

Circular Walk Fourteen - West Monkton

Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

Distance of Walk: 5 kilometres

Quite a short walk over undulating countryside to the north of this pleasant village, with fine views all around.

OS map - Explorer 128, Taunton and Blackdown Hills

Terrain - Undulating, some steep gradients

Parking - Limited parking beside the road at the old quarry just beyond West Monkton

Refreshments - The Monkton Inn at West Monkton.

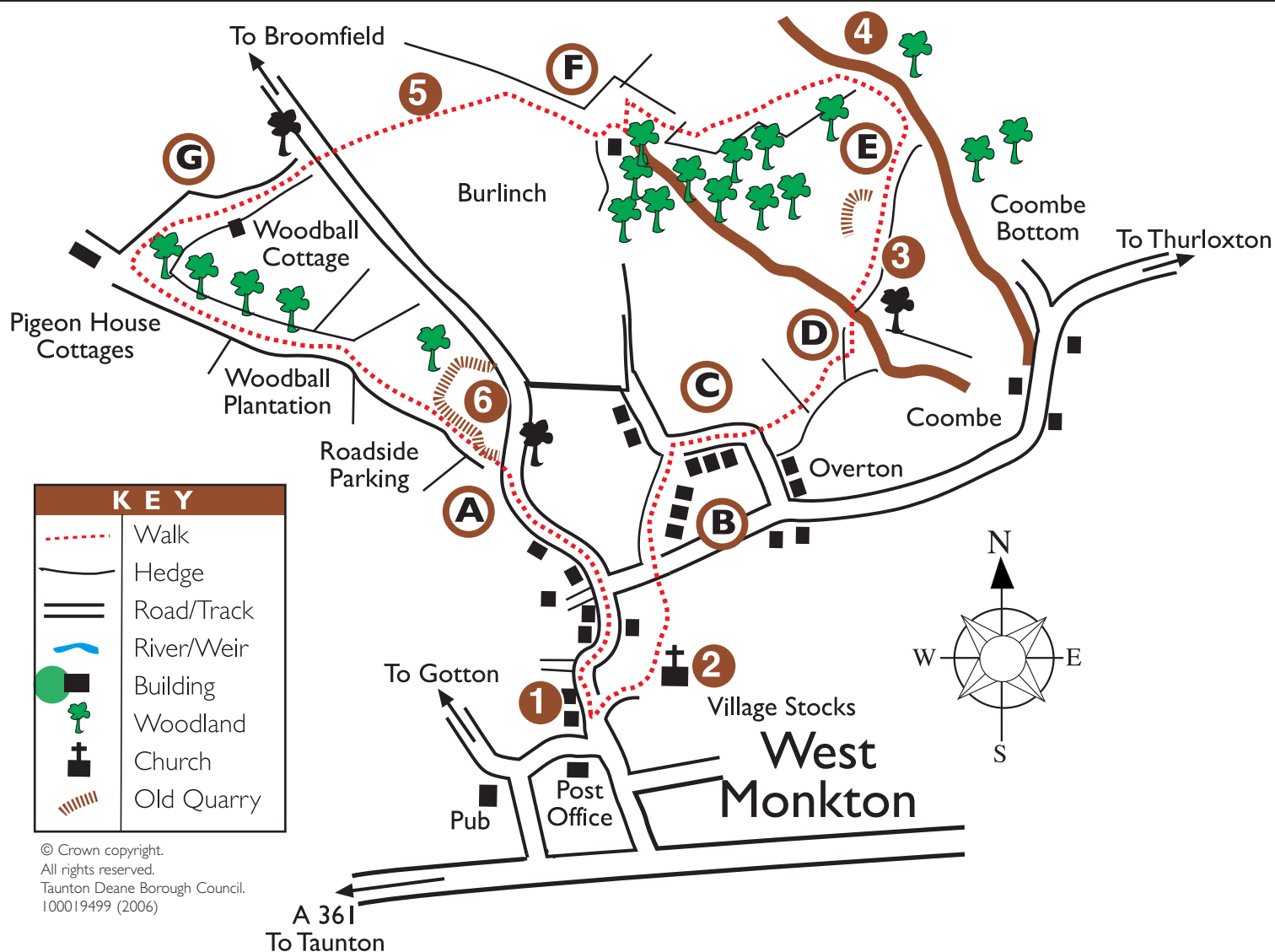
Landscape character of the walk

The village lies in the landscape of Low Vale. 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 Hestercombe. The underlying geology is predominantly marls, and the agricultural land is good quality, composed of pasture, arable and market gardening. North of the village the landscape becomes High Vale in character, more undulating with wooded hilltops, and rising to 170 metres in parts. It lies within the catchment area of the River Tone and is the source of many springs and tributary streams. Typical tree species here vary depending on the type of habitat, which may be woodland, woodland edge and scrub, heath, or wetland and river bank. The underlying geology is mainly Devonian sandstone, siltstone, mudstone and slate with Permo-Triassic reddish mudstone and alluvium. The good quality agricultural land is used for mixed arable and pastoral farming.

Directions

- A** Go down the hill to the village and turn left to walk along the tarmac drive signposted to the church. On reaching the car park go past the church porch and take the narrow path beside the house near the front of the church. At the end of the narrow path turn right onto the track and go past cottages to the road.
- B** Cross the stile opposite and keep on the enclosed path and past the cottages until the next road is reached.
- C** Turn right and go over a stile on the left of the right-hand bend. Go straight on over two more stiles and into the next field. Continue downhill, keeping the hedge on the right to cross the stile in the hedge near the valley bottom.
- D** Turn left to cross the stream by the gate. Go through the gate and then turn right uphill keeping very close to the right-hand fence. Pass through the copse with the old quarry on the left. After the copse ignore the bridle gate on the right and 20 metres later pass through the gate in the fence and continue downhill through the scrub thicket and trees to a stile. Turn right and just before the stream and cottages at Coombe Bottom go left to walk alongside the stream.
- E** Follow the stream for 200 metres, ignoring the stile on the right. Cross another stile and turn left uphill to emerge from the wood and continue straight ahead towards the right-hand edge of the wood on the skyline. At the top of the hill continue this line across the field to a gate into the wood. Go through this gate and along the track to the corner. Take the path left downhill inside the wood and meet a track near a stream with a cottage ahead. Turn immediately right, climbing uphill to go over a stile at the edge of the wood into a field.
- F** Bear right and follow the right-hand hedge until the first gate on the right. Here, strike out left across the field towards the right-hand copse and communications tower on the skyline. At the gate cross the road and continue on the drive opposite.

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Directions continued

G Before the gate and house, cross the stile on the right into the woodland and follow the track downhill. At the garden of a cottage turn left along a well defined path through the wood and rhododendron thickets to a stile. Go forward around the edge of the field to a bridle gate and path through the wood to the road and back to your car.

Points of Interest

I West Monkton

The ancient manor of West Monkton once belonged to the Abbey of Glastonbury, to whom it was given by Royal Grant in 682. It is thought to have been part of an administrative area called the Hundred of Whiteleigh, most of which consisted of Abbey estates on the eastern bank of the River Parrett, so it therefore became known as West Monkton.

The parish grew to become one of the largest in Somerset, with settlements scattered from the southern slopes of the Quantock Hills to the edge of Taunton. In the Domesday Book of 1086 three sub-tenants of the Abbey of Glastonbury are noted and this sub-dividing produced smaller holdings such as Overton, Gotton, Heathfield, and Bathpool. Once a valuable asset to the monastery, the estate diminished over time, and after the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539, that part of the parish that was still in its possession was forfeited to the Crown and then came into the possession of William Poulet, Marquess of Winchester, whose house is thought to be the present Rectory. In 1616 the manor passed to the Warre family of Hestercombe, who held it until 1872, when it became the property of Viscount Portman until the Crown once again became the owners in 1944.

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Points of Interest continued

The north, east and west boundaries of the parish have changed little since 682, and many of the place names can be traced back hundreds of years. Large areas in the south have been swallowed up by the expansion of Taunton.

2 Church of St. Augustine

The oldest parts of this Red Sandstone church date from the 13th century. They can be seen in the mouldings on the eastern face of the tower arch, which show the roof-line of an earlier building, and also in the fine chancel arch and the deeply splayed window at the western end of the south aisle. Most of the rest of the church dates from the 15th century, including the fine wagon roof with good carvings. Note the large collection of interesting monuments including a small half-figure of a cleric in brass. In the churchyard there are well-preserved stocks and whipping posts under a canopy. It is thought that the big yew tree could be as old as 1,500 years.

3 View

Climbing steeply here, you will be rewarded with good views to the south and east. Note the spinney known as Thorn Clump in the middle distance. The quarry here (a County Geological Site), like West Monkton Quarry, was worked for the Morte Slates (see right).

4 Coombe Bottom

A hamlet in this steep-sided, partly wooded valley with a stream which rises from the eastern slopes of the Quantock Hills and flows down to the River Tone.

5 View

From this high field there are panoramic views to the Blackdown Hills, South Somerset, Dorset and across to the Mendips. On clear days look out for Glastonbury Tor, Burton Pynsent Monument and Wellington Monument.

6 West Monkton Quarry

This now abandoned quarry was worked for the Morte Slate that was much used as a rough walling stone in the area. The rock dates from the Devonian period (400 - 350 million years ago) and was formed of muds, sands and silts that were deposited in shallow seas and then subjected to deep burial, compression, folding and faulting which transformed the finer grained sediments into slates. Quarrying ceased here over 100 years ago, allowing vegetation to recolonise the site. The secondary oak-ash woodland, much of it reaching maturity, now supports a valuable and extensive resident wildlife community, made more diverse by the presence of open water.

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Sources of information and further reading

Church of St Augustine of Canterbury, West Monkton

Leaflet available from the church, by Revd. M. E. Roydon

Taunton Deane Church Trail

Taunton Deane Borough Council

The Buildings of England - South and West Somerset

Nikolaus Pevsner, Penguin Books

Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane

Hugh Prudden, Taunton Deane Borough Council

West Monkton Quarry, Management Plan

John Clare, Taunton Deane Borough Council

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

More information about various aspects of this walk and other Circular Walks in the Borough can be obtained from the Taunton Deane website, www.tauntondeane.gov.uk or Taunton Tourist Information Centre, Paul Street, Tel: 01823 336344

Email: tauntontic@tauntondeane.gov.uk.

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

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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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