

Circular Walk Eight - Otterford and the Yarty Valley - Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

Distance of Walk: 6 kilometres

A walk from Otterhead church across part of the Blackdown Hills, down into the Yarty Valley, passing Birchwood church and returning past the Bronze Age burial mounds of Robin Hood's Butts.

OS map - Explorer 128, Taunton and Blackdown Hills

Terrain - Moderately undulating, quite steep in parts

Parking - At Otterford Church - from Taunton take the road through Trull and Blagdon Hill turning left to Otterford just after the Culmhead radio masts on the right.

Refreshments - The Holman Clavel just north of Otterford, or the York Inn, Churchinford.

Landscape character of the walk - Blackdown Hills Plateau (see point of interest no. 2)

Directions

A From the car park go into the churchyard and out through the gate on the far side of the church. Walk across the field towards the right hand corner, go through a gate into the adjoining field and then left through a gate onto the road. Go straight ahead along the road and after about 100 metres go through a gate on the right.

B Walk diagonally across the field, go through two gates and then continue across the field to the right of the houses. Go through another gate and turn left onto the road, and then right down the next lane. Cross the main road with care and follow the lane as it meanders down into the valley.

C At the T-junction, turn right and follow this lane alongside the river Yarty. Just before the lane bends right, go left through a gate and then straight up the hill to follow a hedge on the right. Continue ahead through a gate and follow the hedge until you reach two gates on the right. Go through the second of these and walk with a hedge on your left, through a further gate and down to a concrete farm track. Turn right and proceed into the

farmyard. Turn immediately left and go through a gate to follow a hedge downhill to a stream.

D Bear right to go over the footbridge, and then follow the track diagonally up the hill into the copse. Continue ahead, through a gate, past Birchwood Church and along to the road where you turn right. After a short distance turn left down a lane (Blind Lane) and follow it to the T-junction.

E Turn right and walk up this lane to a gate on the right just before you reach Rull Farm. Go through this gate and then left to walk below the farm buildings to a stile. Go over the stile and walk across fields to join the farm track. Follow this ahead, going through three gates and past Waterhayes Farm to reach a road. Turn left and walk up the road and round a right hand bend. As the road then bends left, go right through a gate and walk ahead across the field with the hedge on your left. Go through (or over) another gate and immediately over a stile and continue ahead to another stile and onto a green lane, which you follow past Lower Fyfett Farm to a road.

F Turn left and walk up to the main road. Cross over this busy road carefully and walk ahead between Robin Hood's Butts and the houses. Go through a gate and over a stile, continue across the field and over a further stile to reach the stile in the corner of the field. Walk ahead with the hedge on your left, towards the church and back to your car.

Points of Interest

I Church of St Leonard

This parish church is thought to date from the 14th century. The walls are mainly coarse chert rubble, with the Ham Stone dressings and Blue Lias flooring typical of the region. It was much restored in 1860-61, when the north aisle was added. The restoration was spearheaded by William Beadon, the creator of Otterhead House. The parish register starts in 1559, though it is incomplete because the churchwarden of 1810, who kept a shop, used some of the pages to wrap customer's purchases!

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2 Blackdown Hills

(Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) - This area extends broadly from Wellington in the north to Honiton in the south, and from Cullompton in the west to Chard in the east. It is formed primarily by an extensive and thick outcrop of the largely non-calcareous Upper Greensand dating from the Cretaceous period (70 to 135 million years ago).

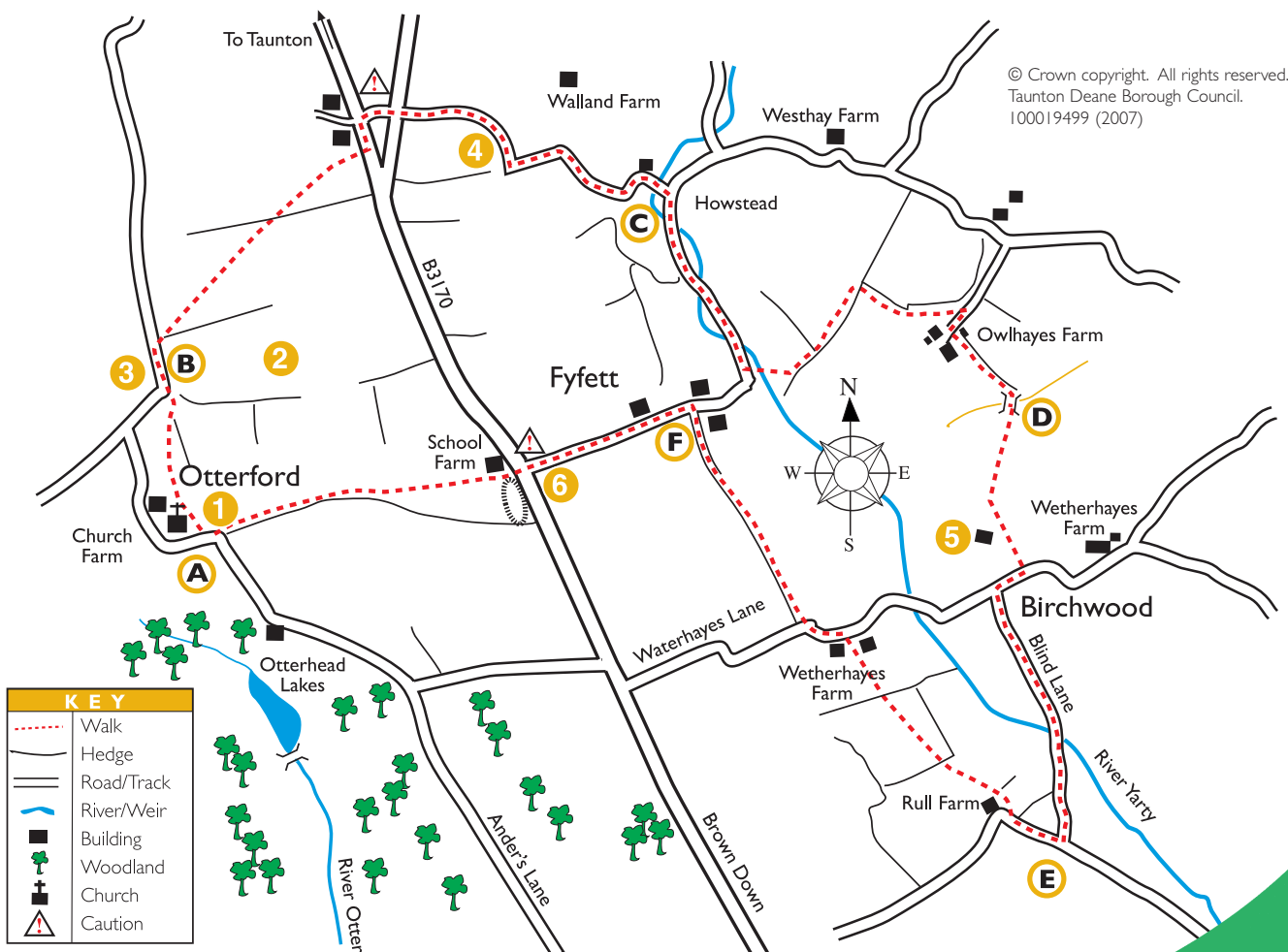
Below this are impermeable rocks, and above, a thin layer of clay with flints and cherts. Rising to 315 metres at Staple Hill, the Blackdowns are characterised by a dramatic, steep, and largely wooded scarp slope facing north and a gently sloping plateau to the south, as here, which is deeply dissected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

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 the various nature reserves managed by the Somerset Wildlife Trust and woodlands owned by the Woodland Trust. There are a number of important

archeological sites such as the great earthworks of Castle Neroche, to recently discovered evidence of Roman iron smelting. The area is still sparsely populated - there are few settlements and no towns in the AONB. The land is generally of low agricultural value, restricting farming to mainly dairying and stock rearing. Oak and ash have been the dominant trees in the past. Beech trees, an introduced species, have been used for hedging (see point 4).

3 Blackdown Beeches

The mature beech hedges and avenues are part of the distinctive character of the Blackdown Hills. They are generally on top of earth banks which are often very 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 hedgelaying. These big, closely spaced trees will be kept for as long as possible as features in the landscape, until they begin to thin out as the older trees die, leaving rows of mature specimens. Where spacing between trees allows, infill planting can take place. The traditional craft of



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hedgelaying is being encouraged where possible to manage these younger trees. The ancient hedges provide important habitats for wildlife; - nesting holes for birds and insects, roost sites for bats, and banks for insects, plants burrowing mammals.

4 View - Looking east across the Yarty Valley

The River Yarty flows south from the heights of Staple Hill for over 20 kilometres to meet the River Axe at Axminster. Here, in the valley below you, it forms the boundary between Taunton Deane and South Somerset District. It provides many good habitats for wildlife, and areas of it have been designated County Wildlife Sites or more importantly Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's).

5 Birchwood Church

This is a Chapel-at-Ease, ie. a church built for parishioners who live at a distance from the parish church (Buckland St. Mary). It was built in 1887 in the patronage of the Rev. W. H. Lance to accommodate 72 attendees.

6 Robin Hood's Butts - Round Barrow Cemetery

Round barrow cemeteries date from the Bronze Age (c.2000 – 700 BC) and consist of closely spaced groups of barrows - rubble or earthen mounds covering single or multiple burials. This linear cemetery follows a north to south alignment and includes four bowl-shaped barrows and a bell barrow at the south end. It forms part of a larger group of round barrows that are situated

along Brown Down, collectively known as Robin Hood's Butts. Most cemeteries developed over a considerable period of time, often many centuries, and in some cases acted as a focus for burials as late as the early medieval period.

They exhibit considerable diversity of burial rite, plan and form, frequently including several different types of round barrow, occasionally associated with earlier long barrows. Round barrow cemeteries occur across most of lowland Britain, with a marked concentration in Wessex. In some cases they are clustered around other important contemporary monuments such as henges. Their diversity and longevity provide important information on the variety of beliefs and social organisation amongst early prehistoric communities.

Sources of information and further reading

The Blackdown Beeches

leaflet produced by Taunton Deane Borough Council

Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane

Hugh Prudden - *Taunton Deane Borough Council*

Listed Building Database

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Taunton Deane Church Trail

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Deane Tree Plan

Taunton Deane Borough Council

If You Require Further Information Please Contact:

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Bengali

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Chinese

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Hindi

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Portuguese

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Polish

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