

# Circular Walk Fifteen - Wiveliscombe and Maundown Hill - Exploring Taunton Deane



## General Information

**Distance of Walk:** 9 kilometres

This is a 'walker's walk' with spectacular views over the surrounding landscape and down to the historic town of Wiveliscombe.

**OS map** - Explorer 128, Taunton and Blackdown Hills.

**Terrain** - Hilly with steep gradients.

**Parking** - North Street car park in Wiveliscombe, reached from Taunton on the B3227.

**Refreshments** - There are two pubs in the main street of Wiveliscombe, as well as shops and a cafe.

**Landscape character of the walk** - Brendon Hills (see point of interest no. 2)

## Directions

**A** From North Street car park turn right onto the road and go past the school and left into the lane by the cottage. There is a steady climb to the top of the hill. Bear right at a junction after 0.75 kilometre.

**B** Continue to walk upwards. Beyond the brow of the hill turn left at the junction and follow the track for a kilometre (ignoring the footpath on the left that goes through a gate, which is the return route) until it ends at a gate into a field. Continue ahead for 80 metres before turning right through a gateway. Keep the wood on the left for 100 metres and then bear right to a path leading to a gate into the wood.

**C** Follow the track down through the wood carrying straight on at the crosstracks and later bearing right to a road. Turn left to Washbattle Bridge and the River Tone. Take the track to the left of the bridge, and after 100 metres fork right along the river bank. Pass the cottage in the clearing and go through a gate into a meadow beside the river. On reaching the farm keep to the river bank below as far as the road.

**D** Turn left and climb steeply up the road for a kilometre. 200 metres after the drive to Challick Farm, turn left on the track signposted 'Maundown Top' and follow it until you reach five gates. Go through the second gate from the left. Bear left and walk with the hedge on your left to the next gate. Go through the gate ahead and then immediately right, passing between the barn and the hedge. Continue through fields with the hedge on your right.

**E** Turn right on the lane and keep straight on until the junction. Turn right and after 0.75 kilometre fork right. Continue downhill to a road which eventually joins West Street in Wiveliscombe. Go left and left again to return to North Street car park.

## Points of Interest

### **I** Wiveliscombe

Situated at the foot of the Brendon Hills, the site of this small town has been important for many centuries, as remains from pre-historic, Roman and Saxon times have been traced, including the fortifications of King's Castle to the east and the Roman fort to the south east. The medieval bishops of Bath and Wells had a 'palace' here, one of several throughout Somerset, and the entrance archway can still be seen on Church Street. The Market Square is the hub of the town, and several of the buildings around it and along the High Street have their origins in the late medieval period.

In 1285 Edward I granted the Bishop of Bath and Wells a market and a three day fair. By 1301 'Wivvy', as it is known locally, is described as a Borough with shops paying rent around the Market Place, then known as the Shambles. A dominant building on the Wiveliscombe skyline is the former brewery built by the Hancock family during the 19th century. Having moved to Wiveliscombe in 1805, they quickly expanded their brewing business to become one of the most well known breweries in the south west of England. Some of the old brewery buildings are now used by the Exmoor Brewery.

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The unusual red tile-hung, timber jettied building at the top of the High Street, the Court House, was built by the Hancock family in the 1880's. Note the elaborate carvings of figures, stylised fruit, mythical animals and the Hancocks' initials. St. Andrew's Church was built relatively recently, 1827-9, on the site of a medieval church. It was designed by the county architect of the time, Richard Carver. Under the church are extensive vaults in which are buried some of the families of those who purchased the right when the church was rebuilt. These vaults were used during the Second World War to store art treasures from London.

### 2 The Brendon Hills

Lying north of the Carboniferous rocks of central Devon, there is an east-west belt of Devonian rocks which extends from the coast at Ilfracombe and embraces Exmoor and the Brendon Hills, and occurs as an inlier in the Quantock Hills. The Brendons are characterised by rolling hills deeply dissected by wooded valleys. They rise to over 400 metres at Wiveliscombe Barrow, and to the west they merge into Exmoor.

The sandstones, mudstones, siltstones and slates are overlain generally by fine loamy reddish soil, the land being used principally for dairying and stock rearing. There are a number of mixed forest plantations, particularly to the north of the area, and some of

these have open access. During the 19th century a number of small mining settlements grew around local deposits of iron ore, and many buildings and features from this industry remain.

### 3 Green Lanes

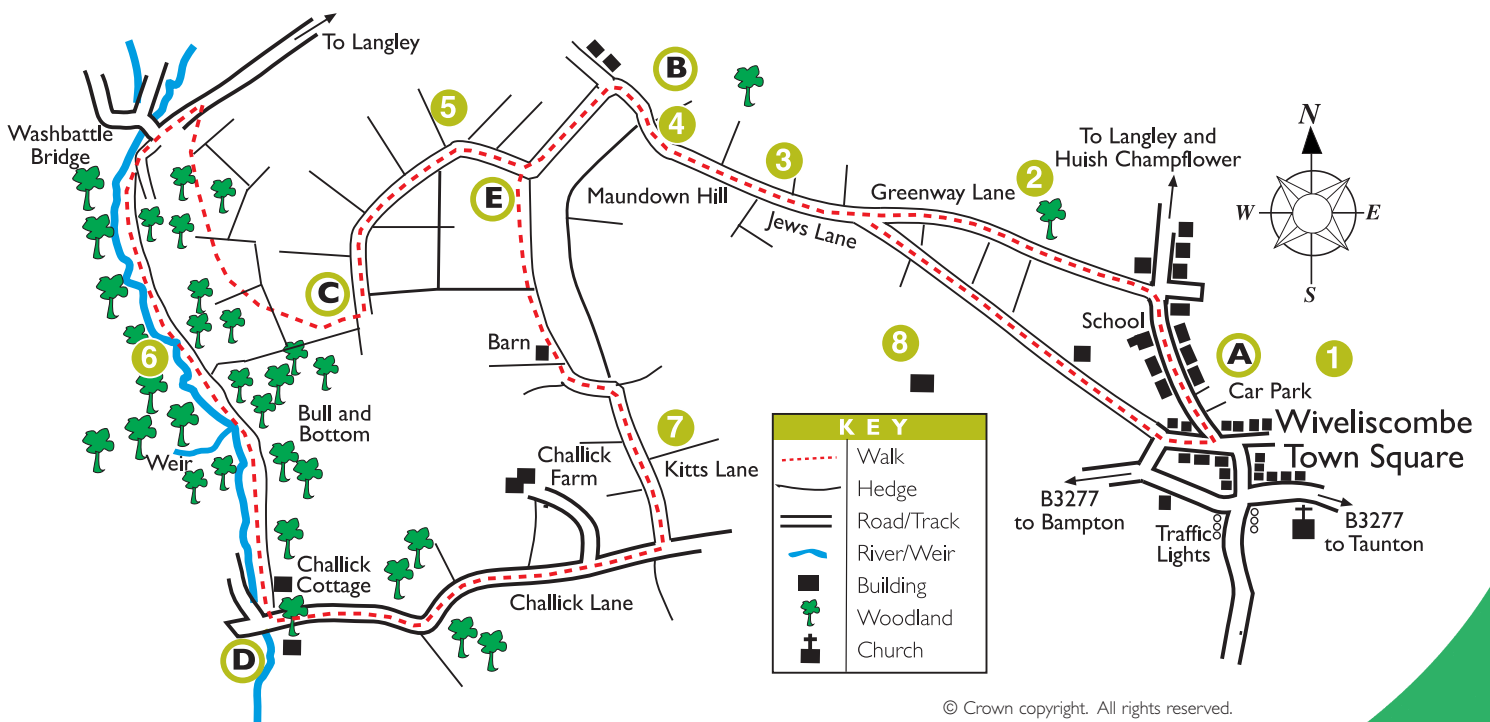
With the advent of motorised vehicles, the number of so-called green lanes has diminished rapidly. These tracks, here known as Greenway Lane, Jew's Lane and Kit's Lane, have great cultural and historical value. They may represent routes that have been in use since pre-historic times, perhaps trodden by Roman legions, pilgrims, medieval travellers or miners, or etched out by primitive sledges and cart wheels. The antiquity of the hedgerows and banks that often enclose these lanes makes them important wildlife habitats.

### 4 West Deane Way

From Wiveliscombe to Challick Lane you will be walking part of this 72 kilometre circular route which starts in Taunton and follows the Tone valley west and then north before returning back to the lower slopes of the Quantocks and to Taunton.

### 5 View

From this track 300 metres above sea level there are fine views across the Brendons, with the village of Huish Champflower nestling in the valley below.



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### 6 River Tone

This river flows for 33 kilometres down from Beverton Pond in the Brendon Hills, south at first before turning east (where it forms the border of 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 downstream 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.

### 7 View

From Kit's Lane there are panoramic views from the Quantocks to the Blackdowns, and beyond to the Somerset Levels and the Mendips. In the valley below you will see the whole of Wiveliscombe.

### 8 Abbotsfield

As you return along Jew's Lane, and fork right towards Wiveliscombe, you will see the distinctive pyramid roof of the staircase tower of this mansion, built for the piano manufacturer Lacey Collard in the 1870's. It was designed by Owen Jones, an influential Victorian design theorist, and is the only building of his surviving.

## Sources of information and further reading

Wiveliscombe, Historic Town Trail  
*Wiveliscombe Parish Map Group*

Taunton Deane Official Guide  
*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*

Somerset's Industrial Heritage  
*Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society*

Somerset Parks and Gardens  
*James Bond - Somerset Books*

Deane Tree Plan  
*Taunton Deane Borough Council*

The Green Lanes of England  
*Valerie Belsey - Green Books*

West Dean Way, Guide Book  
*Taunton Deane Borough Council*

## If You Require Further Information Please Contact:

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