

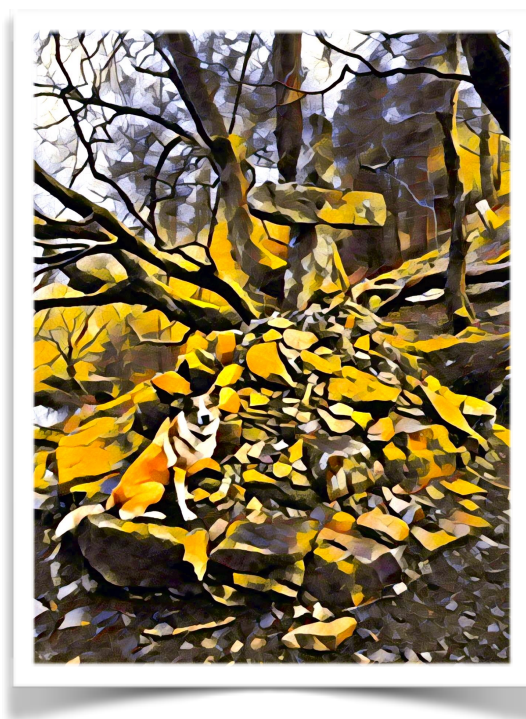
Chapter 2: Timmy Explores Exmoor with the Rutting Stags

You will remember that Timmy's eleven-mile walk along Chesil Beach was a disaster. But today we are going with Timmy on another eleven-mile walk: from the beautiful hamlet of Countisbury on the sea cliffs of Exmoor with its wild ponies, along the South West Coast Path to find the elusive deer in rutting season, with the territorial and vocally amorous stags bellowing across the precipitous cliffs. From the Devon and Somerset border at County Gate we shall turn inland and follow the valley contours to the beautiful villages of Brendan and Rockford, along the East Lyn River to Watersmeet. And if this weren't quite enough, Timmy likes to tag on an extra five-mile stretch to visit a moody beach where the breakers evoke the scent of pirates. From here you can distinctly see Wales—the homeland Timmy has never visited—from the Gower Peninsula all the way along to Barry Island.



Timmy looking for clues along the South West Coast Path at Countisbury

The Vicar of Timberscombe in 1940 knew the area well, and warned that a donkey should always be kept with the cattle to guard against witches. Here wild boar figurehead statues guard the gateway of the Glenthorne hunting lodge. Today we're exploring the haunts of the Beast of Exmoor. Christopher Ondaatje recently related a present-day sighting of the black beast with green eyes, skulking in the shadows. Farmers around Glenthorne have continually reported a dark, long-tailed creature with green eyes. The murder of an entire flock of sheep brought in the Royal Marines, but nothing was found. Glenthorne continues to be haunted by the Reverend Walter Halliday, and the ghost of Halliday told Ondaatje the origin of the Beast of Exmoor: in the nineteenth century, a young man had returned to Glenthorne from the tea estates of Sri Lanka with his beautiful Sinhalese bride Kumari (herself a descendent of Prince Vijaya and Kuveni, who had turned herself into a vengeful leopard). As the marriage was consummated at Glenthorne, Kumari reluctantly fled, leaving behind a shattered window, scratch marks and blood, with the paw prints of a large cat disappearing into the beech woods. Timmy paused for a spot of forensic sniffing around Sisters' Fountain, where Joseph of Arimathea, searching for water on his journey to Glastonbury, perhaps created the spring by striking his staff against the ground, whilst at Wingate Combe, where the brooks plunge into waterfalls, any thirsty dog is easily satiated.



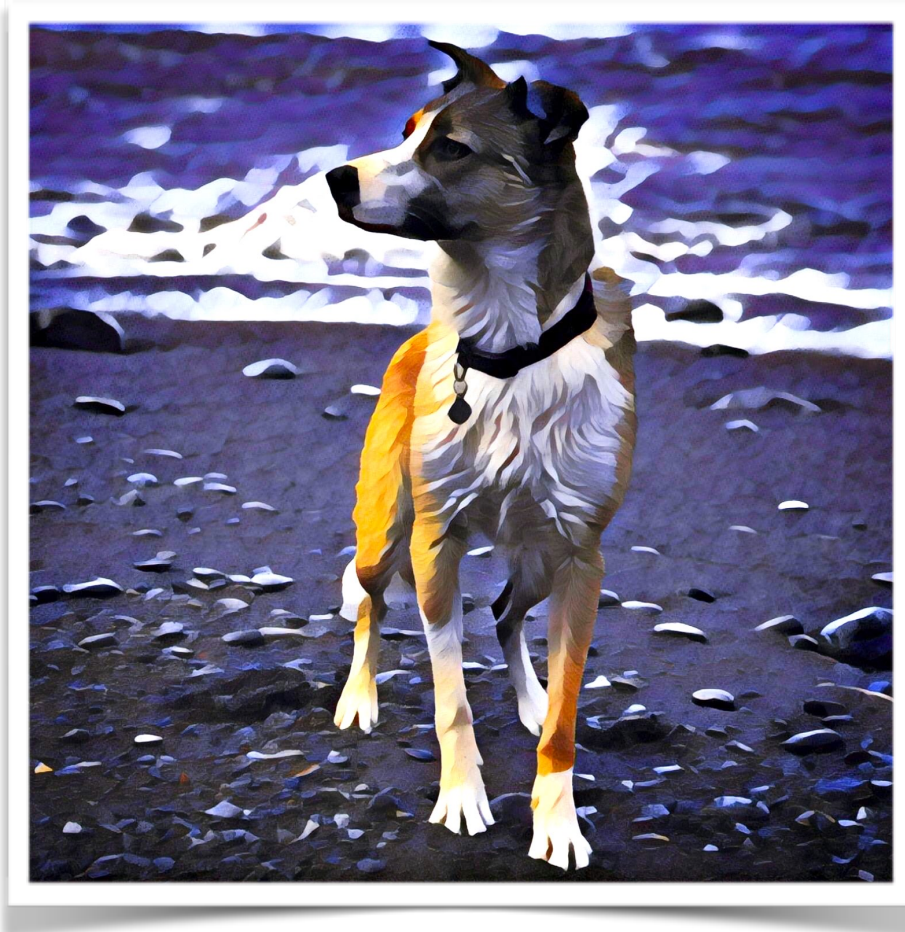
Timmy searches for Joseph of Arimathea at Sisters' Fountain, Glenthorne

At the Staghunters Inn at Brendan it's possible to perceive the presence of an eerie goblin flitting around the shadows, whilst the old, gnarled hanging oak at Malmsmead marks the spot of the ancient gallows at the entrance to the picturesque Doone Valley. Further down, at the Rockford Inn, salmon leap and dogs plunge into the lively river to cool off in the summer. But sometimes the dappled sunlight can't reach into the depths of the valley floor, where the mischievous water sprites play like Ondine. But Timmy always likes to stay at the Blue Ball Inn at Countisbury: an old coaching inn with log fires, huge fireplaces, and mists swirling up from the Bristol Channel. Here the spectre of a tall old man walks through the inn, pausing behind customers, and swiftly vanishes with no trace. But the dogs sense him. Is it Halliday himself? This is Lorna Doone country, and it's down in Lynmouth at the ancient Rising Sun Inn, with its creaking floorboards and wood paneling, that Blackmore penned the most gripping chapters of his novel. The boulders on the beach here at Lynmouth mean that it's no place for dogs, where the surfers resemble playful seals in the waves.



Timmy loves a trip on the Cliff Railway from Lynmouth to Lynton

The ascent to Lynton involves the Cliff Railway, and then a sniff around the narrow Victorian streets and onwards to the Valley of the Rocks with its herd of goats. Here Timmy always practises some intense focus with ball control, just in case he decides to marshal the goats. But this is just a waypoint on the trail past Lee Abbey and down to the beach, where the sea can be violent, conjuring images of the wreckers and smugglers of past centuries. On the gruelling ascent back to Countisbury, the paths bring rhododendrons and rabbit holes, with wind-battered trees and gorse bushes punctuating the bleak forests, and views of open moorland contrast with the surging river below. Eventually Timmy arrives back at the ancient church of Countisbury, with its evocative graveyard and whistling wind.



Timmy likes to visit the beach at Lee Abbey, on his search for wreckers, smugglers, and pirates



Timmy finds his way back to the Blue Ball at Countisbury