



## Exmoor & West Somerset

### Hurlestone Point & Porlock Bay

Few places in Britain can boast high moors, deep forests, fertile vales and dramatic and vertiginous coastlines all bundled into one small corner. Porlock Vale can – it is a small chunk of paradise tucked under Exmoor's biggest range of hills, and it runs down to the coast in an almost impossibly picturesque way.

It even has its very own microclimate which somewhat miraculously allows it to enjoy similar conditions to places much further south like The Lizard in South Cornwall.

To get the best out of the vale I found the little car-park in the almost unbelievably chocolate box village of Bossington a mile-and-a-half north-east of Porlock, and crossed the foot-bridge that looks as if it's been inspired by the one at Claude Monet's lily-pond.

Walking north along the riverside, the path ascends gently towards Hurlestone Point. This dramatic headland commands the eastern tip of Porlock Bay. There's a ruined coastguard look-out that sits squat on a shelf some 200 feet above the end of the jagged point and, although reaching it takes you on a short detour, I do recommend strolling out to its airy realm. From it you can peer around the corner and see the wide expanse of Selworthy Sands stretching east under the great hill.

These sands are just about inaccessible and yet I have noticed people down there on my last two visits, having seen not a single soul on those lonely skerries ever before. My advice is – do not try descending to this beautiful beach by clambering down the cliff. The rock is friable to say the least, and you are likely to hit the beach sooner than planned.

Another way round to the sands - though I certainly do not recommend you take it - is through the Gulls' Hole. This is a magnificent cave that passes right through the end of Hurlestone Point and to get to it you must walk down the zig-zag path which you'll see 500 yards back in the direction of Porlock.

The Gull's Hole is reachable by climbing over the rocks towards the Point - but do not attempt it if the tide is coming in. You will be cut off and it will be a helicopter job to get you out of there - if you survive the attentions of the waves. On an ebb though, it is safe enough, but you will need some climbing skills to reach the cavern that has daylight at either end.



*Basic Hike: From Bossington car park to Hurlestone Point then up to Selworthy Beacon and down to Selworthy village, following edge of woodlands back to Bossington.*

*Recommended Map: Ordnance Survey Outdoor Leisure Map 9 - Exmoor.*

*Distance and going: five miles - easy going.*

*Food and Drink: Plenty to chose from in Porlock as well as two tea-rooms in Bossington.*

Back at the old look-out I continued around the point in an easterly direction. This took me along the extremely scary path and introduced me to the big dark, back-sunned ravine above Selworthy Sands where I began to ascend through the screes and rocky bluffs.

It would be a bit alarming for anyone scared of heights. But you soon reach more solid terra-firma – albeit some six or seven hundred feet above where you started. Eventually I rejoined the official coast path and followed this across the hill towards the famously scenic car park under Selworthy Beacon.

Walking along the road for a few hundred yards I came to The Wind and Weather Hut which has poetry carved into its stone sides. Here's a bit of it by Keble:

*Needs no show of mountain hoary  
Winding shore or deepening glen  
Where the landscape in its glory  
Teaches truth to wandering men.*

From here a track runs down lovely Selworthy Combe. Half way down you might want to fork left for a stride or two until you see Lady Acland's Hut situated on a bank to your left. You can sit in this attractive chalet and look out at the graceful, delicate beauty of the birch forest which surrounds you, and perhaps think of Chekhov or Turgenev, so entirely Russian is the atmosphere of the place.

Down to even more chocolate-boxy Selworthy we go, turning right on the green to follow the footpath marked Bossington. Now it's simply a matter of following this scenic right of way which tucks in and out of the woodlands – so that you get fabulous glimpses of the vale between the trees as you walk back towards the sea.

Part of the walk takes you through the eerie but wonderful ilex woods – said to be the biggest plantation of evergreen oaks anywhere in the country. We pass picturesque nestling far below, and not long after we traverse to the rear of the big house at West Lynch – one of the most handsome homes in the region.

Next comes Bossington and the Monet-like bridge which will take you dry shod back to the car park.