

Beautiful Walks from the Blue Ball Inn

Walk No. 6

CLIFFS AND VALLEYS

Countisbury, Lynton, Valley of rocks and Lydiate lane.

Distance if walked from the The Blue Ball Inn – 9 miles approx.

Walking time – four and a half hours approx.

Distance if walked from Lynton – 5 miles approx.

Walking time – two and a half hours approx.

OS 1:25,000 Sheet 64/74 Lynton and Lynmouth or the new OS Outdoor Leisure Series Map No. 9 – Exmoor.

General information:

This walk is on either defined rights of way or Permissive Paths (routes where the owner has given permission for walkers to pass over their land but at their own risk). The walk starts on the same route as that for Winston's Walk (walk no. 2) but on reaching the East Lyn river it leaves this route and makes its way up to Lynton via the Cliff Railway and then on to the Valley of Rocks along the coastal path. The route climbs the further side of the Valley to the top of Southcliffe and continues along this ridge as far as Lee Abbey then turns inland to return to Lynton via six acre farm and Lydiate lane. From Lynton the return to Countisbury may be undertaken either via the coastal path or by retracing the first part of the walk from East Lyn River. The route involves steep ascents and descents: the views make this walk all the worth while and the path surfaces on the whole are good. Good sturdy shoes are recommended however as certain stretches of the route are stony and others may be muddy.

This walk is easily suitable as a circular route from Lynton car park, this saves having to tackle the final ascent back to the hotel!

The route:

Starting at The Blue Ball Inn. (grid reference 747496). Turn left on leaving the Inn and walk with care down the road towards Lynmouth. After passing the National Trust Exmoor Base Camp continue for a further short distance to the second gate on the left hand side of the road which has the "Watersmeet Estate" sign on it. Go through this gate and take the path to the right signed "Lynmouth 1 ½ miles" which follows a wide grass track, circling around the base of and iron age fortress of Arx Cynuit on Wind Hill. Continue along this track, with a stone wall on the right hand side and pass a further sign to "Lynmouth". As the path curves around to the left there is a good view up the East Lyn Valley towards Watersmeet.

The woodland cladding the steep sides of the valley, mainly composed of Sessile oak but also including some rare Devon Whitebeam is considered to be one of the best examples of "hanging woodlands" in England. The whole area is designated as a site

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of Special Scientific Interest on a parallel promontory on the further side of the river can be seen the remains of another ancient fortification.

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Pass through a hunting gate and continue ahead with, on the left steep woodland descending to the East Lyn River below. At a junction beside a bench there is a signpost; follow the higher of the paths, signed "alternative path to Lynmouth" and continue close to the stone wall, as the path curves around to the right. The route continues ahead, beginning to descend gently and at the point where it enters an area of scrubby thorn trees and holly a very large and extensive badger set will be seen on the left of the path.

As the route continues ahead, the view opens up to encompass Lynmouth and its harbour with the little town of Lynton perched high above. At one time this area was called "The English Switzerland!"

After a short distance the path divides and there are two signposts. Turn left here following the sign "Sparrow walk" this goes steeply down hill zig zagging its way towards the rivers edge in a series of hairpin bends. (Can be tough on the knees!)

On reaching the East Lyn River turn right and follow the riverside path into Lynmouth crossing the river by the footbridge that will be seen after passing the row of terraced houses and hotels on the right. (Grid reference 725493). Having crossed this little bridge follow the river side down to Lynmouth to the Cliff Railway which starts just beyond the Exmoor National Park Information Centre, (this centre is a positive hive of information on any matter regarding Exmoor!) Either take a ride up to Lynton on the Cliff Railway or walk up the steep path that runs up more or less parallel to it.

The Lynmouth/Lynton Cliff Railway was designed by a local engineer, Bob Jones funded by the publisher Sir George Newnes and opened in 1890. It works by gravity with the weight of one carriage, with its tank full of water, coming down the railway from Lynton pulling the other carriage up from Lynmouth. Over a hundred years old it is still in full working order and well worth riding on!

Walking up to Lynton – approx one hour.

Having reached Lynton by either rail or foot walk into the town centre to continue this route. Leave the main street by taking a small road to the right beside the town hall. with sign stating that this is the way to Hollerday Hill. Continue ahead a short way up the hill leaving Lynton Town hall on the left hand side and two signs to "Hollerday Hill" or the "police station", turn left and walk up the path as it continues up hill between two rock faces.

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As the path comes out of the rock cutting there are lovely views to the right through a magnificent pair of gates that belonged to Hollerday House, Sir George Newness house that was destroyed by fire in 1913.

Follow the surfaced track until it turns sharply around to the left when a narrow path will be seen ahead leading through woodland, the route continues along the path. The

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path climbs steadily uphill around the edge of Hollerday Hill levels out for a stretch and then goes through an old gateway, another forlorn relic of Hollerday House.

As the route comes out of the woodland and continues along the edge of the cliffs there are lovely views up the coast and across Wales. At the base of Foreland Point can be seen the lighthouse a small building with its light periodically flashing. Like every lighthouse has its own sequence of flashes for easy identification; this has a flash of four flashes followed by a pause.

The route continues ahead following this fairly narrow path with a steep drop down to the sea on the right hand side. As the path climbs higher it comes around a corner to give lovely views down the length of the Valley of the Rocks and as the top of the rise is reached a well placed sea will be found for a welcome stop to admire the view!

On leaving this viewpoint the route goes downhill to a signpost on the right – Valley of Rocks. Turn right and follow the steep path as it goes through a succession of bends down to the bottom of the valet reaching the road beside an attractive little summerhouse or “gazebo”

As the route descends into the valley there is a good view of the various names rocks along the sea edge of the valley including the “Beacon”, “Rugged Jack” and “Castle Rock”. Further along can be seen the headland behind Lee Abbey with “Duty point tower” on the top and beyond that Woody Bay with Wingapeak on the far side.

Cross the road with care and continue into the National Park picnic area and car park on the other side. Go across the car park to a gap between a wall and a hedge at the far side, opposite the entrance, through this and onto the footpath on the other side. There is no signpost at this point. – the grid reference is 711496.

Walking time from Lynton – 30 minutes approx.

Turn left and walk up this path which leads uphill into woodland levelling out as it continues. On meeting a junction with another oath the route turns right following the sign – “Lee Abbey and Bay”, over Southcliffe! . The path continues steadily uphill heading up the direction of the Valley of the Rocks again. As the route comes out of the wooded area the path becomes narrower and the views wider.

As the path rises to the top of the hill pause to admire the panoramic view to the right.

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Below can be seen the Lynton and Lynmouth cricket club and the road along the floor of the valley with toy sized cars in the car park. Across the valley can be seen the path walked earlier, the weather eroded rocks of rugged Jack etc, and beyond them the sea. To the left Duty Point Tower shows clearly on the promontory above Lee Abbey with Lee Bay and Woody Bay beyond that.

The route continues along the top of the ridge, the path becoming wide and grassy, edged with gorse and for a change fairly level. Continue ahead as the path starts to drop downhill. Do not go through the five bar gate ahead, (Grid reference 705492), but continue downhill turning slightly to the right and keeping a stone wall on the left

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until it reaches a corner. Here, as the wall turns to the left, the path continues ahead descending steeply.

Walking time from Lynton – one hour approx.

Looking down into the valley from this point Lee Abbey and its grounds can be seen below. This is now a Christian holiday centre but its origins were not as ecclesiastical as its name might suggest. Although built on a site of a much older building most of the present one was constructed in the middle of the last centuries as a private residence.

Continue along the path as it leads down from Southcliffe, zig zagging towards the road at the bottom. There is a junction on the way down the track; keep to the steep path on the left. As the path leaves the open moorland area there is a hunting gate with a sign “Lee Abbey Estates Please Follow Waymarked Paths”. Go through this gate and continue ahead downhill to a seat and a further signpost. Turn left here onto a much wider track. Following the red waymarked sign – “public bridleway Six Acre Crossing, Lynton 2 ¼”

There route continues along this stony track uphill through the wood with glimpses to the right of Lee Abbey and Lee Bay. It then bends around to the left away from the coast and meets a white painted five bar gate with a red waymark. Go through this and continue, the track now running along the edge of rough grassland and gorse on the way to two old slate gateposts, waymarked red.

Walking time from Lynton – one and a half hours approx.

On the right can be seen a valley running down to the sea with Duty Point Tower clearly visible in the distance silhouetted against the sea.

The route leads on into the farm of Six Acre Farm, passing through the yard onto the tarmac entrance road the other side. (Take no notice of the flight of steps up to the left just before the farmyard!)

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Continue up the road reaching Six Acre Cross at the top where the route turns left along a minor road following the sign “Footpath to Lynton via Lyndiate Lane 1 ¼” (Grid reference 703480).

Pass the caravan site on the left and continue straight ahead to a road junction just past the site. Keep going ahead following the sign – “Lynton unfit for motors”. This is Lydiate Lane.

As the road rises it gives, to the right a new set of views; this time across farmed land and up to the ridge of hills known as The Chains in the distance. The combs can be seen running down the ridge with Chapman’s Barrow on the top to the right and Woodbarrow to the left.

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The route continues along this minor road passing between hedge banks on either side giving some shelter if the wind is blowing. As the road levels out at the top of the hill it passes a group of old disused wartime buildings surrounded by a shelter belt of beech trees.

Walking time from Lynton – two hours approx.

Shortly after this, the road begins to drop downhill and there is a good view ahead looking towards Foreland Point with Countisbury tucked behind the headland and as the route descends further towards Lynton, Hollerday Hill can also be seen with the site of Hollerday House to the right hand side.

The route continues downhill coming to the edge of Lynton where there is a signpost – turn right following the sign to “Lynton ¼” and walk down to the main road. Cross with care to the footpath on the other side and turning left continue down into the town of Lynton taking the sign to “The Old Village” continue ahead walking down the road through Lynton ending at the bottom of a street called “Sinai Hill”. Turn left by the Crown car park, walk a short way and then turn right. Walk past the school and the museum and then either right to the car park if a car has been used, or left up into the town to take the Cliff Railway or footpath down to Lynmouth.

Walking time from Lynton to Lynton – two and a half hours approx.

If walking the whole route return to Countisbury and The Blue Ball Inn by either retracing the route used at the start of the walk or by using the shorter but steeper coastal path route.

Walking time Countisbury to Countisbury – four and a half hours approx.