



Exmoor

Lynton & Lynmouth



Westcountry Walks - Lynton-Lynmouth There is a twin-centred Westcountry community that arguably enjoys finer views than any other.

Lynton and Lynmouth boast some of the most spectacular panoramas in the country. It's no exaggeration, few other towns or villages can compare with the sheer drama of this perpendicular place.

Anyone who has ridden on the famous Lyn Cliff Railway will know it for a fact. Stand on the outer platform of the ascending car and it's the nearest thing to taking off in a helicopter you can experience without leaving the ground.

The higher you go, the more grandiose the whole scene becomes - which is not surprising really given that the tallest cliffs in England are just across the bay.

Taking a ride on the railway is the first magical step of this scenic town hike. Park in the Esplanade car park and effortlessly ascend 500 feet on the line. It's all done without an engine in sight: the weight of water in the downward car hauls its climbing mate to the top of the hill by means of a long cable - so it is gravity taking you up, rather than down.

The Victorians, by-the-way, didn't call the place Little Switzerland for nothing.

Alighting from the Westcountry's shortest but most dramatic railway you have no choice but to wend your way along the road leading to the main street. Just to your right is the imposing town hall with its extraordinary mixture of architectural styles. Gothic, neo-Tudor and art nouveau all combine to make

Basic walk: from the harbour-side at Lynmouth up the funicular railway and into Lynton then along the footpath that runs west around Hollerday Hill into the Valley of Rocks - back through the centre of town and returning down the zig-zag paths to the sea.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer OL9.

Distance and going: three and a half miles easy going.

For information on what to do and see in Lynton and Lynmouth phone the TIC on 01598 752225.

the wonderful old place look like something dreamed up in some baroque fantasy by Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle.

Actually Sir Arthur officially opened the place just over a century ago and in a way his man Sherlock Holmes paid for it. The building was funded by Sir George Newnes, part of whose wealth came from publishing Conan-Doyle's famous stories.

Just to the side of the front door is the Tourist Information Centre where you can buy leaflets describing this and other walks in Lynton and Lynmouth. There's a footpath just behind the hall that takes you up and around Hollerday Hill.

Now we are on our way to one of the most startling ravines in the region - the extraordinary Valley of Rocks - described by one famous poet as home to «pre-Adamite Kings».

You have a choice as to whether to round the rocky peak of Hollerday Hill on its vertigo inducing coastal side, or on its inland flanks - either way you are in for views of the most dramatic kind.

If you take the inland path you eventually come down to the most spectacularly situated cricket pitch to be found anywhere - a rock bordered sward that is more often than not being grazed by the wild goats that live hereabouts.

At this point you can chose whether or not to climb Castle Rock which is the jagged pyramid shaped eminence featured in our photographs.

But our route takes back along the roadside footpath to the west end of Lynton where we pass the rather grim looking building occupied by the Poor Clares at the top of Lee Road. How poor they are isn't generally known, but the nuns have a large and dignified looking convent which is occasionally open to the public.

Just opposite is Belle Vue Avenue, which we walk down to turn left into Lydiate Lane. This is part of the grid-system of central Lynton and the lane will take us down to a smaller thoroughfare called Blackmore's Path which, in turn, takes us out onto Sinai Hill - a biblical sounding street named after a rock called Mount Sinai which used to be a favourite viewpoint hereabouts.

At the bottom of the slope, where Sinai Hill meets Queen Street, you'll see The Globe Hotel which was apparently Lynton's first inn. A National Park guide leaflet says: «It was famous for the wrestling matches which were held in its back yard. The winner was awarded a silver spoon which he was allowed to wear in his Sunday hat.»

We would have gone into St Vincent's Cottage Museum to find out more about wrestling and spoons, but could smell the chips frying at the excellent chippie nearby and were drawn away.

If Lynton has an actual centre then it is probably Church Hill - which has shops on the left as you walk up, and St Mary's Church and the vast Valley of Rocks Hotel on your right.

A seat in the graveyard commemorating the life of the mellifluously named Manners Nightingale makes a superb stopping place if you are taking an al fresco snack and if in the unlikely event you tire of the amazing panorama in front of you, you can always turn your gaze left and play the game of trying to count how many rooms there are in the Gormenghastian sized hotel. Why such a modest sized community should have such a vast hostelry one can only ponder - what we can report for sure is that Bertrand Russell stayed in one of the many rooms with his wife Dora in 1924.

North Walk Hill passes between the graveyard and the hotel and leads to the zig-zag paths that descend to Lynmouth.

Once down at the ancient port we admired the Rhenish Tower, looked at the photographs of the Flood Disaster in the Flood Memorial Hall, crossed the footbridge to Manor Grounds, argued over whether or not to have a game of putting in the rain and wandered out across the beach to a place the map calls Point Perilous.

Men used to play cricket a mile out to sea from here in the old days - which seems like some sort of insane untruth when you look at the wild waves today - but there used to be a big sand bar out that has been washed or dredged away. At low tides it offered one of the only flat places around these parts.

We walked behind the Manor House and crossed the bridge to the Glen Lyn Gorge hydro-electric power station where paying visitors are invited to play on the fantastic water-jets that spout in great arcs across the abyss.