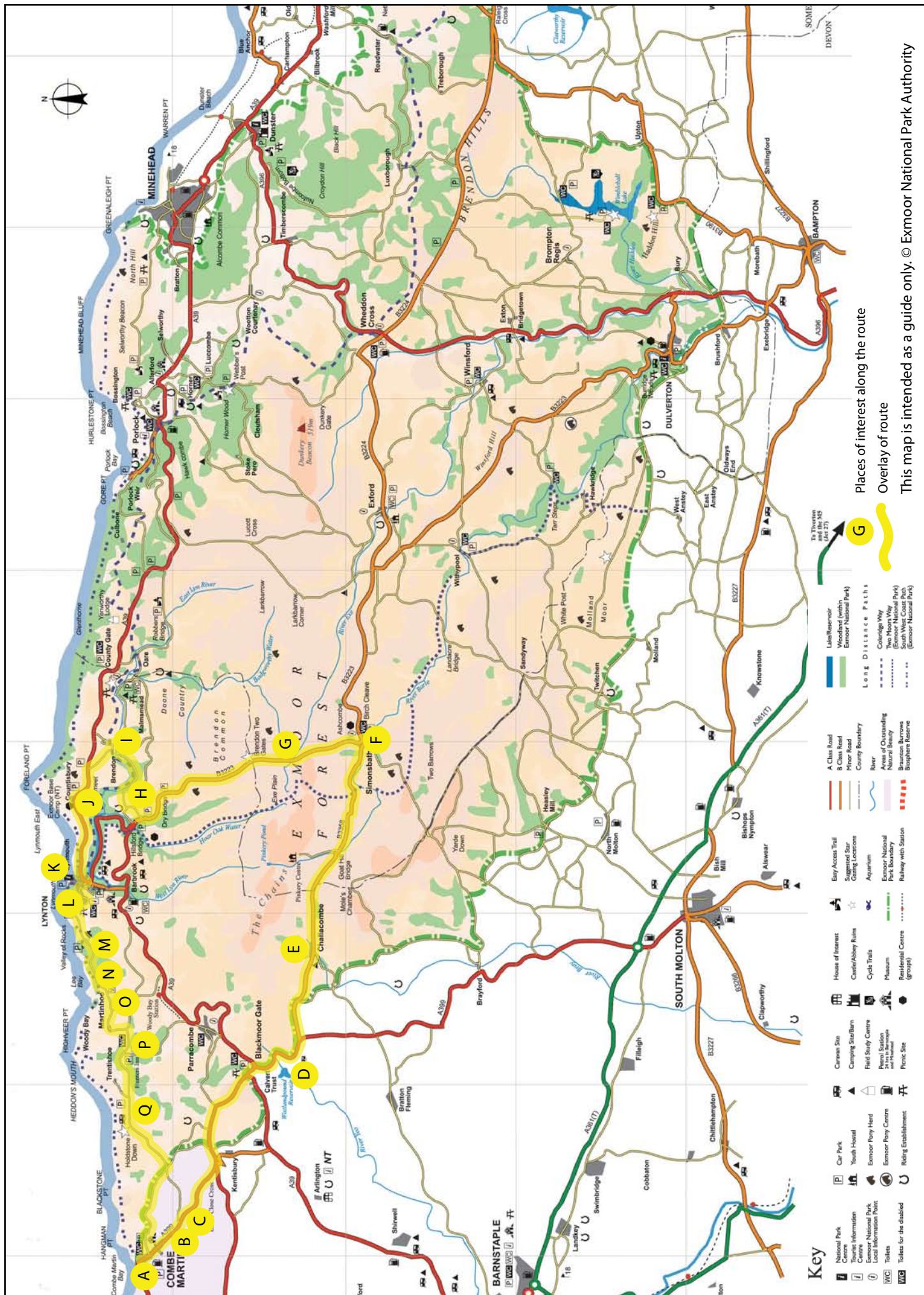


'Off-the-Beaten Track' Sightseeing Tour of Western Exmoor



Circular drive around the western side of Exmoor

This drive through the beautiful scenery of Exmoor, is designed to give you a 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 Combe Martin, but you can pick up the route anywhere along it, depending on where you are staying.

Places of interest are listed in the order you reach them going anti-clockwise around the route, which is the recommended direction to follow.

Distance: about 38 miles

Duration, including stops: all day

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

Main towns and villages visited

Combe Martin, Challacombe, Simonsbath, Rockford, Brendon, Countisbury, Lynmouth, Lynton, Martinhoe, Hunter's Inn.

Places of interest along the way

- A. Combe Martin – beach, Museum, shops, tea rooms
- B. Pack of Cards – unique inn built to resemble a house built with a pack of cards, after a successful win on a game of cards in 1690.
- C. Wildlife and Dinosaur Park – zoo set in gardens with theme park train ride, fossil museum and life-size animatronic dinosaurs.
- D. Wistlandpound Reservoir, 1 mile off route, easy 1.6 mile walk around the reservoir
- E. Challacombe – Black Venus Inn, National Park Information Point and shop
- F. Simonsbath – Restored saw mill at (seasonal), tea rooms, pub, walks
- G. Exe Head Bridge – first bridge over the infant River Exe
- H. Rockford – pub, East Lyn River walk
- I. Brendon – tea rooms, pub
- J. Countisbury – church and pub, Countisbury hill with amazing coastal views
- K. Lynmouth – cliff railway, National Park Visitor centre, Rhenish Tower and harbour, Lyn and Exmoor Museum, tea rooms, shops, East Lyn valley, rocky beach
- L. Lynton – Tourist Information Centre, cliff railway, impressive town hall, tea rooms, shops
- M. Valley of Rocks – unique scenery, picnic area, Poets shelter, feral goats, tea rooms, Lee Abbey, secluded beaches
- N. Woody Bay – coastal walks and views
- O. Martinhoe – small church
- P. Hunter's Inn – pub, NT shop and refreshments, walks
- Q. Trentishoe Down – free car parks with stunning views

Public conveniences along the way:

Combe Martin car park; Blackmoor Gate (A399 junction with A39); Simonsbath, Ashcombe car park (just off route); Lynmouth car park; Lynton town hall; Valley of Rocks picnic area; Lee Bay, just past Lee Abbey; Hunter's Inn, next to National Trust shop.

Route directions

This route can easily be picked up at any of the towns it passes through. It has been started at Combe Martin, 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 **Combe Martin beach (A)**, follow the A399 through the village towards South Molton. As you drive along the longest 'High Street' in England, you pass the **Pack of Cards (B)** on your right, built to look like a pack of cards as the result of a successful gambling bet.

2. 1.9 miles, Wildlife and **Dinosaur Park (C)** on your right. Continue ahead on the A399.
3. 1.1 miles, Easter Close Cross. Continue ahead on the A399, ignoring both roads off to the right.
4. 2.4 miles, Blackmoor Gate. Continue ahead still on the A399. Shortly a turning on the right takes you to **Wistlandpound Reservoir (D)**, if you want an easy short walk around the reservoir.
5. 1.4 miles, Friendship Cross. Turn left onto the B3358 towards Challacombe and Simonsbath.
6. 2.2 miles, **Challacombe village (E)**. Continue ahead.
7. 5.3 miles, **Simonsbath (F)**. Turn left here towards Lynmouth on the B3223. For a break there is a tea rooms almost opposite this junction. Continue up this road.
8. 1.6 miles, **Exe Head Bridge (G)**. The first bridge over the infant River Exe with the source of the river 1 mile up the valley on your left. Continue on to cross a cattle grid to open moors with various small car parks along this road. A good chance of seeing Exmoor ponies grazing.
9. 4.0 miles, having crossed the second cattle grid, you soon reach a hairpin bend. At this bend go straight ahead towards Rockford and Brendon.
10. 0.5 miles, having ignored the first small road on the right to Tippacott, follow the road as it turns right to pass Brendon church on the left.
11. 0.5 miles, Rockford. Pass the **Rockford Inn (H)** and a footbridge over the East Lyn River leading to some river side walks.
12. 1.2 miles, **Brendon (I)**. Turn left at the triangle to cross the two bridges over the East Lyn River, bearing left on the other side, signed to Porlock and Lynmouth to climb the hill.
13. 0.9 miles, Kipscombe Cross. At the top of the hill you reach the A39, bear left onto it. There is a good chance of seeing Exmoor ponies along this road.
14. 1.0 mile, **Countisbury (J)**. Pass the road to the small church on your right and the Blue Ball Inn on your left with a National Trust car park opposite, ideal for a coastal walk or break. Continue along the A39 to go down Countisbury Hill with stunning coastal views. The hill steepens at the bottom.
15. 1.5 miles, Lynmouth. At **Lynmouth (K)** cross the river bridge and there are car parks on your left or turn right into the village where there are further places to park. There is plenty to enjoy here. Having spent time here, leave Lynmouth on the B3234 up the steep Lynmouth Hill. At the top of the hill turn hard right to Lynton.
16. 0.6 miles, **Lynton (L)**. You now pass through the unspoilt village with the impressive town hall on your right where you will also find the Tourist Information Centre. Continue ahead on this road.
17. 0.8 miles, Valley of Rocks. Soon you cross the cattle grid into the **Valley of Rocks (M)**. On your right is the Poets Shelter as Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge all got inspiration from this area. On your left is a picnic area and toilets. Further on is a tea rooms. Continue along this road, over the roundabout and on to pass through the Lee Abbey estate.
18. 1.0 mile, Lee Bay. Pass the Abbey on your right and drop down to Lee Bay and the toll house. Lee Bay beach and toilets are on the right. Keep on this small road as it goes along the coast.
19. 1.6 miles, Woody Bay. At **Woody Bay (N)** there is a long roadside layby used by walkers to reach the coast path walks. Continue ahead through the hairpin bend and right at the next junction. At the top T-junction, continue ahead towards Martinhoe.
20. 0.8 miles. **Martinhoe (O)**. This hamlet has a delightful small church. Continue ahead on this small road.
21. 0.5 miles, Mannacott Lane Head. At this junction is a telephone box and triangle of grass. Take the slip-road right here to turn right towards Hunter's Inn. Follow this road as it drops steeply to Hunter's Inn.
22. 0.8 miles, Hunter's Inn. At **Hunter's Inn (P)** you will find the impressive inn and a National Trust shop and refreshments, with public toilets next to this shop. Leave here on the small road to the left of the inn towards Combe Martin.
23. 2.1 miles, **Trentishoe Down (Q)**. As the road climbs through stunted sessile oaks and wonderful mosses, it opens up onto moorland again. You will find free car parks on the right overlooking the coast to Wales.
24. 1.4 miles, Stony Corner. Continuing on the road you reach a cross-roads, where the 'main' road turns left, with a road ahead down to Combe Martin. Instead turn right here, also to Combe Martin along Vellacot Lane.
25. 2.4 miles, Combe Martin. At the end of the lane you reach a T-junction with the main road, A399. Turning right will take you to Combe Martin beach and shops at direction No 1. Turning left will take you to direction No 2 (in 1.5 miles) and on to the Wildlife and Dinosaur Park and the continuation of this 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.

Combe Martin

Combe Martin is a small town on the boundary of the National Park. Adjacent to it, the remaining coastline is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The magnificent coastline offers you plenty of options for activities: Rock pooling, fishing, walking along the coast, horse riding or simply relaxing. As well as a range of shops, Combe Martin has a useful Tourist Information Centre and a local museum which tells the history of the area. A self guided walk leaflet is available in the visitor centre if you wish to explore the coastline on foot, taking in the highest sea cliffs in mainland Britain.

Simonsbath

Simonsbath is 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).

Lynton & Lynmouth

Lynton, at the top, is connected to Lynmouth at the coast below, by a famous water powered cliff railway or a short but steep walk. The power of water is further explored at the Glen Lyn Gorge (01598 753207). A number of museums are in the area and full information can be found at the Lynton Tourist Information Centre (01598 752225) and the Lynmouth National Park Centre (01598 752509). Both Lynton and Lynmouth have a range of shops and a choice of venues for food and drink.

Details of local walks are available from the National Park Centre and the Tourist Information Centre. From Lynmouth it is a relatively easy walk besides the river to reach Watersmeet, whilst from Lynton you can explore the Valley of Rocks.

Valley of Rocks

The dramatic landscape of the Valley of Rocks is a dry valley and home to a range of rock formations in addition to wild goats. The valley nestles high above the coast close by to the twin towns of Lynton and Lynmouth. There are many theories about the creation of the Valley of Rocks. Most hark back to the ice age when the glacial ice bumped up against the north Devon coastline but could not penetrate it. One theory is the ice blocked both the River Lyn's exits to the sea and so they were forced to divert their flow. It created this valley parallel to the coast, finally finding a way out at Wringcliff Bay at the end of the valley. The valley became redundant when the ice retreated and the two rivers could once again exit directly into the sea. Over many years the valley has silted up and become a U-shaped valley, classic in some ways of a glacial valley but without the rocks showing any characteristic glacial striation.

The Poets Shelter is so called as this area was loved by Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge who were inspired by the scenery.

Lee Abbey was built around 1850 as a grand house. In 1924 it became a golfing hotel when it was extended with many more bedrooms. In 1939 it became an evacuated boys school. In 1946 it was dedicated by the Bishop of Exeter and run by a community, which it still is today.

Woody Bay, Martinhoe and Hunters Inn

This remote corner of Exmoor is famous for its steep sided valleys, breathtaking views and historical features including small roman forts. Hunters Inn provides the perfect opportunity for a gentle half hour walk to the remote beach at Heddon's Mouth or to follow an old Victorian carriageway high above the coast to Woody Bay. Woody Bay can also be reached by road and offers a remote and beautiful Exmoor beach.



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