



Exmoor

Larkbarrow – Badgworthy Water

Halfway along the Exford – Porlock road (which is one of the most scenic thoroughfares in the Westcountry, passing as it does along a series of watersheds that separate the Dunkery range and the rest of the central massif) you'll come to an isolated lane that heads west. This will take you to Alderman's Barrow, before rounding Larkbarrow Corner to sink away from the moors again and rejoin its former companion.

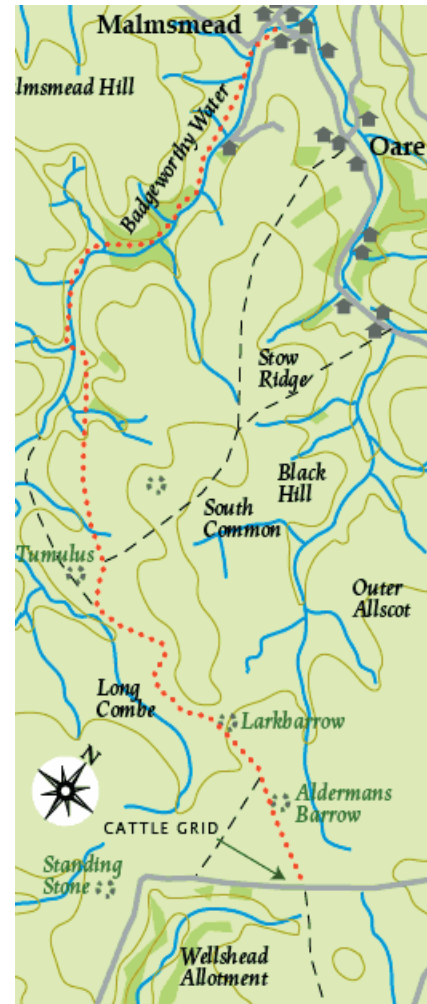
The best place to begin the hike is at Alderman's Barrow. Park near the cattle grid at and take the track that crosses the moors to Larkbarrow. Nice name – and plenty of larks in spring and summer. These tuneful birds are apparently on the decrease, but there are still a good number around in this location where mankind has more or less ceased mucking things about.

Indeed, that is the great thing about this walk. Evidence of mankind is joyfully lacking. Larkbarrow is the exception. You can see the ruins of the farm that once stood here defying loneliness and solitude – and you can also see the traces of the bullets and shells that blew the place to smithereens when Allied troops trained on manoeuvres here during the Second World War.

I cannot pass without thinking of the families who braved the wilds of this most uncomfortable of corners over the years. And at Larkbarrow I think of one man in particular – poor Will Little who, on July 13th 1923, was walking home in a terrific storm having spent the day harvesting over at Warren. Will saw two cows belonging to Larkbarrow and herded them on their way – it would have been better had he not bothered. A bolt of lightning struck and killed him stone dead within a few yards of the house.

And I think of poor Tom again, a little way west along this marvellous walk. For that is the direction we must go in order to round Tom's Hill and gain access to Badgworthy Water.

Tom Little stayed for a short time at Badgworthy Cottage (also flattened by the guns) but refused to remain because there was a strange atmosphere about the place that upset him. In his book *The Heritage of Exmoor*, Roger Burton ponders: "In the case of Badgworthy, it is not just possible – if all, or even some of the stories we have read about the Doones are true – that the spirits of this infamous family continue to haunt this spot. For let us not forget, the shepherd's cottage is said



Basic hike: From Alderman's Barrow (map ref SS837-424) to Malmsmead via Larkbarrow.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey OL 9 Exmoor.

Distance and going: just under eight miles – easy going in summer, can be boggy in winter.

Food and drink: café in Malmsmead, pubs in Brendon or Porlock.

to have been built with the stones taken from the old 'Doone's Cotts'...."

We are now in the valley of Badgworthy (pronounced Badgery) Water. It is one of the most beautiful river valleys in the kingdom. From high moor, it cleaves its way into an increasingly deep ravine until it reaches Malmsmead.

As it has been featured in the Western Morning News walking column before, so I won't go on about the Doones and other Badgery related tales in this particular article – suffice to say that the track is simplicity itself to follow and that, after four miles or so, you are introduced to the touristy hamlet which is situated at the point where our river meets Oare water. Together they make up the East Lyn River.

From here you could find any one of numerous routes back to your car – if you were in the mood for a good 15 mile all-rounder. Or you could, as I've suggested, persuade a friend or relative to convey you back to Alderman's Barrow.