

Circular Walk Three - Creech St Michael

Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

Distance of Walk: 8 kilometres

This is an easy walk following the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal, then gently climbing up to Knapp before returning back along the River Tone.

OS map - Explorer 128,
Taunton and Blackdown Hills

Terrain - mostly flat, with a moderate climb up to Knapp.

Parking - in Vicarage Lane, beside the canal (signposted from the main street through the village).

Refreshments - The Bell Inn, the Riverside Tavern and the shops in Creech St Michael

Landscape characters of the walk - River Flood Plain

Most of this walk is within the low lying catchment area of the River Tone and the Sedgemoor Old Rhyne. In Taunton Deane this corridor of land extends west to Wellington and east to Burrowbridge where the Tone meets the River Parrett. The land is well treed with open river edges and with extensive flood plains which are liable to occasional flooding. The soils are mainly alluvial and clay with some overlying peat. Agricultural land use in this area is mainly permanent grassland suitable for stock rearing and dairying with some cereals where the flood risk is low.

Low Vale

As the walk climbs the sandstone ridge to Knapp, it moves into landscape described as Low Vale, which in parts of the Deane rises to 100 metres. The higher ground is often accentuated by copses, and scattered throughout the vale are small pockets of broadleaf woodland and numerous orchards. Ash and oak are the dominant woodland and hedgerow species. New tree planting has occurred on much of the north-west facing sandstone escarpment. The agricultural land is generally of good quality and suitable for mixed farming and market gardening.

Directions

- A** Go right onto the tow path so that the canal is on your left and follow it for 2km until you reach a red brick bridge (on the other side you can see Charlton Farm). Opposite the bridge turn right down a farm track which in 100 metres crosses the railway and bears left for 100 metres downhill.
- B** Just past a gate with an old Iron kissing gate beside, the path goes right and follows a bank above a stream, veering left and right to reach the river. Keep the river on your right for 0.75km to Knapp Bridge.
- C** Turn right across the bridge. After 150 metres turn left into the track and left again through a gate into the field. With the hedge on your right, continue to the stile on the right. Cross the stile onto a tarmac road, and follow this past the former pub and take the first road to the right which rises to a T-junction.
- D** Turn right. After 300 metres take the third turning on the right by the road sign. After passing Knapp Farm, the lane rises but instead of going right into Birds Farm go ahead through the gate into an orchard. Keeping the hedge on your left, walk round the field to a stile. Continue downhill for a short distance to another stile into a field.
- E** Descend the hill, keeping the hedge on your left, to a footbridge. Then continue to a gate. Once through the gate, continue with the ditch on your left and cross the field onto a wide track by the river.
- F** Go left following the river until the suspension bridge. Then turn right onto the road to Ham where, just before the village notice board, look for a track which crosses the village street. Turn right up the track and cross the River Tone via the footbridge.
- G** Turn left and follow the river bank until reaching a gate and a minor road on the outskirts of Creech St. Michael. Go left to the Riverside Tavern, pass the church and return to the start.

Circular Walk Three - Creech St Michael

Points of Interest

1 Bridgwater and Taunton Canal

Opened in 1827 as part of an ambitious plan to link the English Channel to the Bristol Channel, this short 22.5km length of canal superseded the River Tone as the primary navigation between Taunton and Bridgwater, forming a much shorter route to the River Parrett at Bridgwater than the river navigation via Burrowbridge. It was engineered by James Hollinsworth and featured a short brick tunnel and 12 swing bridges. There was opposition to its construction by the Tone Conservators, and in 1832 the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal Company agreed to take over the navigation of the river. By 1838 the Grand Western Canal had reached Taunton and a junction between the two was formed at Firepool. The coming of the railways led to the demise of the canal, and commercial traffic ceased in 1907. During the Second World War the swing bridges were fixed, the locks decayed and the canal filled with silt and weed. In 1966 the Somerset Inland Waterways Society was formed to work for the restoration of the canal for amenity purposes. For more information contact the Waterway Manager, South Wales and Somerset Canals, Canal Office, The Wharf, Govilon, Abergavenny, NP7 9NY, telephone (01873) 830328.

2 Pillboxes

Along the canal can be seen a number of concrete pillboxes, miniature for built during the Second World War. The idea of pillboxes is thought to have originated during the First World in France, the term pillbox

referring to their resemblance to contemporary boxes used for carrying pills and medicines.

3 Charlton Engine House

Built in 1827 to pump water into the canal from the River Tone. It originally housed a beam engine pump, and later two locomotive boilers worked a centrifugal pump which delivered 125,000 gallons per hour. It later supplied the pick-up troughs fixed between the nearby railway lines.

4 Charlton Bridge

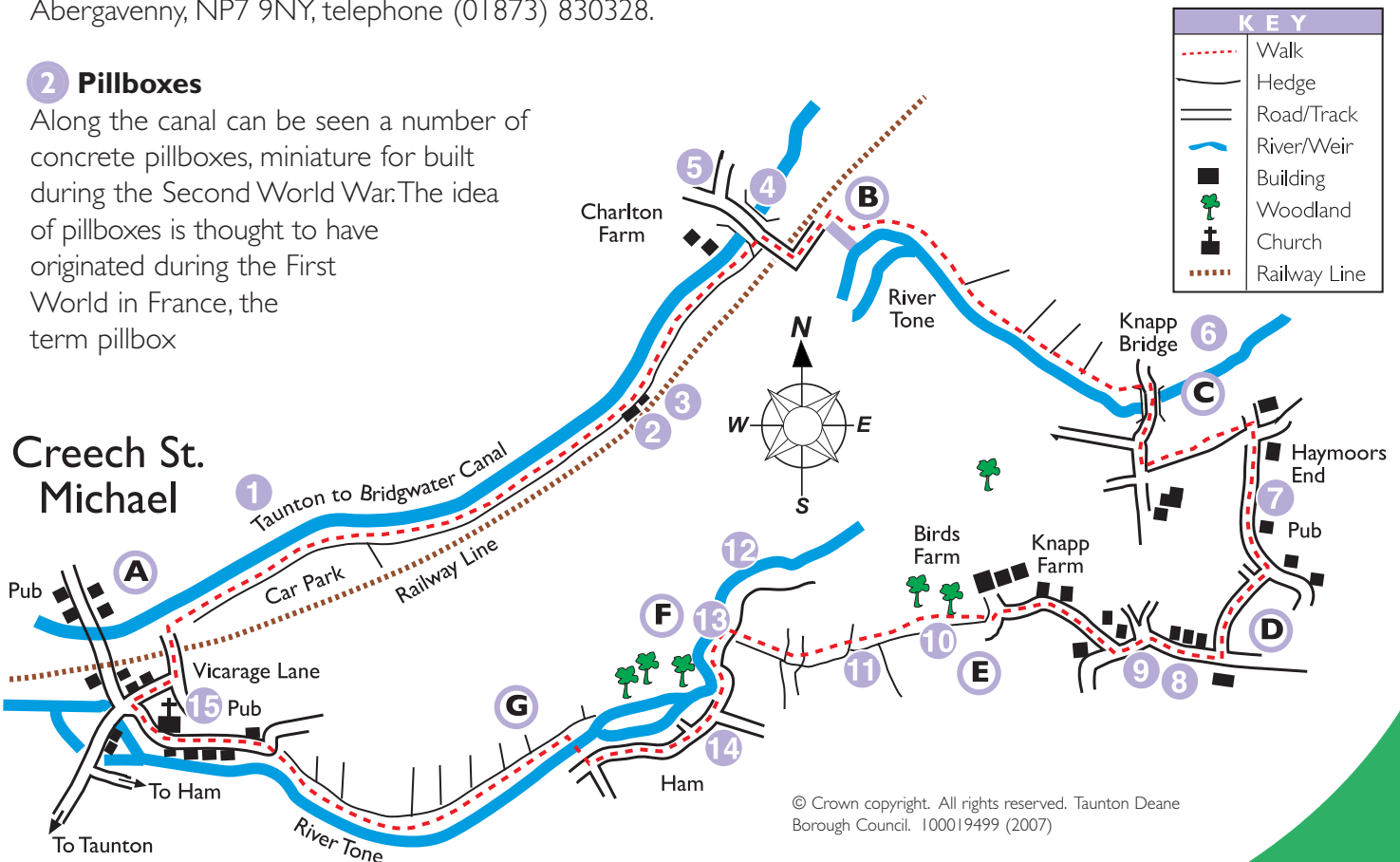
This red brick single span bridge is probably the best surviving of the bridges over the canal, many of which are accommodation bridges provided to link farm lands divided by the canal.

5 Charlton Orchard

Up to thirty varieties of apples as well as many other fruits are grown and sold here.

6 Knapp Bridge

Built in 1820 of Blue Lias with Ham Stone coping.



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Taunton Deane Borough Council. 100019499 (2007)

Circular Walk Three - Creech St Michael

7 Former Rising Sun Inn

A 16th century cross-passage farmhouse which until recently had been used as a public house.

8 Knapp

This ancient hamlet lies on top of a ridge formed by the resistant North Curry Sandstone. The walk passes the late medieval Knapp Farm and 16th century Birds Farm.

9 Withy Boiler

Here is evidence of a once flourishing rural industry, the growing of withies (young willow stems) primarily for basket making. The withies are boiled to soften the bark, which is then stripped. This process releases tannin and other chemicals, mainly salicylic acid, which give the withies their characteristic buff colour. The boilers are large metal tanks set in brick foundations with a short chimney to create a draught.

10 Orchard

Here, on top of the sandstone escarpment and on a gentle west-facing slope, is a typical Somerset scene. Old orchards make good habitat for wildlife... watch out in winter for large flocks of field fares feeding on the remaining apples.

11 Views

South west to Thorn Clump and the Blackdown Hills, and west and north west across the Vale of Taunton to the Quantock Hills.

12 River Tone

The river flows for 33km down from Beverton Pond in the Brendon Hills, due south at first before turning east (where it forms the border between Devon and Somerset) to flow into the River Parrett at Burrowbridge. This then continues out to the Bristol Channel through Bridgwater. It is an important wildlife corridor through the Borough and notable species to be seen are kingfisher, bank vole and otter, as well as the more common grey heron, moorhen and mute swan. Look out also for birds of prey such as buzzard, kestrel and sparrowhawk.

13 Black Poplar

This native tree is nationally rare (approximately 10,000 trees have been recorded in Britain) but Taunton Deane has a relatively high number. It can

reach a height of 30 metres, growing rapidly until reaching maturity in about 100 years. Many of the old specimen trees have been pollarded. They are usually found growing in the alluvial soils of river flood plains, and have traditionally been planted beside wet ditches, farm ponds and wells and on parish boundaries. All black poplars are dioecious, ie male and female flowers are on different trees. Nationwide, however, only 5% of trees are female. This tree is male.

14 Ham

This was an important settlement from the middle ages to the early 19th century as it was the nearest navigable point on the River Tone to Taunton. Barges brought coal and other goods from Bridgwater and Langport to wharves at what is now called Coalharbour. Cargoes to and from Taunton were carried by packhorse and cart until, in 1699, the Tone Conservators were established to extend the navigation to Taunton via a series of locks at Ham, Creech St Michael, Bathpool and Obridge. The navigation prospered until the opening of the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal in 1827 and the coming of the railways hastened its decline, the last barge reaching Ham in 1929. The Wharf House, Ham Mills and Lock Cottage (all private dwellings) are evidence of the village's past activity.

15 Church of St. Michael

This 13th century church has a number of interesting features, including a fine waggon roof, an unusual number of niches, and some good carving on choir bench-ends, some of which have been used to make a reading desk. There are stocks in the churchyard, and in the churchyard wall there are stone tablets engraved with the initials of people who had agreed to maintain a small part of the wall in return for rights to common land. It is thought that the big yew tree could be 1,600 years old.

Circular Walk Three - Creech St Michael



Sources of information and further reading

Somerset's Industrial Heritage - Editor Derrick Warren - *published by Somerset Industrial Archeological Society ISBN 0 9509776 7 5*

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

Deane Tree Plan Report
Taunton Deane Borough Council

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

TDBC Listed Building Database

Exploring the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal
British Waterways

The Bridgwater and Taunton Canal
Jean Hall and Joy Yeates

The River Tone Navigation
Jean Hall and Joy Yeates

Why Pillbox?
John Hellis - Pillbox Study Group website

The River Parrett - *Jean Hall and Joy Yates*

Willow Industry Leaflet - *Willow and Wetlands Centre*

Black Poplar Leaflet - *Taunton Deane Borough Council*

Great British Trees - *Jon Stokes - The Tree Council*

If You Require Further Information Please Contact:

The Heritage and Landscape Team,

Taunton Deane Borough Council,
The Deane House, Belvedere Road,
Taunton, TA1 1HE
Tel: 01823 356491

Email: heritage.landscape@tauntondeane.gov.uk
or parks@tauntondeane.gov.uk

www.tauntondeane.gov.uk

If you would like this document translated into other languages or in Braille, large print, audio tape, or CD please telephone us on 01823 356491 or email us at: heritage.landscape@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Bengali

অপনি যদি এই দলিলপত্র অন্য কোন ভাষায় অনুবাদ করে চান, বা ব্রেল, বড়ো ছাপার অক্ষর, অডিও-টেপ বা সিডিতে চান, তাহলে আমাদের টেলিফোন করুন এই নম্বরে 01823 356491 বা অথবা ই-মেল করুন heritage.landscape@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Chinese

如果你要這文件翻譯成其他語言或盲人凸字,大號字,聲帶,或光碟,請致電我們,電話 01823 356491 或電郵 heritage.landscape@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Hindi

अगर आप इस दस्तावेज़ का अनुवाद दूसरी भाषाओं या ब्रेल, बड़े अक्षरों वाली छपाई, ऑडियो टेप, या सीडी में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया हमें इस नंबर पर फ़ोन कीजिये 01823 356491 या यहाँ ईमेल कीजिये heritage.landscape@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Portuguese

Se desejar a tradução deste documento para um outro idioma ou em Braille, letras grandes, cassette de áudio ou CD, contacte-nos pelo telefone 01823 356491 ou pelo endereço de correio electrónico heritage.landscape@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Polish

W celu uzyskania niniejszego dokumentu w innym języku, w języku Braille'a, wydrukowanego dużym drukiem, nagranych na taśmie dźwiękowej lub CD prosimy o kontakt pod numerem telefonu 01823 356491 lub na adres heritage.landscape@tauntondeane.gov.uk