PUBS WORTH THE WALK · SOMERSET · QUANTOCKS

The Plough Inn Pub Walk

Holford: Red Deer (maybe), Wooded Combes & Wordsworth - A Quantocks Shortcut

DISTANCE	TIME	ASCENT	DIFFICULTY
4.5 miles	**2.5 hours**	**830 ft**	**Moderate**
7.2 km	approx.	255 m	some steep ascents

OVERVIEW

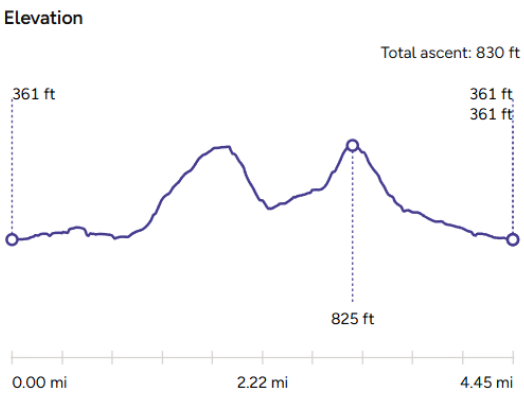
A 4.5-mile circuit from Holford into the wooded combes of the Quantock Hills, following a mixture of lanes, gravel tracks, woodland paths and grassy trails. The route begins on the Coleridge Way, passing through Alfoxton Woods before climbing steadily towards the higher ground around Longstone Hill. Here, the trees give way to more open terrain, with views across the surrounding hills and woodland.

The route then descends into Hodder Combe, crossing streams before climbing out through the neighbouring combes and returning towards Holford. The landscape alternates between enclosed woodland, steep-sided valleys and more open ground, with uneven paths and some steep ascents.

The circuit also passes Alfoxton House, historically associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge, and presents a landscape that showcases classic Quantocks' red deer habitat.

Allow around 2.5 hours, with suitable footwear recommended, particularly after wet weather when stream crossings may be more challenging.

START / FINISH	**Plough Inn, Holford, TA5 1RY**
PARKING	Car park at the pub.
GRID REFERENCE	ST 155 411
WHAT3WORDS	///cone.jaundice.names
PATHS / TERRAIN	Lanes, gravel tracks, streams, woodland
PUBLIC TRANSPORT	On Bridgwater to Minehead bus route 15
TOILETS	At The Plough; Combe House Hotel



ELEVATION PROFILE

OTHER PUBS NEARBY

The Hood Arms, Kilve is a little further West on the A39.

Try **The Bicknoller Inn** in the village of **Bicknoller**, and the **Carew Arms, Crowcombe** are superb Quantocks pubs.

THE ROUTE



Numbered waymarks on the map match the badges in the directions below. Not every waymark is mentioned in the text.

DIRECTIONS

Part 1 · Holford to Hodder Combe via Alfoxton House *steps 1–10*

1 Turn right out of the pub car park to follow a narrow tarmac lane away from the main road. Join the 'main' village road that arrives from your left 2 then continue ahead to a small junction to Holford Combe. Follow the lane round the corner to the right, in the direction of the Car Park. 3

2 We're now following the Coleridge Way, a long-distance trail associated with the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Follow the lane, passing the stone memorial of the old 'dog pound' on your left. 4 *Dog pounds were a common sight in parishes of old - simply the village enclosure where stray or troublesome dogs were kept until their owners reclaimed them — a small, practical feature of parish life. There used to be a deer park here a few hundred years ago, so I wondered if this particular pound had rather more significance.*

3 From here, the route rises gently on a track through Alfoxton Woods. Later, fields appear on the right, with distant views of the Bristol Channel. This is red deer country, so stay quiet and keep your eyes open for movement in the woods!

4 Then pass Alfoxton House on your left. 6 *It's currently being renewed by a Buddhist community. It may look unassuming today, but this was once the St Albyns' Georgian seat, and later the house where Wordsworth and Coleridge lived during their Quantock year — the place where poems like Kubla Khan and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner first stirred into life. I was thrilled to see the house being renovated.*

5 The lane becomes steeper beyond the house. At a sharp right-hand bend, carry straight ahead to leave the lane and pass through a wooden bar gate into the woods, following the bridleway signs. 7

6 Follow the fence line on your left all the way to the top of these woods. *(When the beech leaves are off the trees the path will be obscured, but it's clear where you need to go)*. Breaking clear of the trees at the top of the slope, the path meets a junction of footpaths, an area referred to as 'New Ground' on OS Maps. 8

7 The route is to the left, but it's '2nd left' – look for a blue public bridleway sign on a track that also displays a 'No Vehicles' sign. (1st left is back down the hill, and we're not ready for that yet!). Follow this easy route on a clear track gently uphill, following the contours around Longstone Hill, and avoiding the need to go up and over it. *(During the day, red deer tend to be grazing on higher ground, often in areas that provide a clear view of any possible disturbance. They drop down into the combes as the light fades)*.

8 Continue straight over a grassy top to join a path that starts to curve right and downhill into the combe below. 9 *Before you drop into the combe there are some superb views of Quantocks landscape, showing the extent of the woodland and moorland you're exploring.*

9 Follow the stony track as it descends into Hodder Combe. At the bottom of the hill, cross the small stream that is flowing from the right. *There are a few streams to cross on this section of the walk – you might need your ingenuity to find a suitable crossing point after heavy rain, but suitable footwear is best at any time. !f you time your walk at dawn or dusk, you might be lucky enough to find a stag in this area.*

10 Note the narrow meadow to your left. Once across the stream, head over a slight rise in the path and continue to drop down further to cross another stream. *(Note that our goal is to locate a path that climbs out of the combe on the opposite hillside to the one we dropped down on).* The path forks here, head to the left 10 .

Part 2 · Hodder Combe return to Holford via Holford Combe *steps 11–17*

11 Continue ahead for 150m where the path splits again 11 Take the left-hand fork, and identify that the route is starting to head gently up the hillside on your left-hand side. The OS Map calls this Somerton Combe. Cross another stream to start the steeper section of the climb on a gravel track ahead through the trees. After this initial steep section (c.100m), the path switches back sharply to the left, 12 to continue its advance uphill, slightly less steeply but still an effort! Here the OS Map refers to Lower Hare Knapp.

12 Steadily climb out of the combe. You'll start to see the density of trees starting to thin as you reach the tree line. The track becomes quite stony and uneven here, likely a result of water pouring into the combe during heavy rain. Eventually progress to a grassy track between ferns and gorse. Continue straight ahead.

13 The path soon levels out onto a grass track, meeting informal footpath crossroads of grass tracks as it crosses this open plateau. 13 Carry straight on, until the path starts to drop downhill again towards another combe. *As a landmark, look for some fire beating poles at a distinct path to the left.* 14 Continue straight ahead to drop down into the next combe (Holford Combe), and to begin the return to Holford.

14 Follow the route down through the trees until you reach a stream at the bottom. 15 Again, pick your way across at a suitable spot and go left through a wooden farm gate to follow a level bridleway aside a field hedge, in the direction of Holford.

15 Soon join a tarmac lane past Combe cottages, and then the Combe House Hotel. (A hidden gem. They serve lunches and teas here, everybody welcome).

16 Leave Holford Combe to rejoin the road through the village, continuing straight ahead to the Holford Combe/Car Park junction that you passed earlier (waymark #3). Continue ahead, but stick to the lane as it curves to the right, following Bridgwater signs. Take a moment to visit The Church of St Mary The Virgin 17 *St Mary the Virgin doesn't really have a story of grand additions, chapels, new towers or wealthy patrons. It's remarkable precisely because nothing much seems to have happened to it. The church was built early, built plainly, and then simply left to do its job — an unadorned medieval tower that has quietly outlasted every family, fashion and era around it.*

17 Return to the lane and continue through the village. The Plough will appear on the left as you reach the A39.

Don't walk past, go in....before it's not there anymore.

More pubs worth the walk across England and Wales, with a GPX download and OS Maps link for every route, at

pubsworththewalk.co.uk