PUBS WORTH THE WALK

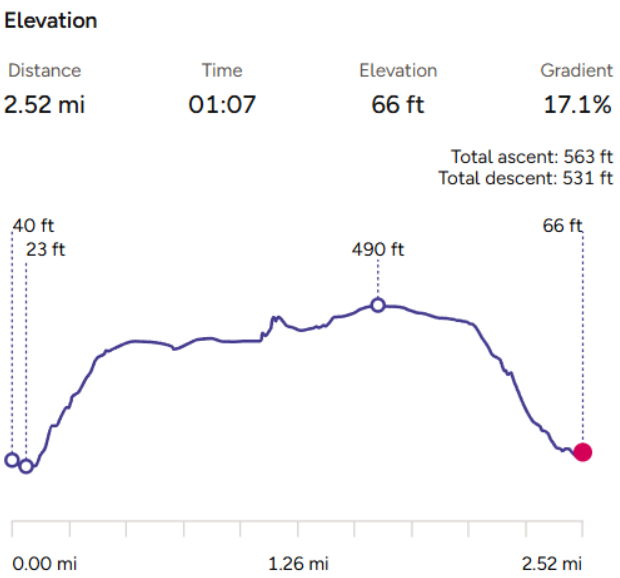
# The Rising Sun, Lynmouth

## The Valley of the Rocks

### OVERVIEW

There are landscapes in Britain that feel as though they've been over-described, photographed to exhaustion, and pinned to too many postcards — and then there is the **Valley of Rocks**, which somehow remains astonishing every single time you see it.

The climb from sea-level Lynmouth to the cliff-top is a short, sharp transition from harbour life to something altogether wilder: a dry river valley perched improbably above the sea, flanked by jagged rock towers and opening westwards to a sweep of coastline that feels ancient, exposed and elemental.




It's a place that looks as though it should belong in a myth, and yet it's right here, a few minutes' walk from the Cliff Railway and the churchyard in Lynton.

Stand on the upper path and you understand why this view would make any list of Britain's "must-see" places.

The Bristol Channel drops away beneath you; the rock pinnacles rise like weathered sentinels; the cricket pitch sits neatly in the valley floor as if placed there by a mischievous hand; and the toll road curves towards Lee Abbey with a kind of quiet inevitability. On a clear day you can see the coast of Wales; on a stormy one you feel the full force of Exmoor's weather. It is brutal and beautiful in equal measure — a landscape that doesn't need interpretation boards or superlatives because it speaks for itself.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Start/Finish** | **The Rising Sun, Harbourside, Lynmouth, EX35 6EG** | | | | |
| **Parking** | Some parking on the roadside along the Harbourside. Public parking areas are available at either end of the town. | | | | |
| **Grid Reference** | SS 722 497 | | | | |
| **What3Words** | ///cringe.plans.unloading | | | | |
| **Distance** | 2.5 miles / 4 km | **Time** | 2 hrs | **Ascent** | 563 ft / 175 m |
| **Paths/Terrain** | Pavements and tarmac footpaths, some slippy, some very steep. Short section of road walking. Choice to clamber and scramble over cliffs at valley of the rocks at your own risk! | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Difficulty** | Moderate. It's a relatively short walk, but a steep climb. A trip up the cliff to Lynton via the Cliff Railway would make the route to Valley of the Rocks accessible for most. |
| **Public Transport** | Buses serve Lynmouth from both the Barnstaple and Minehead directions. |
| **Toilets** | Multiple options in the hospitality businesses of Lynmouth & Lynton. |
| **Other Pubs Nearby** | In Lynton, the **Queens Hotel** and **The Crown Hotel** are worth trying. Further afield, seek out **The Rockford Inn** along the East Lyn Valley, upriver from Watersmeet. **The Blue Ball Inn** at Countisbury is 'just 1000 feet up the A39' to the East. To the West, **The Hunter's Inn** at Heddon Valley is recommended too. |

## DIRECTIONS




1. From The Rising Sun, turn the corner towards the Cliff Railway. Pass the Information Centre; to its side is a set of steps leading to the zig zag path up the hillside. Look out for 'The Walker' sculpture across the road before you start the climb, marking the confluence of The Two Moors Way, The Coleridge Way and the South West Coast Path.
2. The steep path snakes beneath the Cliff Railway on a series of short footbridges, climbing quickly towards Lynton.

3. At the top of the zig zags you reach Poets Corner, a small terrace with a bench and a fine first view back over Lynmouth. Join the lane here and bear right past The North Cliff Hotel.
4. The gradient eases and the path levels out, giving you wonderful views over Lynmouth, now far below, and across the Bristol Channel to the South Wales coast. The path ahead is shady and wooded.
5. After a wooden gate, the landscape opens dramatically. You join the tarmacked cliff path that reflects the sheer volume of visitors who come to this part of the coast. Here the paths split:
   Right: beneath the Valley of Rocks along the South West Coast Path
   Left: up onto the dramatic rock tops — the classic postcard view, with the Bristol Channel plunging away on one side and the old dry valley on the other, complete with its famous cricket pitch and the toll road towards Lee Abbey
6. Take the left-hand option for the full Valley of Rocks experience.
7. Rather than descending the valley, return towards Lynton on the tarmac path that leads from the cliff top. This becomes pavement as you enter the town.
8. In front of Lynton's parish church (whose graveyard has one of the best views in the area), turn down Church Hill, beside the Valley of the Rocks Hotel. This brings you back to Poets Corner.
9. Retrace your steps down hill, but after 100 metres, at the junction to take you back on to the zig zag section, continue straight ahead following signs for Lyn Gorge. This steep, sometimes slippery footpath drops to meet the main road through Lynmouth.
10. Join the main road for a short distance, steeply downhill. There is a pavement on the opposite side, but the footpath you need is on the town side of the road: a public footpath running along a lane behind the buildings.
11. Follow this lane as it curves right. Directly ahead is the steep harbour lane that runs past The Rising Sun, returning you to your starting point.

**NOTES - The Company You Keep On Exmoor**

Exmoor has always drawn writers, but it's only when you stop and picture them here that the whole thing becomes faintly ridiculous.

We imagine the Romantic poets striding across the moors in search of Xanadu, or some ancient mariner, or a line of verse that might change the world. But they weren't following waymarked trails, kissing gates and National Trust footbridges. They were trudging through mud, rain, bracken and sheep poo, probably lost half the time, and almost certainly arguing about whose idea it was to come this way.

And yet — they came. Again and again.

Coleridge and Wordsworth walked these cliffs in the 1790s, dreaming up the Lyrical Ballads. Shelley lived in Lynmouth in 1812–13, launching political pamphlets in hydrogen balloons from the cliffs. R.D. Blackmore wandered Exmoor half a century later, gathering the raw material for Lorna Doone before returning to Teddington to prune his plums. And just up the coast, at Ashley Combe, Ada Lovelace — daughter of Byron and pioneer of computing — spent her summers looking out over the same Bristol Channel.

It's an extraordinary cast for such a small stretch of coast.

What's striking is how ordinary their movements would have been. Shelley didn't glide romantically along the cliff path; he scrambled up it. Coleridge didn't float across the moor in a haze of inspiration; he sweated like I did this morning. Blackmore didn't sit in a picturesque window seat with a quill; he jotted notes in a battered notebook and went home to check on his fruit trees. Ada Lovelace didn't gaze wistfully at the sea thinking of Byron; she was probably thinking about algorithms.

And imagine them here today. Coleridge with a Silva compass he can't quite read and promises to go on a navigation course. Shelley in Gore-Tex, complaining about the humidity. Blackmore stopping every ten minutes to adjust the wrong coat. Ada Lovelace striding ahead with walking poles, an OS Maps app open on her iPhone, quietly confident she could design a better version.

And this, really, is where I find myself in their company. The thing that brought them to Exmoor, and brought them back, is exactly the same thing that brings me. You develop a passion for the place, and a pride in being privy to a kind of secret: the combinations and contrasts that make this landscape so compelling.

The Rising Sun just happens to sit in the middle of it all — a harbour inn folded into the cliffs, a place where people have paused for centuries before heading back out into the weather.

Today isn’t about the beer at the Rising Sun. It’s about Exmoor — a quiet, private loyalty to a brutal, beautiful landscape that envelops you and settles into your bones. And once it takes hold, you're done for.