park for walks A, B and D, head north (away from the castle) and left across the grass to a pedestrian gate. Follow the path past the backs of gardens, past a lime kiln, and down to a small gate at the back of a large modern building (the Rohan shop); this last part can be slippery. The gate takes you in to the main car park.

Walk A. Dunster village and the Conygar Tower. 1.7 miles, ascents and descents of 110 metres, grade 2/3.

From the car park turn left on to the road, then right at a cream-painted house and immediately left on to a footpath ('Conygar Woods'). Go uphill, past gate posts, and turn left at a T-junction, continuing uphill. Keep right and uphill at a junction. When the path comes to a T-junction, turn right and walk along the ridge to Conygar Tower. This conspicuous landmark was built in 1775 for Henry Luttrell of Dunster Castle, with no apparent function other than as a landscape feature. Start to return the same way, but continue ahead along the ridge. The path narrows, twists and turns, and descends to some stone arches. Descend rough steps and go straight ahead through the larger arch, initially following the path around to the left. Turn right at the first junction and follow the path as it curves around to the right, descending gradually. Where it meets a wider track bear right, pass metal gates on your right (a former quarry), then turn left past the gateposts to return to the cream house. Briefly turn right on the main road, then bear right on a narrow street between houses ('The Ball').

Follow the road around to the left at a bend, then continue until you pass under a stone arch. Take a moment to look first at the small garden and dovecote on the right, then the church garden through an arch in the wall on the left. Continuing along the road, go under another arch then turn left into the churchyard. The fifteenth-century church is worth a look inside. Bear right at the church, turn right on to the road to pass the traffic lights, then opposite St George's Street head left past the vehicle gate, towards the castle. Turn left at the top of the hill and descend into the centre of Dunster. Keep ahead; the road takes you past the early 17th-century Yarn Market and around to the right, where you will find the car park.

Walk B. Dunster Marsh and Dunster Beach. 3.1 miles, 45 metres, grade 1.

Turn right out of the car park on to a footpath alongside the road. Cross over as you approach the traffic lights, and use an underpass to cross the A39. Turn left to walk beside the road, then after passing a former courthouse turn right into Marsh Street. At a junction turn right into Station Road. The railway station is a little way along on the right. Cross the railway at a level crossing, then soon afterwards the road runs out at a farm. Keep ahead past the houses, continue past the working part of the farm, and cross the River Avill. Turn right to come to the coast, then right again on the coast path. This is Dunster Beach. Walk on the grass to the seaward side of the chalets. Come to a car park; there is a seasonal refreshment kiosk on the left. At the end of the car park turn right on to the road to head inland. Recross the railway, then at the end of a small group of modern houses turn left on a footpath. This takes you alongside the River Avill. Cross the river on a footbridge, turning left to continue on the opposite bank. The path turns right before meeting the main road. Keep left, and turn left to retrace your route under the A39 and back to the car park.



Dunster

Walk C. Gallox Hill. 2.8 miles, 200 metres, grade 4.

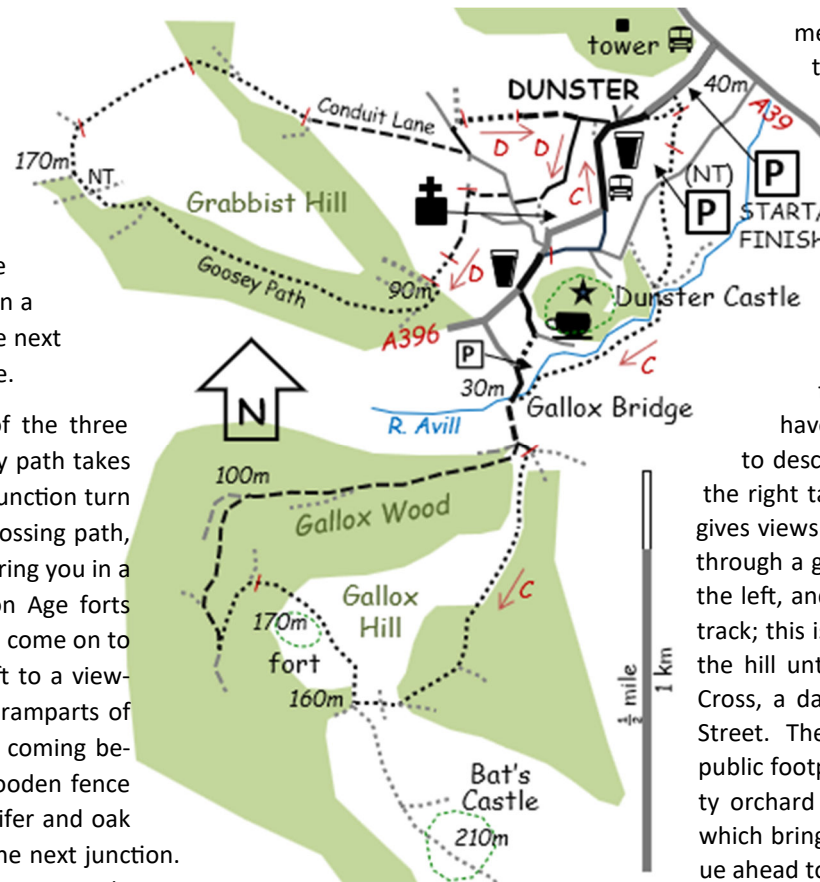
Leave the car park through the pedestrian gate next to the back of the large Rohan shop. Continue ahead, crossing a small ridge and dropping down via a pedestrian gate to the National Trust car park. Turn right on the driveway, then almost immediately turn left through a metal kissing gate to head downhill beside a field. Go beneath trees and cross the River Avill on a stone footbridge. The path continues between a field and the river. Continue until you come to another bridge next to a wide ford. Turn left here and pass a long thatched cottage.

Go through a tall wooden gate, then take the rightmost of the three paths, a permitted path to Bat's Castle. This somewhat stony path takes you steadily upwards through a valley. When you reach a T-junction turn right on to a grassy path. Continuing uphill ignore a small crossing path, then come to another T-junction. A diversion to the left will bring you in a quarter of a mile to Bat's Castle, the larger of the two Iron Age forts above Dunster. The walk continues to the right; you will soon come on to a broad open area at the top of Gallox Hill. Bear slightly left to a viewpoint over the Avill valley; you will soon pass the ditch and ramparts of the Gallox Hill fort. Follow the main path downwards, soon coming between birch and holly trees. Go through a gate in a high wooden fence and turn left just beyond a dry stone wall, entering dark conifer and oak woods. Soon take a wide path sharply right. Keep right at the next junction. (The path ahead goes to a viewpoint over the Avill valley and on to Dunkery Beacon; it is a dead end). Follow this broad track downhill, keeping right where a similar track comes in from the left. After several minutes you will arrive back at the thatched cottage.

Walk back past the cottage and cross the River Avill on a stone bridge. Turn right to pass a small car park and head along a pedestrian lane, then turn left on a road alongside a small rill or leat (the National Trust café and mill are less than 100m to the right). Coming to the main road turn right. When the church comes into view take a right turn and head up past the vehicle gate towards the castle. Turn left at the top of the hill and descend into the centre of Dunster. Keep ahead; the road takes you past the 17th-century Yarn Market and around to the right, where you will find the Rohan shop and car park.

Walk D. Grabbist Hill. 2.2 miles, 150 metres, grade 4.

From the car park turn left on to the road, then opposite the Luttrell Arms bear right on a narrow street ('The Ball'). Follow the road around a sharp left bend and under stone arches as described in walk A. At its end turn right then immediately left, joining a lane signposted as a public bridleway; a cemetery is on your left. Turn left at a T-junction, pass the allot-



ments, and come to a second cemetery. Go through a gate to take a footpath alongside the graveyard. After a second gate keep left. Shortly afterwards ignore a path that heads left downhill, keeping right towards Wootton Courtenay (this is Goosey Path); ascend gradually up the side of the hill. Ignore a track off to the left, then head more steeply uphill until you arrive at a seat and a National Trust sign with the grid reference SS 97937 43704.

Cross the main path and continue on a bridleway, confirmed by a blob of blue paint on a tree trunk. You will have a glimpse across the Bristol Channel before beginning to descend. Follow the path downwards; at a wooden gate on the right take the bridleway towards Dunster. A wide grassy path gives views across to Minehead; it soon narrows beneath trees. Go through a gate into woods. Bear right where a path comes in from the left, and continue through a large gate on what is now a broad track; this is Conduit Lane. At its end turn left on a road, ascending the hill until you come to a track on the right next to the Butter Cross, a damaged market cross that was relocated from the High Street. The track soon branches into three: take the middle way, a public footpath, through a pedestrian gate. This passes a community orchard then goes through another gate to join a wider track, which brings you back to The Ball and your outward route. Continue ahead to the main road and car park.

Longer walks in the area: circular walks 73 and 74 can be started from Dunster, and walks 47 (to Porlock), 50 (from Exford), and 56 (from Wheddon Cross) are linear walks that use the bus to start or finish at Dunster.

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