

Circular Walk One - Ash Common

Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

Distance of Walk: 5 kilometres / 3.1 miles.

A walk from Ash Common (nature reserve) through gently rolling countryside with views south across the Vale of Taunton and north to the Brendon Hills and the Quantocks.

OS map - Explorer 140, Quantock Hills. Grid ref. 155 289.

Terrain - moderately hilly.

Parking - turn left off the A358 just after the turning to Bishops Lydeard, signposted to Ash Priors. Drive to the common and park in the carpark on the right.

Refreshments - not available on the route, but at the New Inn in Halse 1.5km from Ash Common.

Landscape character of the walk - High Vale

The walk lies in an area described as High Vale. Rising from 70 metres up to 170 metres, this diverse area tends to be composed of moderately undulating vale with wooded hilltops and small fields enclosed by hedgerows. It lies within the catchment area of the River Tone and is the source of numerous springs, tributary streams and brooks which give rise to an interesting riparian vegetation. Typical tree species vary depending on the type of habitat, which may be woodland, woodland edge and scrub, heath or wetland and river banks. In the hedgerows hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn, dogwood, spindle, holly, privet, crab apple, field rose, dog rose and guelder rose can all be found with ash, oak and field maple as standard trees. The underlying geology is predominantly Devonian sandstone, siltstone, mudstone and slate with Permo Triassic reddish mudstone and alluvium. Throughout the area the soil is generally Lower Marls and Pebble Beds giving rise to good quality agricultural land suitable for mixed arable and pastoral farming.

Directions

A Walk across the common and turn left down a narrow lane passing a house on your right. Follow the lane for 1.25km, then take the third track on the right (tarmaced and signposted bridle way) leading up towards a wood.

B Bear left at the fork and follow the track along the edge of the wood. Pass a lime kiln and continue up into the sunken lane until the track widens. Continue ahead as the track descends to a tarmac lane.

C From here bear right and follow the lane past houses. Take the first right along the lane past Down House on the right and stables 100 metres on your left. Follow the lane until you reach Pitpear Farm. As the road bends left up to the farm, go straight ahead through the gate into a field and go straight on until you reach a gate just beyond the duck pond.

D The track enters a wood and continues to another gate. Turn right to follow the boundary of the wood up to the top of the field. Go over a stile on the left, then follow the hedge on the left around the field to a gate which leads onto a wide track.

E Keep ahead on the track bending between hedgerows to go through two gates. Continue straight ahead downhill between the farmhouse and a barn onto the farm drive which then joins the road.

F Here, turn left to walk along the road. After 200 metres turn right into a bridleway and follow for about 300 metres before turning left through a gate, crossing at first a scrubby field, then a bridge over Halse Water to reach the road. Turn right and walk back to Ash Common.

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Points of Interest

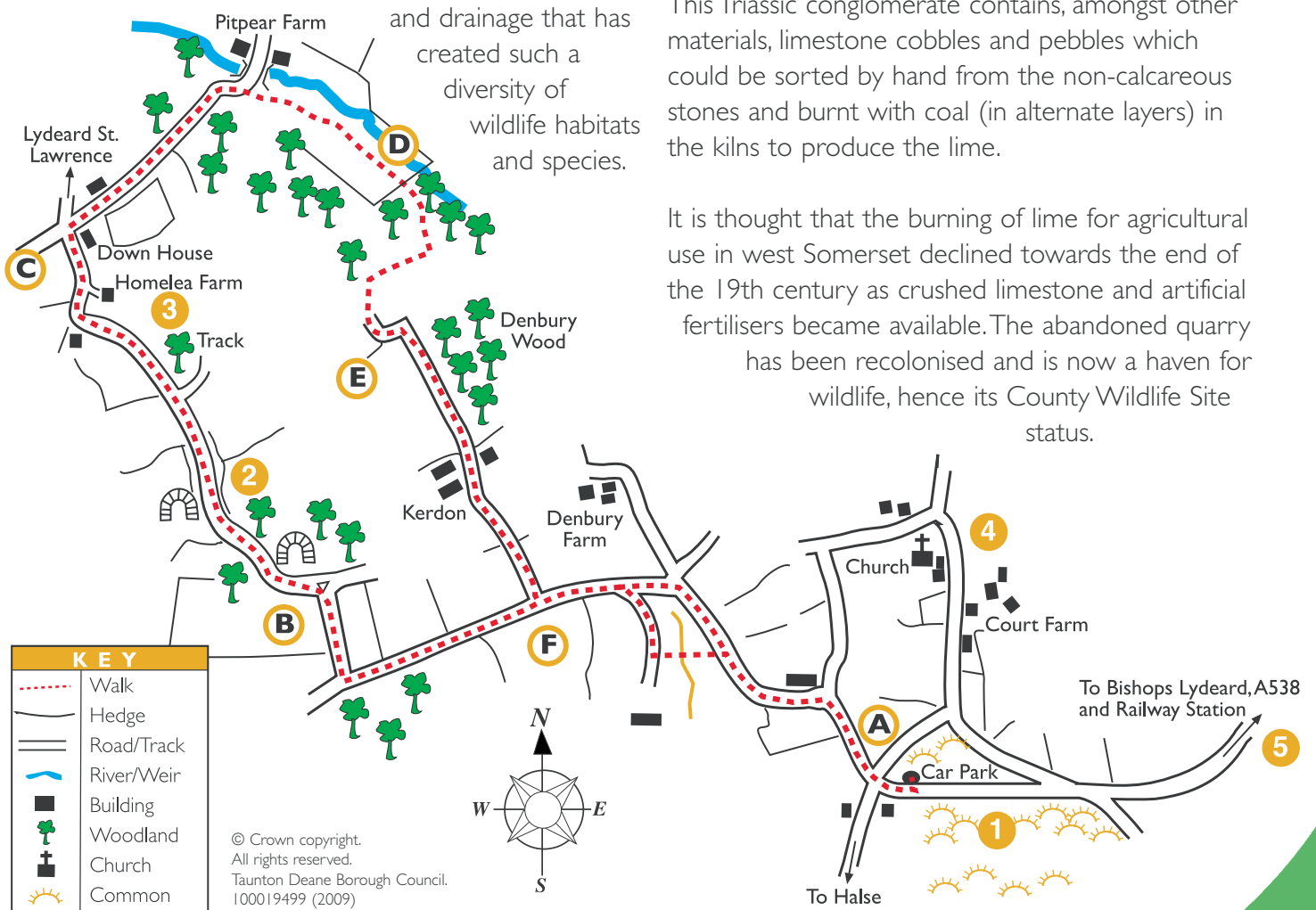
1 Ash Common

This Local Nature Reserve and County Wildlife Site has within its 20 hectares (50 acres) an important variety of habitats. There are areas of 'unimproved' (ie not artificially fertilised or ploughed) grassland, heath, scrub, semi-natural deciduous woodland, bracken, carr and stream. Also important for wildlife are three small ponds, footpaths and lanes, hedgerows, lone trees and grassy rides and clearings.

Of particular significance for their scarcity and high species content are the grassland and heath which contain several notable plants, such as orchids, moschatel, ragged robin and devils bit scabious.

In past times the Common would have been grazed by stock, primarily cattle, and it was this management together with the local soil conditions

and drainage that has created such a diversity of wildlife habitats and species.



Current management of the Common aims largely to recreate the effect of grazing by cutting the grassland once a year and by regularly cutting back scrub and dense areas of bracken. (Grazing cannot currently be reintroduced because of road traffic levels and the legislation that does not allow the fencing of commons).

2 Old Limekilns and Quarry

In the 17th century there was growing awareness that the application of lime on acid soils improved crop yields. Much of the soil in west Somerset has developed on non-calcareous rocks and therefore tends towards acidity. Limekilns were built where there was a source of limestone, and here it was the outcrop of the Budleigh Salterton Pebble Beds (30-35m thick) which follows a roughly north-south line through Ash Priors, Milverton and Langford Budville.

This Triassic conglomerate contains, amongst other materials, limestone cobbles and pebbles which could be sorted by hand from the non-calcareous stones and burnt with coal (in alternate layers) in the kilns to produce the lime.

It is thought that the burning of lime for agricultural use in west Somerset declined towards the end of the 19th century as crushed limestone and artificial fertilisers became available. The abandoned quarry has been recolonised and is now a haven for wildlife, hence its County Wildlife Site status.

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3 View towards Willett's Tower and the Quantocks

To the north west can be seen Willett's Tower on top of Willett Hill in the parish of Elworthy. This folly was erected by a Mr Belmerton in 1820, probably connected to the parkland surrounding Willett House built in 1816, and is a copy of a ruined Somerset church tower. To the north east are the Quantock Hills (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), a narrow ridge of Devonian slates rising to 386 metres at Wills Neck. These represent the eastern end of a belt of Devonian rocks, collectively known as Old Red Sandstone, which extends from the coast near Ilfracombe eastwards to embrace Exmoor and the Brendon Hills.

4 The Village of Ash Priors

A short detour will take you round this pleasant village. The church of Holy Trinity dates from the 15th century, although it was much altered during restoration work in the late 19th century. The red sandstone shows inclusions of pebbles of rock derived from the Quantocks and the Brendon Hills.

5 West Somerset Railway

Just 1 km to the east of Ash Common is Bishops Lydeard station, the HQ and start of the WSR. Originally connecting Taunton and Minehead, it is now Britain's longest heritage railway. For more details telephone (01643) 704996 or look at www.West-Somerset-Railway.co.uk.

Sources of information and further reading

Deane Tree Plan Report
Taunton Deane Borough Council

Ash Common leaflets and interpretation
Taunton Deane Borough Council

Ash Common Management Plan
John Clare

Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane
Hugh Prudden - Taunton Deane Borough Council

British Regional Geology - South West England
HMSO

Taunton Deane Borough Council Listed Building Database

The Buildings of England, South and West Somerset
Nikolaus Pevsner - Penguin



If you require further information please contact:

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or parks@tauntondeane.gov.uk
www.tauntondeane.gov.uk

For comments regarding the condition of the paths, stiles, gates etc. please contact Rights of Way at Somerset County Council.
Tel: 0845 345 9166

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