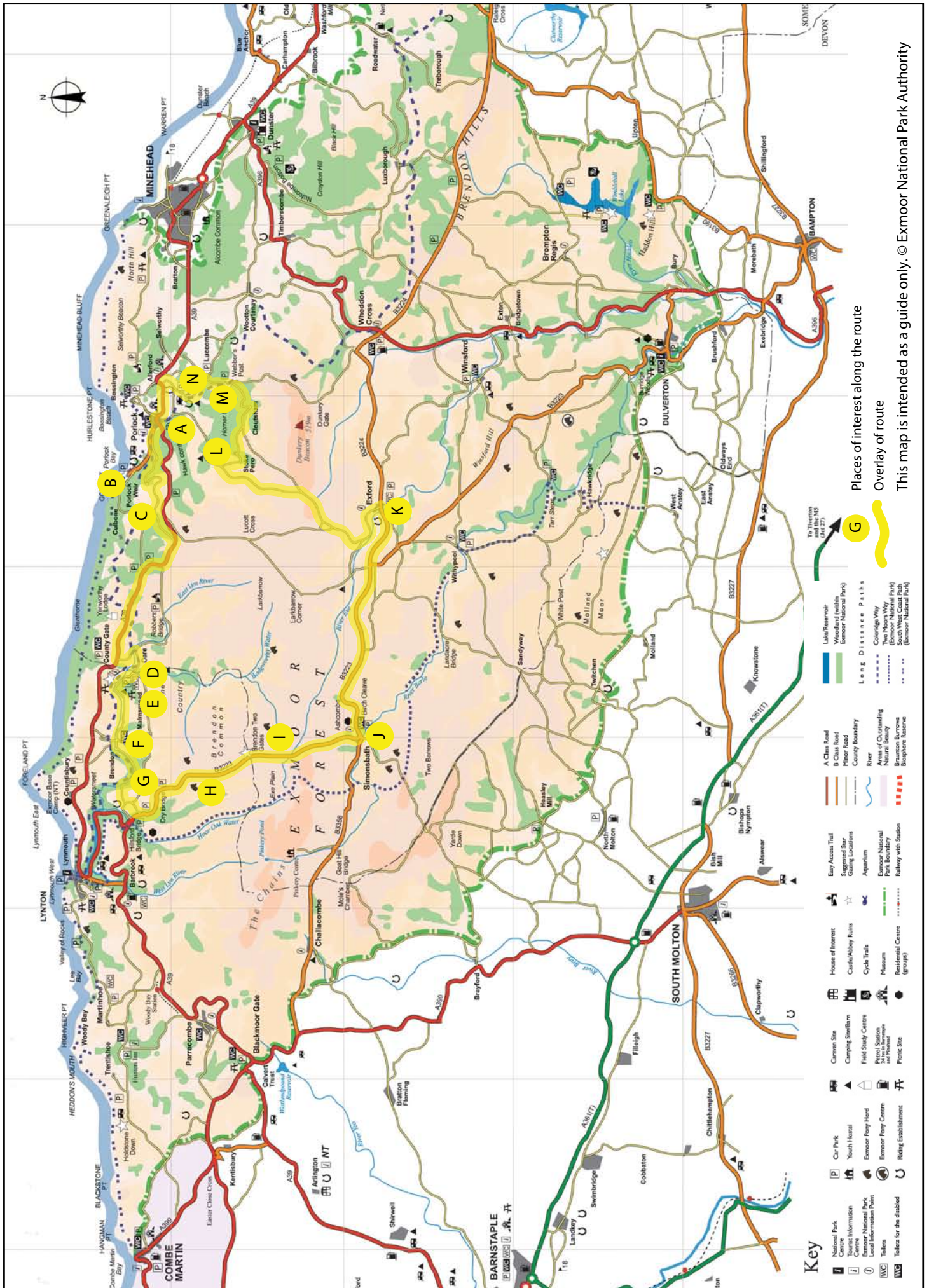


'Off-the-Beaten Track' Sightseeing Tour of Central Exmoor



Circular drive around central Exmoor

This drive through the beautiful scenery of Exmoor, is designed to give you an 'off-the-beaten-track' sightseeing tour with plenty to do along the way. It includes small single-track roads which have passing places and a picturesque toll road. The information starts at Porlock, but you can pick up the route anywhere along it, depending on where you are staying.

Places of interest are listed and numbered in the order you reach them going anti-clockwise around the route, which is the recommended direction to follow. Remember to take your binoculars with you, as you have a good chance of seeing red deer herds on this route, as well as Exmoor ponies.

Distance: about 36 miles

Duration, including stops: all day.

Please note: This route is not suitable for larger vehicles.

Main towns and villages visited

Porlock, Porlock Weir, Oare, Brendon, Rockford, Simonsbath, Exford, Stoke Pero, Cloutsham, Horner.

Places of interest along the way

- A. Porlock – Doverhay Manor Museum, St Dubricius church, Greencombe Gardens
- B. Porlock Weir (off route) – harbour, boat museum, Exmoor Glass, Porlock Marsh, Culbone church
- C. Toll road through ancient woodlands
- D. Oare church (Lorna Doone story)
- E. Malmsmead – Doone valley, tea rooms, old pack horse bridge, walks
- F. Brendon – tea rooms, pub
- G. Rockford – pub and East Lyn River walks
- H. Moorland road with good chance of seeing Exmoor ponies and with several small free car parks
- I. First bridge over the infant River Exe
- J. Restored saw mill at Simonsbath (seasonal), tea rooms, pub, walks
- K. Exford – hunting centre of Exmoor, pubs, tea rooms, shops
- L. Stoke Pero church – tiny church
- M. Webbers Post – car park, sculpture walk, viewpoint
- N. Horner – tea rooms, toilets, car park

Public conveniences along the way:

Porlock car park; Porlock Weir car park; County Gate car park (just off route); Malmsmead car park; Village Hall, Brendon; Ashcombe car park, Simonsbath; Exford; Horner car park.

Route directions

This route can easily be picked up at any of the towns it passes through. It has been started at Porlock, simply as it needs to be started somewhere. It is common for junctions to be named, usually written down the directions post at the junction. I will refer to these in these directions. The mileages shown are the distance between each direction. As the route can be started anywhere along it, cumulative distances are not given. Always continue ahead unless otherwise directed. The bracketed letters refer to the places of interest listed on the map along the route.

1. 0 miles, Starting at Porlock (A) High Street car park, follow the A39 towards Lynmouth.
2. 0.2 miles, at Y-junction to Porlock Weir along B3225. Only take this road if you would like to visit Porlock Weir (B). As the roads from Porlock Weir are not suitable for vehicles, you will need to return to this point. Otherwise keep on the A39.
3. 0.1 miles, Y-junction. Almost immediately bear right by the village hall on to the toll road (C), avoiding the steep Porlock Hill, and taking a very scenic route to the top of Porlock Hill.
4. 4.3 miles, Pittcombe Head. Having followed the toll road you reach the A39 again at Pittcombe Head by the restored AA patrol box. Turn right onto the A39, ignoring turnings off for...

5. 3.2 miles, the turning to Oare is on the left, but just another 0.2 miles is County Gate car park with toilets and a good viewpoint. If you went to County Gate, return to the Oare turning.
6. 0.9 miles, Oare church. At the T-junction, visit Oare church (D), where Lorna was reputedly shot by the villainous Carver Doone during her wedding to John Ridd.
7. 0.7 miles, Malmsmead. At Malmsmead (E), cross the ford or the narrow bridge and then turn right, ignoring the road up to the left.
8. 2.1 miles, Brendon. At Brendon (F) continue straight ahead at the small triangle and cross-road, soon passing the village hall.
9. 1.1 miles, Rockford. At Rockford (G) pass the Rockford Inn on the left and a footbridge over the East Lyn River on the right, going to some lovely riverside walks.
10. 0.6 miles, Straypark Corner. Follow the road up the steep hill and past Brendon church, to reach a T-junction, where the road goes to the left.
11. 0.5 miles. This road meets the B3223 at a hairpin bend. Bear left onto the B3223 to follow it up to cross a cattle-grid onto open moorland (H) with various free car parks along it.
12. 4.0 miles, Exe Head Bridge (I). The road loses height slightly into a valley and crosses a small bridge. The stream running under it is the infant River Exe which rises about a mile to your right.
13. 1.7 miles, Simonsbath. At Simonsbath (J) continue along the B3223, ignoring the B3358 back right to Barnstaple and the next turning right by the saw mill.
14. 0.2 miles, Ashcombe car park. The entrance to this car park is on the left where several walks start and there are public toilets.
15. 5.2 miles, Exford. On reaching Exford (K), follow the road over the bridge over the River Exe and shortly at the triangle, turn left towards Porlock.
16. 0.5 miles, Y-junction. At this Y-junction, bear right.
17. 1.2 miles, Hillhead Cross. At the cattle grid turn right.
18. 0.8 miles, Porlock Post. At the Y-junction bear left towards Stoke Pero over open moorland. This road is usually good for spotting red deer herds to your left. There are a few small places to pull up to use your binoculars. Hint: do not get out of your car so the deer do not recognise your profile and spook them. Continue along this road to cross a cattle grid and go downhill to the next junction.
19. 2.2 miles, Pool Cross. Turn right to Stoke Pero along a gated road. Please leave all gates as you found them.
20. 0.3 miles, Wilmersham Farm. Follow the road through the farm.
21. 0.6 miles, Stoke Pero church (L). This delightful little church is on your left. Continue along this small road to a T-junction.
22. 0.7 miles, Cloutsham Gate. Turn left over a cattle grid. There is a good chance of seeing red deer herds to your right in the open fields.
23. 1.9 miles, Webbers Post. Follow this small road through the hamlet at Cloutsham and through the hairpin bends to go along by East Water, over the ford and up to Webbers Post (M) car park on the left. This car park offers good views and the start of various walks.
24. 0.1 miles. Leave the car park and continue to a Y junction with a road coming in from back-right. Continue ahead down the steep hill through woods.
25. 0.6 miles, Chapel Cross. At this cross-roads, turn left towards Horner.
26. 0.7 miles, Horner. At Horner (N) you will find tea rooms, a NT car park with toilets. Keep on this road to reach the main road.
27. 0.8 miles, Red Post. Turn left onto the A39.
28. 0.5 miles, Porlock. At the Y-junction bear left to drop down into Porlock and the car park on the left where this route started. If you did not start here, then go to instruction No 1 to continue along the route.

Notes

General

The woodlands on Exmoor are predominantly native sessile oaks. These were grown to fuel the lime kilns, as they produce excellent steadily burning charcoal and were tolerant of the lighter, more acid, less fertile soil of this area. Sessile means stalkless, referring to its acorns, unlike the Pedunculate Oak, otherwise known as the English Oak, which sprouts its acorns from stalks.

Porlock

Porlock is a small town surrounded by the hills of Exmoor on three sides. It is a working town and still has many services since lost from many other similar sized settlements. The Coleridge Way, a 51 miles path linking the Quantock Hills AONB with Exmoor National Park following in the footsteps of literary legend Samuel Coleridge, passes through Porlock and is marked with a sculpture in the grounds of the local Visitor Centre (01643 863150). The Visitor Centre can advise on the many local attractions, particularly museums, found within the area.

Porlock Weir

2 miles away by the sea is Porlock Weir, a quaint harbour with a lot of charm and character. You can wander along the shingle ridge which was famously breached by the sea in 1996 to create a series of salt marshes behind. Within this small settlement is a museum and aquarium (07765 281103) in addition to a range of options for food and drink.

A 1.6 mile walk along the South West Coast Path takes you to Culbone church, the smallest church in England still providing services.

Oare church

Oare church is made famous through the story of Lorna Doone. It is one of the many small churches scattered around Exmoor. This is where Lorna married John Ridd, but was shot by Carver Doone through a side window. There is full information on this inside the church.

Malmsmead

A small settlement at the confluence of the Oare and Badgworthy (Badgery) Waters on the Devon/Somerset border. It is at the entrance to the Doone Valley which was used by R. D. Blackmore as the location for his well known novel Lorna Doone. There is a shop and tea rooms here.

Brendon and Rockford

This large and sparsely populated parish is situated in Devon near to the border with Somerset. The main settlements of Brendon and Rockford are in the superb valley of the East Lyn River. The church, which is about a mile west of and 700 feet above the village, is dedicated to the Celtic saint St. Brendan.

Simonsbath

Simonsbath is the last village located on the River Barle and has a remarkable triple-arched medieval bridge. Simonsbath was once the centre of the Royal Forest and is rich in history with buildings such as St Luke's church and a Victorian water powered sawmill. A range of refreshments are available. From here a number of footpaths allow you to explore the surrounding woodlands and moors. A good one is along the Barle to Cow Castle an Iron Age hillfort (leaflet available from National Park Centres).

Exford

Exford commands a central position on Exmoor. The village is situated around a magnificent green with shops, hotels and restaurants. The village is crossed by the river Exe and is a great rural centre for walking, hunting, fishing and horse riding.



For more information on Exmoor please visit www.visit-exmoor.co.uk