

Circular Walk Thirteen - Wellington to Westford - Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

A walk west from Wellington along the Westford Stream, and back along the course of the old Grand Western Canal.

OS map

Explorer 128, Taunton and Blackdowns

Terrain

Generally level with some gentle undulations

Parking

At the Wellington Sports Centre. From Taunton turn right at the second set of traffic lights in Wellington onto the Milverton road and then left at the Sportsman Inn.

Refreshments

Various pubs and cafes in Wellington, and at the Holywell Inn in Holywell village

(not open lunchtimes during the week, but open at 5pm).

Landscape character of the walk

Low Vale

From the urban fringes of Wellington the walk will take you through the western edge of Low Vale landscape in Taunton Deane, an area of change to the higher ground of West Somerset and Devon. Rising to 100 metres in parts of the Deane, this is gently undulating landscape with small pockets of mainly broadleaf woodland, the higher ground often accentuated by copses. Ash and oak are the dominant trees, and there are many standards in the hedgerows. There are numerous orchards, and also a number of historic parklands, such as at Nynehead just east of Wellington. The underlying geology is predominantly marls, and the agricultural land is good quality, composed of pasture, arable and market gardening.

Directions

A Take the signed path by the sports centre which is a continuation of Corams Lane, to pass between the ponds. Go through the kissing gate and then straight on, with the stream on your right, along a tarmac path to a second kissing gate. Cross the wooden bridge and continue straight on alongside a ditch and then a stream on the right. Cross a metal bridge and continue to a kissing gate. Cross the railway very carefully and bear left over the field past the thatched cottage onto the lane.

B Turn left and, after a left bend in the lane, take the path on the right by the stream. Cross the road to go over metal bar to the right of the bridge. Continue ahead through a gate, keeping Westford Mill and then the hedge on your right, to a stile and small footbridge in the hedge just before the far corner of the field. Go up the bank over Westford Leat and turn left along the track. Follow the track for half a kilometre forking right at the farm. At Prowse's Mill, ignoring the first stile on the left, go left over a stile and then immediately right in front of the mill and over a stile into the field.

C Keep the fence on the right and at the end of the field cross a stile on the right. Go left and over another stile and into the next field and bear half right to a stile onto a lane. Cross to a stile beside a gate and barn and go half right up the field. Go over a stile and follow the hedge on your right to a gate and stile onto a road. Turn left and then right at the crossroads for the village of Holywell Lake.

D Beyond the pub go through the first gate on the right after the stream and, keeping the hedge and then fence on the left, continue through the fields (passing under power lines) to a gate onto a road.

E Turn right onto the road and at the second bend cross a stile on the left. Bear half right under the power line to the hedge and keep this on your left to follow the line of the canal. Cross two stiles, (the remains of the incline lift cottages are visible on a banked section of the canal to the right).

Circular Walk Thirteen - Wellington to Westford

F The path here follows an embankment. Just before it drops down, go right to a stile (under a power line). Keep the hedge on your right, and proceed to a stile at the top of the hill. Continue ahead to a stile in the hedge and then forward to the right hand corner of the next field to a stile onto a lane.

G Turn left and, at the end of the lane by a barn, go over the stile opposite into a field. Keep the hedge on your right and go over a stile on the right onto the lane. At the road, turn left then right onto a footpath by Linden Cottage and then back following the outward route along the path across the railway to the ponds and sports centre.

Points of Interest

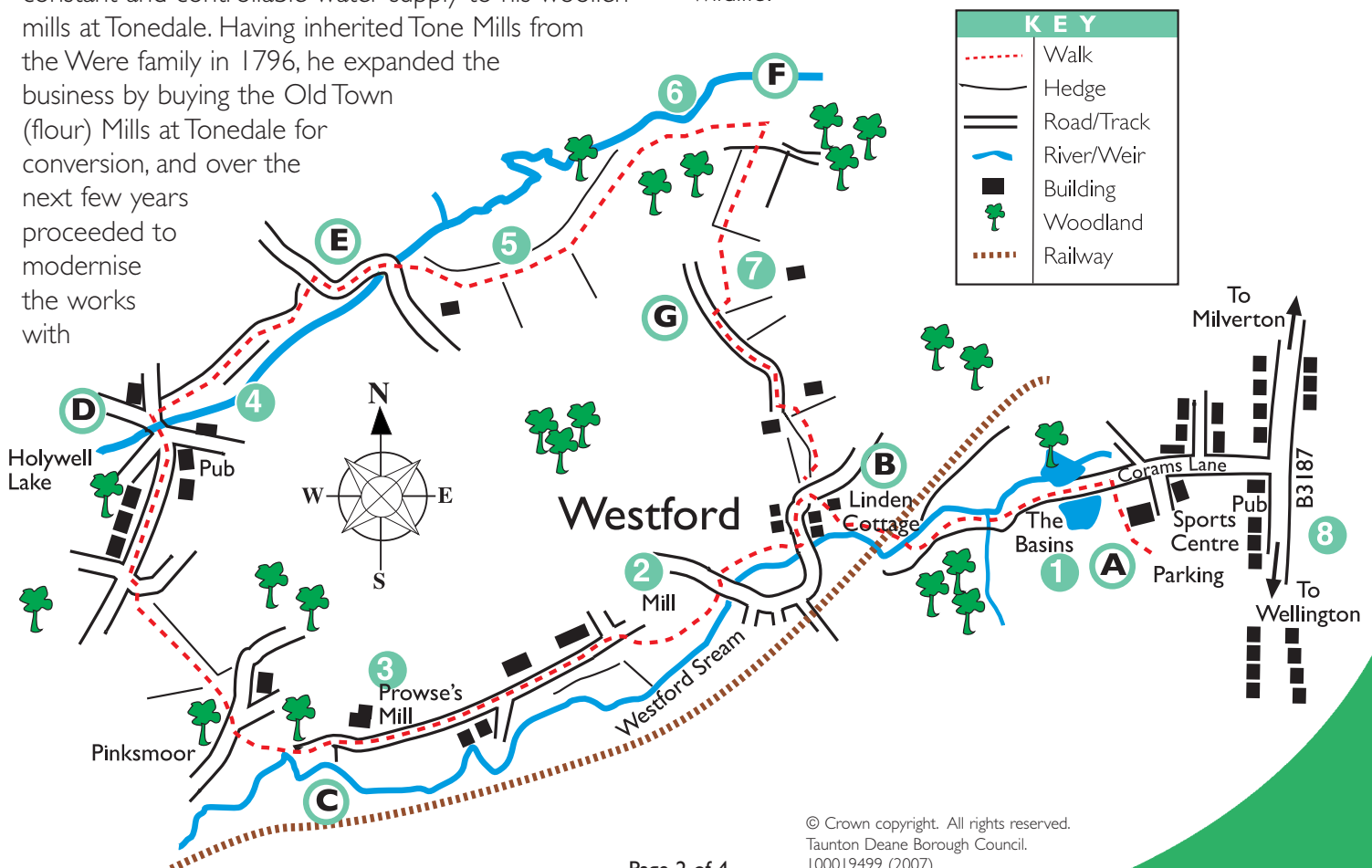
1 Wellington Basins

This complex system of waterways and ponds, developed around the existing Westford Stream and the Rockwell Green Stream, provides a fascinating glimpse into part of the industrial history of the area. The two large ponds, together with improved streams, new channels and various weirs and sluices, were excavated by Thomas Fox between 1801 and 1803 to enable a constant and controllable water supply to his woollen mills at Tonedale. Having inherited Tone Mills from the Were family in 1796, he expanded the business by buying the Old Town (flour) Mills at Tonedale for conversion, and over the next few years proceeded to modernise the works with

complex new machinery which required two water wheels for power. The introduction of steam power in 1840 led to the demise of the water wheels, but the Basins were kept operational in case one day they might prove useful again. As the mills declined during the 20th century the Basins also slowly decayed. In 1978 a Basins Preservation Society was formed to restore the waterways, and it is now a valuable place for recreation and wildlife.

2 Westford

Here can be seen an impressive mill hamlet with various factory blocks and buildings used previously as the manager's house and the workers' institute. These were the premises of Elworthy Brothers, started by Thomas Elworthy in 1780 who set up a small worsted mill on the Westford Stream employing local spinners. The business prospered and expanded throughout the 19th century, adding Prowse's Mill upstream, improved water supply and reservoirs, and introducing steam power. Nearby is the Pumping Station built in 1886 with two steam powered ram pumps, later to be driven by two diesel engines. Woollen manufacturing by the Elworthy Brothers ceased in 1934. Part of the leat and reservoir created to supply water to the mill's water wheel has now developed into a valuable aquatic habitat for wildlife.



Circular Walk Thirteen - Wellington to Westford



3 Prowse's Mill

This three-storey Red Sandstone textile mill was built by Thomas Elworthy in about 1800 with a leat to connect it to his other factories at Westford. The chimney is mid to late 19th century. In 1890 a red brick block to house a powerful steam engine was added to the east side, and remains of this can still be seen.

4 Holywell Stream

This small stream flows into the Tone and provides good wildlife habitats. An area on the opposite side of the stream to the footpath has been designated a County Wildlife Site. The 'Holy Well' made use of the large underground lake that is known to exist in the area, and from which the leat for the Westford mills was sourced.

5 The Grand Western Canal

After cutting across the field, past what used to be Payton Wharf, the walk begins to follow the line of the old Grand Western Canal. This short-lived canal was one of the few canals in the country to employ mechanised lifts and inclines to overcome steep hills. Born of a plan in the late 1700's to build a waterway to connect the English Channel with the Bristol Channel (thereby saving the small wooden freight ships from a treacherous journey round Land's End), the canal was not actually started until 1810 when work began on the 17.5 km section between the limestone quarries at Lowdwells (near the Somerset and Devon border) and Tiverton. It was not until the 1830's, once the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal had been completed, that work continued to take the canal across the 22.5 hilly kilometres of Somerset to reach Taunton. Opened in 1838, the Grand Western Canal Company did not enjoy the commercial success it had anticipated, and the building of the railway between Taunton and Tiverton ten years later quickened the demise of the canal which was abandoned in 1867. After following the route of the canal for approximately 0.75km note on the right a disused quarry and to the left the River Tone. The ruins on the right are those of the former Winsbeer Lift keeper's

cottage. At the end of the canal embankment is the site of the Winsbeer Lift which had a drop of 5.5 metres. At this point the canal bed comes to an abrupt stop.

6 The River Tone

This river flows for 33 kilometres 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, and then out to the Bristol Channel through Bridgwater. The fast flowing headwaters pass through steep wooded sections, into a meandering channel (as here) 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 the 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.

7 View

From this hill, which rises quite steeply from the Tone valley, there are good views cross Wellington and Westford, and beyond to the south the Blackdown Hills which rise to 315 metres at Staple Hill.

8 Wellington

This small country town was mentioned in the Domesday Book which recorded that land at 'Walintone' and West Buckland was being worked by 61 farmers, 65 small holders and 32 cerfs. Even earlier than that there is reference to 'Weolingtun' in a grant made between 899 and 909. Once a hamlet in the prosperous valley of the Tone, it attracted travellers from the ancient Old Way to the west to its church and by the 14th century had grown to be a market town and borough. By the 16th century there is growing evidence of the importance of the cloth trade both as a cottage industry and at mills such as Bishops Fulling Mill.

Circular Walk Thirteen - Wellington to Westford



At Pinks Moor Mills to the west of the town lived a John Were who was the forefather of the Weres and Foxes that, together with the families of Elworthy, Southey, and Price, were to bring such growth and prosperity to Wellington with their mills and factories during the 18th and 19th centuries. Wellington Park, which was given to the town by the Fox family in 1903, has recently been restored and is an important example of late Victorian design. Today the town features a wide range of small traditional and specialist shops and a number of cafes and pubs.

If you would like to make any comments about this walk, or would like to suggest other points of interest, please contact Ian Clark at: i.clark@tauntondeane.gov.uk, or write to him at Taunton Deane Borough Council, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 1HE.

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

Sources of information and further reading

Wellington Basins Heritage Trail -
[Leaflet - Taunton Deane Borough Council](#)

Somerset's Industrial Heritage -
[Somerset Industrial Archaeology Society](#)

The Book of Wellington -
[Gillian Allen and Robin Bush - Barracuda Books](#)

Listed Building Database -
[Taunton Deane Borough Council](#)

In Search of the Grand Western Canal -
[Pack Taunton Deane Borough Council](#)

Environment Agency Interpretation Boards
Tourist Information website -
www.wellingtonsomerset.com

Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane -
[Hugh Prudden - TDBC](#)

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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