









The
WESSEX
Ridgeway


Key to section maps

- WESSEX RIDGEWAY TRAIL**
-  Wessex Ridgeway (walking, horse riding & cycling)
 -  Wessex Ridgeway (walking only)
 -  Place of interest

- TOURIST AND LEISURE INFORMATION**
-  Tourist Information Centre
 -  Public convenience
 -  Parking (walking, horse riding & cycling)
 -  Parking (walking and cycling only)
 -  Other recreational trail
 -  Archaeological feature

- WILDLIFE AND RECREATION SITES**
- Please keep to dedicated paths
-  Dorset Wildlife Trust
 -  Forestry Commission
 -  National Nature Reserve
 -  National Trust

- ROADS**
-  Trunk or Main road
 -  Minor road
- RAILWAYS**
-  Railway line
 -  Train station

- FEATURES**
-  River
 -  Woodland
 -  Farm, Village or Town area

SCALE 1 cm = 0.537 km



ALSO AVAILABLE

Wildlife of the Wessex Ridgeway (leaflet)

Local History along the Wessex Ridgeway (leaflet)

Wessex Ridgeway, Dorset (leaflet)

North Dorset Cycling Pack

Picture Trek – Countryside Activity Trails (leaflet)

The Wessex Ridgeway – An Audio Journey to the Sea (CD ROM)

Free to download at www.dorsetforyou.com/wessexridgeway

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the late Priscilla Houstoun of the Ramblers' Association who set up the walking route in the 1980s. Thank you to members of the British Horse Society, Ramblers' Association and all the landowners whose help and support made this multi-use trail possible.

The trail has been developed and is managed by Dorset Countryside, Dorset County Council's Countryside Ranger Service with funding from the EU Leader+ 'Dorset Chalk and Cheese' Programme, Dorset AONB, Liveability and the Environment Agency.

Produced and published June 2009 by Dorset Countryside, Dorset County Council, County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ. Telephone 01305 221000. Email dorsetcountryside@dorsetcc.gov.uk, Website www.dorsetforyou.com/wessexridgeway

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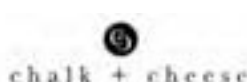
We have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the trail in this guide is safe. However all outdoor activities involve a degree of risk and Dorset County Council accepts no responsibility for any injuries caused whilst using this trail.

Book design and print by **theromangroup (romandesignprint.com)**

Front cover: The Marshwood Vale by Guy Edwardes

Back cover: Broad Ledges, Lyme Regis by ifphotos.com

ISBN number: 978 1 84495 037 9





The Cobb, Lyme Regis

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How to Use this Guide

THIS GUIDE IS IN THREE PARTS:

- An introduction to the trail's wildlife, history, scenery and geology, as well as advice for walkers, horse riders and cyclists.
- Nine chapters describing the trail in detail. This part of the guide includes detailed maps for each section with the key places of interest highlighted.
- The last part includes useful information such as local transport, parking and where you can eat and stay, along with linking trails, other places of interest near the trail and further reading.

FINDING YOUR WAY

On the ground the trail is signed using round discs (waymarks) with an image of a Wyvern, a two-legged dragon associated with the ancient kingdom of Wessex. Where the trail meets other rights of way or a road, specially designed signs continue to point you in the right direction. Along with these unique signs, symbols of a horse and rider mark the main route for all users (walkers, horse riders and cyclists). However if you are on foot, then at certain locations there is an alternative route for walking. At these locations please follow the symbol of a person. The wooden signs along the trail include the name of the nearest point of interest or village, distance from this in miles and the status of the path shown by a coloured symbol. For example a bridleway is shown as a blue horse and rider and a footpath shown as a yellow man. At times the route may change from that on the map. Please follow the specially designed waymark discs and signs rather than stick rigidly to the maps produced in this guide.

MAPS





The maps have been prepared by Dorset County Council. The line of the Wessex Ridgeway is shown in brown for walking, horse riding and cycling and shown in yellow for walking only. The majority of the trail follows bridleways or footpaths but in places goes along green lanes and country roads. The trail is also shown on the Ordnance Survey (OS) Explorer Maps 116, 117 and 118.

KEY FOR EACH SECTION

TYPE OF USER

-  Walking
-  Horse riding
-  Cycling

OTHER SYMBOLS

-  Distance
-  Grid reference (*map centre*)
-  OS map number
-  Place of interest





Marshwood Vale

Walking, Riding and Cycling the Wessex Ridgeway in Dorset

The Wessex Ridgeway in Dorset is a magnificent ridge-top route crossing Dorset's rural heartland. The trail offers vistas across the county and breathtaking views to far beyond. The majority of the route straddles a long Chalk ridge but on occasions is broken up by small rounded hills and secluded valleys. Each section of the trail has its own unique identity and delights to explore.



Tollard Royal

The trail forms part of the Great Ridgeway, an ancient highway that was once an important trading route between the Devon and Norfolk coasts. Today this ancient highway provides the backbone to several recreational trails in southern England (page 56).

In the 1980s the Ramblers' Association recreated the final stage of the Great Ridgeway in Dorset. However this route is primarily promoted as a walking route. The Wessex Ridgeway provides excellent opportunities using either the multi-use route suitable for walking, horse riding and cycling or the walking route originally set up by the Ramblers' Association.

WALKING, RIDING AND CYCLING

The multi-use section of the trail is approximately 58 miles (93 kilometres) long. Starting at Tollard Royal on the Dorset/Wiltshire border, the Dorset section of the Wessex Ridgeway meanders across the Chalk downs, climbs magnificent hillforts such as Hambledon Hill and crosses over Chalk streams brimming with wildlife.

Along the way you will pass many attractive villages such as Cerne Abbas and take in stunning views of the Blackmore and Marshwood Vales, before sauntering down through the quaint Marshwood Vale to the end of the multi-use section at Champernhayes, just north of Lyme Regis.





Walking, Riding and Cycling the Wessex Ridgeway in Dorset

WALKING ONLY

The walking route is approximately 62 miles (100 km) long and follows the majority of the multi-use section of the trail, then just west of Beaminster the two routes divide. Here the walking route continues along the ridge towards Lambert's Castle before taking a brief detour northwards towards Thorncombe near the border with Somerset. The trail then meanders over several more ancient hillforts before dropping down through rolling farmland to finish in the seaside town of Lyme Regis on the dramatic Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site.

WHICH WAY AND WHERE?

The trail can be enjoyed in either direction – whether you want to start at the sea in Lyme Regis or on the high downs near Ashmore or Tollard Royal the choice is yours. The first chapter in this book starts at Ashmore and Tollard Royal and follows the route southwesterly towards Lyme Regis. Generally it seems easier to walk towards the coast and arriving at the sea makes a very satisfying end to the trail. It can be enjoyed as a linear route or form part of a circular route using many trails and walks (page 56) that join the Wessex Ridgeway.

TERRAIN AND WEATHER

The majority of the route follows the top of a ridge but there are some sections which are steep, particularly when dropping down into the Chalk valleys and back up again. The surface of the trail varies from hard-surfaced trackways and sunken lanes to grassy or arable fields. There are also a few sections on the road. During wet weather, particularly in the clay vale and river valleys, the route, although useable, can become muddy.

BE PREPARED!

When venturing into the countryside it is wise to be prepared. Even during the summer, wind and rain can make your walk, ride or cycle an adventure. So make sure you take suitable footwear and waterproof clothing and during the summer take a sunhat, sunscreen and plenty of water. Like any long-distance route, the Wessex Ridgeway is not a route to be taken lightly. Good planning should help to ensure you make the most of this trail and that it remains an enjoyable experience. There are few things better than going over the Chalk downs on a glorious day with the world spread out before you and the Skylarks singing as you travel along. For more details on what to take see page 64.





Wildlife on the Wessex Ridgeway

The Wessex Ridgeway follows a Chalk ridge that forms a 'backbone' across Dorset. Its dominant steep-sided slopes, rounded hills and deep coombes have characterised the wildlife that lives there.

The Wessex Ridgeway falls within the South Wessex Downs Natural Area, which is internationally important for its Chalk rivers and much of England's remaining Chalk grassland.

As well as Chalk downland the trail also passes over a mosaic of other habitats including woodland, arable fields, Chalk streams and remnants of heath. From spring onwards these are awash with many colourful wildflowers including Pyramidal Orchid, Early Gentian, Lady's Bedstraw, Squinancywort, Cowslip, Wood Anemone, Dog Violet, Corn Marigold and Common Fumitory.

During summer these are covered with scores of butterflies and other insects including Grizzled Skipper, Adonis Blue, Marbled White, Comma and Orange-tip butterflies as well as day flying burnet moths, glow worms, dragonflies and damselflies, bright orange soldier beetles and the Great Green Bush-cricket.

A wide range of mammals and birds can also be seen including Dormouse, Brown Hare, Roe and Fallow deer, Pipistrelle and

Noctule bats, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Kestrel, flocks of Linnet and Goldfinch, woodpeckers and Tawny and Barn owls.

In autumn the woodland floors flourish with the unusual and interesting fruiting bodies of fungi. These often break through the dense, damp layer of fallen leaves and along with the ferns, mosses and lichens, glisten in the low autumn sun.

More information about the wildlife along the trail and the best places to see it is available in the 'Wildlife of the Wessex Ridgeway' leaflet available from local tourist information centres (TIC) or free to download from www.dorsetforyou.com/wessexridgeway



Pyramidal Orchid



Brown Hare



Orange-tip butterfly



Goldfinch



Roe deer



Cowslip



Kestrel



Common Blue butterfly

Geology and Landscape

Dorset has a varied and at times, complex geology and landscape. A wide range of rock types can be found along the trail ranging from Lias and Upper Greensand to the much younger Chalk.

The majority of the trail from Ashmore to Beaminster follows a Chalk ridge formed around 100 million years ago in warm shallow seas. Beyond Beaminster the underlying geology changes to Greensand capped hills lying above older rocks from the Jurassic created much earlier between 200 and 150 million years ago.

The Chalk escarpment which the trail follows runs across one third of the county and extends as far as Swanage. Chalk is composed from countless billions of microscopic plants that died and were compressed over time.

The Chalk is very thick and the Chalk ridge itself is a remnant of a vast plateau of Chalk which was pushed upwards between southern England and northern France. The action of water such as rivers and springs has eroded the Chalk to create the river valleys but much stranger to explain are the steep sided dry valleys. These formed during the last Ice Age when the ground was frozen.

When the snow and ice melted, great floods poured down the valleys, eroding the frozen Chalk. Today the valleys are dry as any rainwater simply soaks into the Chalk. The edges of the great Chalk plateau are marked by steep slopes that offer views across a completely different landscape composed of clay vales and sandstone hill tops.

This geology supports many different habitats and has shaped how the land has been farmed and the settlements which have emerged along the

trail. The trail passes through a number of intimate and varied landscapes on its journey to the sea. There are steep grassland fields and areas of scrub and woodland, while the fertile coombes and flatter, clay vales like the Blackmore Vale have been ploughed to produce crops. The Marshwood Vale to the south west of Beaminster has remained relatively unchanged over the last century. This is made up of a patchwork of small irregular shaped fields, copses, thick ancient hedgerows and marshy ground.

Over 40% of the county of Dorset, including the trail, falls within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This national designation recognises the importance of the landscape and helps to protect and enhance this unique and beautiful landscape now and for future generations.



Marshwood Vale



Local History

The Wessex Ridgeway forms part of the Great Ridgeway. This ancient highway was once thought to be an important trading route between the Devon and Norfolk coasts. The high, dry ground made travel easy and allowed traders to see any approaching attackers.

Evidence of the past is visible all along the route. Neolithic causewayed camps and long barrows along with Bronze Age barrows dot the hilltops and magnificent Iron Age hillforts such as Hambleton Hill **6**, Hod Hill **8**, Rawlsbury Camp **14** and Pilsdon Pen **39** dominate the landscape.

Remnants of prehistoric field systems, Roman forts and Medieval settlements and strip lynchets straddling the slopes are visible along the trail. Many of the historical features along the trail have been designated as scheduled monuments, recognising their national importance and preserving them for the future.



NEOLITHIC – EARLY FARMERS

From 4300 to 3500 BC, the local people started to adopt more fixed styles of farming and moved away from the hunter-gatherer way of life. Neolithic man started to use stone to make tools and weapons and here in Dorset the local stone was flint. This was used to make arrowheads and tools such as knives and axes. The only surviving evidence along the trail from this time is causewayed camps and long barrows **6**. These are burial mounds surrounded by a ditch and are between 33 feet (30 metres) and 66 feet (60 metres) long. The best example is on Hambleton Hill **6**.

BRONZE AGE – ROUND BARROWS AND FIELD SYSTEMS

Before the Iron Age, the main surviving evidence of prehistoric man came from their burials and how they farmed. Important people from this time were buried in round barrows placed high up on the hills. You can also see remnants of their prehistoric field systems.

IRON AGE

The Iron Age people probably lived in large groups called tribes. The local tribe here in Dorset was known by the Romans as the Durotriges.

During the Iron Age, large hillforts constructed of deep ditches and large towering 'v' shaped banks called ramparts were built. These still look impressive today, even after 2,000 years of erosion. The purpose of hillforts has long been debated between archaeologists. Suggestions include providing places of safety for people and livestock when under



Hambleton Hill

Local History

siege from neighbouring settlements or from wolves. The hillforts may have also been a symbol of power for a local chief or used to control important trade routes. There are 27 hillforts in Dorset and seven can be found along the trail.

ROMAN OCCUPATION

In 43 AD, the Roman Emperor Claudius invaded Britain so he could expand the Roman Empire. When the Second Legion Augusta led by Vespasian entered the Durotrigian territory, they advanced west building forts like the one on Hod Hill **8** and Waddon Hill **35** to keep the local people under control.

SAXONS

After the collapse of the Roman occupation around 410 AD the local population went back to a more rural lifestyle similar to that of the Iron Age. Around 700 AD, the area was incorporated into the Saxon kingdom of Wessex and many settlements and villages were established that are still present today.

MIDDLE AGES

During the Middle Ages, farming continued to be one of the most important livelihoods in Dorset. Traces of Medieval farming practices still exist today in the form of strip lynchets. These were artificial terraces

created so the steep-sided slopes could be ploughed. The best examples are around the Dorsetshire Gap **15** and Plush **19**. Medieval drovers probably used the Wessex Ridgeway to move livestock such as geese, sheep and cattle from the West Country to the Home Counties to sell.

More information about the past history of the Wessex Ridgeway is included in each section as well as in the 'Local History along the Wessex Ridgeway' leaflet available from local tourist information centres (TIC) or free to download from the website.



Milton Abbey

TIMELINE

NEOLITHIC
4000 BC – 2300 BC

BRONZE AGE
2300 BC – 750 BC

IRON AGE
750 BC TO 43 AD

ROMAN
43 AD TO 410 AD

POST-ROMAN & SAXON
410 AD TO 1066 AD

MIDDLE AGES
1066 AD TO 1500 AD

POST-MEDIEVAL
1500 AD ONWARDS



Art - Creative Footsteps

Local poet James Crowden has walked the Wessex Ridgeway and reflects some of its history, geography and natural history in his poems. Poignant verse from these poems has been integrated into 10 specially commissioned sculptures and installations by local artists. Further information on these sculptures is included under each chapter of the trail.

The sculptures can be seen at Ashmore, Ringmoor, Melcombe Horsey, Minterne Parva, Maiden Newton, Kingcombe Centre, Beaminster, Pilsdon Pen and Lyme Regis. In addition, dotted along the trail is a series of log boxes containing poems written by school children and participants of writing workshops led by James Crowden.

A soundscape by David Rogers featuring sounds recorded along the Dorset section of the Wessex Ridgeway is available at www.dorsetforyou.com/wessexridgeway and within the Creative Footsteps guide.

The Creative Footsteps publication featuring information on the commissioned sculptures, photographs by Catherine Batten and poems by James Crowden is available from Artsreach, The Little Keep, Bridport Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1SQ. Telephone 01305 269512 or visit www.artsreach.co.uk



Ashmore



Minterne Parva

WESSEX RIDGEWAY

From Ashmore to Lyme chalk at its very best, long ridge
Narrow sheep walks laden with orchids, early purple
Flint and cowslip stretch the clouds
Down to the coast skylark's flute
Haven of hollows wait for the footfall
Inspiration lurking just beneath the surface
Small postcards fertile ground
Odd jottings sent home ideas strung out into poems
Invisible footsteps in time with the seasons
Memory embedded each path an invitation
Etched into the hill's brow generations of names
Dark silhouettes that worked the land
Fieldwork and furrows hedge, ditch, gate and copse
Fluid language, landscape the earth tamed, rural matters.



Hambleton Hill




The Trail in detail

The following sections provide further information on the trail. These include detailed maps highlighted with the places of interest.

Tollard Royal & Ashmore to Iwerne Courtney

9.5 miles (15.0 km)   

6.0 miles (9.5 km) 

 118

 ST 898 144



WESSEX RIDGEWAY – WILTSHIRE 1

From Ashmore the Wessex Ridgeway continues onto Marlborough. This section of the trail is promoted primarily as a walking route but can be used by horse riders and cyclists in places. For the more energetic you can continue from Marlborough along the 'Great Ridgeway' to the Norfolk coast using the Wessex Ridgeway, Ridgeway National Trail, Icknield Way and Peddars Way – approximately 370 miles (600 km) in total.

TOLLARD ROYAL 2

The multi-use section of the trail starts here in this pretty village just over the border into Wiltshire. The small pond is a charming feature of the village along with the Church of St. Peter with its unusual fish motif church gates.

CRANBORNE CHASE

The Cranborne Chase was once a Medieval royal hunting ground subject to forest law and administered by the Lord of the Chase. By ancient custom all wild beasts within these areas belonged



Adonis Blue butterfly



to the monarch. This ensured they could breed and feed undisturbed. Covering an area of over 250,000 acres (101,250 hectares) between the Rivers Stour, Nadder, Allen and Crane, this area of high rolling downland and woodland is now protected as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

ASHMORE 3

This isolated hilltop village is the highest in Dorset. Sitting 700 feet (213 metres) above sea level, this quaint village is surrounded by woodland and has a large pond at its centre believed to be Roman in origin. The pond is encircled with attractive flint and brick houses. Beside the pond is the first of the *Creative Footsteps'* commissioned pieces. This beautiful stone bench has been designed and carved by Rachel Jackson and provides a welcome rest spot.

Just south of Ashmore the walking route and multi-use route join in Ashmore Woods before going in separate directions towards Iwerne Courtney.



Ashmore



HARBIN'S PARK 4

The multi-use route passes through Harbin's Park, which was once a Medieval deer park covering 115 acres (47 hectares), features of which are still visible today. The deer park was more or less rectangular in shape and surrounded by a bank up to 16 feet (5 metres) wide and 5 feet (1.5 metres) high and a ditch over 15 feet (4.5 metres) wide.

SHROTON OR IWERNE COURTNEY 5

The walking route passes through the village of Shroton or Iwerne Courtney. The name Shroton comes from Old English meaning 'sheriff's farm or estate', the Domesday Book manor belonging to Baldwin of Exeter, sheriff of Devon. From the early 13th century the Earls of Devon, the Courtenays, lived here hence the present alternative name Iwerne Courtney meaning 'Estate on the River Iwerne belonging to the Courtenay family'.



Fallow Buck (male)



Iwerne Courtney to Ibberton



6.5 miles (10.5 km)   



118 & 117



ST 825 096



HAMBLEDON HILL

As well as an Iron Age hillfort, Hambledon Hill is scattered with evidence dating from Neolithic times. These include two causewayed camps, a long barrow and numerous cross dykes. It is thought that causewayed camps were the first 'enclosures' of land. They were settlements, ritual or burial sites encircled by ditches with causeways at regular intervals. It is suggested the two camps here served different purposes – one for rituals and feasts and the other potentially a settlement. Finds from the site include broken flint tools, pottery and animal bones along with three human skeletons.

There are also long barrows here, which are communal burials. It is thought that when people died they were moved to special locations where their bodies were exposed on platforms raised above the ground. Once the bodies were reduced to bones they were moved to an adjacent mortuary house. This continued until the mortuary house was full. Earth was then piled on top and a mound was created forming a long barrow. There are 250 to 300 surviving long barrows in England with the majority in Wessex.

HAMBLEDON HILL NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

In addition to its rich historical past, 180 acres (73 hectares) of Hambledon Hill's dramatic Chalk grassland has been designated as a

National Nature Reserve, owned and managed by Natural England. During spring and summer this site has a stunning display of butterflies including Dingy Skipper, Marbled White and Chalkhill Blue. There is also an array of wildflowers including orchids and rare species such as Bastard Toadflax, Meadow Saxifrage and Early Gentian.



Marbled White butterfly



River Stour

HOD HILL 8

Hod Hill was occupied during the Bronze Age but was abandoned until the Iron Age. Hod Hill is the largest hillfort in Dorset covering 54 acres (22 hectares). The earthworks from both the Iron Age and Roman conquest are still visible. Hod Hill is unusual in Dorset as it has five entrances through the ramparts. Two were created in the Iron Age, two during the Roman conquest and one from Medieval times. During the Iron Age families lived in round thatched houses. In the southern corner of Hod Hill you can see the hollow circles in the grass that are thought to be the remains of these houses.

Around 44 AD the north west corner of the hillfort was reused as a military base by the conquering Roman army. The fort built here had three entrance gates each with a watchtower and a platform for artillery. Excavations of the barrack blocks reveal that a legionary of 600 men and a cavalry unit of 250 were garrisoned here. The fort also had a granary, storehouse, hospital, commander's house, toilets and a large water tank. Finds from excavations suggest the Romans occupied the fort for about 10 years.

RIVER STOUR 9

The River Stour is a Chalk stream which rises at Stourhead in Wiltshire and continues for 65 miles (105 km) to join the sea in Christchurch Harbour. It is a haven for wildlife such as Kingfishers, Scarce Chaser dragonflies and a large number of visiting birds. There is also a wealth of wildflowers in the surrounding meadows including Oxeye Daisy, orchids and the unusual Corky-fruited Water Dropwort. This magnificent river can be explored using the Stour Valley Way (see page 56).

SHILLINGSTONE WOODS 10

Owned and managed by the Forestry Commission, these woods are undergoing a change from more intensive forestry operations mainly producing softwood to deciduous woodland with a higher wildlife value. There are many public rights of way crisscrossing the site providing



plenty of opportunity for exploration. The woodland is at its best during late spring when the bright green of the fresh Beech leaves contrast with the blue hue created by the mass of bluebells covering the forest floor.

OFF-ROAD MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTE ①

For the more enthusiastic mountain bikers there is a purpose built off-road mountain biking route within Shillingstone Woods. For more information visit www.ukbikepark.com

WIDE-RANGING VIEWS

Along the trail between Okeford Hill picnic site and Ibberton there are magnificent views across the Blackmore Vale to Stourhead, King Alfred's Tower, Shaftesbury, Duncliffe Hill, Fontmell Down and Win Green in Wiltshire. On a clear day you can sometimes see the outline of the Quantocks and Exmoor hills in the far distance.

TURNWORTH / RINGMOOR ②

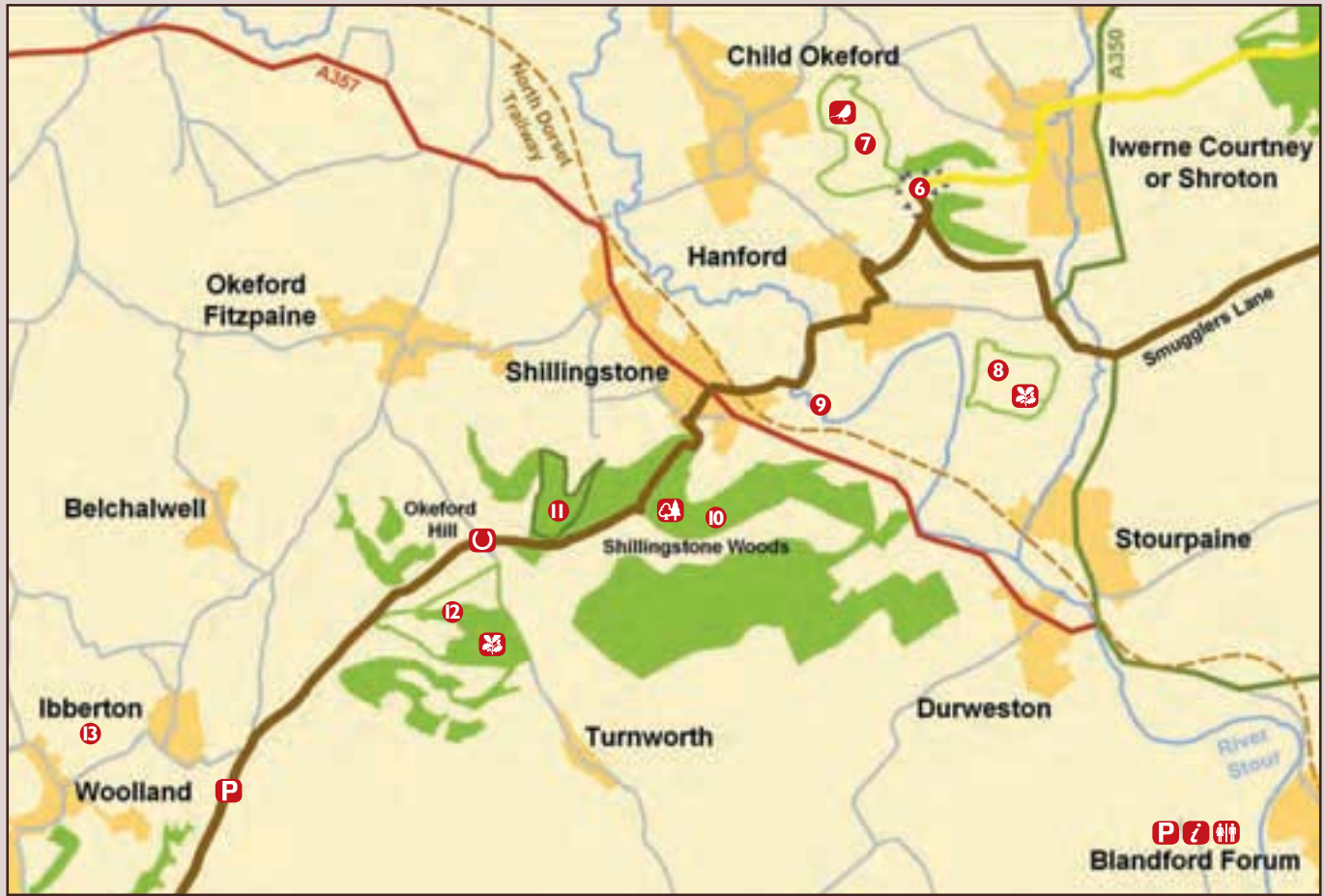
Between Okeford Hill picnic site and Woolland Hill you pass Ringmoor. This small Romano-British settlement is owned by the National Trust and can be accessed by a small gate from the trail. Through the gate is a lovely old dew pond that was once used as a watering hole for animals using this drover's track. Situated by the pond are four oak

posts designed and carved by Andrew Whittle as part of the Creative Footsteps project.

IBBERTON ③




Just off the trail is the village of Ibberton, sitting on the edge of the Chalk ridge overlooking the Blackmore Vale. The village church rests on a ledge just above the village. It is lucky the church was not demolished, as in 1892 it was in such poor condition that services were moved to a temporary corrugated iron building until the church was restored in 1903. The temporary church still survives today and is now the village hall.





Ibberton to Folly and Plush



6.0 miles (9.5 km)   



117



ST 755 050



On a clear day along the whole of this section, you can enjoy spectacular views reaching out across the Blackmore Vale as far as King Alfred's Tower and southwards along the English Channel to the Isle of Wight.

RAWLSBURY CAMP

This Iron Age hillfort dominates the edge of the hillside as you leave the road near Bulbarrow, the second highest hill in Dorset. This hill has been used for thousands of years, first as a hillfort then as a site for one of the Armada Beacons in 1588. These were used to warn of an impending attack by Spain. Later on this site was used as part of a chain of hilltop telegraph stations running across Dorset during the Napoleonic Wars. Today this site is home to a rough cross that sits within the fort.

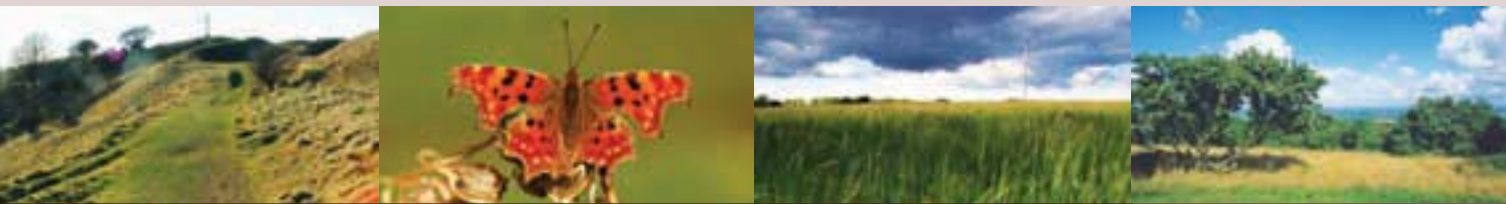
On your way to the Dorsetshire Gap there is an opportunity to rest and picnic at the large oak bench designed and made by Reg Budd, another *Creative Footsteps'* commissioned artist.

DORSETSHIRE GAP

This mysterious junction of five tracks with its steep man-made cuttings lies at the edge of the Higher Melcombe estate. The Dorsetshire Gap has been an important road crossing since the Middle Ages right



View from above Ibberton



through to the 19th century. All around this site there is evidence from before this time from hilltop cross dykes, burial mounds and traces of an unfinished Iron Age hillfort at Nettlecombe Tout **17** to the remnants of a Medieval settlement in the valley below.

For many years visitors to the Dorsetshire Gap have been putting their thoughts on paper in a visitor's book kept at the Gap. The book can be found hidden in the base of the information panel where the five trackways join.

MELCOMBE PARK – DEER PARK? **16**

Just north of the trail lies Melcombe Park. This woodland is believed to be a deer park whose boundary follows the trail from Breach Wood to the Dorsetshire Gap. The deer park dates from around 1580 and was built by Sir John Horsey. However deer parks date broadly from the Medieval period and were areas of woodland and open grassland that were enclosed by a ditch and bank to keep deer in. This was very much a status symbol for the aristocracy. Although many are unused today, evidence of these deer parks is still visible all along the trail.

FOLLY **18**

In the past this private house was once the Folly Inn, used as a resting place for Medieval drovers when moving animals along the network of old drove roads, including the Wessex Ridgeway.



Bench, Breach Wood



PLUSH

High above Plush beside the trail are surviving traces of small rectangular fields, which are part of a prehistoric (pre 43 AD) field system. These once covered large parts of southern England but are now only visible in places that survived ploughing during the Medieval period. There is also a square Celtic encampment visible near the edge of Watcombe Wood. Strip lynchets dating from Medieval times straddle the hillsides around Plush and Lyscombe Farm. These were artificial terraces created so the steep-sided slopes could be ploughed.




You can visit the village of Plush and the Brace of Pheasants pub by taking the bridleway that runs down through the valley from the trail just above Alton Pancras.




Fallow deer



Folly to Sydling St. Nicholas

10.0 miles (16.0 km)   

10.5 miles (17.0 km) 

 117

 ST 675 029



WESSEX RIDGEWAY FARM WALKS

Stretching over 12 miles (18 km) the Wessex Ridgeway Farm Walks provide a rare opportunity to explore this fascinating area around Bookham, Alton Pancras, Buckland Newton and Plush (page 58).

MINTERNE PARVA

Following the track from Giants Head to Minterne Parva, you will notice a small round building on your left believed locally to be an 18th century cockfighting ring. A little further along the road on your right are the remains of a water mill and on your left a sheepwash. Look out for a series of slate posts created by Rachel Jackson as part of the Creative Footsteps project. Carved on them are the local field names found on an old map from 1728, courtesy of Lord and Lady Digby.

CERNE ABBAS

The village of Cerne Abbas is situated just off the trail and is well worth a visit. Its quaint streets, Medieval houses, early Christian wishing well, remains of a Benedictine Abbey and the Giant, make this one of the most popular villages in Dorset.

HILLFIELD HILL

This meadow and woodland site is owned and managed by Dorset Countryside. As well as a variety of routes around the site there are two

'Picture Trek' countryside-based activity trails for children. See page 57 for more information.

SYDLING ST. NICHOLAS

Before continuing along the Chalk ridge the trail drops down through Sydling St. Nicholas with its charming thatched cottages constructed with bands of Flint and stone. The Sydling Water runs through the village on its way southwards to meet the River Frome at Grimstone. As you pass through the village look out for the Yew trees in the churchyard that are said to be over 1,000 years old.






View from Farm Walk



Sydling St. Nicholas to Lower Kingcombe



6.0 miles (9.5 km)   



117



SY 596 977



Between Sydling St. Nicholas and Maiden Newton the route takes you through magnificent Chalk downland scenery with wide-ranging views and the imposing Rampisham masts in the distance.

HOG CLIFF NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

This 210-acre (85-hectare) steep Chalk downland site is managed by Natural England as a National Nature Reserve. Accessible from the trail just south of the A37, the reserve is at its best in spring and early summer when it is home to a wealth of grasses, herbs, wildflowers and butterflies.

MAIDEN NEWTON

Here the walking route and multi-use route temporarily split. The walking route passes the Medieval church of St. Mary with its original Norman door, believed to be the oldest door in England. The route then continues through the water meadows, past three carved posts created by Andrew Whittle before exiting near Chilfrome Church. If you are following the multi-use route through the village, keep your eyes peeled for the Medieval cross in the middle of the village. The village lies between the Rivers Hooke and Frome. During the winter, especially after heavy rain, the water meadows often flood making the walking route impassable, however the multi-use route is not affected.

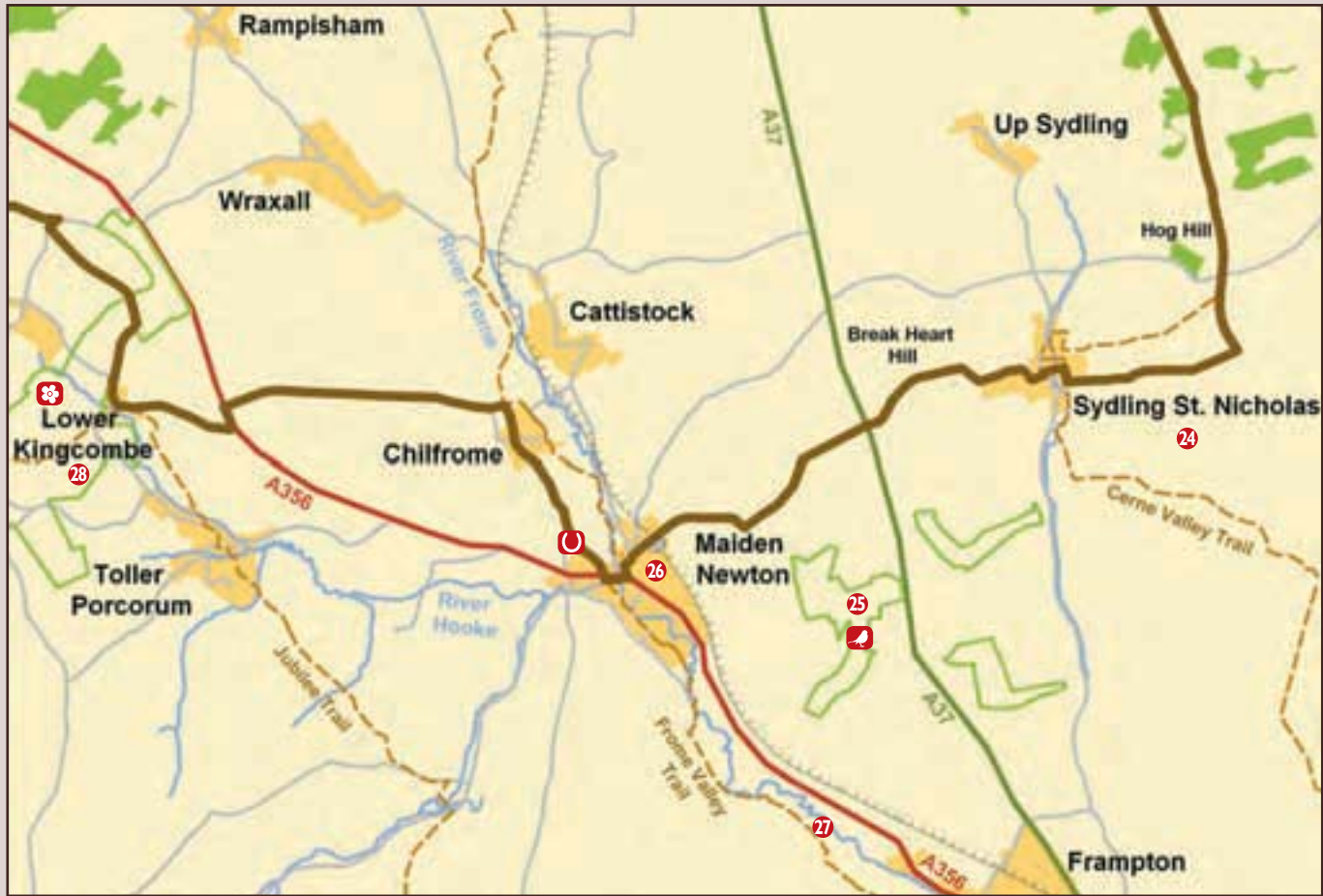
RIVER FROME

This Chalk stream starts at Evershot and runs for 35 miles (56 km) before reaching the sea at Poole Harbour. It is home to Kingfisher, Brown Trout, Marsh Marigold, Water Crowfoot and many beautiful damselflies and dragonflies. The best way to see this wildlife and follow the course of the river is by following the Frome Valley Trail (see page 58).

LOWER KINGCOMBE


This small hamlet, nestled by the River Hooke, is home to the Kingcombe Centre. This famous nature reserve was created in 1987 to preserve the unimproved grassland that is rich in wildlife and the unaltered old-fashioned field systems. There are a variety of picturesque and fascinating walks around this 400-acre reserve. Within the gardens beside the pond is a 'cast' fawn, a young deer created by Jonathan Fry for Creative Footsteps.






Sydling St. Nicholas to Lower Kingcombe

Lower Kingcombe to Beaminster

7.0 miles (11.5 km) to Buckham Down   

7.5 miles (12.0 km) 

 117

 ST 520 013



KINGCOMBE MEADOWS RESERVE

A visit to this Dorset Wildlife Trust reserve is like stepping back in time. The 437-acre (177-hectare) reserve is still managed as a working farm, grazed with cattle and sheep and without the use of artificial fertilisers and sprays. The resulting patchwork of small fields, thick hedgerows, ponds, streams and wooded areas beside the River Hooke is a haven for wildlife. This includes many common wildflowers but also Lady's Mantle, Corky-fruited Water Dropwort and Pepper Saxifrage as well as many varieties of skipper and fritillary butterflies.

RAMPISHAM MASTS

This transmitter site covering over 189 acres (77 hectares) with its 36 antennas dominates the landscape for miles around. The tall metal pillars and web of wires broadcast BBC World Service across the world and other broadcasts to South America and the Falklands.



Marsh Fritillary butterfly



HOOKE 30

This pretty village is situated beside the River Hooke and has a large pond lined with trees near its centre. Nearby is Hooke Park Forest, a 350-acre (142-hectare) site that is home to a working woodland centre and college run by the Architectural Association. A public bridleway runs through the centre of the forest, which is at its best during late spring when the bright green of the fresh Beech leaves contrasts with the bluebells covering the floor beneath.

BUCKHAM DOWN 31

This former rubbish dump has been transformed into a picnic site and wildlife reserve. A small car park provides parking for cars only. Here the multi-use route continues along the ridge above Beaminster on its way to Broadwindsor while the walking route turns left downhill into Beaminster.



Rampisham masts



BEAMINSTER 32

This small rural town is well worth a detour. It offers a host of places to eat or to collect supplies and has many small, traditional shops. Try exploring the side streets to see some of the handsome, creamy-orange stone houses and cottages or visit the Church of St. Mary, the town's oldest surviving building. Beaminster and its surrounding countryside have long been the subject of poetry and stories. William Barnes, the county's great 19th century rural poet wrote:

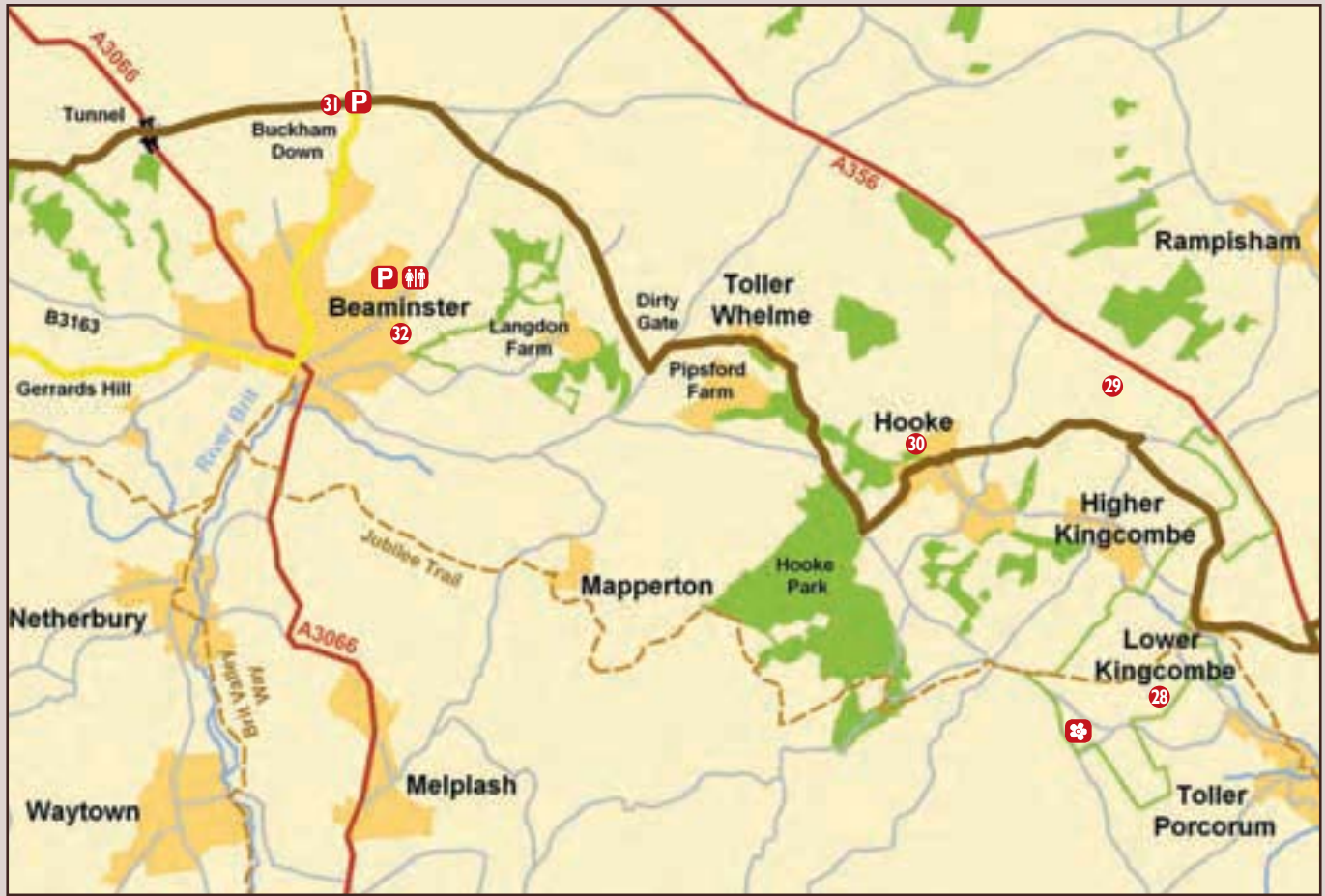
'Sweet Be'mi'ster, that was bist a-bound
By green and woody hills all round,
Wi' hedges, reachen up between
A thousand yields o' zummer green.'

The town also features as 'Emminster' in Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Beaminster has had a long history of flooding as the River Brit runs close by. From Beaminster you can journey along the Brit Valley Way and linking River Parrett Trail to the Bristol Channel or you can travel southwards to the English Channel at West Bay. See page 58 for more information.




Hooke Park



Beaminster to Pilsdon Pen

4.5 miles (7.0 km) Buckham Down to Swilletts Farm   

5.5 miles (9.0 km) 




117 & 116



ST 445 015



PUCKETTS WOOD

As you start to walk back up onto the ridge westwards of Beaminster you enter Pucketts Wood, which is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust. In the wood beside the trail is a curious sculpture, created by Caroline Sharp, which reflects Beaminster's prosperous past in the manufacture of cloth, rope and twine made from flax and hemp. The sculpture of a woven spiral encircles an oak marker post and incorporates a rope that reflects the local practice of picking oakum. This involved untwisting old ropes (oakum) that would then be used for caulking the seams or the spaces between the planks of a ship. This was common employment for prisons and workhouses. The Beaminster Union Workhouse was situated nearby at Stoke Water .

WADDON HILL

The lumps and bumps on this hill form part of a Roman fort, which is thought to have been a base for the Roman advance of the Second Legion. A Roman sword scabbard and coins were found here during quarrying between 1876 and 1878. Other artefacts found here include a bronze brooch now in Poole Museum, legionary equipment and 115 shards of glass, pottery, animal and fish bones.



Gerrards Hill



STOKE ABBOTT 36

In the centre of the village is an oak tree planted in 1901. There is also a stone trough fed by a spring for horses and another spring fed through a lion's head for humans, although this is not recommended.

BROADWINDSOR 37

During the Civil War and following the execution of his father King Charles, Charles II tried to flee the country. After being unable to leave he decided to head back to Trent. As darkness fell on the 23rd September 1651 Charles II found himself in an attic room at the Castle Inn in Broadwindsor. As night drew on the peace was shattered by a troop of Roundhead soldiers who wanted to stay at the Inn. They occupied all the rooms on the ground floor trapping Charles II above. He only escaped detection when one of the women travelling with the soldiers gave birth. This created a distraction for the soldiers until the morning when they left. Eventually Charles II made his way to the Sussex coast where he escaped to France. Part of the building including the King's room was destroyed by fire in 1856 however a tablet on the wall of the adjacent cottage bears the inscription 'King Charles II slept here'.

LEWESDON HILL 38

Surrounded by woodland, Lewesdon Hill at 915 feet (279 metres)

is the highest point in Dorset. It is owned by the National Trust and is the site of an Iron Age hillfort. These hillforts vary in size and are surrounded by large banks and ditches. Today parts of this original bank and ditch are still visible even though it has been disturbed by gravel digging and timber removal. In more recent times Lewesdon Hill was the site for one of the Armada Beacons in 1588 and was used to warn of an impending attack by Spain.





PILSDON PEN 39

Pilsdon Pen has a long history of being occupied. Flint tools found dating from Neolithic times and the two Bronze Age burial mounds show the site was used long before the Iron Age hillfort still visible today.

In 1066 when the Normans invaded they brought with them the delicacy of eating rabbits. These were reared in fenced areas called warrens. Both Coney's Castle and Pilsdon Pen could have had rabbit warrens. In the early 17th century documentary evidence suggests a lodge on top of the fort was a local landmark. Earth mounds in the centre could have been constructed as rabbit warrens and the lodge used by the keeper. There is no sign of a lodge today but it was probably near the site of the concrete triangulation point. During 1803 Pilsdon Pen was listed as a Beacon site designed to provide advance warning of the arrival of Napoleon's fleet.

Today Pilsdon Pen is owned by The National Trust. You can explore the hillfort on foot and it is well worth a short detour off the trail. From the top there are magnificent views of the Marshwood Vale, Golden Cap and the sea to the south, Hardy's Monument to the east, Exmoor and the Quantocks to the west and Polden and Mendip Hills to the north. You can also see several other hillforts including Lewesdon Hill, Lambert's Castle 43 and Coney's Castle 44.



Pilsdon Pen



Pilsdon Pen to Champernhayes



8.5 miles (13.0 km) Swillets Farm onwards



116

SY 389 990



MARSHWOOD VALE 40

From Pilsdon Pen the trail passes down through this intimate and varied landscape on its journey to Champernhayes. The rolling patchwork of fields and bowl-shaped clay vales surrounded by irregular shaped hills gives this area a distinctive appearance. The pastoral fields are scattered with ribbons of woodland and small copses and the River Char winds its way southwards to meet the sea at Charmouth.

During the Iron Age the Marshwood Vale provided fertile land to grow crops, timber for houses and fuel for fires. It also provided animals to hunt and eat. The land was farmed and used to grow wheat, barley, peas, lentils and beans. The Iron Age people also reared sheep, pigs and cattle and kept horses for pulling carts or chariots in battle. Today the Marshwood Vale still provides fertile land for growing crops and rearing animals for food.

FISHPOND BOTTOM 41

Here at Fishpond Bottom the two routes cross over. The walking route travels northwards over Lambert's Castle 43 and southwards over Coney's Castle to Lyme Regis. However the walking, riding and cycling route continues through this small village perched on the edge of the Marshwood Vale and onto Champernhayes.



Gate, near Pilsdon Pen



Pilsdon Pen to Lyme Regis

14.5 miles (23.5 km) 

 116

 SY 370 983



VIEWS

From this section there are stunning views across Dorset, Somerset and Devon. To the south you can see the Marshwood Vale, Golden Cap and the English Channel. Eastwards is Chesil Bank stretching along the coast and Hardy's Monument and Rampisham masts in the distance. To the west lies Dartmoor, Exmoor and the Quantocks and northwards are the Polden and Mendip Hills.

FORDE ABBEY

This magnificent house, formerly a Cistercian monastery, and its picturesque gardens are just off the trail near Thorncombe. In 1141 twelve Cistercian monks were offered the manor of Thorncombe where they built a monastery. The only surviving building from this time is the present day chapel and the dormitory range behind. The Abbot's Hall and cloisters were built just before the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 when the monastery was turned into a house. Forde Abbey is surrounded by 40 acres (16 hectares) of garden, parkland and an arboretum providing interest for visitors all year round. There are also several ponds, originally monastic fishponds, and an impressive bog garden. The beautiful house and gardens are open to the public. Visit www.fordeabbey.co.uk for more information.

MONARCH'S WAY

This 615-mile (990-km) long-distance footpath links with the Wessex Ridgeway near Thorncombe. The Monarch's Way roughly follows the escape route taken by King Charles II in 1651 after being defeated in the Battle of Worcester.

LIBERTY TRAIL

This is a 28-mile (45-km) walk from Ham Hill in Somerset to Lyme Regis. The Liberty Trail follows the route taken by villagers from throughout Somerset and Dorset who were making their way to the coast at Lyme to join the Duke of Monmouth. For more information see page 59.

LAMBERT'S CASTLE

Like Pilsdon Pen this early Iron Age hillfort with a single ditch and bank (rampart) also has a rich and varied past. Between 1709 and 1947 an annual fair was held here on the Wednesday before the feast of St. John the Baptist on 24th June. You can still see the imprint of the fair house and the low banks marking the livestock pens or market stalls. During the 18th century there was also a horse-racing track built as part of the fair. This is still visible today to the south west of the hillfort straddling the Wessex Ridgeway.



In 1806, in response to the threat of a Napoleonic invasion from France, an admiralty telegraph station was erected here at Lambert's Castle. It was part of a chain of signal posts from the main fleet stationed in Plymouth to the Admiralty in London. Messages were sent using a system of six shutters mounted on the roof of a signal building. In good conditions a message could be relayed from Plymouth to the Admiralty in 20 minutes. By the end of the Napoleonic war in 1816 this system was proved unreliable in strong winds and was replaced by the two-arm semaphore system and later, the electric telegraph.

Today, Lambert's Castle is looked after by The National Trust. This large flat plateau of Greensand is capped with a thin layer of gravel, sand and flint, providing the ideal conditions for wildlife usually found on the extensive heathlands of east Dorset. These include Silver Birch, Ling, Bell Heather and Silver-washed Fritillary butterfly.

CONEY'S CASTLE 44

This Iron Age hillfort is completely different in character to Lambert's Castle. Coney's is unusual in that its ramparts encircle two separate areas, one much larger than the other. This may have been a larger hillfort that has been reduced in size, a smaller hillfort extended

or possibly it was part of the original design. The larger area may have been for important buildings, or had religious significance; alternatively it may have been one area for people and the other for livestock or crops.

Both Coney's and Lambert's Castles may have been built as border posts between the neighbouring tribes the Durotriges (eastwards) and the Dumnonii (south west) or as status symbols for local chiefs. They could also have been used to control important trackways and trade routes as they are well situated to defend the coastline and the Marshwood Vale where they farmed.

The name Coney's could come from 'Konung', the Anglo-Saxon word for king, but this is unlikely as the site is too small to be a castle for the king. The other meaning of Coney's, referring to an area full of rabbits, is more likely as Coney's Castle, along with Pilsdon Pen **39** was a site of a warren used for rearing rabbits for eating.

LYME REGIS 45

Just north of Lyme Regis the trail runs beside the River Lim taking you towards this charming seaside town and the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site. On entering the town the first point



of interest is the Town Mill with its long Medieval leat adjacent to the trail. The mill has recently been restored to full working order and is well worth a visit. The trail finishes on the seafront and from here you can explore the town or continue to walk along the coastline following the South West Coast Path (page 59).

In the distance you can see the Cobb, the town's artificial harbour. It was first built in the 13th century and was completely detached from land. This allowed Lyme Regis to develop as a town and commercial port. In 1756 the Cobb was joined to the land and in the 1820s was rebuilt using Portland stone. A walk along the Cobb is a must for any visitor.

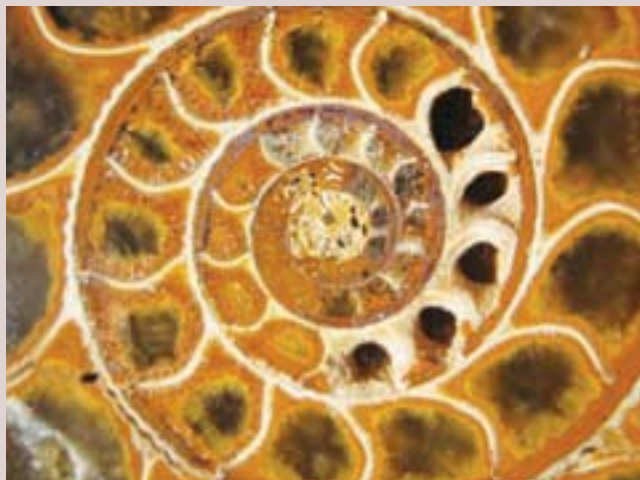
In 1811 Lyme Regis was put on the map when 12-year-old Mary Anning unearthed the first complete skeleton of an ichthyosaur at Black Ven. It took around ten years to uncover it completely and it is now displayed in the Natural History Museum in London. Lyme Regis has also been made famous by Jane Austen and more recently by John Fowles in his book 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'.

The town itself is a maze of narrow winding streets containing local shops, cafés and galleries. All over the town there are superb views of Golden Cap and along Chesil Beach towards Portland. On a clear day you can see for miles along the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.





The Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site is England's first natural world heritage site designated as a place of 'outstanding universal value'. Known as the Jurassic Coast, this 95-mile (153-km) stretch of coastline charts 185 million years of the earth's history through the rocks you can see. For more information visit www.jurassiccoast.com





The Cobb, Lyme Regis



Useful Info

The following section provides additional information including linking trails, other places to visit, a distance calculator and local facilities.

Linking Trails and Walks

For more information on these trails visit www.dorsetforyou.com/wessexridgeway

WESSEX RIDGEWAY (WILTSHIRE SECTION)

From the Dorset and Wiltshire border the Wessex Ridgeway continues through the Cranborne Chase and Salisbury Plain to Marlborough – a total of 127 miles (204 km). Here the trail joins the Ridgeway National Trail and along with the Icknield Way and Peddars Way, form the Great Ridgeway (page 8).

RIDGEWAY NATIONAL TRAIL

This ancient trackway is described as Britain's oldest road. The 85-mile (137-km) trail goes between Overton near Avebury and Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire. Like the Wessex Ridgeway this trail hugs the ridge tops across southern England and is scattered with many Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age sites. For more information visit www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway

ICKNIELD WAY PATH

This 100-mile (160-km) route starts at Ivinghoe Beacon and runs to Knettishall Heath where it joins the Peddars Way. For more information visit www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk

PEDDARS WAY

This National Trail is 46 miles (74 km) long and follows the route of an old Roman road, starting at Knettishall Heath in Suffolk and linking with the Norfolk Coast Path at Holme-next-the-Sea. For more information visit www.nationaltrail.co.uk/peddarsway

STOUR VALLEY WAY

This 64-mile (103-km) long-distance path follows the River Stour from its source at Stourhead to the sea at Christchurch; it is marked with a distinctive Kingfisher logo.

NORTH DORSET TRAILWAY

This route is being developed by Dorset Countryside along the old Somerset and Dorset Railway line which closed in 1966. It takes you through some of North Dorset's spectacular countryside, towns and villages with views of Hambleton Hill and the meandering River Stour.



Sturminster Newton

NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK (NCN)

The Wessex Ridgeway links with a number of National Cycle Network (NCN) routes. These long-distance routes include NCN routes 2, 25 and 26. They vary in length and between on and off road. The trail also links with the regional route 41, a circular road route which links Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Farnham, Blandford Forum and Sturminster Newton. For more information visit www.sustrans.org.uk

PICTURE TREK – COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITY TRAILS

Looking for a family day out with a difference? Set in the heart of some of Dorset's most beautiful countryside, these seven short circular countryside activity trails have been specifically designed for children. The trails are at Milton Abbas, Shillingstone Woods, Bookham, Hilfield Hill Local Nature Reserve and Lambert's Castle. Hidden around each route are small rubbing plaques each with a picture of an animal, bird, flower, historical building or mythical creature. With just a couple of wax crayons and a few thin sheets of paper fabulous pictures can easily be created. These can then be turned into a fantastic poster when you get home or on some of the trails, the pictures can be pieced together to reveal the location of hidden treasure!

MILTON ABBAS HERITAGE HIKE

This 3½-mile (5-km) walk starts and finishes in the quaint and picturesque Milton Abbas. This village was designed around 1780 by famous landscape designer Capability Brown who helped to plan the layout of the village, surrounding gardens and woods. As well as the village, the route takes in St. Catherine's Chapel and magnificent views of Milton Abbey and Milton Abbey School, previously a monastery and a



Milton Abbas

Linking Trails and Walks

stately home. You also pass the lake, site of the former village of Middleton that was destroyed and parts moved to the main village of Milton Abbas.

WESSEX RIDGEWAY FARM WALKS

Stretching over 12 miles (18 km) the Wessex Ridgeway Farm Walks provide a rare opportunity to explore the fascinating area around Bookham, Alton Pancras, Buckland Newton and Plush. There are a series of waymarked routes starting from various locations in Buckland Newton, Plush, Sharnhill Green, Bookham and Lyscombe Farm. Around each walk are local information points about each farm, the wildlife, landscape and archaeology. The high points of the walks are a hide with a difference and the recently renovated 12th century chapel at Lyscombe Farm.

CERNE VALLEY TRAIL

This 26-mile (42-km) circular walk follows the River Cerne and takes in the hamlets and villages of Minterne Magna, Cerne Abbas, Nether Cerne, Godmanstone, Forston and Charminster. Along the route you can see Britain's largest hill figure, the Cerne Giant, and visit Hillfield Hill Local Nature Reserve.

FROME VALLEY TRAIL

Starting at Evershot, this 16-mile (26-km) trail meanders close to the River Frome towards Poole Harbour. The route passes through Maiden Newton, Bradford Peverell, Charminster and Dorchester. Along the way a wealth of wildlife found in and beside the river can be seen. This includes the iridescent flash of a Kingfisher, the bright yellow



Milton Abbey

Marsh Marigold, Water Crowfoot and Brown Trout. At present the trail finishes at Dorchester but there are plans to extend the route to Poole Harbour.

BRIT VALLEY WAY AND SEVEN BRIT VALLEY CIRCULAR WALKS

The Brit Valley lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with the meandering River Brit forming the central feature in this gentle, rural landscape. Small towns and villages can be discovered along the route such as West Bay, Bridport, Beaminster, Netherbury and Chedington. The 11-mile (18-km) linear trail can be walked in one go or enjoyed in short sections using one of the circular walks.

JUBILEE TRAIL

This 90-mile (145 km) trail winds across the county from Forde Abbey on the Somerset border across Dorset to Bokerley Dyke on

the Hampshire border. The trail was created by local Ramblers to celebrate the Association's 60th anniversary in 1995. It winds through quiet villages, passing rural churches and offers extensive views over the rolling downs and secret valleys that make Dorset so special. For more information visit www.southdorsetramblers.org.uk

MONARCH'S WAY

The Monarch's Way is a 615-mile (990-km) long-distance route that roughly follows the escape route taken by King Charles II in 1651 after being defeated in the Battle of Worcester. For more information visit www.monarchsway.50megs.com

LIBERTY TRAIL

This 28-mile (45-km) walk from Ham Hill in Somerset to Lyme Regis follows the route taken by villagers from throughout Somerset and Dorset who were making their way to the coast at Lyme to join the Duke of Monmouth. The Duke was expected to land at Lyme to lead a rebellion against the King with the rallying call of 'Liberty to the People of God'. For more information visit www.visitsouthsomerset.com

SOUTH WEST COAST PATH

The South West Coast Path starts at Minehead in Somerset and runs along part of the Somerset Bristol Channel coast, across North Devon, right round Cornwall, then along the South Devon and Dorset coasts to Poole Harbour. This 630-mile (1014-km) walk is the longest National Trail in Britain. For more information visit www.southwestcoastpath.com



Durdle Door

Other Places to Visit

LARMER TREE GARDENS

Set in the outstanding landscape of the Cranborne Chase, these beautifully laid out grounds were created by General Pitt Rivers in 1880. With plenty of interest throughout the year, the gardens are an extraordinary example of Victorian extravagance and vision. The gardens contain a wonderful collection of ornate buildings, wide laurel-hedged rides and majestic trees. Larmer Tree Gardens are recognised by English Heritage as a Garden of National Importance and were the first privately owned gardens to be opened for public enjoyment. For more information visit www.larmertreegardens.co.uk



FONTMELL DOWN RESERVE

Situated high on the steeply sloping North Dorset Downs, this Dorset Wildlife Trust and National Trust nature reserve has far reaching views over the Blackmore Vale. During the spring and summer it provides a stunning display of Chalk downland butterflies such as Adonis and Chalkhill Blues and Silver-spotted Skipper and wildflowers including nine different orchids and the rare Early Gentian.

MILTON ABBEY AND ST. CATHERINE'S CHAPEL NEAR MILTON ABBAS

In Saxon times around 930 AD, King Athelstan had a vision at his camping spot that he would win a battle with the Danes. He was so moved by the fact that the vision came true, that he had a church built at the spot he saw it. King Athelstan then went on to found the church, which in turn was made into an Abbey a few years later by King Edgar. In the 1300s the Abbey was hit by lightning and burnt to the ground and it took another 200 years to build the Abbey seen today. During the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 this monastic abbey became the parish church until it was replaced by a new church in Milton Abbas around 1785. The Abbey is open to the public. St. Catherine's Chapel was built in the late 12th century. It is named after St. Catherine, a martyr whose body was said to be borne by angels to the summit of Mount Sinai. Today there is still a monastery at Mount Sinai, her cult has spread widely and her places of worship are symbolically sited on hilltops.

MINTERNE HOUSE AND GARDENS

Minterne House has been the home of the Churchill and Digby families

for the last 350 years and is now the seat of the 12th Lord Digby. This magnificent house contains many interesting paintings and mementos of its past residents including the Churchill Tapestries. Minterne House and Gardens are situated in 1,300 acres of beautiful Dorset countryside. The gardens lie in a tranquil valley and are laid out in a horseshoe below the house with a chain of small lakes, waterfalls and streams. They contain a unique collection of Himalayan rhododendrons and azaleas along with many fine and rare trees. There are also over 1.5 miles (2.4 km) of walks. The changing seasons make each visit to Minterne a memorable experience. For more information visit www.minterne.co.uk

BEAMINSTER MUSEUM

Beaminster Museum has displays and collections covering the life of the people of Beaminster and its surrounding villages from Medieval to modern times. This includes past trades, past local families such as the Hine family who founded the Hine Cognac Dynasty, a fine collection of agricultural tools and a working church turret clock. The museum is housed in a converted Congregational Church that still has its early 19th century organ. For more information visit www.beaminster.org.uk

CERNE ABBAS GIANT – AN ANCIENT GOD OR CARICATURE?

Sculpted into the hillside above Cerne Abbas, the Giant is one of three ancient figures cut into the English Chalk downlands. The origin of the Giant is unknown and hotly debated. Some believe he resembles an ancient god and is over 1,500 years old while others think he is a 17th century cartoon! One popular theory is he is the Roman god Hercules who is usually shown naked with a club in his right hand and a lion



Minterne House



Minterne Gardens

Other Places to Visit

skin draped over his other arm. This is not shown on the Giant but scientific tests suggest there may have once been a lion skin that is now grassed over. The other popular theory is he is a caricature of Oliver Cromwell. This is based on the fact that it wasn't until 1694 that he was first recorded in the church warden's accounts.

Whatever the origin of the Giant, old drawings and photos show his shape has changed over time. His nose for example disappeared for a while and his navel has become part of his manhood. During the Second World War the Giant was covered over to prevent the Germans from using him as a landmark.

MAPPERTON HOUSE AND GARDENS

Mapperton has romantic valley gardens surrounded by rolling hills and unspoilt countryside. They descend from the great lawn down to the woodland garden and have several grottos, ornamental stone birds and animals, a fountain court, summer house and 17th-century fishponds. The gardens contain many secret paths and walks and provide fine views of Eggardon Hill, Beaminster, Lewesdon Hill, Pilsdon Pen, Bridport and the cliffs along Lyme Bay. The manor house is Elizabethan in origin, was enlarged in the late 1670s and is a beautiful example of a West Country manor made of golden sandstone. The house and gardens are open to the public. Visit www.mapperton.com for more information.

LYME REGIS

This pretty seaside town has lots to offer including the Philpot Museum, marine aquarium, boat trips, beach, fishing, diving and fossil hunting. For more information visit www.lymeregis.com



Lyme Regis



Cerne Giant

Useful Information

WHAT TO WEAR AND TAKE

- Compass
- Small first aid kit
- Whistle
- Water
- Money
- Sunscreen, Sunhat & Sunglasses
- Food including high-energy snacks
- Warm and waterproof clothing
- Suitable footwear
(a good pair of boots or sturdy footwear)
- Ordnance Survey maps (OS Explorer)
- Torch especially during winter months
- Mobile phone
(although the signal varies according to the network coverage)
- Bicycle pump, basic toolkit, lock, puncture repair kit, spare inner tubes and a set of lights
- Cycling helmet to the approved standard
- Riding helmet to the approved standard



DOGS

Please make sure your dog is under close control at all times to prevent it from disturbing livestock or wildlife. At times you may be requested to keep your dog on a lead. If you find that cattle seriously harass you because of your dog, it may be wise to let them off the lead.

SAFETY

- Be prepared for the weather and dress appropriately.
- Cycle and ride in single file and on the left side on any roads.
- Always let someone know where you are going and how long you are going to be.
- Some sections are on, by or cross roads – remember to look and listen for traffic even on minor roads.
- Carry the right equipment.
- Be careful around farmyard machinery and animals.



DISTANCE CALCULATOR

This will help you calculate the distance in miles between towns, villages and places of interest along the Wessex Ridgeway.

Multi-use Route - walking, horse riding and cycling

TOLLARD ROYAL














9.5	HOD HILL											
12.5	3	SHILLINGSTONE										
16	6.5	3.5	IBBERTON									
22	12.5	9.5	6	FOLLY								
27	17.5	14.5	11	5	MINTERNE PARVA							
32	22.5	19.5	16	10	5	SYDLING ST NICHOLAS						
35	25.5	22.5	19	13	8	3	MAIDEN NEWTON					
45	35.5	32.5	29	23	18	13	10	BUCKHAM DOWN				
47.5	38	35	31.5	25.5	20.5	15.5	12.5	2.5	BROADWINDSOR			
52	42.5	39.5	36	30	25	20	17	7	4.5	PILSDON		
56.5	47	44	40.5	34.5	29.5	24.5	21.5	11.5	9	4.5	FISHPOND BOTTOM	
58	48.5	45.5	42	36	31	26	23	13	10.5	6	1.5	CHAMPERNHAYES

Walking Route

ASHMORE

6	IWERNE COURTNEY													
9.5	3.5	SHILLINGSTONE												
12.5	6.5	3	IBBERTON											
18.5	12.5	9	6	FOLLY										
23.5	17.5	14	11	5	MINTERNE PARVA									
29	23	19.5	16.5	10.5	5.5	SYDLING ST NICHOLAS								
31.5	25.5	22	19	13	8	2.5	MAIDEN NEWTON							
42.5	36.5	33	30	24	19	13.5	11	BEAMINSTER						
48	42	38.5	35.5	29.5	24.5	19	16.5	5.5	PILSDON PEN					
51.5	45.5	42	39	33	28	22.5	20	9	3.5	SYNDERFORD				
55.5	49.5	46	43	37	32	26.5	24	13	7.5	4	FISHPOND BOTTOM			
57.5	51.5	48	45	39	34	28.5	26	15	9.5	6	2	WOOTTON FITZPAINE		
62.5	56.5	53	50	44	39	33.5	31	20	14.5	11	7	5	LYME REGIS	

CODE OF CONDUCT

- Follow the Countryside Code (page 72)
- Keep to the signed trail   
- Be aware of and show consideration to other users   
- Warn others of your approach and pass carefully 
- Warn walkers and horse riders of your approach and give way to them 
- Make sure your bicycle is roadworthy 
- Ride at a safe and controlled pace  
- Give way to horse riders  



Useful Information

LOCAL TRAVEL GUIDE

BUS AND TRAIN

Locations of bus stops and train stations are included on the maps for each section of the trail. Bus and train timetables, taxi services and detailed maps showing the bus routes are available at www.dorsetforyou/wessexridgeway

Alternatively telephone numbers and websites to find out more about public transport to the trail are listed below:

National Rail	08457 48 49 50	www.nationalrail.co.uk
Traveline	0871 200 22 33	www.traveline.org.uk
National Express	08717 818181	www.nationalexpress.com
Dorset County Council	01305 251000	www.dorsetforyou.com

CAR

Parking for the trail for all users is included on the maps for each section. Please park considerately if you are parking in villages on or close to the trail and do not obstruct gateways or access points.



OTHER PUBLICATIONS

CREATIVE FOOTSTEPS

Collection of poetry and photographs of sculpture and landscape along the Wessex Ridgeway in Dorset.

Available from:

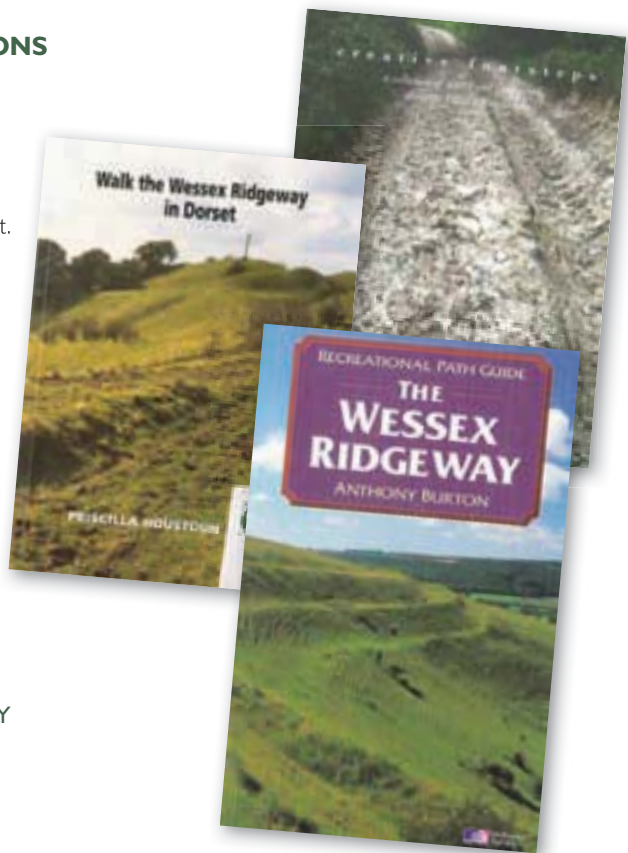
Artsreach,
The Little Keep,
Bridport Road,
Dorchester,
Dorset DT1 1SQ
01305 269512
www.artsreach.co.uk

WALK THE WESSEX RIDGEWAY IN DORSET

by Priscilla Houston
ISBN 0 948699 37

THE WESSEX RIDGEWAY

by Antony Burton
ISBN 1 85410 613 9



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**THE BOOK OF BEAMINSTER AND
LOCAL VILLAGE LIFE**
Halsgrove, 2007.

Dorset County Council
**MONUMENT MANAGEMENT
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various.

Draper J
DORSET – THE COMPLETE GUIDE
The Dovecote Press, 2003.

Ensm P
DISCOVER DORSET – GEOLOGY
The Dovecote Press, 1998.

Houstoun P
**WALK THE WESSEX RIDGEWAY
IN DORSET**
Dorset Publishing Company in association with The
Ramblers' Association Dorset Area, 1994.

Mills AD
DORSET PLACE NAMES
Short Run Press Ltd, 1988.

Morshead Sir O
DORSET CHURCHES
Jarrod Publishing, Norwich, 2003.

The National Trust
THE CERNE GIANT & DORSET HILL-FORTS
2000.

www.en.wikipedia.org

Accommodation, Facilities & Services

The following list includes information on accommodation, eating places, shops and other facilities along the trail. An up-to-date, detailed list can be found at www.dorsetforyou.com/wessexridgeway. Alternatively you can also find information about accommodation at the Tourism Information Centres listed on page 70.

KEYS TO SYMBOLS



Camping



Self-catering



Bed & Breakfast



Grazing or Stabling for Horses



Toilets



Public transport (*Bus / Trainline*)



Parking



Pub (*usually open lunchtimes and evenings*)



Post Office (*usually open weekdays*)



General Store (*usually open weekdays & Saturdays*)



Café / Tea Shop



Restaurant



Take-Away Food



Vets



Cycling Shop



Bank



Cash Machine



Tourist Information Centre

Tollard Royal						✓		✓										
Ashmore			✓	✓		✓												
Iwerne Courtney		✓				✓		✓										
Shillingstone			✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓							
Blandford Forum	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ibberton		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓										
Alton Pancras	✓					✓		✓										
Buckland Newton		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓								
Plush			✓			✓		✓										
Minterne Magna						✓												
Cerne Abbas		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						
Sydling St Nicholas		✓	✓					✓										
Maiden Newton		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Beaminster		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Broadwindsor		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓								
Marshwood		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓									
Wootton Fitzpaine						✓												
Lyme Regis	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

You are strongly advised to book accommodation in advance and during the summer, as early as possible.

Useful Addresses and Websites

MANAGERS OF TRAIL

Dorset Countryside Ranger Service,
Dorset County Council, County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ
01305 221000
dorsetcountryside@dorsetcc.gov.uk
www.dorsetforyou.com/wessexridgeway

RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION

2nd Floor, Camelford House,
87–90 Albert Embankment,
London SE1 7TW
020 7339 8500
ramblers@ramblers.org.uk
www.ramblers.org.uk

THE BRITISH HORSE SOCIETY

Stoneleigh Deer Park, Kenilworth,
Warwickshire CV8 2XZ
0844 848 1666
enquiry@bhs.org.uk
www.bhs.org.uk

BRITISH CYCLING

Stuart Street,
Manchester M11 4DQ
0161 274 2000
info@britishcycling.org.uk
www.britishcycling.org.uk

CYCLISTS TOURING CLUB

National Office,
Parklands, Railton Rd,
Guildford, Surrey GU2 9JX
0844 736 8450
cycling@ctc.org.uk
www.ctc.org.uk

SUSTRANS

2 Cathedral Square,
College Green,
Bristol BS1 5DD
0845 113 00 65
info@sustrans.org.uk
www.sustrans.org.uk

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

Lyme Regis Tourist Information Centre,
Guildhall Cottage,
Church Street,
Lyme Regis,
Dorset DT7 3BS
01297 442138
lymeregis.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk

Blandford Tourist Information Centre
1 Greyhound Yard, Market Place,
Blandford Forum,
Dorset DT11 7EB
01258 454 770 or 01258 484 094
blandfordtic@north-dorset.gov.uk

Bridport Tourist Information Centre
47 South Street,
Bridport,
Dorset DT6 3NY
01308 424 901
bridport.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk

DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

Brooklands Farm, Forston, Dorchester,
Dorset DT2 7AA. 01305 264620

mail@dorsetwildlife.co.uk

www.dorsetwildlife.co.uk

DORSET AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Dorset AONB Partnership,
AONB Office, The Barracks, Bridport Road,
Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1RN
01305 756782

www.dorsetaonb.org.uk

CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

AONB Office, Castle Street, Cranborne,
Dorset BH21 5PZ
01725 517417

info@cranbornechase.org.uk

www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk

NATURAL ENGLAND

1 East Parade, Sheffield S1 2ET
0845 600 3078

enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Regional Offices

Natural England, Government Buildings,
Prince of Wales Road, Dorchester, Dorset
DT1 1PY

01305 257086

dorset@naturalengland.org.uk

Slepe Farm, Arne, Wareham,

Dorset BH20 5BN

01929 557450

dorset@naturalengland.org.uk

FORESTRY COMMISSION

0845 FORESTS (0845 367 3787)

South West Regional Area

Peninsula Forest District, Bullers Hill,

Kenford, Exeter, Devon EX6 7XR

01392 832262

enquiries.peninsula@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk

Dorset Area

The Queen's House, Lyndhurst,
Hampshire SO43 7NH
02380 283141

enquiries.new.forest@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

THE NATIONAL TRUST

PO Box 39, Warrington WA5 7WD

0844 800 1895

enquiries@thenationaltrust.org.uk

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Wessex Region

Eastleigh Court,
Bishopstrow, Warminster,
Wiltshire BA12 9HW

01985 843600

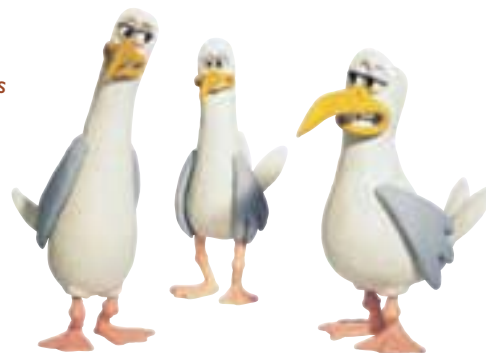
Respect the Countryside - Countryside Code

Enjoy the countryside but remember that most of the trail crosses private farmland and estates which are a living and working landscape. Always follow the trail to avoid trespass and use the gates and stiles provided to negotiate hedges and fences.



“See, people don’t realise their dogs could be a danger to wildlife. There’s sheep running round scared, there’s birds nesting on the ground....., havoc. Keep ‘em on a lead”
Keep dogs under close control

“You know, I think you should treat the countryside as you would treat your home....”
Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home



“If you’re going out for a walk....., don’t go out just willy nilly, be prepared.....”
Be safe, plan ahead and follow the waymarked routes



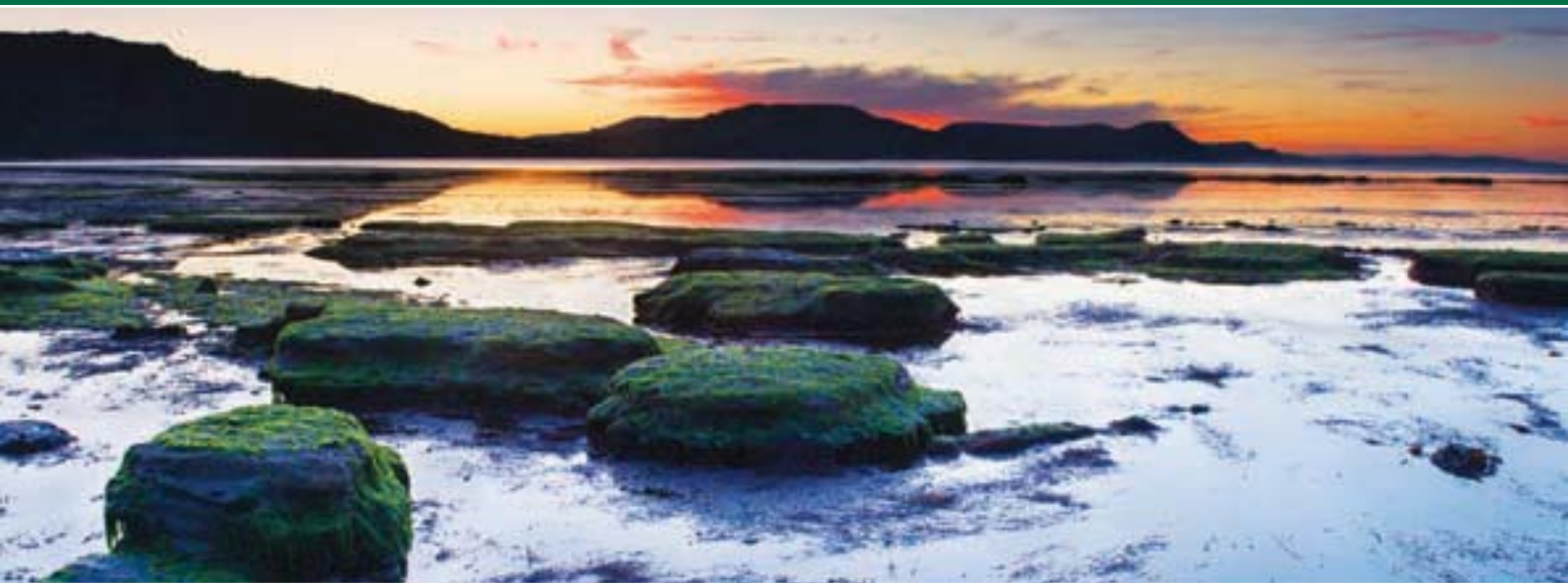
“The thing I enjoy about the countryside the most is the peace, quietness, space, fresh air.....scenery. It’s really beautiful.”
Leave gates and property as you find them

Take special care on roads and if travelling by private vehicles park sensibly so you do not obstruct gateways or others. If you experience any problems while using the trail please email dorsetcountryside@dorsetcc.gov.uk





Pilsdon Pen



The Wessex Ridgeway is an ancient highway through 60 miles (96 km) of beautiful Dorset countryside from the border with Wiltshire to Lyme Regis on the coast. Travel on foot, on horseback or by bicycle for a short section or for the whole trail, and this book will be your guide.

- Detailed map for each section
- Distance checklist to help you plan overnight stays and check on progress
- Photos and information on places of interest
- Local history, wildlife, archaeology, art, landscape and geology
- Public transport, parking, places to eat and stay and other local facilities
- Linking trails off the Wessex Ridgeway

ISBN 1-84495-037-9



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