

Circular Walk Eighteen - Churchstanton and Stapley - Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

Distance of Walk: 8 kilometres

A walk to the west of Churchstanton church across some lovely Blackdown valleys, returning via the hamlet of Stapley.

OS map - Explorer 128, Taunton and Blackdown Hills

Terrain - Undulating, with some quite steep ascents and descents

Parking - There is a large parking area opposite Churchstanton Church, grid reference 196 145

Refreshments - There are no pubs along the route, but there are several quite close by at Clayhidon, Forches Corner, Churchinford and Holman Clavel

Landscape character of the walk - Blackdown Hills Plateau (see points of interest)

Directions

A From the car parking area opposite Churchstanton church, walk left down the road and round the right hand bend, ignoring the turning to the left. Continue down the hill and after the next right hand bend walk left over the ditch and then stile to follow the edge of the meadow ahead. Continue over a further stile and down the next meadow to the gate. Go through and follow the track down towards the house. After crossing the stream walk ahead across the grass to the footpath up through the trees.

B Emerge from the trees over a stile and then follow the right hand edge of the field ahead. Cross the next stile, go under the trees and walk up across the field to the far end. Go through the metal gate and across the next small field to cross the next stile.

Follow the path, half-left at first, up through the trees alongside the wire fence and then up a track and ahead through a glade, veering left to reach a farm track. Follow the track ahead past the buildings on the right. Turn left through the gate along the next track with the hedge on your right. Follow this to the woods

and junction of tracks. Turn left through the woods at first and then along the top of the field to the stile next to the gate.

C Turn right and walk up the road. Shortly after the right hand bend go left through the kissing gate into the Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve, and then immediately right into the next field. Turn left to follow the field edge down the hill. Go through the next kissing gate and continue down the hill. Follow the track as it winds down through the trees.

On reaching the open field near the valley bottom, veer right and follow the path diagonally down the hill to eventually cross the stream and small wooden bridge. (You are now in Devon). Walk ahead with the pond on your left, over a further stream and then follow the track up through the trees. Where the track swings left go ahead on the path through the trees, crossing further streams and wet areas to reach a stile. Cross the next field to the stile and then turn left along the road.

D Follow the road down into the valley, across the river (back into Somerset) and up to the T-junction. Turn right and then after a short distance turn left up the hill. Follow this road until you reach Craigend and Craigend Cottage on the right.

Go over the stile and through the yard of Craigend, over a further stile and turn left to follow the hedge along the top of the field. Continue over a further stile to a metal gate. Continue ahead along the track to the far corner of the field and then down through the farm yard to the road.

E Turn left and after a short distance left again into Grabham Farm. Follow the track to the right of the house and up the side of the hill to the gates. Go through the second gate on the right and follow the path between the hedges. Go through a further gate and follow the hedge on the left to a gate and stile into the adjacent field.

Circular Walk Eighteen - Churchstanton and Stapley

Continue this line across the field to the stile and gate into the next field. Again, continue the line across the meadow to the stiles into the next field, and then across to the far hedge, where you veer left to follow this to the road. Turn right and then right at the next junction to return to your car.

impermeable rocks, and above, a thin layer of clay with flints and cherts. Rising to 315 metres at Staple Hill, the Blackdowns are characterised by a dramatic, steep and largely wooded scarp slope facing north and a gently sloping plateau to the south which is deeply dissected by the valleys of the rivers Culm, Otter and Yarty.

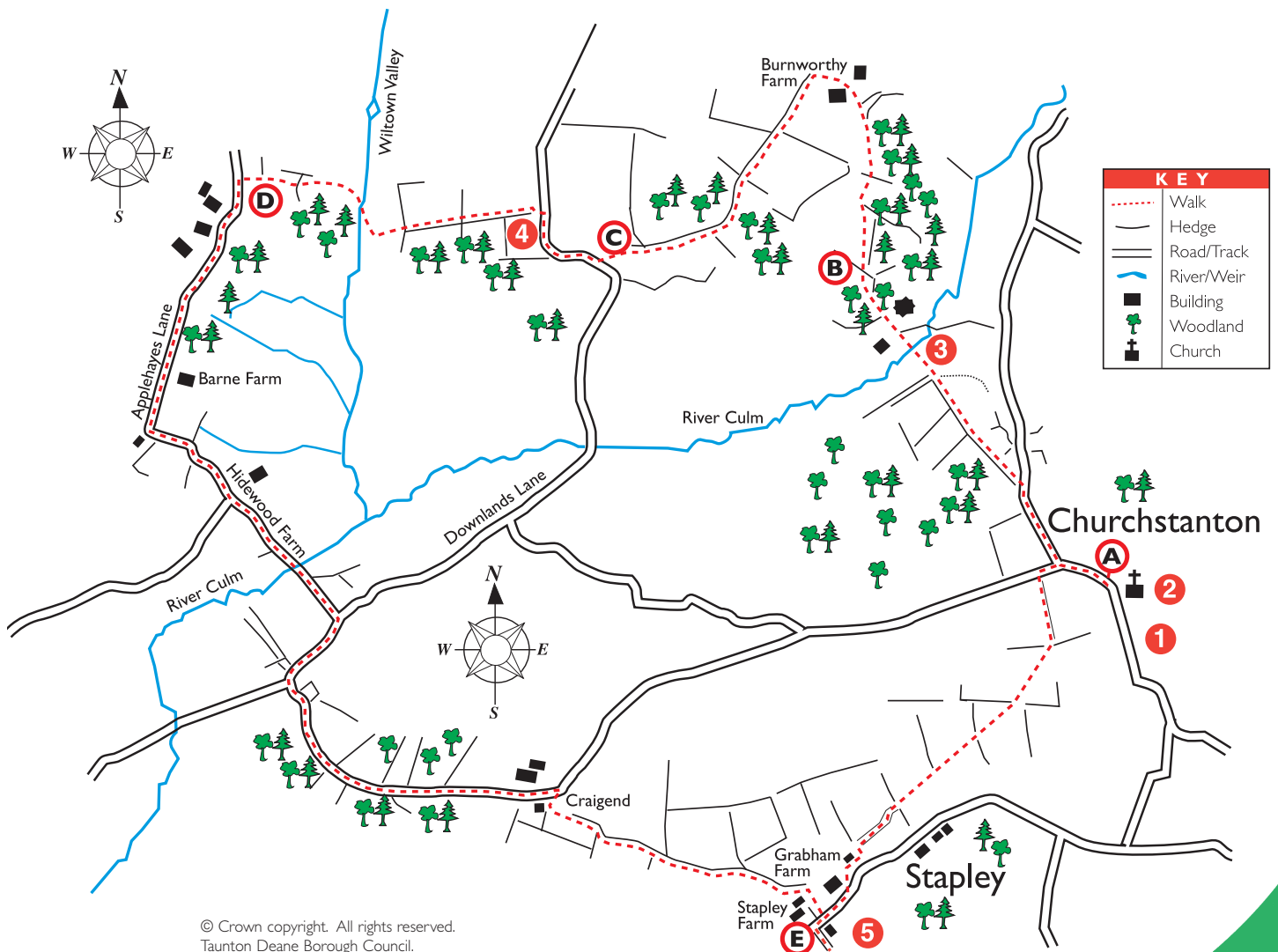
Points of Interest

1 Blackdown Hills

The Blackdown Hills are designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They extend broadly from Wellington in the north to Honiton in the south, and from Cullompton in the west to Chard in the east. They are formed primarily of a thick and extensive outcrop of the largely non-calcareous Upper Greensand, dating from the Cretaceous period (70 - 135 million years ago). Below this are

The geology and the presence of spring water and impeded drainage has given rise to a notably diverse pattern of plant communities, many of which can be seen at various nature reserves managed by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. There are a number of important archeological sites on the Blackdowns, such as Castle Neroche and the iron-age hillfort at Hembury. The area is still sparsely populated - there are few settlements and no towns.

The land is generally of low agricultural value, restricting farming to mainly dairying and the rearing of



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Circular Walk Eighteen - Churchstanton and Stapley



stock. Distinctive in the Blackdown landscape are the mature beech hedges and avenues along many of the lanes and tracks. These are generally on top of earth banks which are often badly eroded. They were planted as hedges to form boundaries, act as wind-breaks and contain stock. It is thought that the magnificent trees of today are the result of years of neglect following the demise of hedge-laying.

2 Churchstanton and the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul

The earliest names of the parish, Estanton and Estandon, are probably Saxon, meaning Stoney Town. In Domesday it is recorded as Tanton and Stantone. During the 13th century it was variously called Cheristonton, Churistanton and Stanton Tudeham after the Lords of the Manor.

The present name is recorded in 1555. There are now two centres of population, Churchinford and Stapley. The siting of the church some two miles from these villages, and at the geographical centre of the parish, suggests that it once stood in the midst of a number of scattered hamlets and farmsteads when Churchinford and Stapley had yet to become important centres.

Other reasons for the location of the church may be its proximity to an ancient trackway from Taunton to Honiton, and the fact that there are earth works in the form of a ringed mound to the east of the Old Rectory and other such earth works on the hill. If these were associated with Saxon or Celtic habitation, or were the site of heathen worship or burial, it is likely that the earliest Christians in the area would establish themselves as close as possible.

The oldest parts of the present church date from the 13th century. The exterior of the church has few notable features and presents a rather sombre appearance with its local flint dressing. The interior,

however, is of surprising beauty and lightness. As the major restoration was about 1830 it is almost free from the influence of the Victorian Gothic Revival.

The unusual height of the narrow priest's door suggests that it may have been the original Norman door raised and given a new arch. In the porch is a rare example of a carved oak 17th century bier dated 1625, the remains of the parish stocks and an embossed sheet of lead from the tower roof dated 1719.

3 River Culm

The walk crosses the Culm Valley at two points, as well as two of its tributaries. The River Culm rises near Holman Clavel and flows west through Culmstock, Uffculme and Cullompton before joining the River Exe just north of Exeter.

4 Ringdown Nature Reserve, Somerset Wildlife Trust

Ringdown is one of many reserves managed by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. It is described as species-rich flush mire, wet grassland and wet woodland. As well as being within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, much of the landscape here, particularly in the valleys, is designated SSSI - Site of Special Scientific Interest. SSSIs are the country's best wildlife and geological sites, and include some of the most spectacular and beautiful habitats.

5 Stapley Silk Mill

Take a short detour from the route to see the complex of buildings, outbuildings and ruins of a redundant 18th century woolen mill converted for silk throwing probably by Lamech Swift of Derby. The mill was in use until 1875 when the proprietor, Samuel Lawton, retired.

Circular Walk Eighteen - Churchstanton and Stapley

Sources of information and further reading

The Deane Tree Plan - *Taunton Deane Borough Council*

A Village Industry - W. H. Pool and Sons
D W Warren - Somerset archeological Society

Listed Building Database
Taunton Deane Borough Council

The Green Lanes of England
Valerie Belsey - Green Books

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

West Deane Way, Guide Book
Taunton Deane Borough Council

Somerset's Industrial Heritage
Edited by Derrick Warren - Somerset Industrial archeological Society



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Bengali

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Hindi

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