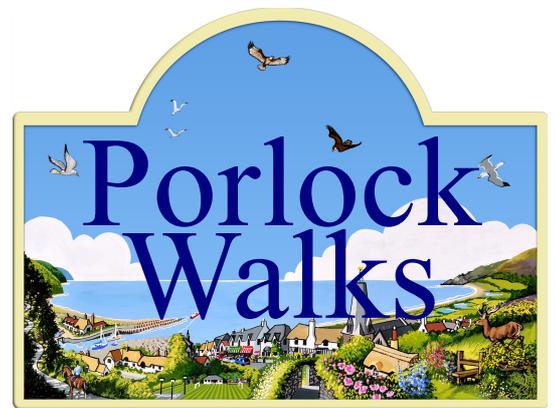
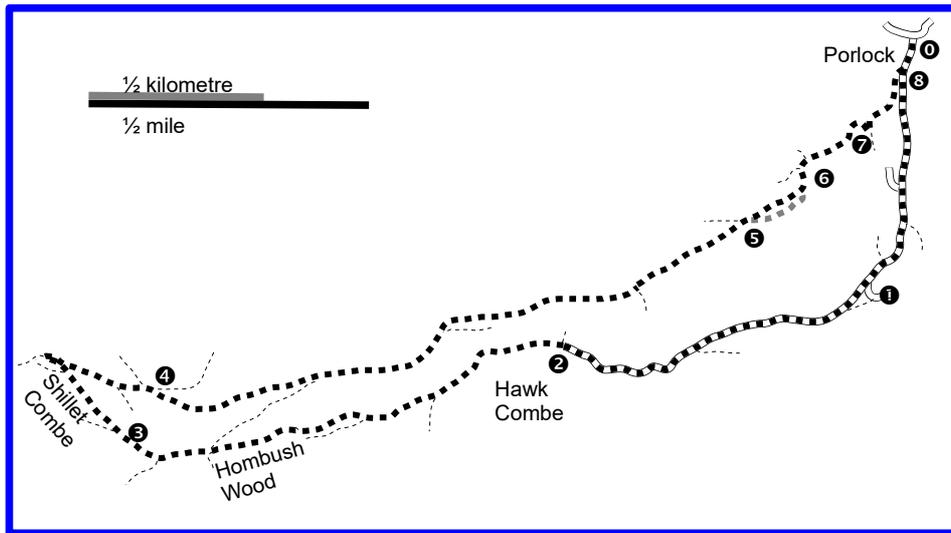


Hawk Combe National Nature Reserve

5 miles / 1¾ hours



This is an easy circular walk on good paths. The walk starts at Porlock church and goes up Hawk Combe along the stream. After a short climb out of the combe, the walk returns along the edge of moor with great views of Porlock Bay.



Hawkcombe Woods is a 101 hectare (250 acre) National Nature Reserve, notable for abundant mosses, lichens and fungi; heath fritillary butterflies and red wood ants. The reserve is one of England's most special ancient woodlands and is a valuable example of a temperate 'rainforest'. The 182 species of lichen growing on the trees are of national importance.

Start in the centre of Porlock with your back to the Parish Church, St. Dubricius.

It is easy to think that nothing changes in villages like Porlock but most of the buildings in the High Street have changed their use over the years. The long white building opposite the church was once split into three – a bank, the Rose and Crown public house and Cape's Family Grocer.

Turn sharp left up Parsons Street ①. Walk all the way up the lane into the hamlet of Hawkcombe.



The stream initially on your right is Hawkcombe stream and you soon come to Hawkcombe Mill which was part of the rector's manor. In 1911, after many hundreds of years use as a corn mill, it was converted to produce electricity for Porlock until 1932.

In Hawkcombe, keep straight ahead when the main road bears left, going up the no through road ①. Follow this lane which becomes more of a

track as it gently ascends up Hawk Combe. The last vestiges of tarmac give out at the Hunting Lodge and The Stables ②.

Keep straight ahead on the track, signed Hawkcombe Head, to cross the stream by a small footbridge. When the track forks, keep right, descending to cross a second footbridge.



Otter



Badger



Fox

Otter, badger and fox are present in these woods – but are all hard to see. You may, however, spot their tracks in mud by the stream or where spring water wets the earth.

Keep the stream on your left to pass through a field gate and continue on the main track. Keep ahead with the stream still on your left, ignoring all paths to the right and left. At the signed junction ③, continue ahead, signed Shillet Combe.

At the next fork, keep right. After a short climb, turn right onto a vehicle track. Climb out of the combe to reach a cattle grid and gate at the top of the climb ④. Turn right here just before the cattle grid, signed Porlock.

If you look back at this point, there is a terrific view up to Hawk Combe Head. This is a Mesolithic (c.7000-4000 BC) hunter-gatherer site where evidence of flint working has been found, perhaps the earliest human activity on Exmoor.

Just 100 years ago, these woods would have been much more open due to coppicing. In a coppiced wood, young trees are repeatedly cut down to near ground level. This causes many new shoots to emerge and, after a number of years, the coppiced tree, or stool, can again be harvested for wood and bark.

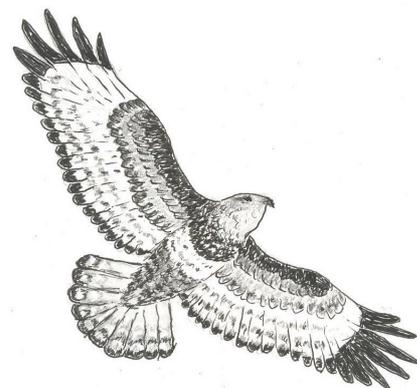
Picture a hive of activity, with horses and carts transporting coppice products, gangs of people cutting wood and charcoal kilns burning all day long. This would have been the scene from Roman times until the demand for charcoal dropped, around the time of the First World War.

Exmoor National Park are reintroducing some coppiced areas. This work will recreate habitat that will benefit many species including the wood warbler, heath fritillary butterfly and wood ant.

The path slowly descends, keeping high on the combe side. When a track joins from the right, keep straight ahead and pass through the field gate. Later the path splits - keep left, signed Bridleway.

You may see buzzards circling overhead. These are quite large birds of prey with broad, rounded wings and a short neck and tail. When gliding and soaring they hold their wings in a shallow 'V' and the tail is fanned. Birds are variable in colour from all

dark brown to much paler variations. All have dark wing tips and a finely barred tail. Their plaintive mewing call could be mistaken for a cat. Buzzards eat small mammals, birds and carrion but when hungry, they will even eat earthworms and insects.



A field gate is reached at the top of the wood. Pass through the gate, signed Bridleway, into a meadow. Keep ahead along the meadow boundary to pass through another gate and down the side of a second meadow to a third gate.

There is a great view from the second meadow across Porlock Bay to the Bristol Channel and Hurlstone Point.

Passing through the third gate, keep straight ahead, signed Porlock passing two houses on your right. The way ahead splits ⑤. Keep on the left, lower, path, indicated with a blue arrow.

Looking to the right, over the wall, you may be lucky enough to see red deer grazing in the field.

The path leads down hill to a junction of paths ⑥. Go forward and then right here, signed Bridleway Porlock (not the Footpath Porlock path). This path goes down hill to a fence. Here fork left through a large deer gate to continue down hill.

The path curves right and then reaches a path junction before a house is reached ⑦. Turn left downhill, signed Bridleway, not recommended for horses! At the bottom of this steep path, cross Hawkcombe stream again and walk left into the car park by Porlock church ⑧.

If you have any comments, corrections or ideas that might improve our route description, please email us at porlockwalks@gmail.com.

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