



## Exmoor

### Chetsford Water

But which section to chose? That was the question that faced us. When in doubt, you can do worse than revisit childhood. There is a tuck and a bend along the road that takes the motorist into a tiny valley in which there is a tinkling stream, and well I remember the delights of exploring this unmessed-about-with, unpolluted water as a boy.

Chetsford Water (you'll see it on Ordnance Survey's Exmoor Outdoor Leisure Map- grid ref: SS848419), surrounded by the welcome purple lines that mean you can wander wherever you will. It isn't Chetsford Water for long, as it mysteriously turns into Nutscale Water after it's been fed by Embercombe Water, but it's all very, very picturesque.

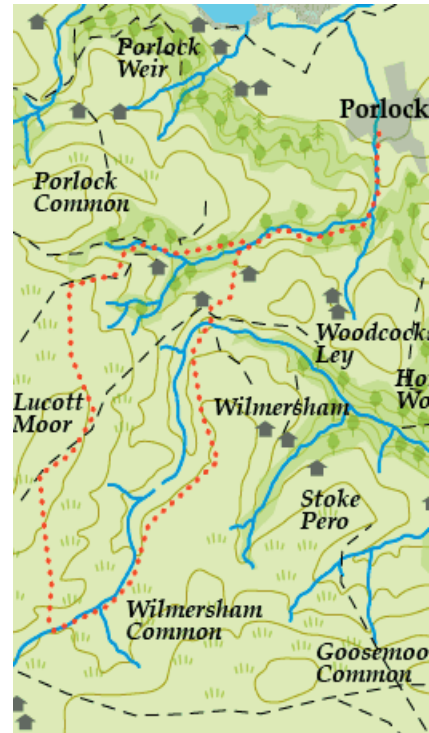
The walk we did took us down the water course with a sort of vague idea that we might come back another way. We would see what we would see - which is part of the joy of being free to go anywhere you want.

We had been informed that we might find the remains of prehistoric man in the shallow valley under Great Hill, but not a single sign of his comings and goings could we spy.

Apparently the little valley may have an archaeological rarity called 'ring-cairns'. We did however enjoy the stunted hawthorns and rowans and mountain ash that punctuate the way downstream. And we did hear a cuckoo. My first cuckoo this year and, unlike the meadow pippets whose nests he may violate, I was exhilarated by the haunting, exotic call.

As mentioned, Chetsford turns into Nutscale Water which then turns north and eventually issues into the reservoir that bears its name. Nutscale Reservoir is a dark affair that nestles in the hills with an air of brooding. When I was three years of age I posed here for a press photo illustrating some article my father wrote about «The driest summer since 1750...»

It was October 1959, in case you're interested, and Nutscale was as low as anyone had ever seen it. Not that the lake had been in place for long - only in 1941 was the reservoir completed after years of arguments and municipal infighting. And then, two months after Minehead's drinking water came flowing from its new Exmoor supply, a 1,000 lb high explosive German bomb was dropped in an attempt to blow the dam. Fortunately it missed and merely made a dent in the hillside nearby.



*Basic hike: from Chetsford Water on the high Exford-Porlock road, down past Nutscale Reservoir and across into Hawk Combe before gaining Porlock - and back via Hawk Combe and Lucott Moor.*

*Recommended map: Ordnance Survey's Exmoor Outdoor Leisure Map (grid ref: SS848419).*

*Distance and going: 10 miles - one or two steep bits.*

Looking at myself in the old press photo now, I wonder where all the intervening years have gone. I was soon finding out on the walk because we had a long way to trudge and my limbs were able to remind me of a lifetime's excesses. The trudge took us along the path to the south of the lake, which we followed until it crossed the small lane that leads down to the dam. Slightly to the left, a we could see a path bearing off along the contours to the north, and this we took to eventually find ourselves dropping past Nutscale Mill down into the deep valley under Tarr Ball.

Opposite, Luckott Farm was perched on its ridge and up to this ancient place we clambered, following the zig-zag footpath to the top where we turned right along the farm track.

After a few hundred yards we found a yellow dot on our left that marked the path down into Hawk Combe. Here, the birthday-girl decided she wanted lunch, so nothing would do but to prepare downstream to Porlock where we visited the excellent Ship Inn. «Did you know Samuel Taylor Coleridge once supped here? « I asked the celebrant - to which a friendly barman butted in to say: «He did indeed - he sat there,» and pointed to an antique settle. It was as if the poet had only just left.

It was a long walk back up Hawk Combe - all the way to the top where the spur comes down under Bromham Farm. Up this spur a footpath ascends, ever westwards, to reach the moors. Now we were back on public access land and I felt free to change my bearings to the south. Past long-lost Berry Castle and its earthworks we wandered, following the bare moorland on a course parallel to the Exford-Porlock road.

Only we three and the skylarks moved upon the great naked purple splotch of Lucott Moor, which is where we eventually spied our car and it looked most welcome, parked under a beech hedge - as if it were some friendly harbinger of home.