

Hill forts and rivers...6 miles

Watersmeet, West Exmoor

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

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Dramatic scenery, fast flowing rivers and ancient woodland all feature on this tranquil walk through West Exmoor. The area is home to a rich variety of wildlife from butterflies to red deer and there's an interesting history to unearth too.

Start: Countisbury car park – grid ref: SS 747497 - maps: OS Landranger 168 & Explorer 196

Getting here & local facilities

By bus: Barnstaple-Lynmouth service (passing close Barnstaple ) , alight Lynmouth. Minehead-Porlock-Ilfracombe service, alight Countisbury (50yds from start) or Lynmouth

By train: Barnstaple  20 miles

By car: A39 Minehead-Barnstaple is the main access road to the area, running in a loop through Watersmeet and Countisbury, east of Lynton and Lynmouth. Car park in Countisbury

WC, riverside tea-garden and shop (NT) at Watersmeet House. Shops, pubs and museum in Lynton and Lynmouth. Fishing licences available from Watersmeet House. Contact us on 01598 741101 or watersmeet@nationaltrust.org.uk

Things to look out for...

Hill forts

Four Iron Age hill forts, complete with ramparts (defensive walls), can be seen along the route. Countisbury Castle on Wind Hill is the largest on Exmoor and has been identified with the battle Arx Cynuit, where Oda the ealdorman of Devon (a prior magistrate) defeated the Danes in 878 AD.

Watersmeet House

Nestled within the valleys lies Watersmeet House, originally built as a fishing lodge in 1832 by the Reverend W S Halliday. It is now a National Trust shop and tea room.

East Lyn River and Hoak Oak Water

These two rivers meet dramatically as they pass Watersmeet House and the waterfall on Hoar Oak Water is particularly spectacular after heavy rainfall. The East Lyn is virtually pollution free and renowned for its trout, sea trout and salmon fishing.

Lime kilns

Look out for two lime kilns sited a little way up from Watersmeet House, along the East Lyn River. They were once used to burn limestone brought over from South Wales by boat. The lime was spread over fields to counteract the acidity of Exmoor's moorland soil.



Keep an eye out for red deer in the semi-natural oak woodland and areas of rare whitebeam trees. Ash and wych elm can be found near the rivers where, in the more secluded parts, you may be lucky enough to spot otters.

NTPL / Joe Cornish



Watersmeet is home to an amazing variety of birds. Herons and dippers reside by the rivers, whilst in the woodland you may catch a glimpse of long-tailed, blue and great tits, jays, wood warblers and sparrow hawks. Look for buzzards, peregrines and swallows on the moorland.

National Trust / Keith Zealand



The purple heathers and yellow gorse of the moorland provide a riot of colour, particularly in August. Down by the river rare Irish spurge, ferns, wildflowers and rare lichens flourish. On sunny summer days butterflies, like silver washed fritillaries, gather in woodland glades.

NTPL / David Noton

Directions...

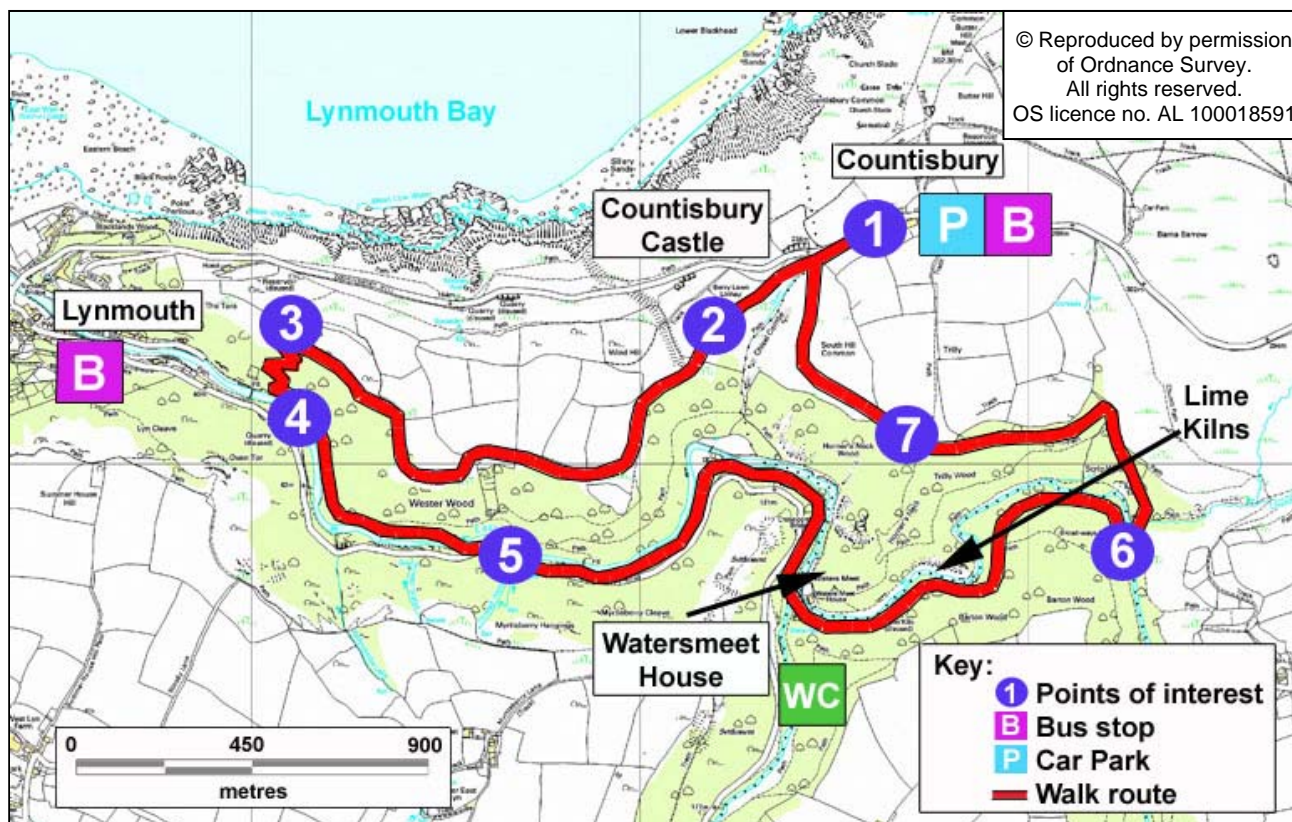
1. From the car park head for Centenary Path at Exmoor Base Camp. Keep right onto Arnold's Linhay path to Lynmouth. Look out for the ramparts in the distance.
2. Continue on the path to Lynmouth where, on the other side of the valley, you will see the scree on the hillside formed in the last Ice Age.

On your left is the woodland, some of which is natural and some planted. This used to provide wood for the burning of limestone, which produced mortar and limewash for buildings in the 18th and 19th centuries.

3. Take the West Ground path to Lynmouth where you will come to a stone wall thought to be 3000 years old. This wall forms part of an original corn ditch used to control grazing stock. The wall appears white as a result of many years of lichen growth.
4. Following the path you will come to a bench with views to Lynton and Lynmouth and of Oxon Tor. Turn left onto Sparrows Walk path. The path now winds down to East Lyn River Valley and Woodside Bridge, passing the remains of the Lyn Rock bottling plant, destroyed in the 1952 flood.
5. Turn left, keeping the river on your left. Head up through Watersmeet Valley to Watersmeet House. Continue up the East Lyn River, passing the old lime kilns, to Ash Bridge.
6. At the bridge, cross the river and turn left. Take the path on the right marked to Countisbury, climbing up to Scrip Wood, Horner Neck Wood and along the top to Trilly Ridge.
7. Follow Winston's Path along South Hill Common to Countisbury and back to the car park.

Terrain and accessibility

A 6 mile (9.6 km) circular walk set in a deep gorge. Some strenuous walking and high paths. Can be muddy after wet weather, particularly along the riverside sections of the route.



National Trust places to visit nearby

- Heddon Valley
- Arlington Court
- Dunster Castle

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