

Circular Walk Six - North Curry & Knapp

Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

Distance of Walk: 5 kilometres

A gentle walk along the River Tone, up to Knapp and along the sandstone ridge to the interesting village of North Curry, before returning back across the western edges of the Somerset Levels.

OS map - Explorer 128, Taunton and Blackdown Hills.

Terrain - Gentle ascent and descent of the North Curry ridge.

Parking - At the car park by New Bridge on the road between West Lyng and North Curry.

Refreshments - At the Bird in Hand or the White Hart in North Curry.

Landscape character of the walk Levels and Moors (see point of interest no. 3)

Directions

A From the car park, walk in a westerly direction along the River Tone. Although the footpath cuts across the meanders of the river, the land owner has no objections to walkers keeping to the river bank in wet conditions.

B After passing an old orchard, the route takes a sharp left away from the river towards Haymoor End.

C After 50 metres climb the stile on the right on the bank. Keeping the hedge on your left, cross the ditch to the stile by the farm buildings (Haymoor Cottage). Go up the road, past a brick house called 'Clouters' towards Lower Knapp. Approximately 200 metres along the road turn sharp left over a stile.

D Keep the hedge on your right, through the field. Cross the stile and walk diagonally to the right across the field to a stile in the corner. Keeping first the fence and then the hedge on your left, walk around the edge of the field to a stile in the top left hand corner.

E Cross the field to a double stile with steps which crosses a small ditch. Go over to the stile on the left and walk left towards North Curry, keeping the hedge first on the right and then on the left,

negotiating further stiles. On reaching a small footbridge, cross the stream and walk straight ahead across the field.

On reaching a hedge, turn right to a stile in the corner. Turn left over the next field to a stile beside a gate and continue ahead to steps down onto the road. Turn right and go up the hill into the village. At Queen Square turn sharp left into Church Road and continue down to the church, which is well worth a visit.

F Leave the churchyard via the kissing gate in the north east corner and walk diagonally right down the hill to follow the hedgerow on your left. After 150 metres turn left over a stile and walk beside the ditch and around the end of the field to a footbridge over a ditch. Continue ahead with the hedge on your left to a stile and then with the rhyne on your left continue over two footbridges to meet the drove track.

G Turn left and walk along the drove track to the road. Turn right to walk back to the car park at New Bridge.

Points of Interest

1 The River Tone

The river flows for 33 kilometres down from Beverton Pond in the Brendon Hills, due south at first before turning east to flow into the River Parrett at Burrowbridge, which then continues out to the Bristol Channel through Bridgwater. The fast flowing headwaters pass through steep wooded sections into a meandering channel before emerging down stream of Taunton as a deep and slow river. The entire length of the river has been influenced by man's activities, from the damming of the headwaters at Clatworthy Reservoir to various leats and weirs that were constructed to power mills. It forms an important wildlife corridor through the Borough. Among the species to be seen are otter, kingfisher, bank vole and eel.

2 New Bridge Sluice

The River Tone becomes tidal at New Bridge. The sluice is used to hold water levels higher in the summer to feed the surrounding

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moors. In winter it is left open to allow flood water to flow into the tidal Parrett.

3 The Somerset Levels and Moors

These represent the most important area of wetland left in England. It was once an inlet of the sea and is now considered to be the floodplain of the rivers Axe, Brue, Huntspill, King's Sedgemoor Drain and Parrett. The wide coastal belt - the 'Levels' - was formed from clays deposited by the sea which restricted the flow of the rivers into it. The inland area - the 'Moors' - thus became marsh, fen and bog. The river valleys became filled with peat deposits which now contain well preserved remains of man's past activities such as prehistoric trackways from 4000BC and lake villages from 250BC. Through time man has struggled to overcome flooding from the rivers and the sea. The monastic estates were responsible for many of the flood containment banks that can still be seen today. A complex system of rhyves, drains, tidal sluices and pumping has developed over the last 800 years, and many river channels have been straightened. It was this landscape that gave the county its name - 'the land of summer'. In the winter it was largely covered by water and inaccessible. In the summer the

meadows provided fertile grazing land, and a high water table can now be maintained to provide drinking water and to contain the herds.

The Levels and Moors are of international importance for wildlife. A large proportion has been designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area, and there are numerous nature reserves managed by English Nature, the Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The wetland habitats are important for breeding and wintering birds, mammals such as the otter, amphibians, and many rare insects such as dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies and beetles. The meadows, rhyves and droves are famous for their abundance of plant life, including a number of orchids.

4 Black Poplar

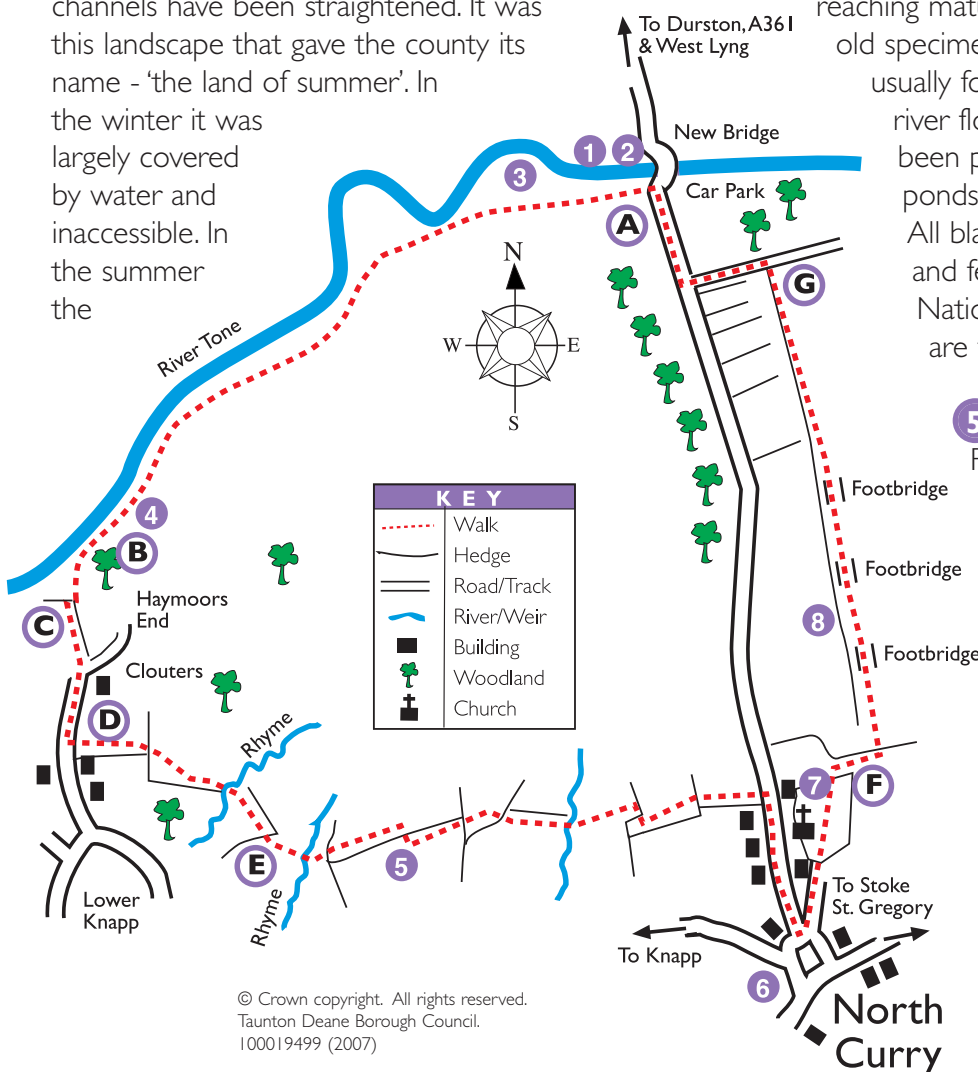
This native tree is nationally rare (approximately 10,000 trees have been recorded in Britain) but Taunton Deane has a relatively high number. It can reach a height of 30 metres, growing rapidly before reaching maturity in about 100 years. Many of the old specimens have been pollarded. They are usually 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. These ones are male.

5 View

From this ridge formed of North Curry Sandstone there are good views northwest across the Vale of Taunton to the Quantocks and north east over Curry Moor to Burrow Mump and the Polden Hills beyond. On a clear day Glastonbury Tor can be seen to the east.

6 North Curry

This large village is well worth exploring. Around its central hub are a variety of interesting old houses, some of which started life not as private dwellings



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but as places of trade. Many of the buildings date from the 18th century when expansion of the wool trade boosted the economy. The Post Office was one of the first in the country, opening in 1860. The stone memorial in Queen Square, known locally as the 'Pepper Pot', was built to commemorate the 60th year of the reign of Queen Victoria.

7 Church of St. Peter and St. Paul

This large church, often described as the 'Cathedral of the Moors', stands at the edge of a broad ridge of North Curry Sandstone, and much of it is built from this material. It has an octagonal tower, the lower stages of which date from c.1300, as do the transepts and nave. There is evidence of an earlier Norman church in the doorway in the north wall dating from c.1180. Inside there is a large nail-studded, iron-bound medieval chest which is thought to be 12th century and possibly from Athelney Abbey. From the churchyard there are fine views across the moors and the Vale of Taunton, and in the spring there is a succession of wild flowers, from snowdrops and crocuses to primroses, celandines and carpets of introduced anemones.

8 Withy Beds

Withies (young willow stems) have been grown commercially in this area since the early 19th century, primarily for basket making. The ground is particularly suitable for willow growing due to its clay content which retains essential moisture. The most popular type of willow is called 'Black Maul', a variety of *salix triandra*. The 'sets', obtained from the previous year's

rods, are planted in spring and after two or three years the new willow rods, up to 2.5 metres in length, can be harvested. This takes place from mid November when the willows become dormant. With good management the plants can remain productive for 25 years.

Sources of information and further reading

Environment Agency Interpretation Boards

The Somerset Levels

Robin and Romey Williams - Ex Libris Press

Black Poplar leaflet

Taunton Deane Borough Council

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

Guide to the Willow Industry

leaflet produced by the Willow and Wetlands Centre.

An External Appreciation of Some Historic Village Buildings in North Curry

Angela Dix - North Curry Society

Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane

Hugh Prudden - BTCV

Listed Building Database

Taunton Deane Borough Council

The Buildings of England, South and West Somerset

Nikolaus Pevsner - Penguin

The River Tone Navigation - *Jean Hall and Joy Yates*

The Lamps of North Curry

Hugh Bushell - Taunton Deane Borough Council

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