



# **Brentor to Glastonbury & Glastonbury to Avebury**

A walker's guidebook

# Purpose

Whether you are walking for a day, a week or a month, Mary/Michael Pilgrims Way offers you the opportunity to step out from your day to day life, to slow down to walking pace and to reconnect more deeply with yourself and the earth.

The pilgrimage route passes through diverse and beautiful landscapes and links together many significant Christian and pre-Christian sacred sites, creating a spiritual and cultural journey, with space and time for reflection and inspiration.

I hope this guidebook will support you on your way.

*"I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found was really going in."*

John Muir



Please visit our website for background information about the project, regular news updates, photo galleries and videos:

**[marymichaelpilgrimsway.org](http://marymichaelpilgrimsway.org)**

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# Background

Mary/Michael Pilgrims Way was set up to establish a walking pilgrimage route across England from West Cornwall to Norfolk and to support people of any faith or none in undertaking that journey. Pilgrimage is part of many spiritual traditions and cultures around the world and consequently has a universal appeal. The earth energy currents identified by Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst in their book *The Sun and the Serpent* have been followed. They give coherence to this route connecting many sites of spiritual significance, both Christian and pre Christian along the way.

We tried to stay true to the spirit of the Michael and Mary lines dowsed by Hamish Miller, but recognise the compromise inherent in incorporating points from two separate interweaving lines into one pilgrimage route. Hamish and Paul did much of their surveying travelling by car we by contrast avoided all main roads and include stretches of walking on minor roads only where necessary. The bulk of the route is on public footpaths and moorland with open access.

This book incorporates both an updated guide to the pilot section of the pilgrimage between Brentor and Glastonbury - SECTION 1 along with details of the route between Glastonbury and Avebury - SECTION 2. Combined this covers a distance of more than 200 miles. There is a separate guidebook describing the Cornish section of the pilgrimage, which links to the pilot section at Brentor. Together they give a detailed description of a 350 mile journey, enabling the possibility to walk all the way from the cliff tops of west Cornwall to Avebury.

The guides are primarily practical aids to help people get from A to B and find places to stay and eat. They also include brief background information about interesting features along the way.

Symbols have been used to highlight different elements in the text:

**Route directions**



**Accommodation, shops & places to eat**



There have been some modifications to the format of the guidebook first produced for the pilot section in 2011, including the use of text boxes to highlight information about places of interest; clearer measures of

distance to help with journey planning and some detailed maps sketching the way through potentially confusing parts of the route. Other additions include the description of a choice of routes for walkers along the sections of the pilgrimage between Chagford and Crediton and around Taunton.

The pilgrimage has been divided into stages for convenience. There is an indication at the start of each stage of the facilities available on that particular stretch of the walk with more details given in the main body of text including mention of all B&B accommodation directly on route. The stages are somewhat arbitrary and are not intended to prescribe how far someone should be walking in a day. They do tend to begin and end at points where there are easily accessible public transport services.

Our aim is to balance functionality with the recognition that the journey is a metaphorical as well as a literal one. The outer pilgrimage provides the context and opportunity for inner transformation. Included in the text are quotations and observations intended to support and deepen the experience of pilgrimage along with extracts from poems that seem relevant to particular locations.

*"A true pilgrimage is where the traveller is guided by the spirit of the enterprise to visit places which have an effect upon the innermost nature"*

John Michell

Like all guidebooks, this is an evolving creation. There may be errors and omissions, as well as changes that occur over time. We ask for your understanding and help in updating and enhancing the quality of information contained here for the benefit of those who may follow in your footsteps.

## Preparing for Your Journey

The desire to journey is deep in the human psyche, maybe stemming right back to the earliest human experience of hunter gatherers. This route with its associations with myth and history, spirituality and wilderness offers a rich opportunity to reconnect with ourselves and with the earth. This process begins to happen naturally as we slow to the pace and rhythm of walking for which our senses were evolved and our minds so often overstimulated by the demands and distractions of modern life begin to settle.

An intention underpinned with reverence and respect creates the possibility that we not only receive the gifts that pilgrimage may offer, but nurture the relationship of interdependence and reciprocity with all life.

*"In travelling between these sacred places one not only refreshes one's own spirit but assists in the work of reviving the latent spirit of the earth."*

John Michell

Pilgrimage is a process of preparing, journeying and arriving and the more fully we are able to be present with the experience as it unfolds the more we are likely to be enriched by it. It is how we travel that transforms the journey into a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is not a route march or a competition. Take your time, find the pace and rhythm that suits you and follow your own guidance and inspiration.

*"If a man does not keep pace with his companions perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, However measured or far-away"*

Henry David Thoreau

Part of the experience is the emotional and physical ups and downs that we go through. In making a pilgrimage we are stepping out of our comfort zone, challenging ourselves and in the process connecting to resources and capacities within that we perhaps did not previously recognise we possessed. It also opens us to unforeseen meetings and events which we are often insulated from in our daily lives.

The heyday for pilgrimage in Europe was the Middle Ages and a legacy of this may be that pilgrimage today could be perceived as anachronistic and outmoded. Yet there seems to be a re-emerging desire for spiritual experience which is not necessarily defined by the parameters of traditional religion. In this respect pilgrimage can offer a form for the process of personal inquiry to unfold.

*"Undertaking a physical journey is necessary because you come face to face with your fears and you discover that the fear you were gripped by was momentary and illusory."*

Satish Kumar

## **What is drawing you to the idea of pilgrimage?**

Traditionally in India, a pilgrimage was undertaken by people at 50 years of age. It offered an opportunity to reflect on the life already lived and to

contemplate the future. It often coincided with a changing focus away from the responsibilities to family and earning a living towards an increased attention to spiritual aspects of life.

Maybe you have reached a crossroads in your life, where the old certainties that you have lived by no longer reassure you as they once did. Are there deep questions you are wrestling with or is change being forced on you by outside circumstances? Perhaps you recognise the need to step out of the routine of your life to reassess your priorities or the impulse could be to embark on an adventure. Whatever your motivation give time for this inner preparation.

Equally give time to practical considerations. Traditionally, pilgrims would set all their worldly affairs in order before embarking on a journey that was often long, arduous and potentially risky. This route does not offer that level of challenge, but there may be loose ends that need to be tied up before you set out, so that they do not accompany you as pre-occupations.

Do you want to walk alone or in company? Are you physically fit enough for the journey? If not what will support you to be adequately prepared? Be realistic and recognise that a long walk on one day is very different from the experience of getting up day after day and repeating the endeavour, particularly if you are carrying a pack that is heavier than you are used to.

Dartmoor is the most challenging part of the route in terms of topography with some steep ascents reaching up to 2000 feet at Yes Tor and some equally severe descents. The terrain is also variable, sometimes tussocky grasses, sometimes stony or boggy. In regard both to the unevenness underfoot and the variations in altitude be realistic about how far you plan to walk each day. 10 miles over the high moor from Lydford to Okehampton is a very different proposition to walking 10 miles along the towpaths of the Tiverton or Kennet and Avon canals. In John Brierley's Pilgrim Guides to Santiago de Compostela, he estimates an extra 10 minutes should be added to the duration of a day's walk for each 100 metres climbed.

Keep your load to a minimum. If you are camping, there are a range of websites or camping and outdoor shops to advise you on ultra- light weight equipment. I particularly like Kate Fletcher and Corwen Broch's straightforward advice based on their pilgrimage experiences at [www.ancientmusic.co.uk](http://www.ancientmusic.co.uk). Do your research.

Travelling light will allow you to focus more fully on the totality of your experience, rather than being dominated by awareness of the burden on your back.

Finally, make sure you are well shod, with footwear that is comfortable and adequate for the rigours of the journey, particularly over Dartmoor.

*"The beginning is the most important part of the work"*

Plato

## Accommodation

Unfortunately Mary/Michael Pilgrims Way is not blessed with a system of refuges or hostels similar to that which has evolved to provide for pilgrims walking to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. Currently the choice is between camping and bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, or a combination of the two, with in addition, a Youth Hostel at Okehampton and a bunk house at Drewsteignton. If you choose the alternative route that follows the river Teign on beyond Castle Drogo estate (Chagford to Crediton stage), there is another Youth Hostel at Steps Bridge near Dunsford.

Our vision for the project includes the aspiration to recruit hosts along the way willing to offer accommodation for a night to a pilgrim or two in the spirit of generosity and hospitality towards strangers. Another alternative is to establish a network of 'tent keepers', who may be willing to store a tent which pilgrims are able to pitch in return for a small fee, thus reducing the load which needs to be carried. These are long term goals in the early stages of development. With our programme of guided group pilgrimages, we have been fortunate to receive a number of invitations to camp on privately owned land, which complement official campsites. At present we are not able to supply details of potential hosts.

## Wild Camping

Choosing to camp makes available the experience of wild camping on Dartmoor. The National Park is one of the few places in the U.K. where wild camping is very much accepted, with the following provisos:

- Don't pitch on farmland; on moorland enclosed by walls; within 100m of a road; on flood plains or archaeological sites.



- Take all litter with you.
- Guard against risk of fire.
- Ensure you don't pollute streams or rivers.
- Avoid disturbing wildlife, especially during the moorland lambing and bird breeding season from 1st March to 31st July.

If you camp in the military firing range make sure that the range is free of live firing both overnight and the next day.

In recent years there has been no live firing timetabled on Okehampton range (which our route crosses) in April, May, July, August and up to the 15th September. There is also no live firing on any Dartmoor ranges over Bank Holiday weekends. But do check any access restrictions in advance at [www.access.mod.uk](http://www.access.mod.uk) or by ringing freephone 0800 458 4868. Red flags are flown to indicate when the range is in use. An alternative route has been included that bypasses the firing range if this is necessary.

Some suitable locations for wild camping are mentioned in this guide, but for more information go to [www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk).

Most registered campsites have indicated that it is their policy is to find space for backpackers even if the pitch has not been pre booked. This gives campers the benefit of flexibility in undertaking the pilgrimage compared to pilgrims using Bed and Breakfast accommodation, when pre booking is the norm. With regards all facilities we have tried to offer current contact numbers and prices, but would appreciate updates and recommendations for future users. Additional sources of information are listed at the end of the introductory section.



# The Guide Book, Maps & Waymarking

This guide is intended to give clear directions. Distances are given from settlement to settlement, usually from church to church, or a central point in a town. Distances are given in miles rather than kilometres to give consistency with road signage information.

Along the pilot section of the route, we experimented with putting up waymarking symbols at strategic points. These are designed to use in conjunction with the guide book rather than to be followed on their own. They are occasional reference points to reassure pilgrims that they are still on track and are numbered in the text beginning (1) at the waymarker nearest Brent Tor and finishing with (65), the last waymarker before Glastonbury. Feedback will be valuable with regards to their usefulness, or if any are damaged or missing.

The waymarkers are 5x3 inch oak plaques with the pilgrimage route logo etched on. They are mainly located on existing finger posts and will often be found at intersections where our route joins another recreational walking route, such as the West Devon Way or The Two Moors Way and again where the routes diverge. The route between Glastonbury and Avebury currently has no such waymarkers.

The maps used in planning and surveying this route, are in the Ordnance Survey Explorer series. From west to east, they are Explorer 112, OL28, 113, 114, 128, 140, 141, 142, 156 and 157. The maps not only complement the information in the guidebook and the way marking, but put the route in the context of the wider landscape.

OL28 is the map which covers most of Dartmoor National Park and all of the wild open access land on route and it has the boundaries of the firing ranges clearly marked. Of all the maps it is the most essential. Others are available to buy in towns along the way.

On the grounds of travelling light they may not all be prerequisites for starting your journey. Explorer 112 and 113 each covers a small section of the route, whilst by contrast the route stretches across both sides of Explorer 128 between Halberton and Stoke St Gregory. In reaching a conclusion about which maps you need, it is worth familiarising yourself with them before starting your journey. They should be available to view at main libraries.

You can purchase a set of the maps produced by Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst indicating the Michael and Mary earth energy currents, printed under licence from the Ordnance Survey. There are 53 maps in the complete set, available from Penwith Press. A set currently costs £38. The relevant sheets, which can be purchased individually, could be used to complement this guide enabling you to dispense with at least some of the Ordnance Survey Explorer maps.

## Other Useful Sources of Information

Tourist information centres are located in:

Tavistock. The Archway, Bedford Square, 01822 612938.

Okehampton. 3 West Street, 01837 53020.

Tiverton, Museum of Mid Devon Life, Becks Square, 01884 230878.

Taunton. Taunton Library, Paul Street, 01823 336344.

Glastonbury. 9 High Street, 01458 832 954.

Shepton Mallet, 70 High Street, 01749 345258

Trowbridge, St Stephen's Place, 01225 765072

Devizes, Wiltshire Museum, 41 Long Street, 01380 800400

Visitor information about Dartmoor can be found at [www.dartmoor.co.uk](http://www.dartmoor.co.uk). The site includes information about where to stay and an online booking facility for accommodation. There are also similar countywide tourism websites at [www.visitdevon.co.uk](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk), [www.visitsomerset.co.uk](http://www.visitsomerset.co.uk) and [www.visitwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk)

Information about walking in Devon, including free booklets for The West Devon Way and other walking trails in the county can be obtained from the Devon County Council website at [www.devon.gov.uk](http://www.devon.gov.uk). Equivalent information about walking in Somerset can be obtained from the Somerset County Council website at [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk)

For information on bus timetables call Traveline on 0871 200 22 33 or visit [www.traveline.org.uk](http://www.traveline.org.uk). For information on train timetables call National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950 or visit [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)

There is a luggage transfer service in the South West. The geographical area of operation includes the pilot section as far as Taunton. Prices start from £7.50 per bag for a 2 bag transfer, 0800 043 7927 or 01326 550721.

## Distances – Brentor to Glastonbury

Measurements to nearest 0.1 of a mile

In each of the 3 cases where a choice of route is offered for a section of the pilgrimage, the running total excludes the alternatives marked with \*

(C) indicates a campsite on or close to that stretch of the route

	Distance (miles)	Running total (miles)
Brentor to White Lady Falls (Lydford)	4.5	4.5
White Lady Falls to Lydford village	1.3	5.8
Lydford to Widgery Cross (C)	1.9	7.7
Widgery Cross to Black a Tor Copse	4.3	12
Black a Tor Copse to Okehampton Camp	4.1	16.1
*Lydford to Meldon Viaduct	6.7	
*Meldon Viaduct to Okehampton Camp	2.5	
Okehampton Camp to Belstone	5	21.1
Belstone to South Zeal	2.3	23.4
South Zeal to Throwleigh	3.8	27.2
Throwleigh to Gidleigh	1.8	29
Gidleigh to Scorhill Stone Circle	1.5	30.5
Scorhill to Chagford	5	35.5
Chagford to Fingle Bridge	3.7	39.2
Fingle Bridge to Dunsford (C)	5.9	45.1
Dunsford to Tedburn St Mary	5.1	50.2
Tedburn St Mary to Posbury	3	53.2
*Chagford to Drewsteignton	4.2	
*Drewsteignton to Hittisleigh (C)	3.2	
*Hittisleigh to Colebrooke	4.4	
*Colebrooke to Posbury	4.2	
Posbury to Crediton (C)	2.8	56
Crediton to Upton Hellions	3	59
Upton Hellions to Shobrooke	2.6	61.6
Shobrooke to Thorverton	6.2	67.8
Thorverton to Cadbury Castle	2.2	70
Cadbury Castle to Bickleigh Mill	4.7	74.7

	Distance (miles)	Running total (miles)
Bickleigh Mill to Tiverton	3.9	78.6
Tiverton to Halberton	5.6	84.2
Halberton to Sampford Peverell (C)	2.3	86.5
Sampford Peverell to Holcombe Rogus	5.3	91.8
Holcombe Rogus to Greenham (C)	1.9	93.7
Greenham to Thorne St Margaret	2	95.7
Thorne St Margaret to Runnington	2.1	97.8
Runnington to Nynhead	2.2	100
Nynhead to Bradford on Tone	2.4	102.4
Bradford on Tone to Trull	4.8	107.2
Trull to Corfe	2.7	109.9
Corfe to Stoke St Mary (C)	3.8	113.7
Stoke St Mary to Ruishton	2.3	116
*Bradford on Tone to Taunton	4.8	
*Taunton to Ruishton	2.8	
Ruishton to Creech St Michael	0.9	116.9
Creech St Michael to North Curry	3.5	120.4
North Curry to Stoke St Gregory (C)	2.4	122.8
Stoke St Gregory to Burrowbridge (Mump) (C)	3	125.8
Burrowbridge to Othry	3.1	128.9
Othry to Middlezoy	1.5	130.4
Middlezoy to Sutton Mallet (C)	4.4	134.8
Sutton Mallet to Moorlinch	1.8	136.6
Moorlinch to Shapwick	1.7	138.3
Shapwick to Wearyall Hill	6.6	144.9
Wearyall Hill to Glastonbury Tor (Via Abbey) (C)	2	146.9

Total Distance

146.9 miles

# Section 1 Brentor to Glastonbury

*"Be safe and well. Peace, Love and Courage."*

Traditional Arab farewell for those leaving on a pilgrimage

## Stage 1: St. Michael de Rupe Church (Brentor) to Lydford (5.8 miles)



Facilities include loos at the car park near the base of Brentor; cafes at Lydford Gorge; pub, B&B accommodation and campsite at Lydford.

St. Michael de Rupe Church is situated in an isolated spot, making its location as the start point of this section, the first challenge along the way, (unless of course you have walked the Cornish section too in which case well done for making it this far!). It was the place where I chose to start the pilgrimage when the project was in its infancy. Being relatively close to home it was convenient when I was developing the original pilot section of the pilgrimage (Brentor to Glastonbury).

As one of the crossing points of the Mary and Michael earth energy currents dowsed by Hamish Miller it was significant. The Tor is also an iconic and spectacular landscape feature and provided a nice symmetry (from Tor to Tor) with the pilot section end point, Glastonbury Tor.

It remains one of the most memorable landmarks along the way even as the original scope of the project evolved towards the more ambitious goal of developing a pilgrimage route from coast to coast, Cornwall to Norfolk.

Public Transport. There is a regular bus service between Plymouth, Tavistock and Okehampton – Beacon Bus 118, with stops in Mary Tavy and North Brentor, either alternative leaves you with a walk to Brent Tor. We recommend the Mary Tavy alternative which is slightly further to walk but offers an attractive approach. If you start from North Brentor village, you will need to retrace your steps on the way to Lydford Gorge.

Alternatively you may choose to begin your pilgrimage by walking from Tavistock to Brent Tor, about 7½ miles.

## Tavistock

The relationship between Tavistock Abbey and St. Michael de Rupe Church was historically strong, with dispensation given by Pope Celestine III in the 12th century for the Abbot to manage its affairs without interference from the Bishop of Exeter. This authority continued until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 and gives a historical justification for those who choose to start their pilgrimage in Tavistock. It also offers a gentle introduction to the pilgrimage, in preparation for the more arduous crossing of Dartmoor.



Tavistock has all the facilities of a small town, B&B accommodation includes The Hollies, 67 Parkwood Road, 01822 617709, from £25pppn; Kingfisher Cottage, Mount Tavy Road, 01822 613801, from £27.50pppn and April Cottage, 12 Mount Tavy Road, 01822 613280, from £30pppn. See below for the camping option close to Tavistock.



From Tavistock follow The West Devon Way (WDW) to beyond Mary Tavy. This is marked on the O.S. Explorer maps and uses a symbol of Brent Tor church to mark the way. (Booklets describing this trail are available free from The Tourist Information Office, Archway, Bedford Square in Tavistock, 01822 612938.)

In summary, start from Bedford Square, cross over the Abbey Bridge and follow WDW logos north out of town. It is pavement and road walking for about 2/3 mile before you turn left into a peaceful lane. Walk past Mount House School beyond which the lane reduces to a track.

About 1.5 miles from Tavistock, Brentor is visible in NW direction. At Harford Bridge there is an attractively located campsite on your left, (01822 810349). Pitches range in the season from £14.20- £19.15 for 2 adults sharing. Opposite the campsite, the path turns right, past the intriguingly named Beggars Hatch and across fields, with Mary Tavy church appearing ahead in the distance and Peter Tavy church to the right. Continue following the WDW symbol, past the sign to Elephant's Nest Inn, and on into Mary Tavy.



Food and B&B accommodation are available at the Elephant's Nest Inn, 01822 810273, with rooms from £87.50/night. Other accommodation in Mary Tavy is available at Glebe End, 01822 810696, from £60/room/night, throughout the year; and at The Mary Tavy Inn from £75/room or £55 single occupancy, 01822 810326. There is a small shop and post office near the coach station which is open 7 days a week, morning only on Sundays.



Mary Tavy church 4.5 miles from Tavistock, lies on the the Mary Line which weaves across Dartmoor to be met again at Throwleigh.

If you took the bus from Tavistock or Okehampton to Mary Tavy, the bus stop on the A386 near Downs Garage is the start point of your walk.

3 miles to Brentor. At Downs Garage follow the lane signposted to Brent Tor. Once across the cattle grid leave the WDW. Carry on along the lane with Brent Tor straight ahead and take the first turning off on the left, identified as a no through road. Pass Wortha Mill and cross over the bridge.

At the T junction of tracks go left, joining a tarmac lane at South Brentor Farm and fork left onto Holyeat Lane. After a few hundred metres, the lane bends left, take the permissive path through the gate on the right. The finger post (1) points along the hedgerow on your right towards Brent Tor.

The church on the summit is one of the smallest in the country. The stained glass window depicting St. Michael holding the sword of righteousness and the scales of justice is a recent addition, whilst the wind pruned hawthorns to the east of the church are testament to the exposed nature of the Tor.

A Michaelmas fair was held here from 1231 up to the Reformation and plans are afoot to reinstate this tradition. It is interesting to note that many fairs originated near prehistoric earthworks as at Brentor, which may indicate a lineage back to a far older tradition of ceremony and celebration.



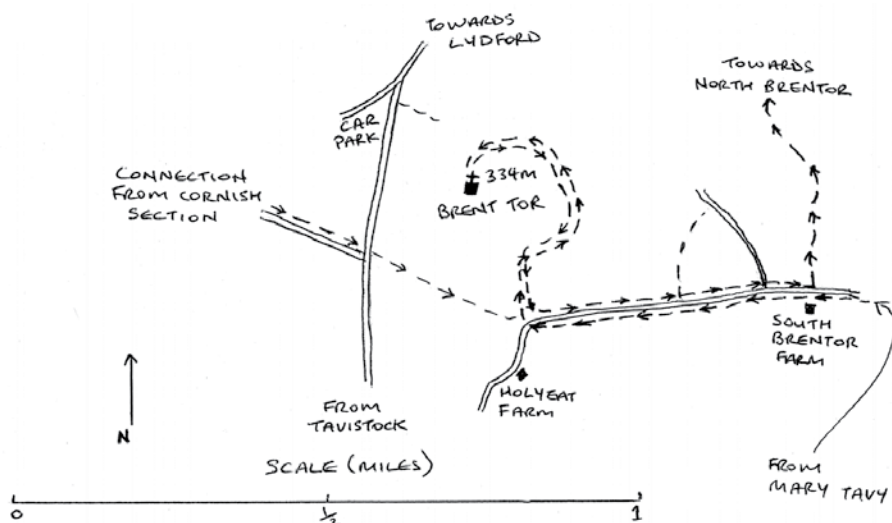


Perhaps before proceeding it may be a good moment to pause and reflect on the journey ahead. The Gatekeeper Trust which promotes pilgrimage in sacred landscape for the purpose of healing the earth and healing ourselves has a quotation on the back cover of its magazine which ends thus:

*"We can both give and receive love, in mutual benefit. In such a way a pilgrim's relationship with the earth, with the landscape, can be a loving relationship....That is the hidden purpose of pilgrimage – the so called redemption of mankind and nature, the raising of all to light, wherein light is the manifestation of love."*

Peter Dawkins

## Routes to and from St Michael de Rupe Brentor



2 miles to North Brentor. Retrace your steps off the Tor back to Holyeat Lane and turn left. At the fork in the road, follow the route signposted "unsuitable for motors" to the right. Pass South Brentor Farm and at the next fork follow the track marked with the finger post (2) left towards North Brentor. Walk through fields, one with a pond adjacent to the path before coming along Dark Lane into the village. Turn right by the war memorial towards Christ Church.

The church was described as "hardly a thing of beauty and a joy to behold" in a leaflet and it seems as if every effort has been made to camouflage it, with an abundant variety of trees in the churchyard. It is a chapel of ease, built for the convenience of parishioners and clergy in Victorian times, when in poor weather the trek up to St Michael's may not have been relished. It lacks the romance of St Michael's, which remains the parish church but is used sparingly, mainly for services in the summer months.

As I began the survey of the pilgrimage route, a bat flew about in front of me for several minutes at the edge of the village. It was 2pm on a warm and sunny early summer's day.



2.5 miles to Lydford Gorge - White Lady Falls. With Christ Church on your left walk along Station Road and past Station House, both remnants of the railway line which used to link Okehampton and Tavistock. Beyond Station House cross the cattle grid and with the open moor before you, turn left along the road just above the Old School House. When after a few hundred yards the road turns away left, carry straight on along the well-defined moorland track which re-joins the WDW to Lydford.

The path runs parallel to the dismantled railway for just under a mile, then passes through a gate in front of a row of cottages and crosses the old railway bridge. Turn left onto the road and over the "weak" bridge. The southern entrance to Lydford Gorge is just round the corner beyond Mallard House.

Lydford Gorge is a National Trust Property. Opening times are: 13th March to the 3rd October 10am to 5pm; 4th-31st October, 10am to 4pm, 01822 820320. Through the winter months access is possible down to The White Lady Falls only, because of the flood risk further along the gorge. In the evening, access to the White Lady Falls is free. There is a café at each end of the gorge.

The gorge is the deepest in the South West, with the White Lady Falls having a 90 foot drop. A sign identifies this as reputed to be the most romantic site in Devon and Cornwall, a claim that may be dependent on the company you are keeping when you visit. It is atmospheric and has attracted its fair share of stories and folklore, including the belief that anyone who falls into the river here and sees the figure of a woman dressed in white will be saved from drowning.

The Michael Line has been dowsed running close to the waterfall and it is certainly an invigorating spot. The water has an amazing translucence in the dark of the night.

If your visit coincides with the seasonal opening times, follow the track that winds through the gorge. The Michael Line goes all the way along the gorge following the river and through the dramatic Devil's Cauldron. Beyond here, exit via the main National Trust car park, turn left over the bridge and proceed into the village of Lydford. Out of season you will need to follow the road from the White Lady Falls entrance into Lydford.

## Lydford

Once a place of significance and wealth, with a royal mint in the time of Ethelred the Unready, its prosperity made it an attractive target for Viking raiders. On the roadside verge, opposite the church of St. Petrocs, is a monument to the Lydenforde skirmish between Danes and Saxons in 997AD. The Saxon stronghold was burned down and the mint raided. Tavistock Abbey was destroyed in the same raid. Numerous coins from Lydford mint have been found in excavations in Denmark.

It is thought that a church to St. Petroc was first established in about 600AD. The font is probably the oldest surviving feature in the current church. The intricate Rood Screen was carved by Violet Pinwell, contradicting my preconception of the narrow opportunities afforded to Victorian women.

The history of Lydford is evident as you walk through the village, with remnants of the earthworks of the Saxon/Norman stronghold in the field behind the church. This was replaced in the 12th century by the nearby medieval stone castle, which later became a fortified prison and courtroom where the notorious Law of Lydford was administered over the Royal Forest of Dartmoor. This role continued up to the early 19th century. Gibbet Hill, between Lydford and Mary Tavy, was the spot where many who were convicted here were taken to be hung.

When Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst visited Lydford they found the energy in the castle dark and foreboding as if some of the suffering and misery associated with the history of the place had seeped into the walls. Sceptics may discount this explanation yet even those without spiritual belief, sometimes experience the peace and tranquility of a church, an atmosphere possibly enhanced by generations of prayer and contemplation. Is it far-fetched to consider that misery and suffering may also permeate the fabric of a building?

*"Whenever a centre is found to be neglected or in disrepair, do not leave that spot without doing something, however small to improve the situation, in the spirit of loving service."*

Wellesley Tudor Pole

Beyond the Castle and about 200 metres on past the pub is a sign on the left pointing towards the ancient village spring. The site has recently been restored.



Lydford is a recommended rest stop before the hike over the high moor. B&B options include: Downtown Farm, £35pppn 01822 820210; Heathergate, from £25pppn, 01822 820486; Moor View House, Vale Down, from £80/room, 01822 820220; The Castle Inn, tariff from £50-£95/room, 01822 820241. The Castle Inn may serve breakfast to those not lodging there.

Camping is available at Lydford Caravan and Camping Park, 21st March to 31st October. Prices for backpackers range from £5.55 to £6.90 depending on the season, 01822 820497. There is a small shop on site with basic provisions, which is open 9-11am and 4-6pm. The Dartmoor Real Welcome accommodation guide produced by the Dartmoor Partnership ([dartmoor.co.uk](http://dartmoor.co.uk)) gives more details of accommodation available throughout the National Park.

The area east of Lydford near to the river Lyd offers ample choice for wild camping, under the watchful presence of Widgery Cross on Brat Tor. (See next section for more detailed directions).





## Stage 2: Lydford to Okehampton Camp (10.3 miles via higher altitude route, 9.2 miles by the alternative)



Okehampton offers a wide range of facilities. No facilities between Lydford and Okehampton.



Two alternative choices for this section of the walk are offered. The first is over the high moor, via Widgery Cross, Bleak House, Kitty Tor, Sandy Ford, Black-a-Tor Copse and Yes Tor. To the outskirts of Okehampton it is about 11 miles. Consideration needs to be given to the steep climbs and descents in assessing the time this will take to complete. The route passes through Okehampton Firing Range Danger Area, so please check for any restrictions before embarking. Okehampton range free phone 0800 458 4868. A further note of caution is that this route takes you through wild and remote country, where the weather can be unpredictable. Be prepared.

In the summer it is also important to be conscious that ticks are found on the moors and may brush off onto you from tall vegetation. Some tick bites carry the risk of Lyme disease, so do check at the end of a day's walk, whether any ticks have attached themselves to you. Having sounded the warnings I would now like to recommend this route to you.

The second choice is less strenuous, skirts around the Firing Range Danger Area and if weather conditions are poor, or for those less confident of their orienteering skills, may be worth considering. The route is via Great Nodden and Sourton Tors, joins the Granite Way at Meldon Viaduct and passes through Saxon Gate. It is about 9 miles to the outskirts of Okehampton.

Both alternatives start the same way. From the centre of Lydford with castle and pub on your left, follow the main road up through the village, past the junction and war memorial to your left. (You could turn left here and follow the WDW all the way to Okehampton as a third alternative!) Lydford caravan and campsite is also situated along here.

Carry straight on up the hill out of the village ignoring signs to the Granite Way, the disused railway line which now forms part of the national cycle network. Cross the A386 and take the track to the left of The Dartmoor Inn. This is about 1 mile from St Petroc's church in Lydford.

Follow the bridleway sign (3) through a gateway onto the open moor with Widgery Cross clearly visible ahead on the summit of Brat Tor. Keep close

to the field boundary wall on your left down to a footbridge and stepping stones over the River Lyd. Up or downstream from here are possible camping sites. This is the point where the two alternative moorland routes diverge. The higher altitude route will be described first.

On one visit, a pair of what I thought were nightjars, flew off amongst the gorse bushes on the slopes of Brat Tor. I am more confident of having seen Red Grouse on the moor beyond Widgery Cross. Dartmoor is recognised as a southern outpost of their habitat range. The higher route passes through an area of particular significance for breeding birds. It is therefore not advocated for large groups or people with dogs during the nesting season.



### Alternative 1: Higher Route



Before crossing the river, it is worth making a brief detour downstream a few hundred metres to the memorial to Captain Nigel Ratcliffe Hunter, killed aged 23 in the last year of the First World War. On the memorial plaque is a poem he wrote during his last visit to Lydford prior to his death.

I hope it doesn't seem sacrilegious to mention the swimming hole that has been created just beneath the memorial. Along with the wild camping, wild swimming is one of the joys of Dartmoor.

Retrace your steps to the footbridge and stepping stones and crossing the river aim for Widgery Cross. This landmark was erected on Brat Tor by William Widgery a local artist to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. The cross is on the Michael Line.

*"Were sacred sites located to mark or attract such energy ... the two clearly have some kind of symbiotic relationship."*

Nigel Twinn

Seeing the earth as a living system animated by its own currents of energy is a belief widely held in many cultures around the world. This energy is often associated in myth and story, with dragons or serpents. For example the gigantic Rainbow Serpent a primordial creature associated with beneficent powers of fertility among the Aborigines of Australia. Within our own culture are the folklore stories of dragons in hills guarding buried treasure, or slumbering waiting to be awoken.

The snake was revered as a source of wisdom in ancient Greece, The Pythoness being the title bestowed on head priestess at the Oracle of Delphi, who sat on a stool supported by 3 legs carved in the form of snakes. The cobra was also the symbol of authority and power worn around the Pharaohs head in ancient Egypt. Only in the Judeo Christian tradition, beginning with the story of the Garden of Eden does the serpent take on a darker aspect.

The vanquishing and banishing of Satan is one of the symbolic functions associated with The Archangel Michael. Perhaps his slaying of the dragon/serpent also represents the old earth based religion being subjugated by Christianity which supplanted it. Another interpretation is that this battle represents the potential transformation and integration of the baser instincts of humanity through piercing them with the wisdom and insight available to our higher consciousness.

Whatever the layers of meaning, the symbolism of dragons and serpents battling with angelic forces will be a recurring theme in the pilgrimage, represented in stained glass and carvings in many locations along the way.

*"The degradation of the sense of symbol in modern society is one of its many signs of spiritual decay."*

Thomas Merton

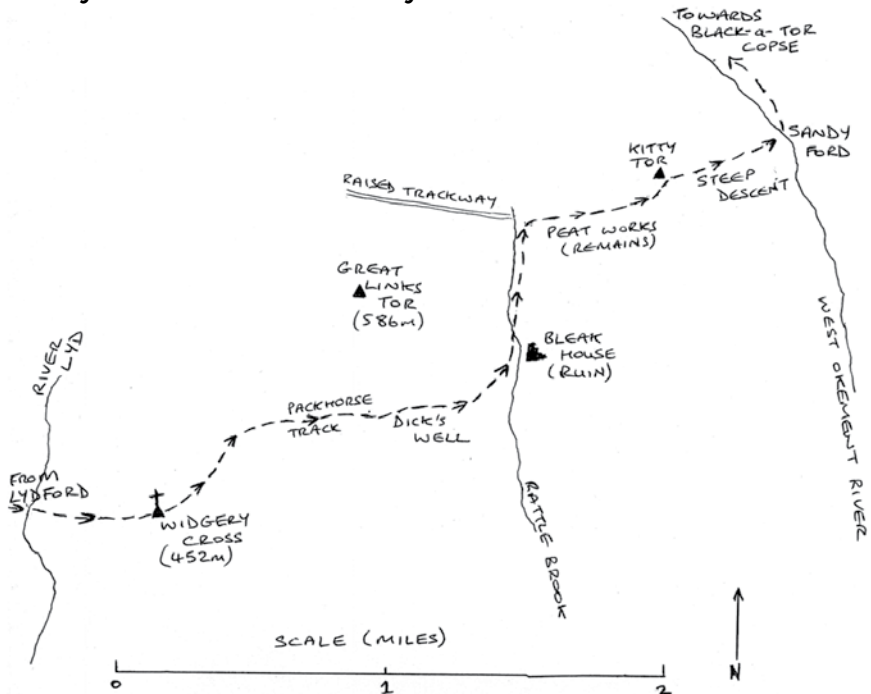




From Widgery Cross (altitude 450m) you have a panoramic view on a clear day, with the sea to the south, Brentor and beyond this Bodmin Moor, all visible. In the opposite direction, Great Links Tor rises to the north east.

Intercept the bridleway that follows the old tin miner's packhorse track below Arms Tor and walk east along the southern slopes of Great Links Tor. Depending on how wet the ground is and how windy the weather, you may appreciate the shelter of the sunken track. It offers a profusion of Whortleberries (bilberries) to feast on in the summer. All around is the extensive legacy of old mine workings in what must have been at times a harsh working environment.

### River Lyd to West Okement valley



There is a parish boundary stone at Dick's Well, which rather than an actual well is the end of a deep gully, approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from Widgery Cross. Just beyond is a fork in the track. Take the more northerly path which stays to the right of the small granite outcrops known as the Dunna Goats and leads into the valley of the Rattle Brook near the ruin of Bleak House.

This remote spot is resonant with layers of history that have marked the changing fortunes of the moor and the people who have lived and worked here.

In 1240, the Sheriff of Devon and 12 knights confirmed the boundaries of land granted by King Henry III to his brother, Richard of Cornwall, by riding a perambulation of the moor. The Rattle Brook became part of the boundary of his land, which was known as, and remains, The Forest of Dartmoor. Our route includes other points named in the documentary record of this perambulation, such as Yes Tor and Halstock Farm.

More will be said later about mine working on the moor, but Bleak House is a reminder of another industry which developed to extract a natural resource, in this case peat. It was the home to the manager of The West of England Compressed Peat Company. Extraction of peat for Naphtha which was used as fuel for gas lighting began in 1868, but although a tramway was constructed for conveyance of men and peat, the industry never really prospered.



From Bleak House follow the brook upstream a few hundred metres to the junction with the former tramway and head east along it, past the ruins of the peat works to Kitty Tor where there is a lookout hut associated with the firing range. Red flags indicate live firing, when public access is prohibited and one of the recommended alternative routes should be taken. (From here following the tramway back skirting north of Great Links Tor is simplest and then joining the route via Coombe Down and Sourton Tors.)

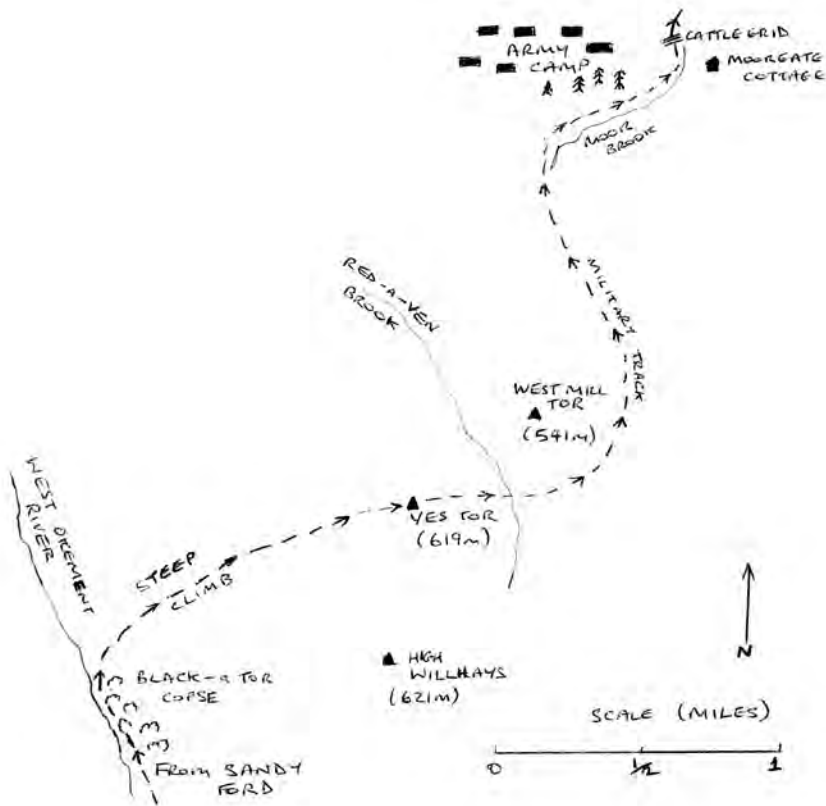
If the range is open and it is for most of the year, begin a steady descent from Kitty Tor down to Sandy Ford. Make for the visible meander in the river at Sandy Ford, where there is a shallow crossing of the West Okement.

You will probably need to remove shoes and socks to cross. Be aware, the cobbles at the ford are slippery, but the water is relatively shallow, even in winter. On the east bank of the river, the ground is initially boggy, but improves as you follow the course of the river downstream towards Black-a-Tor Copse through the dramatic landscape of the West Okement Valley.

The area from Sandy Ford through the valley and including Black-a-Tor Copse has been identified by Dartmoor National Park ecologists as important for breeding birds. In light of this an alternative between Sandy Ford and Yes Tor could be to follow the ridge along High Willhays. This more gradual ascent also follows the direction of the Michael Line as dowsed by Hamish Miller.

Black-a-Tor Copse is included on the route being one of the best examples of high altitude oak woodland in Britain, nationally important for the lichens and mosses which thrive here in the clean air and a remnant of the woodland that was at one time a more extensive feature of Dartmoor. It is a fantastic place to pause and reflect, sat cushioned by the thick moss against one of the gnarled oak trunks. One time, I sat quietly as a stoat passed within 6 feet of me carrying a small rabbit in its jaws.

**Black-a-Tor Copse to Okehampton Army Camp**



*"What matters most on your journey is how deeply you see, how attentively you hear, how richly the encounters are felt in your heart and soul."*

Phil Cousineau



From here, the high altitude route makes a steep ascent up the boulder strewn slopes of Black Tor and on to the summit of Yes Tor. At over 2000 feet it is just surpassed in height by its near neighbour High Willhays. Yes Tor, said to be a corruption of Ernestor, meaning Eagles Tor, has the remnants of cairns (burial mounds) on its western slopes. The Michael Line was tracked through the summit by Miller and Broadhurst.

There is a panoramic view. Having been in apparent wilderness it is startling to see how close you are to the bustle of 21st century life, with the A30 clearly visible and all too often audible to the north and Okehampton Camp, the army barracks about 2 miles ahead. Directly beyond in the valley below is the town of Okehampton.

Walk east from Yes Tor, crossing the Red-a-ven Brook and pick up the military vehicle track which skirts the east flank of West Mill Tor. Bear left at the junction of tracks and head towards the line of conifers around the southern perimeter of the camp. As you approach, keep this tree belt on your left and follow the tarmac track down to and across the cattle grid.



Moorgate Cottage on your right offers B&B accommodation, from £25pppn, with evening meals available, 01837 659729 or text 07768 622151.

The training camp was built in 1893, although military training began on Dartmoor as far back as the Napolionic Wars. The conifer shelter belts around it provide a site for starlings to roost in winter, although numbers have reportedly declined since some of the shelterbelts were felled. I have still seen several thousand moving in their spectacular, graceful display as dusk approached.



From the gateway which leads to the military camp, follow the road down-hill towards Okehampton. After several hundred yards there is a Holy Well to the left of the road with an associated ancient cross and a reclining willow behind.

The well is named after Sir John Fitz who owned large estates around Okehampton in the 16th century. The cross is older and is thought to have originated from the dismantled chapel at Lower Halstock. Terry Faull in his book on Holy Wells of Devon identifies its traditional uses as a wishing well and for general healing. Until late in the 19th century it was customary for young people to visit the well on Easter morning to learn their fortune. Today the well is covered by granite slabs, though the water still seeps out into the adjacent field and ribbons are often left tied to an overhanging willow.

The route proceeds from Fitz Well along the farm track leading to Lower Halstock. But before continuing, I will describe the alternative route from Lydford which reconnects with the high altitude route near Fitz Well and mention some of the facilities available in Okehampton which may be of interest.

## Alternative 2: Lower Altitude



Stay on the west bank of the river Lyd and head north-east, following the course of the river upstream from the footbridge and stepping stones with the field boundary wall on your left. At the corner of the enclosed land, climb the ridge away from the river in a northerly direction, heading towards the rounded bulk of Great Nodden. Turn right along the dismantled railway which runs along the eastern slope of Great Nodden, above the river valley. Trains first powered by horse and later by steam, serviced the peat works at the head of the Rattle Brook and used this track.

The track passes through a cutting and merges with another track from the south west. The route skirts around the north western slopes of Great Nodden. Recently a previously unrecorded granite cross was found near here, thought to have been a wayside cross, indicating this may have been an ancient travel route.

Carry on along the dismantled railway - with views to the left of the impressive Lake Viaduct - until you reach a hairpin bend. Leave the track here and head north through the turning circle created for the wagons. The path runs close to a line of cairns towards Sourton Tors. At the top of

the valley which rises up from Lake Viaduct is a boundary stone. Carry on from here to the Tor, or continue along its eastern slope.

Over the brow of the hill, Meldon reservoir nestles in the valley. West of the reservoir is a line of beech trees. The footpath to follow lies to the left of these and passes between field boundary walls onto a drove track, where it re-joins the West Devon Way (4).

Follow the track, which gains a tarmac surface near Higher Bowden to the junction just before the railway bridge. Take the path on the left (5), up onto the Granite Way, the cycle path between Okehampton and Lydford. Turn right along the Granite Way and over Meldon Viaduct with its impressive view.

Meldon Viaduct was built in 1874 to carry the London and South Western Railway main line between Waterloo and Plymouth. Spanning 165 metres, it looks across a landscape which has seen a wide range of mining and quarrying activities over the centuries. To the south west is the imposing structure of Meldon Dam. At the far end of the viaduct is the destination of the steam railway which operates from Okehampton. The Railway Buffet at Meldon is open weekends during the summer.



Continue for just under a mile along the Granite Way, past Meldon Quarry, in the direction of Okehampton. Just before the underpass beneath the A30, take the footpath signposted on the right (6). Follow the fingerposts, over the railway bridge, across a stream and through fields with stands of ancient coppiced holly trees. The fingerposts direct you to the far side of a hedgerow with an associated line of mature beech trees. Follow this field boundary up the hill to a stone wall.

Climb the stile and turn immediately left. This area known as Saxongate, is marked on the map as a medieval settlement. There are also indications of an ancient chapel. It seems that the settlement was abandoned around 1300, probably as a consequence of land clearances by the Earls of Devon who owned Okehampton Castle and created a substantial deer park around that time.

Saxongate is thought to have been on the ancient track way to Okehampton. John Christian in his dowsing exploration of the earth energies of Dartmoor, drew a connection between Saxongate and the row of cairns along the ridge at the back of Sourton Tors, which along with the ancient waymark cross recently found on the slopes of Great Nodden, give some credibility to the idea of this as an ancient route.

Pass through the gateway at the north east corner of the abandoned settlement and walk along the track below Moor Cottage, past the water pumping station and the YHA building. (The main Youth Hostel is located near Okehampton Station.) At the road, turn left for Okehampton or right past Klondyke House to Fitz Well where the alternative routes re-join.

## Okehampton



As previously mentioned, Okehampton has a YHA hostel, 01837 53916 situated near the railway station, prices range from £21 for existing YHA members. There is B&B accommodation down Station Road at Meadowlea, 01837 53200 from £56 for a double room and £32 single and hotels in the centre of town including The White Hart 01837 52730. Rooms cost £80 for a double, £65 single. There is a camping and outdoor shop, OK Leisure on Fore Street along with a range of shops, cafes and restaurants.

Okehampton was a Saxon settlement, which became more prominent after the Norman Conquest when the castle was built and the town became established as an administrative centre, thriving on the trade in tin and wool. St James Chapel on Fore Street, is the only remaining link with the medieval town. It is one of five churches in England that is strictly non-denominational. The town lies on the route of The Trafalgar Way, the name given to the historic route used to carry dispatches with news of the Battle of Trafalgar overland from Falmouth to the Admiralty in London. The first messenger was Lieutenant Lapenotiere, of HMS Pickle, who reached Falmouth on 4 November 1805 after a hard voyage in bad weather. He then raced to London bearing dispatches containing the momentous news of Lord Nelson's victory and death at Trafalgar on 21 October.

## Stage 3: Okehampton to Chagford (19.4 miles)

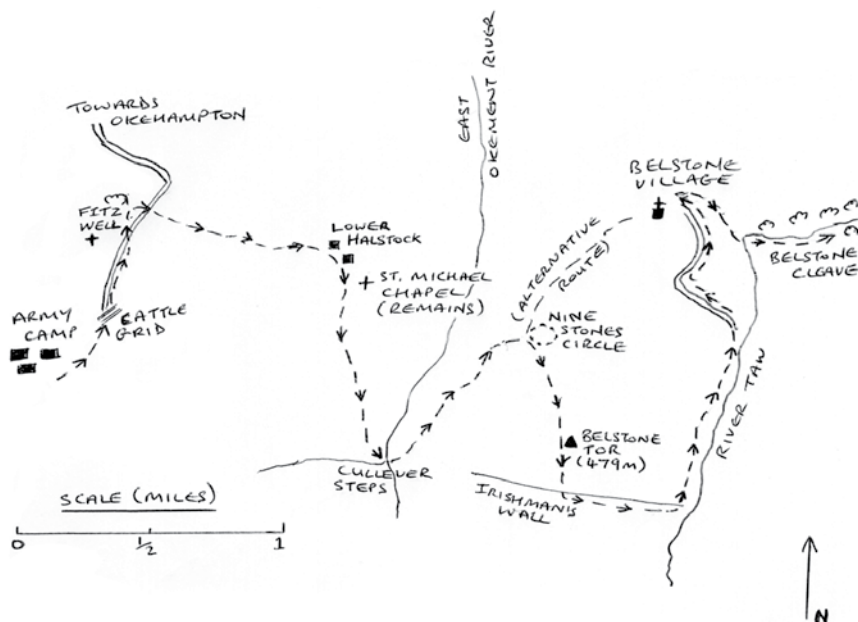


Facilities include pub and B&B at Belstone and South Zeal, shops at Sticklepath and South Zeal, pub at Wonson and a range of facilities in Chagford.



5 miles to Belstone. From Fitz Well, cross the road and follow the bridleway over the cattle grid (7) towards Lower Halstock Farm. At the junction of paths in the farmyard follow the bridleway signposted to the right (8). As you pass a large open hay barn, there is a gateway on your left where grass covered foundation stones mark the outline of an old chapel. Its dedication to St Michael, is verified by its mention in the perambulation of the Forest of Dartmoor in 1240. The Michael Line was traced to the same spot by Hamish Miller almost 750 years later.

### Okehampton Army Camp to Belstone



From here follow the bridleway back onto the open moor, keeping the boundary wall of Higher Halstock close to your left. The track leads to the ford and bridge at Cullever Steps an historic river crossing, again



mentioned in the perambulation of 1240. If you look closely you can see that the ford has been carefully cobbled. This dates from the 19th century when the cobbles facilitated the passage of horse drawn gun carriages.

On the East Okement River about 50 metres downstream from Cullever Steps is a swimming hole and nearby, potential camping spots.

Crossing the bridge at Cullever Steps, you have a boulder strewn ridge ahead of you with Belstone Tor the highest point. Rather than a direct ascent our route takes you first to the Nine Stones cairn circle following the main rough stone track in a north easterly direction for about a ½ a mile. The Nine Stones (GR 612928), a Bronze Age burial site, can be a bit elusive, it is on the right of the main track just above the point where Tarka Trail and our track from Cullever Steps meet. The small cairn circle marks the flow of the Michael Line.



From here the draw of rest and refreshment may hasten your journey to Belstone and the Tors Inn, following the short cut of the Tarka Trail around Watchet Hill. If time and energy allow, it is well worth the effort to climb the ridge up to Belstone Tor. The views over the natural amphitheatre of the Taw Marsh and across to Cosdon Beacon are expansive.

There is anecdotal evidence in a local history guide to Belstone of a Logan Stone (rocking stone) near the summit of the Tor which may be implicated in the naming of the village as the stone rocked in the wind like a tolling bell. Unfortunately the stone was said to have been dislodged by miners. Miller and Broadhurst speculated about a link with the ancient deity known as Baal having influenced the naming of the village.

The easiest path down to the Taw valley from here avoiding the boulder strewn slopes is to pass through Irishman's Wall, however National Park Rangers are concerned about the extent of erosion here and request that people go further along the ridge before descending. The Irishman's Wall was built in the early 19th century by Irish labourers, employed by a landowner seeking to enclose common land for his own use. Local people waited until it was almost complete before driving off the labourers and demolishing parts of the wall. Further work on it was abandoned.

Follow the river valley downstream, to the gateway and lane into the village and join the Tarka Trail. This long distance recreational walking route traces the journeys of Tarka the Otter, taking in locations featured in the book.

*"When the sun like an immense dandelion looked over the light smitten height of Cosdon Beacon, Tarka was returning along a lynch or rough trackway to the river."*

Henry Williamson

## Belstone

For pilgrims wanting to extend their day's walk, the stretch to Belstone could be added to the Lydford to Okehampton leg. There are sheltered spots to camp adjacent to the River Taw on the route into Belstone or just downstream in Belstone Cleave.

The church in Belstone is dedicated to St Mary and contains the Belstone Ring Cross. It is thought the carving dates from 7th-9th century, making it the oldest evidence of Christianity in the village. Rather cryptically an accompanying descriptive text suggests it may have had significant meaning before the Christian era. A local woman I spoke to described feeling drawn to touch the stone every time she visited the church.

Many standing crosses in our country were predecessors of churches. The Anglo-Saxon nun Hunebere wrote:

*"On the estates of the nobles and good men of the Saxon race it is the custom to have a cross, which is dedicated to Our Lord and held in great reverence, erected in some prominent spot for the convenience of those who wish to pray daily before it."*

It is not a huge leap of the imagination from here to contemplate some equivalent symbolic function being fulfilled by standing stones, or to understand why for many people the stones and the carved crosses which replaced them still have the power to move and inspire today.



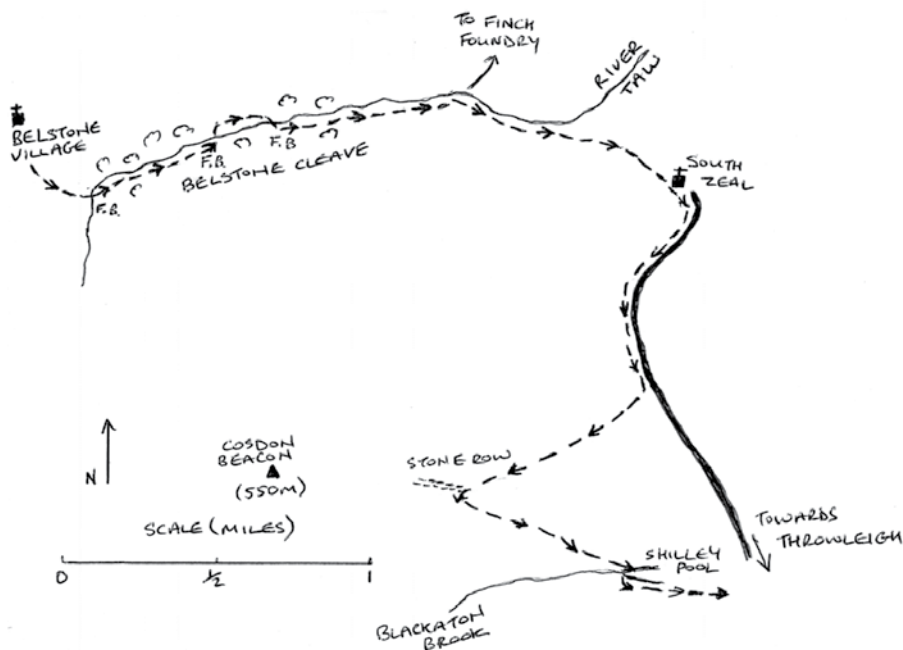
B&B accommodation is available at Dartmoor House, from £70 for a double room, 01837 840337, whilst The Tors Inn offers B&B and evening meals, 01837 840689.



2.3 miles to South Zeal. East of the pub, cross the common and walk down the slope back to the river Taw. Cross the footbridge and follow the river down through Belstone Cleave along the Tarka Trail to Sticklepath. Keep close to the river and at each fork in the path keep left. Cross the footbridge signposted to Skaigh (9) and turn right through the woods. After about 50 metres, turn right again back towards the river. Cross another footbridge, on which is carved text from Henry Williamson's story of Tarka.

Follow the track along the river bank until the fingerpost which marks a path left to the museum. Our route carries straight on, but Finch Foundry, a museum of water power owned by the National Trust with associated teasshop and a peaceful garden, may be an interesting and worthwhile diversion. There has been a mill of some description on the site since at least the 13th century.

### Belstone towards Throwleigh



There is a small village store in Sticklepath which does hot drinks. A fact I was grateful for one drizzly morning. Having camped near Belstone I was rather damp and fed up, anticipating the cold breakfast I was carrying without much relish. Hot tea and shelter in the thatched summer house at the back of Finch Foundry, was sufficient to restore my enthusiasm.

*"If the only prayer you say in your whole life is Thank You, that would suffice."*

Meister Eckhart

I was also intrigued by stumbling across a Quaker Burial Ground next to the museum. A significant Quaker community developed around Sticklepath during the 17th century as members moved to avoid persecution in places like Exeter and Launceston. Later Methodism also became a religious force in the village with John Wesley preaching there on at least two occasions. The Methodist chapel remains.

If you ignored the detour to Finch Foundry you come out on the road. Leave the Tarka Trail here, instead follow the cycleway signs and lane into South Zeal. The route is also marked on OS Explorer maps as the Taw-Teign Link and Dartmoor Way.

## South Zeal



There is an excellent village store with tearoom, two pubs with accommodation at the Oxenham Arms that may suit the wealthier pilgrim. Prices start from £95 for a double room low season and £115 high season, 01837 840244.

The pub dates from the 12th century and is thought to have been built by lay monks possibly as a wayside hospital/hotel for pilgrims and merchants engaged in the wool trade. Of particular interest is the menhir built into the wall of the unsurprisingly named Standing Stone room. This is thought to date from the Neolithic period and is evidence of how the early Christian Church incorporated the old sacred sites into the fabric of their buildings perhaps out of respect for the old spirituality or in an attempt to steal their thunder. In the formal restaurant there is another Standing Stone - holding up the ceiling. Local legend states that if a lady walks twice around the stone she will become pregnant! (source: Oxenham Arms website)

St Mary's Chapel in South Zeal confusingly lies on the Michael Line and is strategically situated, in the middle of the main street with a prominent 14th century cross at the end of the churchyard. This is known as Market Cross associated as it is with the charter which established a market in the village at the end of the 13th century. South Zeal's medieval history can also be seen in the narrow fields stretching away behind the cottages either side of the main street. These Burgage plots were enclosed by the lord of the manor in the 13th century, tenants paid rent for these as opposed to giving feudal service as previously occurred.



3.8 miles to Throwleigh. Continue down the main street in South Zeal, turning right at the car park sign. Beyond the car park take the left fork and pass under the bridge and along the lane towards Throwleigh. After about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile, at signs to Nine Stones/St David's Veterinary Surgeons, follow the bridleway on the right (10). There are a number of alternative access routes to Cosdon Stone Row, but this is the easiest to follow without going astray. Cosdon Beacon looms above you an obvious site as its name suggests for the lighting of beacons and transmission of messages. A fire was lit on its summit in 1588 to warn of the arrival of the Spanish Armada. It is speculation how far back this tradition goes.

Keep left around the back of Nine Stones House and follow the track uphill through the patchwork of enclosed fields. The labour required to build the myriad of stone walls around this field system would be totally uneconomic these days. Climbing steeply you come to a gateway onto the open moor with parallel boundary walls to either side, this was probably used as a drove for gathering livestock rounded up from the unenclosed moor.

Follow the track close to the left hand boundary wall until this turns away to the left. Carry straight on up-hill, now using as a guideline the wall on your right hand side. At the highest point of this field boundary you come upon an old peat cutters path, sunken from heavy use. Follow in a south westerly direction to the stone row and cairn at GR 643917. Two mature hawthorn trees stand just to the north. Although many of the lower stones have disappeared this is one of the best preserved Bronze Age

stone rows on the moor. It is sometimes known as "The Graveyard", a place for rest and reflection after the steep climb.

Here it is possible to see these ancient sites as part of a larger whole. If you continued along the peat-cutters path around Cosdon Beacon you would reach the stone circle and Cairn at Little Hound Tor, whilst our route heads towards a cairn just above the Shilley Pool. John Christian identified all these sites as being in some way connected by subtle earth energy currents which gives rise to a sense of wonder about their original purpose.

*"Objects can attract earth energy lines to them. There are numerous before and after studies that show how the placing of a large stone or Menhir will cause a line to move from some distance away to rest under the stone."*

Nigel Twinn

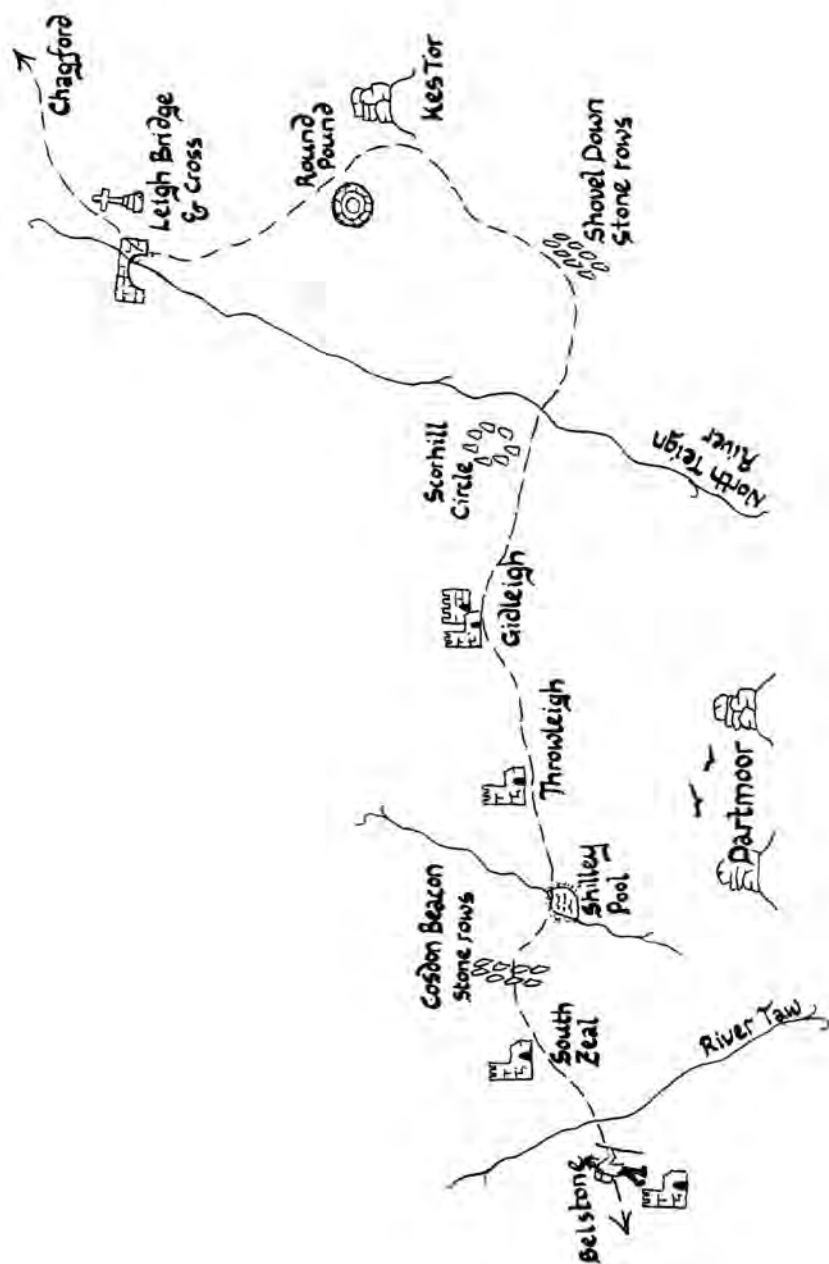


It is a steady descent of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile in a south easterly direction along a grassy track from the stone row towards the Shilley Pool, passing a cairn which can be difficult to spot, before dropping more steeply into the valley of the Blackaton Brook. Crossing the stream can be a challenge. For a safer alternative, retrace your steps about 100 metres back along the boundary wall of enclosed land to the bridleway on your right. Passing through the gateway you can follow the track down to a lane. At the T junction turn right to re-join the route towards Throwleigh.

If you choose to cross the brook, it is easier above the Shilley Pool. Be aware the water smoothed rock surfaces can be very slippery. I have witnessed a couple of painful falls here. Sliding down the rocks into the pool is a more satisfying experience on a warm summer day.

In Roger Deakin's book "Waterlog" he quotes recollections from a local resident who swam there during her childhood in the 1920's. Small trout co-exist with the turbulent splashing of bathers and I have watched them begin rising for flies on the surface as soon as swimmers vacate the water.

From here follow the Blackaton Brook downstream to the lane. Turn right towards Clannaborough Cross and take the lower road signposted Throwleigh  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile. About 200 metres beyond the cattle grid at Clannaborough Farm, there is a footpath on the right (11), which leads through a wet meadow and across some paddocks to the Church of the Virgin Mary. If the meadow is too boggy to cross, continue along the lane to the church.



## Throwleigh

St Mary's Church has a still and peaceful quality, particularly after the wilds of the moor. The combination of rugged natural beauty; ancient and mysterious sacred sites; interwoven with the crafted simplicity of many of the Dartmoor village churches, creates a harmony where it is possible to appreciate the spirit and intention that moved the creators of each symbol and monument to faith.

Even within the church, the pagan finds a place, in the ceiling boss carvings of the three hares (often perceived as magical creatures) and the Green Man. The church is dedicated to Mary. It lies on the Mary Line as do many of the places our journey takes in between here and Hittisleigh.

Above the stand of votive candles the following quote seemed to emphasise the search for shared understanding and compassion on life's journey:

*"Other passers-by, pilgrims on life's way, when they see our candle burn will know that a fellow traveller has passed this way. Perhaps they too will stop and light a candle from ours and join a prayer to ours until the world is one great light again....."*

A place where time stands still is a bit of a cliché, but a cliché grounded in reality in the case of St Mary's church where the sundial above the porch still wishes long life to King Charles II. Vivat Carolus Secundus.



1.8 miles to Gidleigh. The route now follows a series of green lanes which offer a contrast to the wildness of the open moor.

From the thatched lych-gate of the church, walk up the lane signposted to Shilstone, just beyond the top of the churchyard turn left into Deave Lane (12), follow this byway to Wonson. Deave (Death) Lane is so named because it was the route which bearers of coffins took on their way to the church from the southern part of the parish.



The Northmore Arms at Wonson serves meals lunchtimes and evenings except Sunday. You reach it with two left turns in rapid succession once you emerge from Deave Lane at Forder. The pub originally a fortified manor house is the last source of nourishment until Chagford about 7 miles away by the moorland route.

If the pub doesn't attract you, having turned left out of Deave Lane, carry straight on towards the Methodist chapel at Providence Place. Pass the chapel and take the bridleway on the right (13). This follows another beautiful green lane to Coombe Farm where you cross the Blackaton Brook, previously encountered at the Shilley Pool.

Turn left onto the lane towards Gidleigh Mill, and follow the byway on the right (14) signposted to Gidleigh. According to the owners of the Mill, the Mary Line has been dowsed flowing through their grounds close to the bottom of the track. Turning right at the end of the byway brings you to the church and adjacent castle, a fortified manor house built around 1300.

## Gidleigh

The church of the Holy Trinity is unusual in having a stream flowing through the churchyard. Along with Throwleigh, the church escaped the ravages of Puritan excess following the Civil War. It has an attractive Chancel Screen made in about 1530.

The existence of a Saxon chapel here was recorded in the Domesday Book. It was one of only two parishes in the country where a Saxon priest retained the living after the Norman Conquest, an indication of the far reaching consequences of military defeat and the imposition of a new order. A plaque fixed beneath the list of rectors invites us to remember Godwin, the last Saxon priest in Gidleigh.

From here a short detour is possible (about 30 minutes) to visit the remains of the 13th century Chapel of La Wallen. Turn left out of the churchyard past the castle grounds and the village pound where stray animals used to be held. At the T-junction take the footpath straight on. A finger post indicates this is on the Mariners Way. Follow the path north for about a ¼ mile. Just before Moortown Brook a fingerpost points towards the chapel ruins. Cross the stream, go through the gate. Turn right to reach the chapel.

The chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary lies on the Mary Line. According to A Guide to Gidleigh (Howis Croxford 1984), a church clerk named Robert de Middlecote, raped a local girl here. As a consequence, the chapel fell into disuse and became a cattle byre. Later six oak trees were planted in the ruins. These have been recently felled, perhaps to prevent further damage to the remaining structure.



6.5 miles to Chagford. Retrace your path to Gidleigh church. From the churchyard, turn right along the lane to the junction with the village hall on your left. Turn right up the hill, back towards the open moor. This is a circuitous route via Scorhill, Shovel Down, Kes Tor and Leigh Bridge, selected because of the concentration of ancient sites and interesting features in a beautiful landscape. John Christian identified a number of these as being linked by the Mary Line.

For those in need of rest or refreshment, turning left at the junction by the village hall will lead you to all the facilities and comforts of Chagford within a couple of miles. Just follow the lane.

If you turned right, it is just under a mile up the lane to Scorhill Down. Beyond the gate which opens on to the moor follow the stone wall on your left. There is a well-worn track over the brow of the hill heading in a south westerly direction. Scorhill stone circle remains hidden in the lee of the hill until you are almost upon it. GR654873.



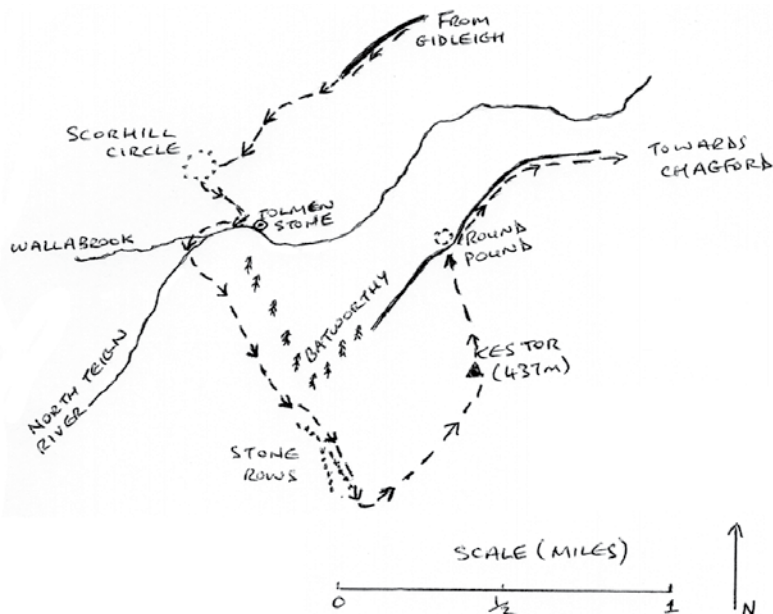
The circle forms part of a matrix of sacred archaeology and ancient settlements in a dramatic landscape, with a number of cairns, stone rows and other circles in the vicinity.

There are 23 stones still standing with another 11 fallen. The circle would originally have contained up to 70 stones. The Mary Line dissects the southern side of the circle.



Head south to the North Teign River. The valley offers sheltered camping and pools for bathing. About 50 metres downstream from the Clapper bridges, (historic crossings using large granite blocks to span the streams) is the Tolmen stone. This holed stone has been hollowed out by the erosive force of water. Passing through is reputed to have healing powers, giving protection against rheumatic disorders. There is also mention on the Legendary Dartmoor website of its possible association with Druidic purification rights, in which people were lowered through into the water.

## High Moor via Scorhill and Kestor



Cross the clapper bridges, over the Wallabrook and North Teign. The church path from mediaeval times crossed here, connecting the farms around Fernworthy with Gidleigh.

Head south east, walking parallel to the boundary wall and associated shelter belt of trees on your left for about ½ a mile to Batworthy Corner. Around the Bronze Age settlement of Shovel Down there are multiple stone rows lying on the slope rising south of Batworthy Corner along with standing stones, circles and cairns.

Follow the convergence of stone rows up the slope to the Longstone, the tall standing stone which marks the end of the southern-most stone row. More prosaically this has been requisitioned into service as a parish boundary stone, marking the boundaries of Gidleigh, Chagford and The Forest of Dartmoor. From here follow the grassy track north east to the rocky outcrop of Kes Tor.

Kes Tor offers a great vantage point over the expanse of moor and views north and east to the gentler landscapes of the next part of the journey. It has its own feature of note in the form of the largest rock basin on Dartmoor. These are eroded over millions of years by a combination of wind and the freeze/thaw of water levering out specks of rock.

Their use in ritual as a source of pure or holy water is disputed neither possible to prove nor disprove. What is clear from the study of cultures around the world, whose lives are closely integrated with the natural environment in which they live, is that all of nature is often perceived holistically and treated with a reverence that could be ascribed to spiritual belief. The number of archaeological structures in the vicinity of Kes Tor, with an apparent spiritual or ritual purpose, tends to suggest a different priority was given to these aspects of life than is common in our predominantly secular and urban society.

In early October I sat one afternoon on Kes Tor whilst hundreds of swallows and house martins swooped and dived around me. The next day they were gone, taking with them their own unique contribution to the seasons and cycles of life.



Take the shortest route north down from the Tor through the remnants of the old field system, drove tracks and associated boundary walls of the Bronze Age Kes Tor Settlement, to the lane which leads from Batworthy. Follow the lane right towards the cattle grid. Before you get there, the lane curves at Round Pound (GR663868), this was the largest hut of the settlement, with evidence of holes for posts that would have supported a thatched roof. Around this is an outer pound. Excavations have revealed residues from a smelting furnace.

Continue over the cattle grid and down past Teigncombe where the pilgrimage meets the Two Moors Way coming up from the south. Follow the Two Moors Way signs for the next few miles along the Teign Valley.

The path leaves the lane a few hundred metres below Teigncombe, turning left down a track (15), towards Leigh Bridge. At Leigh Bridge, the North and South Teign rivers meet and just beyond the confluence, to the right of the lane is an elegant little granite cross perched high upon a boulder, partly hidden amongst the trees. Although old, this is not its original location. It is thought to have stood at Teigncombe, perhaps as a waymarker on the Mariners Way, a path which sailors trod between ports on the north and south coasts of Devon.

A final point of interest before reaching Chagford is Holystreet Manor, a Tudor period house with private chapel dedicated to St Boniface. His name will crop up again later, in Crediton.

You emerge from Holy Street at Factory Cross. Take the second turn on the right up the hill and into the main square in Chagford.

## Chagford



There is a wide range of accommodation available in Chagford including B&B at Cyprian's Cottage 47 New Street, 01647 432256 and Farleigh Cottage on Lower Street 01647 432600, both charge from £35pppn.

Inns and hotels include, The Ring of Bells, 01647 432466; Mill End Hotel, 01647 432282; The Globe Inn, 01647 433485 and The Three Crowns, 01647 433444. Prices start from about £80/room. The Three Crowns is more costly.

Chagford has a range of cafes and shops including a chemist and two adjacent hardware stores, Bowden's and Webber's. They will cater for most needs for additional equipment.

The town has an air of prosperity much of which stemmed from its role as one of Devon's Stannary Towns. This was a function established in 1305 by Edward I. Stannary Towns had a monopoly over tin mining in Devon, as centres where refined tin was assessed, taxed and sold. This administrative role also gave rights of representation at the Stannary Parliament. This was almost like a mini state within a state, with the whole of Dartmoor coming under its jurisdiction.

Tinners' privileges were promoted above the Common Law. Unless a tinner killed, injured or stole he was beyond the reach of the Common Law. So for example, he could dig wherever he wanted, no matter who the land belonged to. The Tinner's law was not a soft option, with Lydford Gaol synonymous with brutal punishment for offenders.

During the Civil War, Chagford was the scene of a skirmish between parliamentary forces billeted there and Royalists. The most famous casualty of the action being the Royalist Sydney Godolphin, a poet and M.P. for Helston in Cornwall who died of his wounds in the porch of what is now the Three Crowns Hotel.

The church is dedicated to The Archangel Michael, a statue of whom adorns the church tower with another just inside the door of the church in which he is armed with what looks like a flail being used to beat the dragon beneath his feet. The church was the place where at Christmas 2009, I sat late in the evening and was inspired by the vision of creating a pilgrimage route across England.

*"Being a pilgrim is a state of mind. We travel in life and through life. All of life is a journey. The journey is metaphorical as well as literal. Making a journey from A to B is only the ostensible goal. But going from A to B is not the point of the pilgrimage. Wherever you are with your consciousness, with your way of being, with your way of looking at the world, with your way of connecting, a pilgrim is someone who sees life as a sacred journey, who sees the earth as a sacred home."*

Satish Kumar

## Stage 4: Chagford to Crediton (20.5 miles via Dunsford or 18.8 miles via Drewsteignton)



Facilities on route via Dunsford include a pub at Fingle Bridge, camp-site near Clifford's Bridge, hostel at Steps Bridge, shop, pub and tea-room at Dunsford and shop and pubs at Tedburn St Mary. The route via Drewsteignton has a shop, pub and B&B in the village with camp sites close by. There is also a pub and B&B at Yeoford. The routes rejoin before the camp site at Salmonhutch near Crediton where all other facilities are available.



Two alternative routes are described below for this stage of the pilgrimage, although they don't diverge from each other until the path reaches the Castle Drogo Estate, where one climbs quite steeply towards the village of Drewsteignton, then follows the Michael Line more closely along the ridge through Hittisleigh and Colebrooke. The other follows the Mary Line and the valley of the River Teign to Dunsford. The routes reconnect at Posbury for the last couple of miles into Crediton.

From the square in Chagford walk down Lower Street, past the primary school and turn left along the lane signposted to the swimming pool. Continue over the bridge, past the outdoor pool and turn right at Rushford Mill Farm (16).

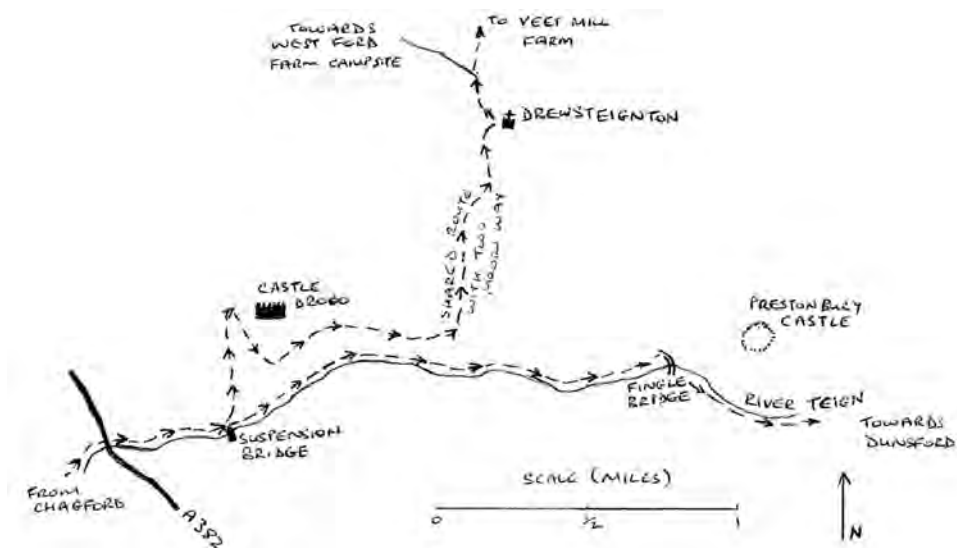
The swimming pool is fed from the river by a mill stream originally used to power the water mill at Rushford Farm. The pool was dug out by hand, on the site of what was originally the mill pond and opened in 1934. These days the water is filtered and some chlorine added. The pool is open through the summer months, afternoons only.

From Rushford Mill Farm, the path follows the river. Entering the woods, look out for the granite sculpture by Peter Randall Page on the island. It reflects a continuity of human activity stretching back thousands of years to the craftsmen carvers who shaped the granite crosses and standing stones on the moor.

Cross the road near Mill End Hotel and continue along the riverside path. The way now leads through Castle Drogo estate which is managed by the National Trust.

At the steel suspension bridge our two possible routes divide. A finger post with our project logo attached marks the spot (17). The first turns left away from the river and continues to follow the same path as the Two Moors Way, towards Drewsteignton and along the ridge to Hittisleigh. The second follows the banks of the river Teign on to Fingle Bridge and beyond. I will describe the Drewsteignton/Hittisleigh/Colebrooke route first.

## Alternative Routes via Drewsteignton or Fingle Bridge



### Alternative 1

Before beginning the climb up the hill away from the river, it is worth pausing. Beyond the suspension bridge, the large pool is very inviting for a swim on a warm day. At the weir, salmon and sea trout can be seen in the autumn, leaping on their journey up river to spawn, although they are probably less numerous than in the past.

Now follow the Two Moors Way climbing The Hunters Path below the imposing outline of Castle Drogo. This is England's newest castle, designed by Edwin Lutyens and built from local granite between 1910 and 1930.





At Castle Drogo there is a café and visitor centre where breakfast is available from 8.30am. The castle is open 11am-5pm from April to September, with reduced opening times the rest of the year, 01647 433306.



Whether or not you choose to visit the castle and /or café, return to the Hunters Path and follow this in an easterly direction for a further ½ mile. There are some spectacular views down over the tree canopy of the Teign valley. At Piddledown Common (18), follow signs left towards Drewsteignton. Passing over the brow of the hill, the village is clearly visible.

Another point of interest which our journey unfortunately misses is the Neolithic burial chamber at Spinster's Rock (SX 702908). This was part of a much larger ritual complex dating from 3500–2500 B.C. which was destroyed at the beginning of the 19th century. John Michell, in his *Travellers Guide to Sacred England*, suggests that it was one of the most important megalithic sites in the country. Hamish Miller identified the Mary Line passing through the Dolmen that remains. If you have the time, it is accessible by taking the lane west 2½ miles from Drewsteignton.

## Drewsteignton

This is an historic settlement. As well as Spinsters Rock there is a series of Iron Age fortifications astride the river Teign close by. The prominent Church of the Holy Trinity is 15th century.



The village offers a potentially useful rest stop, with limited accommodation available in Yeoford about 9 miles from here. Crediton about 15 miles away is the next town on route. The Drewe Arms has bunk rooms available, the room only price is £20 for the first person and £15 for subsequent people sharing. Breakfast is £4.50 or £8 for continental or full English, 01647 281409. The pub was managed by Mabel Mudge from 1919 until 1994 when she retired aged 99 and the pub retains some of its old world character.

Alternative accommodation is available at The Old Inn from £90/ room, 01647 281276. There is a well- stocked village store/post office and two nearby campsites, both within about 1½ miles of Drewsteignton. Barley

Meadow is open from 11th March-1st November. Backpacker prices from £7.15pppn, 01647 281629. A second campsite established recently at Westford Farm is open from end of March – end of October, prices from £9pppn. 01647 281138. This is a quieter location than Barley Meadow as regards traffic noise. Directions to both sites are in the next paragraph.



3.2 miles to Hittisleigh. Continue on the Two Moors Way, turning down the hill beside the village shop. For Westford Farm campsite, turn left along the lane just before Netherton House otherwise carry straight on down the hill to Veet Mill Farm. For Barley Meadow campsite, carry on to the right along the lane at the entrance to Veet Mill Farm, then turn left at the end of the lane. The campsite is on your left when you reach the main road at Hooperton Cross.

The main route carries on through Veet Mill Farm where there are a number of sculptures on display created by Peter Randall Page. Continue through the woods to Winscombe Farm, climbing steeply following the track to the left of the farmhouse before coming out on the road. Turn left, over the A30 and immediately right at Brindlewood Farm.

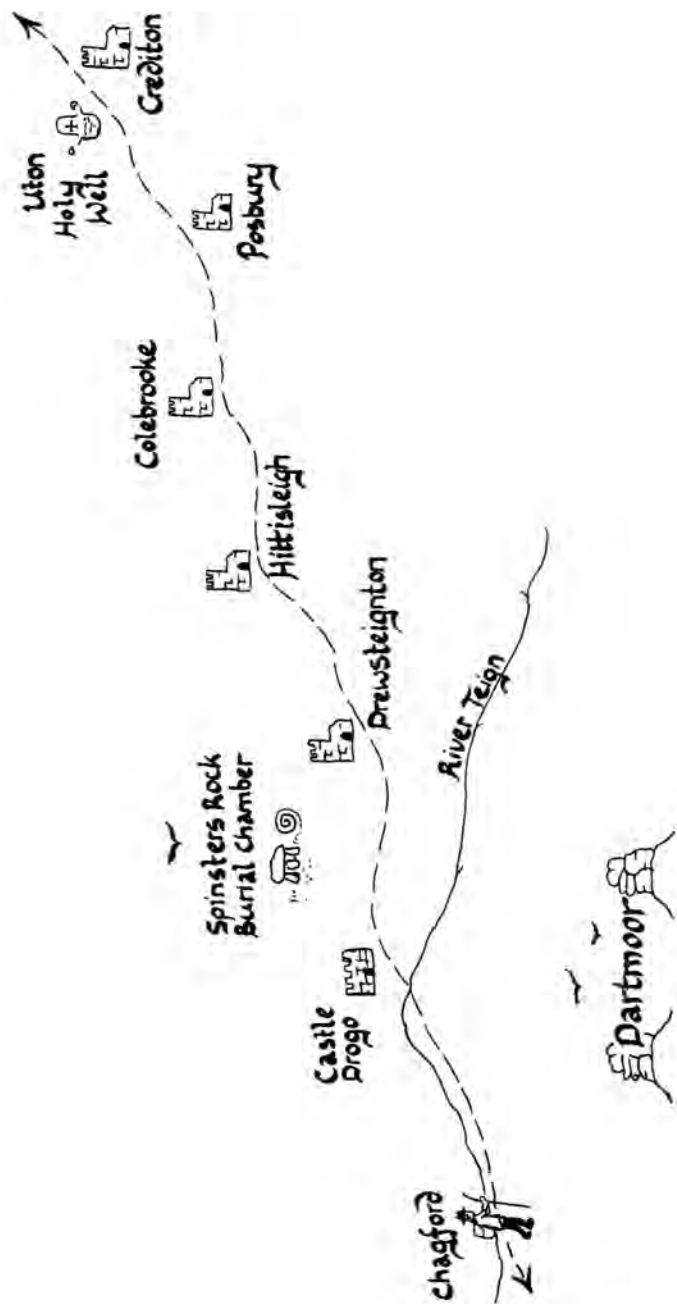
Carry on across the fields to West Ford Farm. Just beyond the stream, (the young River Yeo) it is easy to miss the path which climbs steeply up to Hill Farm and carry on instead along the streamside path towards Hittisleigh Mill. If you make this mistake, follow the lane from the mill up to Hittisleigh Cross where the two lanes converge.

At St Andrew's Church you are again on the track of the Michael Line. The church is simple and unadorned and I have heard people's whispered appreciation of the atmosphere of tranquility. It has an ancient font and an unusually configured cross on the floor in front of the altar.

*"Recognising and uniting with the universal gives us the greatest aesthetic satisfaction, the greatest emotion of beauty. The more this union with the universal is felt, the more individual subjectivity declines."*

Piet Mondrian







4.4 miles to Colebrooke. Continue along the lane towards Colebrooke church. This is the longest period of sustained road walking of the whole pilgrimage, but tracks the Michael energy line much of the way. The lane follows a ridge and offers excellent views on a clear day. At Great Heal Cross our route diverges from the Two Moors Way, continuing towards Yeoford, before turning left at North Down and following the lane into Colebrooke. There is a footpath which runs parallel to the lane part of the way into the village, but this had been ploughed up and the ground was very claggy when we surveyed the route.

The church is dedicated to St Andrew. A surprising feature is the bench seat known as the Copplestone Desk thought to date from the 15th century, on which is carved the Copplestone family coat of arms but also figures part man part beast. Hamish Miller dowsed the Michael Line as changing direction substantially at this point. The Desk was originally in the Copplestone Chantry Chapel, part of the church reserved for the family, screened off from the rest of the church with its own door in the north wall and a fireplace.



Less than a mile north of Colebrooke, lies the village of Coleford where the 13th century thatched pub The New Inn claims to have been a traditional resting place for travelling Cistercian Monks in the 15th century. Accommodation is available. Prices begin at £90/room, £70 single occupancy, 01363 84242.



1½ miles to Yeoford. Coleford is a diversion from the route which proceeds left out of the main gate of Colebrooke church and along the lane to the bend in the road. Take the footpath (19) over the railway track and river to the hamlet of Penstone. Turn right between the rows of cottages and continue along to Penstone Barton, down to the ford and across the footbridge, then turn left on the footpath before the railway bridge. The path now continues between river and the railway line for a mile to Yeoford.

The railway line is a scenic journey, following the valleys of the Yeo and Taw from Exeter up to Barnstable. It has survived in one incarnation or another since 1851. Now known as the Tarka Line it retains footpath

crossings and request stop stations, where passengers signal if they want to stop the train.

## Yeoford



There is B&B accommodation at Warrens Farm 01363 84304, from £40pppn, where the proprietors offer a luggage transfer service and packed lunch and evening meals if required. There is also a pub, The Mare and Foal, 01363 84348, which operates a shop stocking basic provisions.



6 miles to Crediton. With the pub and Warrens Farm on your left, follow the road as it bends right up the hill out of the village. Pass Hill Barton on your right and 200 metres further on take the footpath on the right with the Devonshire Heartland Way logo attached to the finger post (20). Beyond the Devon Longhouse, climb the stile and walk diagonally across the field towards the trees on the horizon. You reach a hedgerow before the trees. Stay on the top side of this hedge and follow it past an ancient oak tree and obscured way mark post, to a gateway beyond which is a sunken track leading onto the lane at Neopardy.

Turn right down the lane and over the railway bridge. At Lower Neopardy Cross turn left to Gunstone Mill Cross and proceed to Gunstone Mill (21). Follow the footpath between the buildings up the hill to Posbury where the two alternative routes rejoin.

So pause at Posbury and catch your breath, while I describe the alternative route from Castle Drogo estate.

## Alternative 2



From the suspension bridge over the River Teign below Castle Drogo, follow the riverside path on either bank downstream. It is just over 1½ miles through the scenic wooded valley to Fingle Bridge. The Mary Line was dowsed by Hamish Miller flowing through the bridge and up towards Prestonbury Castle, an Iron Age hillfort located on top of the precipitous hill that rises directly up behind The Fingle Bridge Inn. There are tracks up through the conifer plantation that covers the lower slopes, but no public access to the hillfort which is unfortunate as there are spectacular views from the summit.

The Fingle Bridge Inn serves food lunchtimes and evenings as well as afternoon teas.

5.9 miles to Dunsford. Cross the bridge to the bank opposite the pub and continue walking downstream past the public toilets and along the permissive bridleway/footpath which runs parallel to the river for 2½ miles through a mix of broadleaved woodland and conifer plantation. At the lane turn left past the cottages and over Clifford Bridge. Follow the signs that direct you along the road towards Steps Bridge. This brings you to a crossroads (Clifford Cross).



There is a small campsite close by at the aptly named Sweet Meadows. To reach it turn left at Clifford Cross. The campsite about 300m along on the left is very low key. It costs £8/night for backpackers, 01647 24331.



If you are not spending the night here, turn right at Clifford Cross and continue along the lane( past the field of wooden holiday lodges) until you reach the entrance to Dunsford Nature Reserve. Follow the bridle-path on the right through the reserve, which leads back to the river bank. Continue heading down stream to Steps Bridge. The nature reserve managed by Devon Wildlife Trust is particularly renowned for the profusion of wild daffodils in the spring.



There is a small independent hostel at Blytheswood about 200m up from Steps Bridge which is on route. It costs £14/night for a bed, 01647 252435.



At the far end of the nature reserve the recommended route is to the right over the bridge. However note, this way requires a crossing of the river downstream via stepping stones which though substantial will be treacherous or even submerged when the river is in spate. If in doubt turn left along the road. It is about ½ a mile to the path where the alternative routes meet opposite Woodcote Cottage.

If the river is not running high the following way is more satisfying. Having crossed Steps Bridge at the end of the nature reserve, take the footpath to the left opposite Steps Bridge House (Blytheswood Hostel is 100m further on). The path is signed to Swannaford and Stepping Stones to Dunsford and follows the valley with the River Teign below on the left. Amongst the trees is an abundance of bilberry bushes with fruit ripe in late summer. When you reach a fork in the path, keep to the lower way. On reaching a boundary fence, follow the fence line down the slope to a tarmac track. Turn right along the track away from the bungalow and after about 100m turn left onto a path which leads to the stepping stones. Cross here if the water level allows. If in doubt, retrace your route back to Steps Bridge and take the road option towards Dunsford already mentioned.

Having successfully crossed the stepping stones walk along the driveway between the houses to the road. Across the road from Woodcote Cottage are two footpaths. Don't take the one straight ahead, instead turn right along the road for about 25m and follow the second path. This leads in the direction of Dunsford village and church. The path crosses through the middle of the first field then follows the hedge up to a small gate in the top right corner. Through the gate, follow the hedge on the right and then the row of mature oak trees. Fading yellow paint dots indicate the line of the path. Beyond the last of these trees, veer left through the field with its abundant rushes to a gateway next to a house. The path comes out in the centre of the village opposite the school. Turn right for the church, pub, shop/post office and tea garden.



Dunsford is an attractive village. The Royal Oak public house serves food lunchtimes and evenings with accommodation available in a converted cob barn, B&B costs £40 for a single and £60 for a double room, 01647 252256. Church Cottage has a popular walled tea garden and offers B&B with singles from £40 and doubles from £70 per night, 01647 253338. The tea garden is open 7 days a week Easter to October. Next door, the shop/post office is open Monday to Friday am and pm and Saturday mornings.

St Mary's Church is located on the Mary Line. In the Sun and the Serpent, Miller and Broadhurst enthuse about the ancient chair close to the altar with its pagan carvings of the Green Man and writhing serpents. The church was dedicated in the 13th century but most of the current architecture is 15th century. The Fulford family tombs are particularly notable recording the influence the family has had in the locality for eight centuries. They still reside close to Dunsford at Great Fulford a manor house whose significance justified it being besieged and occupied by parliamentary forces during the Civil War.

In the churchyard is a gravestone commemorating Jonathon May who was murdered whilst returning from Morton Fair on 16th July 1845.



5.1 miles to Tedburn St Mary. Leaving Dunsford church, turn left along the lane, up the hill past Lewis Hill, a house dating from the late 15th century. At Thomas Cross turn left in the direction of Cheriton Bishop, then take the first right down Zeal Road (a hare ran out in front of me on the steep descent into the valley). Continue over the ford and turn left at the crossroads following the lane which is signposted as a no through road.

Carry on past Brook Farm but just before another ford take the footpath left down the track leading to Scuttishall Farm. Approaching the farmhouse climb the stile on the left and passing a couple of walnut trees take a diagonal path to the right down the slope and climb another stile. The path is marked along a managed ride through woodland, following the valley and the course of the Reedy Brook on the left. Continue until you reach the lane at Staddon Ford.

The cobbled ford is to the left, but our route continues to the right up the narrow lane. You gain about 100m in height along the lane to the junction at Home Gate. Turn left here. If the steep climb leaves you in need of refreshment the next farm on the left at Halstow is home to the Gray family who have been producing cider for more than 300 years. Cider is dispensed straight from oak barrels in the large barn behind the farmhouse. Available sweet or dry, it can be mixed according to your taste. Open Monday to Saturday 10am-5pm throughout the year, 01647 61236.

Continue along the lane then fork left towards Tedburn St Mary. The road brings you closer to the main road (A30) the sound of which becomes increasingly apparent until for about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile you are walking parallel to it, separated only by a shelter belt of trees. Past Fairview Farm and Oakfield, take the next turn on the right, a road bridge over the A30 and continue along the lane into the village. Just past the Tedburn St Mary sign, turn left down the one way street to the crossroads.



There is a small convenience store in the village open 6am-9pm every day except Sunday when it is 8am-9pm. There are also two pubs, The Red Lion and The King's Arms which are almost opposite each other to the left of the crossroads. The King's Arms serves food lunch times and evenings and has B&B accommodation available from £50/room, 01647 61224.



To reach the church, turn left at the crossroads. Just past the Red Lion pub turn right down the lane. The next turning on the left leads to the church with a cluster of older cottages around it. Behind is one of the farms owned by The Donkey Sanctuary. The Mary Line passes through the



old moss covered cross in the churchyard and the porch and tower of the church. It is a peaceful place perhaps in part because it is some way distant from the modern village centre. The occasional braying of a donkey creates an appropriately biblical soundscape.

The original village was centred around the 12th century parish church of St Mary. The modern centre was known as the Taphouse, which referred to an inn at the crossroads where the Crediton and Exeter roads meet. Tedburn was a staging post between London and Cornwall with the A30 passing through until it was rerouted with the building of the dual carriageway. Historically it is said that King Charles II stayed at the Kings Arms (hence the name) and that it was also a stopping point for Lieutenant Lapenotiere on his journey from Falmouth to London, bringing news of victory at the Battle of Trafalgar.



3 miles to Posbury. From the church, head back along the lane. A few metres beyond the entrance to the Donkey Sanctuary turn left up the track. This brings you out onto another lane. Turn right down the hill, then after 100m turn left turn down a quiet back lane which you follow for about 1½ miles to Meetford Cross, where it joins the busier road linking Crediton and Tedburn St Mary. Turn left, walking with care because although a relatively narrow lane, it is a regular commuting route and link between Crediton and the A30. Cars are often driven quite fast along here.

It may therefore be a relief to reach the sanctuary of the bridleway on the left, just after the thatched cottage as you enter the settlement of Venny Tedburn. Follow this uphill through Posbury Copse. At the junction of tracks at the top, there is a view over the gateway opposite towards what remains of Posbury Castle, an Iron Age hillfort largely obscured by a shroud of trees. There is no footpath to the hillfort itself which is a shame as it is an atmospheric spot.

Turn right down the track which brings you out onto a lane next to the entrance to The House of St Francis, a convent. Continue along the lane to the chapel dedicated to St Luke.

The two alternative routes that separated at Castle Drogo meet here.

## Posbury

For a small place Posbury has a lot of history. It was settled in the Iron Age and was an outpost of the kingdom of the Dumnonii until 661AD, when Cenwalh the Saxon king of Wessex reputedly defeated and killed King Culmin of Cornwall in a battle here and drove the native tribes out of mid Devon.

Posbury Clump, the site of an extinct volcano became a source of distinctive red/brown igneous rock. It opened as a quarry in the 12th century and was much used in the building of Crediton Church. The Clump is now a geologically important Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The Mary Line passes through Posbury where a community of Franciscan Nuns resides in the valley just beyond the little chapel dedicated to St Luke. There is a serene atmosphere in this chapel, indicating that this quality is not only the preserve of old churches. It was built in 1834.



2.8 miles to Crediton. From the chapel gate turn right down the hill, past the wooded Posbury Clump. On the way if you look back towards the site of the hillfort you get a good sense of its original scale and prominence in the landscape. It was suggested to me that the cork screw curves in the road were created to ease the descent for horse drawn wagons carrying stone from the quarry. It's less than a mile from the chapel to Uton, where if you turn left at the junction and walk just beyond the last houses in the settlement, you can find a somewhat obscured path leading down to the Lady Well on your right.

According to Terry Faull in his book on Holy Wells in Devon (2004), there was a chantry chapel at Uton in the 12th century and the dedication of the well suggests it was in use in medieval times. The water was traditionally associated with curative problems for the eyes and although the site is rather neglected I drink the water that issues from the pipe. The owner of the adjoining house is also an advocate, using it for his tea and home brewed beer.



For those wishing to camp, there is an excellent, simple site at Uton. Go back along the lane from the Lady Well and turn left. The campsite is by Salmonhutch fishing lakes. Telephone 01363 772749. The cost is £3.00 for a two person tent. There is a loo and washbasin but no showers.

*"I'm not at all contemptuous of comforts, but they have their place and it's not first."*

E.F. Schumacher



From Salmonhutch cross the river and level crossing, then take the foot-path on the right (22) which climbs steeply up the slope and diagonally across the fields to the thatched cottage at Yeolands. Turn right along the track past the school and down the hill into Crediton, heading towards the parish church.

## Crediton

The scale of The Church of the Holy Cross is evidence of the town's former religious significance. There was a monastery founded here in 739AD and it was the site of Devon's Saxon cathedral until The See moved to Exeter in 1050. Crediton is renowned as the birthplace of St. Boniface who was hugely influential in the spread of Christianity through northern Europe in the 8th century A.D. He is patron saint of Germany and The Netherlands.

As an evangelising missionary, he was considered an advocate for the Roman Church which had gradually gained influence over the Celtic brand of Christianity. For Boniface, there was no place for the worship of nature spirits, a perspective emphasised in his act of felling the Donar Oak at Geismar in Hesse to show the pagan German tribes the error of their ways (Faull 2004). A fir tree growing in the roots of the Oak was claimed by Boniface to represent the Christian church emerging from the shadows of outdated beliefs, a symbol thought to be the source of the modern Christmas tree.

The church was identified by Hamish Miller as a node point where the Michael and Mary Lines intersect. The booklet, "Crediton, The Crossing of the Lines" by Dr Angela Blaen, gives an account of the spiritual influences that have shaped the area from its pagan heritage; through Celtic and Roman Christianity; the life of Boniface; to the present day identification of the Michael and Mary Lines.

As with the granite built Dartmoor churches, local materials were used in the construction of the Church of the Holy Cross. Transporting vast quantities of bulky materials long distances over land was not an option in the 15th century, a limitation which results in the church seeming rooted in the landscape in which it stands. There is no incongruence between the red/brown stone of the church and the soils that surround it.

Inside the church are many fascinating features. There is the tomb of Sir John de Sully who died in 1387 aged 106. He led a eventful life including being present at a number of historic battles including Crecy, yet it is a discreet monument in contrast to the enormous arched memorial to General Sir Redvers Buller.

As with many churches along the way, the font is the oldest artifact. It is interesting to consider why, when restoration and sometimes rebuilding of a whole church occurs, the font is carefully retained. Maybe it reflects the sacred significance associated with the ritual of baptism and/or continuity in the cycle of life which is recognised when holy water is drawn from the same vessel that has been used for 1000 years. It is perhaps also no coincidence that the font is often aligned exactly with the flow of earth energy through the church.

Even in this home town church of Boniface adversary of the pagan, the Green Man makes a mischievous appearance in a corbel carved in the west of the nave. Another carving of interest is that commemorating Thomas Orey. He was moved by a dream to travel from near Bristol to Crediton, a journey which was no mean feat for a blind man in 1315. Having done so, he miraculously regained his sight whilst praying in the church.



Close to the church are two more Holy Wells. The first, Libbett's, is reached via the gateway in the north corner of the churchyard. From here, cross the road and follow the driveway opposite, to a narrow track on your left, this leads to the well where water emerges from an old stone archway.

Retrace your steps to the road and turn left through the park to St Wynefred's Well. Wynefred or Wynfrith was Boniface's birth name, and a statue of him stands close to this holy well. As Terry Faull indicates "he may have had mixed feelings about a holy well named after him," considering his reputed antipathy towards the tradition of nature spirits and nature cures. It is ironic therefore to read that the site of his murder in Dokkum, Germany is also marked by a holy well which arose after his death in 754AD. This well near to the Boniface chapel in Dokkum became a focus for pilgrimage and has miraculous properties associated with it.

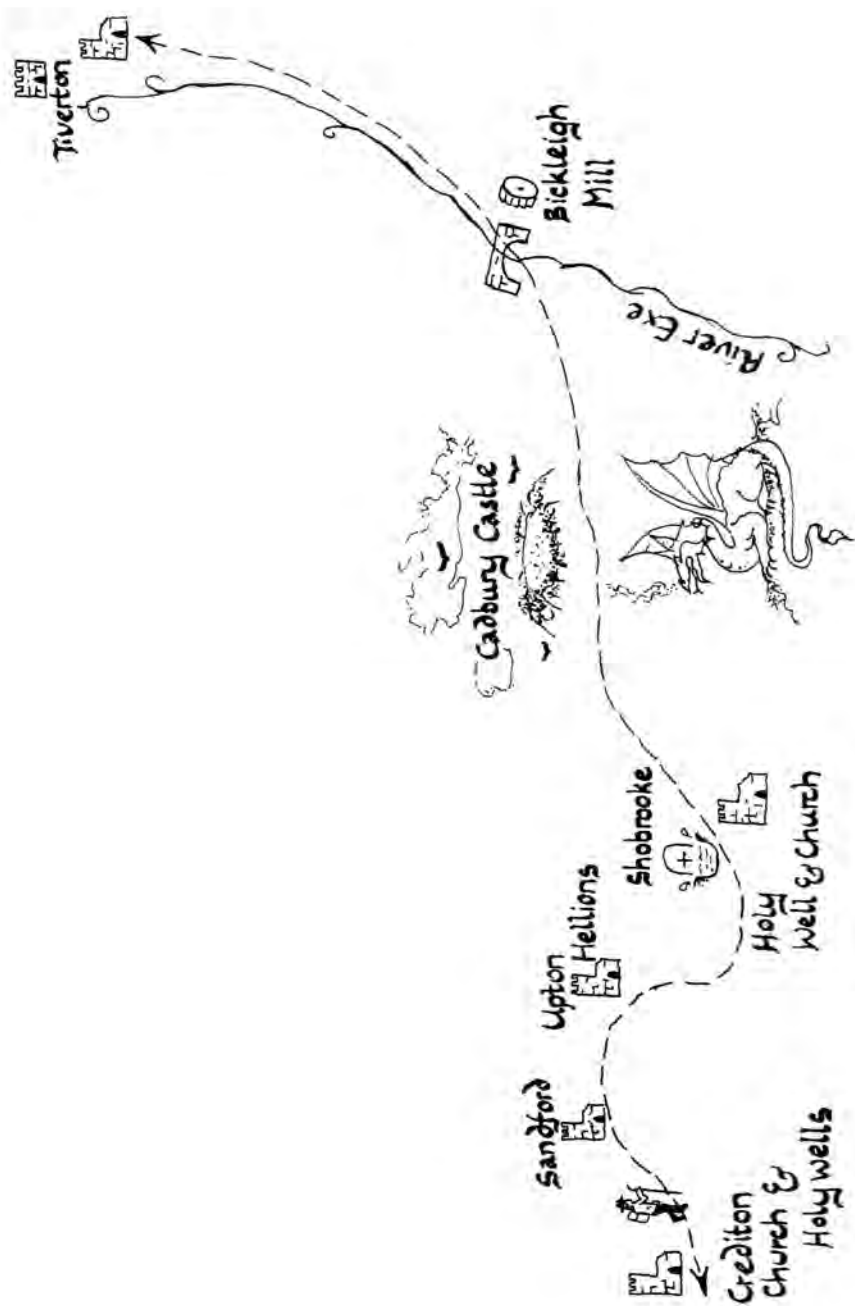
One final thought regarding Holy Wells in this area is that Uton, Libbett's and St Wynefred's Wells are all traditionally associated with having curative properties for the eyes, the subject of the miraculous cure commemorated in the church.

*"Believe a further shore is reachable from here, believe in miracles and cures and healing wells"*

Seamus Heaney



Crediton has good bus and train services to Exeter and all the facilities of a small market town with a range of shops, cafes and restaurants. B&B accommodation is available in the town at Pugsley, Great Park Farm Crediton 01363 772050, from £31 for a single room and £62 double and Taw Vale, 2 Station Road, Crediton 01363 777879, where prices are £39 for a single and £72 for a double.



## Stage 5: Crediton to Tiverton (22.6 miles)



Facilities include pubs offering B&B at Sandford, Shobrooke and Thorverton, shops at Sandford and Thorverton, pub B&B and café at Bickleigh and a range of facilities in Tiverton

Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst found that the Michael Line from Crediton closely followed the A3072 towards Tiverton. This offers a convenient route for driving pilgrims but not for walkers. Our route is more circuitous, but for those who wish to miss out the loop through Sandford and Upton Hellions, there is a shorter alternative to Shobrooke along the path from Crediton Leisure Centre through Shobrooke Park.



1½ miles to Sandford. For the main route, take your starting point as the statue of Boniface and Holy Well in the public park. From here take the path past the bowling green and adjacent to the library. Cross the road and proceed up Deep Lane to Forches Cross at the top. Forches were places of hanging in previous times.

Turn left into Higher Road and after 50 metres, cross the road and follow the footpath (23) all the way to Sandford. As you enter the village take the left fork up the hill.

### Sandford



The village has a shop and pubs including the Lamb Inn a 16th century former coaching house which offers accommodation from £69/room/night, 01363 773676. Turn right just before the Lamb Inn to reach St Swithun's Church. Visiting the church, be aware that the main door may be locked, but a side entrance is usually left open.



1½ miles to Upton Hellions. From the church in Sandford, carry on over the crossroads at Church Cross. As you walk along the lane, the tower of St Mary's church Upton Hellions is visible on the hillside ahead. At Fanny's Lane Cross turn left, towards East village and after about 400 metres turn right just before Northlake Cottage. The footpath here, (24) leads down to a bridge (known locally as Shady Bridge) over the river Creedy. Beyond the bridge take the path on the right across the field to Old Mill. The path follows a track which curves left alongside the mill and then forks off right across the fields up hill to Upton Hellions.

St Swithun's Church and St Mary's Upton Hellions both lie on the St. Michael ley line, a straight line from Cornwall to Norfolk first described and mapped by John Michell. It connects a string of important sites including St Michael's Mount, Glastonbury Tor and Avebury. It is around this ley line that the Earth energy currents dowsed by Hamish Miller weave.

This alignment, whether by coincidence or design, also corresponds with a line drawn across the country by the direction of the sunrise at Beltane - the beginning of May. Beltane marks the mid-point in the sun's progression between spring equinox and summer solstice and was a significant festival for polytheistic religious traditions that preceded Christianity. Avebury in particular was thought to have played a pivotal role in rituals associated with Beltane.

St. Mary's Upton Hellions is another church in an idyllic spot, with a tiny cluster of houses around it. The Mary Line runs along its length. It is simple in design and decoration with the curious exception of the signs of the Zodiac tiled on the wall behind the altar. Apparently these used to be covered over during services. It has a 13th century font made from Beer stone and a very characterful crouching lion carved on the finial of one of the benches.



2.6 miles to Shobrooke. From the lych gate turn left, then at the junction follow the path to the right by the fingerpost. This is a permissive route rather than an officially recognised public footpath and is uneven under foot. It is a sunken path running between ancient hedges, clearly a traditional route and is known as Church Path. It emerges at Middleways Cottage where the route turns left down the lane to Lower Creedy. The alternative is to take the lane to Middleways Cottage.

There was a private chapel built at Lower Creedy in the 13th century dedicated to St Martin though it didn't last long falling foul of the Bishop who was of the opinion that a proliferation of private chapels was detrimental to the Church.



At Lower Creedy Cross carry straight on for about 400 metres, then take the tarmac track left towards Haske. Walk on through Haske Farm, turn left at Haske Farm Cottage and continue to the T-junction. A right turn brings you to the crossroads at Nomansland. Cross the A3072 with care and continue along the lane past the caravan site to the footpath on the left (25) which leads over the hill towards Shobrooke Church. On occasion, the path is obscured by crops. If this is the case you may need to follow the lane to the church.

This is a second St. Swithun church in close proximity after the one in Sandford. I have spoken to people who have made a short pilgrimage between the two on St Swithun's Day, July 15th. A Holy Well is situated on Church Lane which runs north from the church.

The well first mentioned in parish records in 1576 is still maintained today. A short service is held beside it on Ascension Day.

The co-existence of Christian tradition alongside pagan is reflected in the well dressing ceremonies which have occurred here in recent times to mark festivals such as Harvest and Candlemas. Like other Christian festivals, Candlemas draws some of its elements from Paganism. In pre-Christian times, it was the festival of light, Imbolc. This ancient festival marked the mid point of winter, half way between the winter solstice (shortest day) and the spring equinox.

## Shobrooke



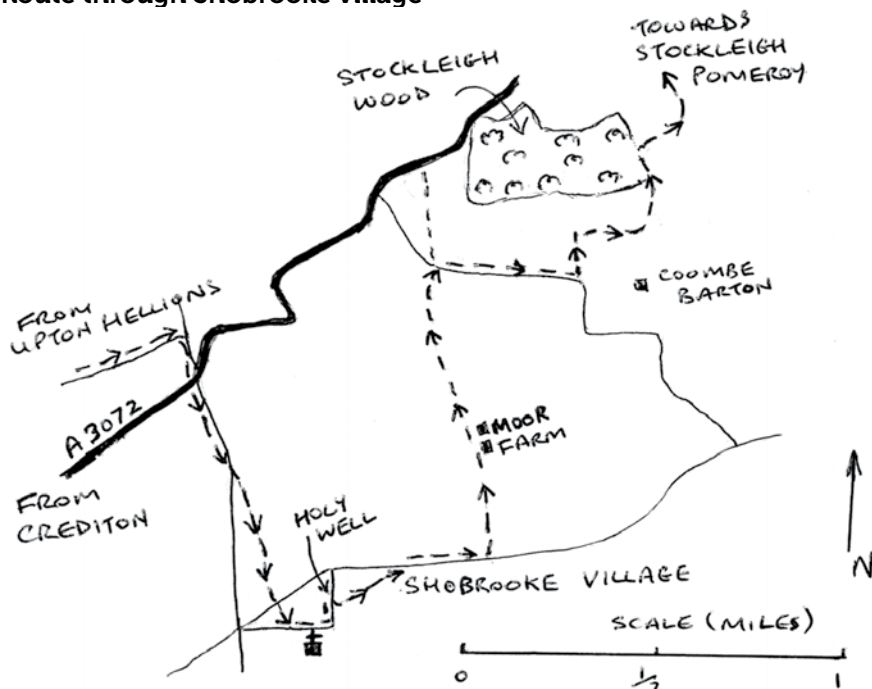
Just before the well, the footpath on the right (26) leads in to the main part of the village. There is a pub, The Red Lion which serves lunches and offers accommodation from £60/room/night or £40 single occupancy, 01363 772340.

Shobrooke has a concentration of buildings made from cob, (a mix of clay, water and straw), a method of building which is seeing a revival of interest as a sustainable and ecologically low impact building material. The village recently received a grant to rebuild the cob wall around the churchyard.



2 miles to Stockleigh Pomeroy. Beyond the pub, at the end of a row of cottages, turn left onto the footpath (27) that runs through Moor Farm. Where the path divides, keep right heading in a northerly direction. The path comes out on a lane just left of a bridge over the stream identified on maps as Shobrooke Lake.

## Route through Shobrooke village



If so inclined, there is a shortcut which brings you to this point, missing out Shobrooke completely. This would be achieved by taking the footpath just above Nomansland to Great Gutton (the fields here are sometimes grazed by Alpacas). There is then a short section of walking on the A3072 (about 50 metres) to the footpath junction on the right. The path leads to the bridge over Shobrooke Lake. Our intention is to avoid all walking on major roads, so don't take this as a recommendation and if choosing this route be careful. It can be shocking to come into contact with fast moving traffic after a few days walking and little exposure to normal driving speeds.

Turn right and cross the bridge over the Shobrooke Lake stream and follow the lane uphill past the farm cottage, heading in the direction of

Coombe Barton. About 500 metres beyond the stream is a footpath on your left with steps up to a gate (28). The path cuts across the field, rising steeply to the hedgerow on the horizon. Beyond the hedge turn right through a patch of scrubby woodland, along the edge of Stockleigh Wood, before following field boundary hedges on the left to Parsonage Copse. A track from here leads down to the village of Stockleigh Pomeroy and the church of St Mary the Virgin.

## Stockleigh Pomeroy

The village played a peripheral role in the Prayerbook Rebellion of 1549, through association with the Pomeroy family, owners of the estate for 500 years. Sir Thomas Pomeroy and his brother joined the rebellion which was triggered by the imposition of the New English Prayerbook. Catholics and many throughout Devon and Cornwall were opposed to the abolition of the Latin Mass and the banning of many traditional processions and pilgrimages.

The rebels besieged Exeter and a number of battles were fought in the area at Fenny Bridges, Clyst Heath and Woodbury before a final stand was made by the rebels near Sampford Courtney where the rebellion had begun. Thousands died in the uprising, apparently more than 2000 at the battle of Clyst Heath alone, and more were hanged in brutal reprisals that followed. Many had been drawn to the rebel cause from the area that still spoke Cornish, so that the heart was ripped out of the Cornish language as a result.

Sir Thomas Pomeroy had rather an ignominious end. He was said to have betrayed his comrades, none the less he was found guilty of treason and died in the Tower of London, having forfeited his lands.

The church of St Mary's is today far removed from the violence that raged in the vicinity in the past. Evidence of recurring conflict over faith, however, is apparent in carvings such as the Lion of St Mark on a pew near the pulpit, literally defaced in a Puritan attack at the time of the Civil War.



3.5 miles to Thorverton. Turn left out of the churchyard and follow the lane to Little Raddon Cross. Turn right and walk up hill to the junction at the top. Another right turn brings you to the summit of the hill. Follow the footpath on the left (29) along the ridge of the Raddon Hills (literally meaning Red Hills), with panoramic views on a clear day and the power of the wind evident from the sculpted shapes of trees. Further along the ridge is a solitary pine, a landmark tree for miles around.

Beyond this tree, climb the stile and cross diagonally down the slope of the adjacent field, to a stile near the far left hand corner. Pass by Raddon Hill Farm and in front of Raddon Hill Lodge. Beyond is a footpath on the left (30) which continues the descent through a series of fields to Chapel Farm. Turn left and walk along the lane for  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile into Thorverton.

## Thorverton



The village gives a snapshot of what has changed in the rural economy over the last 150 years. In 1850 there were 4 bakers, 3 blacksmiths (one of whom covered dentistry requirements), 3 butchers and 4 grocers amongst a range of other tradesmen and professionals. Nowadays, there is a post office in a portacabin and a shop in an old library van. Two pubs do remain, including the Thorverton Arms offering accommodation, 01392 860205, prices from £50/£70 for a single/double room.

The church dedicated to Thomas Becket, the 12th century archbishop murdered in Canterbury Cathedral, overlooks the old centre of the village where there was a Saxon burgh (the strongpoint of a village). Of particular interest in the church, are the medieval carvings in the vaulted roof of the porch, including one thought to represent the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



2.2 miles to Cadbury. With the church on your left, cross over Dinneford Bridge and take the left fork to Cadbury. It is predominantly uphill, with views over the rolling hills and valleys of mid Devon. Grass grows in the middle of the lane, indicative of light traffic use. As you approach Cadbury, there is a bend in the road and a footpath sign just beyond Terley (31), pointing the way up to the castle. This is an Iron Age hill fort, at a height of 829 feet above sea level it has a commanding position over the

surrounding countryside and clear views over a network of at least 8 other hill forts.

Here you are back on the trail of the Michael Line. At Cadbury the dragon and St Michael reside side by side, with Cadbury Castle reputedly protected by a dragon guarding a hoard of treasure, whilst the church at the bottom of the hill is dedicated to St Michael and All Angels. The legend of the dragon is somewhat borne out by a 19th century excavation which found votive objects and beads in a shaft within the fort. The dragon is also reputed to guard the Fursdon family, who live in nearby Fursdon House. It seems to be doing a good job as they have lived there in an unbroken line for 750 years since 1259.

The value of Cadbury Castle as a defensive position was recognised by Thomas Fairfax who used it as an encampment for his parliamentary forces during the Civil War. After Tiverton Castle was stormed, it was his base from which to lay siege to nearby Bickleigh Castle in 1645.





From the castle retrace your steps to the lane and turn right towards the church. In the fields to your left you may glimpse deer in the deer park.

St Michael and All Angels Church is also on the Michael Line, its most ancient feature is the Norman font. There is a remnant of 15th century stained glass above the east end of the north aisle. This depicts the risen Christ with his five wounds inflicted at the crucifixion. It is known as "The Cadbury Master." Maybe the subject of the piece saved it from being destroyed during the Civil War, (or maybe it was the protection of the dragon!), but it did so when the church was in close proximity to Fairfax's army whilst other stained glass in churches along our route did not survive. At the back of the church, are two church-warden's staves; one has a carving of the cross of St Michael with accompanying dragon; the other shows wheat and a vine representing the body and blood of Christ. Nearby on a pillar is the carving of a Green Man.



4.7 miles to Bickleigh. From the church, turn left and at Cadbury Cross go straight over the main road towards Pitt Farm. Walk past the farm entrance on your left and along the track to Chapeltown Cross. Turn right here. It is signposted as 1¼ miles to Cadleigh and the village church is visible on the hill. At the T junction, turn left over Burn Bridge. After a bend in the road, follow the footpath down the farm track on the right (32) towards Cadleigh Court. The well-marked path, skirts around the manor house through a mature orchard, heavily laden with fruit last autumn. The path continues on past East Court and meets the lane from Cadleigh. Turn right and follow the lane down the valley of the Dart, a tributary of the Exe, which it flows into at Bickleigh.

For a short but interesting diversion turn right before crossing the river Exe and follow signs to Bickleigh Castle, a moated, medieval, manor house, restored after the damage it suffered during the Civil War. It has an ancient chapel with the Norman structure built on what are thought to be 6th century foundations.

The route now takes you to Bickleigh Bridge, past the Fisherman's Cott pub. Cross over the river Exe and turn into Bickleigh Mill.



The mill was built in the 18th century and was working up until 1960 when it was devastated by floods. It has a restaurant and bar and is open 10am till 5pm Sunday - Wednesday and 10am till 9.30pm Thursday - Saturday, 01884 855419. Accommodation in Bickleigh is available at The Fisherman's Cott from £83.95/room/night, 01884 855237, and Trout Inn from £80/double room, 01884 855596.

In the summer of 2008 at Bickleigh I saw a poster pinned to the bus shelter advertising Awakening Albion, a pilgrimage walk along the Michael and Mary lines from Cornwall to Norfolk. It was one of the threads that led to the development of this project.



3.9 miles to Tiverton. The path lies just beyond the mill buildings. At the end of the car park, there is a footpath sign pointing left (33) which indicates you are joining the Exe Valley Way. Follow this upstream, past Holywell Farm, the location today not of a holy well, but a sewage works, by Lower Collipriest Farm and on to Tiverton.

## Tiverton

Entering the town, turn left down St Andrews Street and cross the A396 over the footbridge taking you past the Museum of Mid Devon Life, (open Monday – Friday 10.30am-4.30pm, Saturday 10am-1pm 01884 256295). This now also houses the Tourist Information Office. Outside the museum lies a timber remnant of the 15th century bridge over the River Exe. Apparently a chapel dedicated to St Mary stood on the bridge.

Tiverton lies on the confluence of the rivers Exe and Lowman. There is evidence of human habitation from Stone Age times. It thrived particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries due to a rich trade in wool. It has a central market on the site of a Roman encampment and all the facilities you would expect in a busy market town.



Past the museum, turn left by the town hall, then right into St Peter's Street. This leads to the church and adjacent castle, both of which lie on the Michael Line.

The church of St Peter's dates from the 12th century and reflects some of the past prosperity of Tiverton, having been richly endowed by wealthy merchants. The front "constructed in Beer Stone" is carved with ships, Barbary Apes, anchors and a depiction of the Virgin Mary as Stella Maris above the main door. The medieval font was discarded in favour of an extravagantly carved alternative. The former was consigned to the churchyard where it is used as a planter.

The castle is also 12th century, built by order of Henry I, although much has altered since then. As mentioned earlier it was besieged by the Parliamentary forces during the Civil War, "a lucky shot broke the chain of the drawbridge," after which it succumbed. The walled gardens are open to the public between Easter Sunday and the end of October on Sundays, Thursdays and Bank Holidays. 2.30- 5.00pm, 01884 253200.

One interesting tradition in the town is the 7 yearly perambulation of the town leat, better known locally as waterbailing, which commemorates the gift of the town's water supply by Isabella Countess of Devon in the 13th century. From Coggins Well on Fore Street, the traditional centre of the town the perambulation traces the watercourse to its source 6 miles away. As part of the tradition, Withy boys whip the stream with willow wands, a practice thought to have originated in the belief that this would rid the water of demons.



There is accommodation in Tiverton at Angel Guest House, 13 St Peter's Street with prices from £35 single £49.50 double, 01884 253392 and at Bridge Guest House, 23 Angel Hill, prices from £30- £36pppn, 01884 252804. There are regular bus links to Exeter, Taunton, Wellington, Crediton and Barnstable. Tiverton Parkway mainline station is some miles distant from the town, but offers access to the pilgrimage route near Sampford Peverell.

*"Slow down and enjoy life. It is not only the scenery you miss by going too fast, you also miss the sense of where you are going and why."*

Eddie Cantor



## Stage 6: Tiverton to Bradford on Tone (23.8 miles)



Facilities include a farm shop and pub at Halberton, shop and pub offering B&B at Sampford Peverell with a campsite close by. A shop and pub at Holcombe Rogus, a campsite and B&B at Greenham and a pub and shop at Bradford on Tone.



5.6 miles to Halberton. From St Peter's Church, walk down Newport Street, following signs for The Grand Western Canal and turn right towards the market, opposite Castle Street (note the stream which flows down the middle of Castle Street). Walk through the historic Pannier Market onto Fore Street. To see Coggin's Well, turn right, otherwise go left along Gold Street past Greenway's Almshouses and cross the bridge over the River Lowman. Just beyond is the old Blundell's School building. The school was founded in 1604 by Peter Blundell a wealthy Tiverton merchant. The original school house is looked after by The National Trust, the school itself having relocated to a more extensive campus on the outskirts of Tiverton, where interestingly the school's chapel is on the Michael Line.

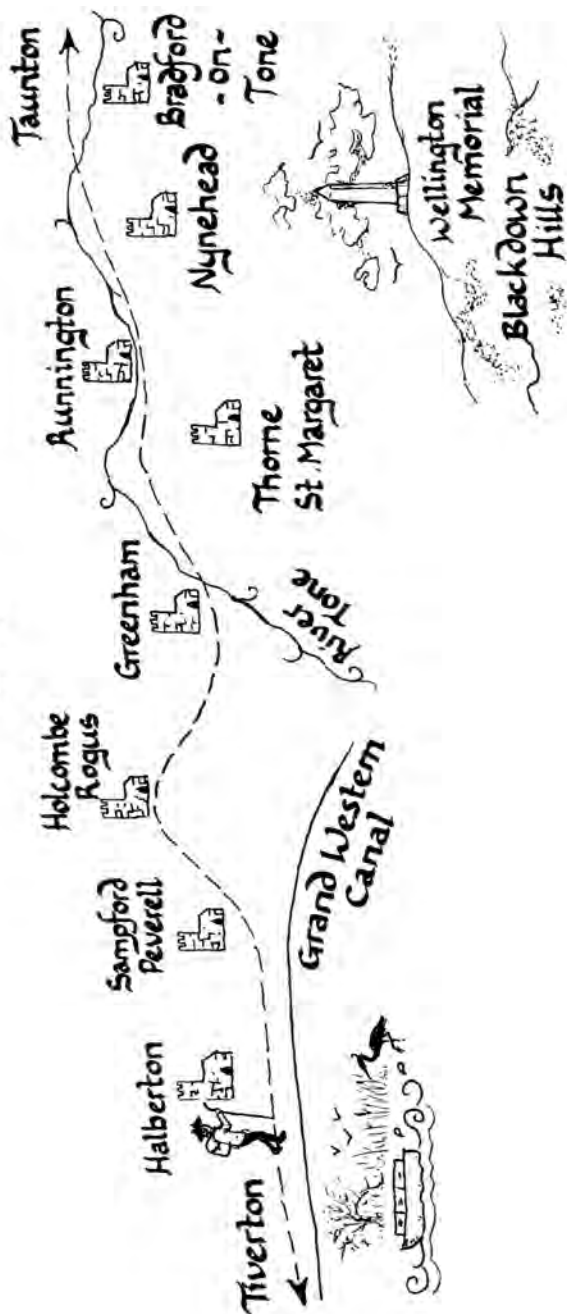
Cross the busy Grand Western Way, via the pedestrian crossing to the left of the roundabout and climb the flight of steps which lead on to Canal Hill. Continue up the hill to the entrance to the Grand Western Canal and canal basin. There is a tea room here, open from Easter to October 10am-6pm. Follow the canal towpath out of town towards Halberton.

The Grand Western Canal winds for just over 11 miles from Tiverton to the Somerset border. It was built as part of an ambitious scheme to connect the Bristol Channel and English Channel, to avoid the need to transport goods around the treacherous Cornish peninsula. The project was never completed, but the stretch between Tiverton and Holcombe Rogus was built between 1810 and 1814.

It was supplanted by rail and road transport and was in danger of being turned into a linear rubbish dump in the 1960's, before being saved and designated a Country Park and Local Nature Reserve. The canal provides habitat for dragonflies and numerous waterfowl. Occasionally you may glimpse the blue flash of a kingfisher.



# SOMERSET





As you approach the village of Halberton, leave the towpath at Greenway Bridge and turn right down the lane. At the junction with the main road through the village turn left. Immediately opposite is the Old Priory where in the 12th century an Augustinian college dedicated to St Jude was established. Like other monastic centres it was dissolved in 1539 by Henry VIII.

Cross the road by the village hall and turn right down Pond Hill to the Mill Pond. This apparently never freezes due to warm water springs which feed it. To reach the church of St Andrews, walk up Pond Hill to Church Path which leads to the main entrance.

The church, on the Michael Line, dates from the 14th century, but likely replaced an earlier place of worship. The village was already a well-established settlement, having been recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 as part of the landholding of Queen Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror. Its 12th century font certainly pre-dates the rest of the church. There is also a beautifully carved 15th century Rood Screen and Pulpit.



In Halberton The Barge Public House serves food except on Wednesday and Sunday evenings, there is also a farm shop and tearoom, visible as you approach Halberton on the canal towpath, which is open between May and September, 9am-5.30pm.



2.3 miles to Sampford Peverell. Retrace your steps back to the canal and continue to Sampford Peverell. The church of St John the Baptist is on the north bank.



The Michael Line passes through the 13th century church. The 12th century font and the oldest memorial in the church, the recumbent figure of a knight in armour, Sir Hugh Peverell, are made from Beer stone.

Beer stone has been quarried near the east Devon coastal town of that name since Roman times. It was popular because of its colour and easy workability when first cut, though its property of hardening when exposed to the open air meant that stone masons often worked on the quarried blocks in the caves. It was used in 24 Cathedrals throughout England and for detailed work in numerous churches. This indicates a sophistication of planning, craftsmanship and an effective transport infrastructure and degree of mobility amongst the population during the Middle Ages.

Quarrying at Beer over a period of 2000 years has created vast underground chambers with vaulted ceilings and huge supporting pillars of natural stone, giving a cathedral-like quality to the caves themselves. Quarrying has now ceased and there is a profound quiet in the caves, contrasting with the incessant ringing of hammer and chisel which would have filled these enclosed spaces in the past. The impact of this noise on the hearing of the quarrymen is the origin of the term "stone deaf".



There are two pubs in Sampford Peverell, The Globe Inn, which is open all day every day has rooms from £35pppn, 01884 821214. There is also a general store in the village.

About ½ a mile east of the village along the canal is The Minnows Camping and Caravan Site, 01884 821770, where prices for backpackers range between £5 and £10 per person depending on time of year. There is a small shop selling basic provisions. Tiverton Parkway station is ½ a mile to the south of campsite, giving access to mainline trains.

There is also the possibility of accommodation at Mill House Retreats, Rocknell Manor Farm, 01884 829000 situated about 1½ miles north of the canal. This can be reached by crossing the bridge close to the Minnows

following the road up the hill and taking the second turn on the right, signposted to Westleigh. Mill House is sympathetic to our vision of pilgrimage and offers either camping or B&B options. The centre is located in a beautiful environment and is evolving with a focus on community, sustainability and slowing down, all shared aspirations for our project.



5.3 miles to Holcombe Rogus. Our route continues along the canal towpath from Sampford Peverell for another 4 miles before diverting off to Holcombe Rogus. Before this it passes the picturesque setting of the Grade 1 listed 15th century Ayshford Chapel and Manor which are on the north side of the canal about ½ mile after the Minnows. Inside the chapel are a number of monuments commemorating members of the Ayshford family. A key is held at the adjacent bungalow. Visitors are asked to ensure that they don't shut inquisitive sheep in the church when they leave!

Further on near Canonsleigh, again on the far bank, is the site of a former Augustinian Abbey.

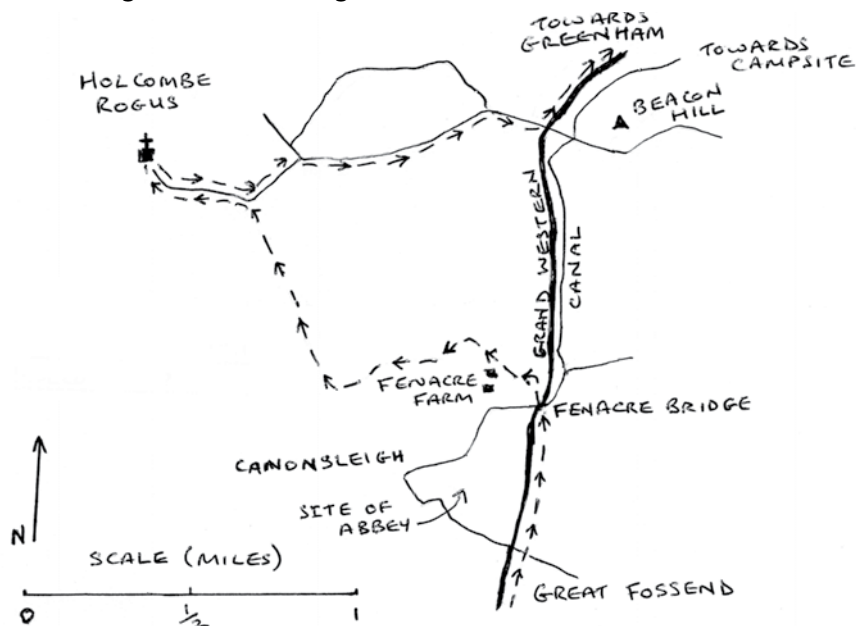
There is little to show for what must once have been a significant religious community which occupied the site from 1166. Originally it was inhabited by monks but some dispute led to their expulsion, to be replaced by nuns, who remained until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539.

Rocknell Manor had an affiliation with the Abbey and it is satisfying to consider the re-establishment of spiritual community occurring in the area after a gap of nearly 500 years. We can only speculate about how closely our route retraces the steps of pilgrims from the past, travelling between the old religious houses at Halberton and Canonsleigh, part of a network spread throughout the land.

*"Today the practice of pilgrimage is enjoying a vigorous revival, perhaps more popular now than at any time since its peak during the Middle Ages, when millions annually followed the pilgrim paths to thousands of shrines all over Europe."*

Phil Cousineau

## Route through Holcombe Rogus



At Fenacre Bridge, leave the towpath via some stone steps, cross the bridge and climb the stile on the right (34). Walk diagonally across the field beyond the dilapidated buildings of Fenacre Farm, cross a small wooden footbridge and go through the gate opposite. Keep the stream and hedge-row on your left, before turning left through a gateway and walking along by the stream until you come to a new looking footbridge. Cross this and follow the path adjacent to the stream until you come to a gateway with farm track beyond, which leads past substantial hen houses, through a farmyard and into the village.

## Holcombe Rogus



The Prince of Wales public house is on your right, it serves food lunch-times and evenings. Next door is the garage/village shop/post office, open mornings and afternoons Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings.



Turn left through the village to All Saints Church which has a very attractive position next to Holcombe Court, the 16th century manor house.

All Saints lies on the Mary Line and replaced an earlier Norman church. It has a tranquil and welcoming feel and some exquisite craftsmanship particularly in the carvings around the Bluett family pew with its scenes from Genesis and Exodus. There are also various memorials to members of the family.

At Holcombe Court the Tudor manor house replaced an earlier dwelling built by the Fitzrogus family, who lived there from about 1100. There are a number of other historic buildings close by, including the Priests House which is said to have the largest fireplace in Devon.

Another interesting feature are the drinking wells set into walls around the village. These were in use right up until the 1950s.



1.9 miles to Greenham. Proceed back past the Prince of Wales pub and down Dunn's Hill towards the canal. Turn left to rejoin the towpath, this time on the left bank of the canal (35), just before Beacon Hill over which the Mary Line passes.



There is a campsite at Gamlins Farm, 01823 672859 or 07986 832516 which is best reached by crossing the canal on the road bridge then taking the lane just beyond on the left which passes below Beacon Hill. The site is open from end of March to end of October, with prices between £7-£10 for solo tent, £10-£15 for 2 person tent. Prices vary according to season.



Follow the towpath to the end of The Grand Western Canal Country Park and cross the lane to continue along the footpath towards Greenham. When the path reaches the lane, turn left to the church (or turn right to view the historic Greenham Barton).

Somewhere between Holcombe and Greenham you cross the county boundary into Somerset, though given Greenham church you could be mistaken for thinking you had crossed into another country. The Church of St Peter has an alpine look to it, with a spire rather than a tower, a unusual feature amongst the churches on our route. It is squeezed in between the road and the river Tone. Trout are sometimes visible in the shallows from the churchyard's riverside bank.

## Greenham

The church (on the Mary Line) is Victorian, built in the Gothic Revival style. It is small, ministering to the needs of what is no more than a hamlet.

In spite of its size, Greenham has two historic houses, Cothay Manor and Greenham Barton. Both are 15th century and preserve their privacy, offering only glimpses of their full glory from the road.



The formal gardens of Cothay Manor, which are on route from Greenham, are open to the public from the 1st Sunday in April to the end of September, 11am to 4.30pm on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday and Bank Holidays.

Greenham also has B&B accommodation at Greenham Hall, the imposing house which looks down on the church, 01823 672603. Prices start at £80/double room or £60 single occupancy. One of its previous owners was Admiral Sir John Kelly, for whom there is a memorial in the church, created by Eric Gill, the controversial sculptor, responsible for the sculptures of Prospero and Ariel on BBC Broadcasting House in London.

At Appley, about 1 mile from Greenham up Bishop Hill, is the 500 year old Globe Inn, 01823 672327, which serves food, lunchtimes and evenings. There is also a village shop/ post office/café, open 8am-6pm Monday to Saturday and 8am-1pm on Sunday.



2 miles to Thorne St. Margaret. The path out of Greenham is almost opposite that which brought you in to the village (36). It runs alongside a strip of wet woodland which has colonised this stretch of the former canal. Along the path are signs for the Two Counties Way, a route that links Taunton to Starcross on the south coast beyond Exeter.

Pass through Elsworthy Farm, the public footpath is to the right of the farm buildings, but there is an alternative permissive footpath via a metal kissing gate to the left, bypassing the farmyard. At the end of the farm drive, turn left onto the lane which takes you past Cothay Manor. At the road junction just beyond, cross straight over and follow the farm track towards Higher Wellisford Barn. Initially this is identified as a permissive path, but further on when the path diverges from the concrete farm track and crosses a field, a finger post distinguishes it as a public footpath (37).

You share the way briefly with The West Deane Way, a long distance path encountered several times between here and Taunton. It may seem from



recent observation that there is a proliferation of long distance routes treading on each other's toes. The UK Trailwalker's Handbook lists about 720 long distance paths. In our secular age, these perhaps fulfil some of the need previously met by ancient pilgrimage routes.

*"With a deepening of focus, keen preparation, attention to the path below our feet and respect for the destination at hand, it is possible to transform even the most ordinary trip into a sacred journey, a pilgrimage."*

Phil Cousineau

After Higher Wellisford Barn leave The West Deane Way and turn right to follow the lane into Thorne St. Margaret.

## **Thorne St Margaret**

The church which serves a parish population of about 50 has been locked each time I have visited. Keys for the church are available from Thorne Manor, 01823 672264. This is an historic house, much of it dating from the early 16th century. To get there turn right out of the churchyard.

Miller and Broadhurst refer to their experience of the church.

*"...she (the Mary line) ran diagonally through the porch and tower of the church at Thorne St Margaret, where an enormous rough-hewn goblet-shaped font marks the centre of the line. This was the first time we had come across a St Margaret church in the Westcountry and it seemed particularly appropriate, for her legend recounts how she was swallowed by a dragon, only to kill it when she miraculously burst forth from her uncomfortable containment. She is the feminine counterpart to St George and St Michael. A stained glass window in the church depicts the Blessed Virgin Mary alongside St Margaret standing on a dragon."*

Further research indicated that the font is more ancient than most, of Saxon origin and was rescued after being found discarded in the churchyard. Another interesting fact was that in pre-reformation days, the Abbot of Glastonbury would say mass at Thorne on his visits to Cothay Manor.



2.1 miles to Runnington. Turn left from the church and proceed down Bughole Lane. As the lane approaches a bend, it descends sharply. There is a footpath on the left (38) which takes you through two fields. This is a worthwhile detour for the expansive view. Stay close to the field boundary on the left, then through the second field head for a stile in the bottom left hand corner. This brings you out onto a quiet lane which runs along the top of Rewe Mead Nature Reserve, a wet meadow managed by Somerset Wildlife Trust. Turn right and walk along the lane to the junction with Bughole Lane, (alternatively you could have stayed on Bughole Lane past Rewe Farm, to arrive at this point). There is a nature reserve information board and gate close to the junction.

Enter the reserve and follow a path right between the line of the old canal and the River Tone to a stile, the path beyond leads you behind Two Bridges Cottage and under Harpford Bridge (39). From the bridge keep close to the post and rail fence on your right.

The path follows the floodplain of the River Tone for about 1 mile, parts of it on raised embankments. At times the church at Runnington, the next destination, is visible amongst the trees, but the footbridge over the River Tone is hidden and will require you to descend from the raised embankment to locate it. Cross the river, way markers for the West Deane Way (40) guide you to the 15th century Church of St Peter and St Paul. It lies on the Mary Line. If locked a key is available from Mrs Osborne 01823 662568.

One pleasure of this pilgrimage has been the experience of foraging for wild foods along the way. At Runnington, I was initiated into the joys of eating yew berries. Be vigilant, spit out the pip which is the poisonous part!

From early spring and the emergence of wild garlic leaves, nettle and dandelion; to the summer fruitfulness of wild strawberry and cherry, plum and bilberry, and the late season abundance of apple, blackberry and grape, there is the opportunity to be physically as well as spiritually nourished by pilgrimage. It creates another level of interconnection with the land through which we pass and a window into the distant past when perhaps the first pilgrims were hunter gatherers making a yearly ritual journey around their country.

*"As nomadic people have always done, they took the accustomed routes and stopped at familiar places.... This was the innocent Golden Age yearned for by poets, the Garden of Eden or lost paradise..., The basic pattern of the English landscape, still discernable beneath its modern accretions was laid down in a time before settlements as a network of sacred centres with pilgrimage paths between them."*

John Michell



2.2 miles to Nynehead. From the church at Runnington retrace your steps back over the River Tone. Climb the raised embankment and continue in a south easterly direction along the West Deane Way. This brings you to the B3187 and the industrial park at Tone. If you need provisions, turn right for the town of Wellington, otherwise cross straight over the road and through an area of recently planted trees. About  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile on from the road crossing, beyond the sewage works, there is a junction of paths which is easy to overlook as the fingerpost is missing. Looking south, you have views of The Wellington Monument on the Blackdown Hills which marks the course of the Michael Line. The monument was erected to commemorate the battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Turn left, leaving the West Deane Way which continues alongside the remains of the canal, and head north east along a steep sided path through mature woodland. At the woodland edge (41), cross a stream and head for the triple arched stone bridge over the River Tone, designed by Thomas Lee who also designed the Wellington Monument.

Beyond the bridge, the footpath divides, splitting either side of Nynehead Court. The choice is yours. The destination is All Saints church, situated east of Nynehead Court. The church is on the Mary Line. It is usually found locked. The key holders are: Tony Locke 01823 461214; Alan Howe 01823 666995 and M.E Sparks 01823 660407.

Nynehead Court is now an old people's residential home. The grounds of the house are open to the public and are worth exploring. They are well managed with a classical box hedge garden to the south of the house. Amongst the wide variety of specimen trees at Nynehead is a beautiful Mulberry tree, which in the summer was literally dripping with fruit. Nearby the old ice house has a marvellous echoing acoustic.



2.4 miles to Bradford on Tone. From Nynehead Court, walk along the lane past the primary school and Island Cottage. Carry straight on through the rock cutting, known locally as the Hollow. Just beyond Nynehead Memorial Hall turn right down the straight tarmac track past the footpath sign indicating Tone 2 miles. On a recent visit this post had been dislodged. A second waymark post is still standing beyond the house on the left (42). Follow the track down to the buildings and turn left, rejoining the West Deane Way up past Perry Farm. This brings you to the outskirts of East Nynehead.

Turn right, go through the village and continue over the level crossing to the junction at Tone Green. Turn right here and proceed towards Bradford on Tone. The last 250 metres of road walking is on a busier road with no pavement, so be aware. Cross the historic bridge over the river.

## Bradford on Tone



The church of St Giles stands on your left hand side, opposite the White Horse Inn, which serves food both at lunchtime and evenings. Next to this is the community run village shop open 9am-12am each day.

The church was dedicated to St Giles in 1754, but like many churches this dedication was preceded by others, according to fashion. In the Middle Ages, the church was Our Lady Of Bradford, as with other churches along the Tone valley it lies on the Mary Line. Within are some interesting stained glass windows including one depicting St James, the patron saint of pilgrims, pictured with boat and scallop shell, a traditional insignia worn by pilgrims, particularly those travelling to Santiago de Compostela. A second window shows St Boniface, axe still in hand having cut down the sacred oak.

*"We're so engaged in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that we forget the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive is what it is all about."*

Joseph Campbell

## Stage 7: Bradford on Tone to Burrowbridge (17.4 miles via Taunton, 23.4 miles via Trull)



All facilities in Taunton. On the alternative route via Trull, Corfe and Stoke St Mary there is a shop, pub and B&B in Trull, pubs in Corfe and Stoke St Mary with a campsite near Stoke St Mary. Where the alternative routes meet again, there is a pub in Ruishton. There is a shop, pub and B&B at Creech St Michael, a pub at Knapp. Shop, pub and B&B at North Curry and camping, B&B and a café on the way to Stoke St Gregory. In Stoke St Gregory is a pub and shop. There is a pub with a campsite at East Lyng and a pub and B&B at Burrowbridge.

In the original pilot section guidebook our suggested route from Bradford on Tone followed the River Tone through Taunton to Ruishton. The choice was made because it seemed that following the Michael and Mary lines more closely as they meandered their way south of Taunton introduced additional complications, particularly with regards crossing the M5 motorway. However on reflection and with the benefit of some help and advice from Jane Embleton who lives close by we identified a route more in keeping with the aim of following the earth energy currents.

We have retained the route through Taunton as an option (Alternative 1), it is more direct but perhaps less enjoyable than the more circuitous route that takes in Castleman's Hill, Trull, Corfe and Stoke St Mary before connecting with the Taunton route at Ruishton.

### Alternative 1 4. 8 miles to Taunton Town Centre



2.8 miles to Ruishton. From the church at Bradford, cross back over the bridge and rejoin the riverside path heading east. The way is initially marred by the presence of electricity pylons and the hum of power cables seem to dominate the soundscape. Beyond Hele the power lines become less intrusive. Cross the lane near Hele Manor and carry on along the riverside path. If you turn left at the lane, The Allerford Inn (about ¼ of a mile) serves food lunchtimes and evenings except Monday, 01823 461119.

The recognised line of The West Deane Way turns away from the river bank, across an arable field and to the left of a line of mature oak trees, although the river bank field margin seems to offer a well-used alternative path. They re-join and enter Netherclay Community Woodland, an area of former arable land, recently planted with trees. Keep close to the boundary hedge on the left through the woodland. This brings you out onto

Netherclay Lane (43) where you turn left and proceed to the junction with the A3065.



There is B&B accommodation in Bishops Hull just south of Netherclay Community Woodland at The Old Mill, 01823 289732, prices from £65 for a double room and £50 single occupancy. It has a very attractive aspect. The Old Inn in the village serves food every day except Mondays, 01823 334111. Opposite the pub, The Meryan House Hotel 01823 284728 has a restaurant and rooms from £80 for a double and £70 for a single room. There is a small butcher's shop, which stocks a basic range of other provisions.



From Netherclay, cross the A3065 and walk along the lane past Roughmoor House and carry on left by the post box. Then turn right, following the footpath sign to Roughmoor Farm (44).

Park and Ride is not a phrase you might expect to read in a guide to a walking pilgrimage, but having turned down the drive to Roughmoor Farm, the Park and Ride site is on your left hand side. It offers an alternative to 4 miles of predominantly urban walking through the centre of Taunton. The final destination on the park and ride route is conveniently close to Ruishton where the Mary Line, which detours south of Taunton, reconnects with our route. The Park and Ride operates every day except Sunday and Bank Holidays and costs £2.20. Ring 0845 3459155 for more details.

For those continuing on foot through Taunton, the path past Roughmoor Farm brings you back to the banks of the River Tone; through to Weirfield Riverside Local Nature Reserve and on to Frenchweir Park with the river on your right. Don't cross the bridge over the weir, but instead follow Clarence Street out of the park with the River Tone Navigation Channel on your right.

Cross over the river opposite the castle, turn left over a smaller bridge which spans a tributary stream and carry on to the old white road bridge along the riverside walk. Stay on the south bank of the river, passing the Brewhouse Arts Centre and Somerset Cricket Ground heading towards Ruishton.

## Taunton

Although not directly on the Michael or Mary lines, Taunton offers good transport links to join the pilgrimage route. It is the largest town on this

section with a population of just over 60,000. The riverside walks through the town offer the opportunity to pass through on foot without having to share a route with cars.

Taunton was a fortified Saxon town with its own mint and a minster which was in existence before 904AD. In the 12th century a small monastery was built along with the town castle. As with Tiverton its wealth was largely derived from the wool industry. It was the scene of a series of sieges during the Civil War, but its most prominent moment in history probably came with the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685, (of which more later), when the Duke of Monmouth had himself crowned king in Taunton prior to his crushing defeat at the Battle of Sedgemoor. It was subsequently the scene of Judge Jefferies Bloody Assizes.



There are all the facilities of a busy town and a range of accommodation. The closest guest house to the river is The Blorengre House, 57 Staplegrove Road, north of Tangier, 01823 283005 with double rooms from £62 and singles from £48.

There is a campsite at Tanpits Cider Farm, 01823 270663 in Bathpool just to the east of Taunton, which is open March-November and costs £7/night for a two person tent. I have not camped here but have read some very mixed reviews. Its location close to the main road also makes it potentially noisy. If choosing this for a stopping point, follow signs for the East Deane Way from Firepool over the river Tone and along the towpath of the Bridgwater and Taunton canal. After camping, follow the canal towpath on to Creech St Michael to connect again with the main pilgrimage route.



3 miles to Ruishton. For the main route out of Taunton, carry on past Firepool Weir. Just before the flyover that carries the A358, cross the footbridge to the north side of the river. We planned to put a way marker here to indicate the change of river bank but saw the extent of vandalism inflicted on other footpath signs in the area and decided against it. Instead, look out for some impressive graffiti art, particularly the images with the tag BUCK on one of the flyover buttresses. The footbridge is situated just short of this.

The path on the north side of the river is a joint footpath and cycleway adjacent to the railway line; it passes through Children's Wood Nature Reserve and under the A38 road bridge near Bathpool, beyond which the path crosses again to the south side of the river into Hackridge Local Nature Reserve. Continue to follow the riverbank path with the river on your left, passing under the motorway. About  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile beyond the motorway, the footpath turns away from the riverbank, cutting across the field towards Ruishton. The church tower provides a distinctive landmark. The village name derives from its location overlooking the rush growing lands of the River Tone.

The experience of slowing to walking pace and being for a number of days in a rural landscape can heighten the impact of noise and speed associated with modern urban living. The route through Taunton is sympathetically managed, offering a corridor for wildlife, walkers and cyclists largely separate from traffic, but for all this it can be a dispiriting experience, bearing in mind it is a relatively small urban centre compared to the towns and cities in which most of the population live.



If you selected the Park and Ride alternative, the bus journey terminates at Cambria Farm. From here cross the A358 at the traffic lights and walk up Ruishton Lane past The Premier Inn which offers room only rates from £44/night, 0871 5279074. It is a 10 minute walk into the village.

## Alternative 2 – via Trull, Corfe and Stoke St Mary

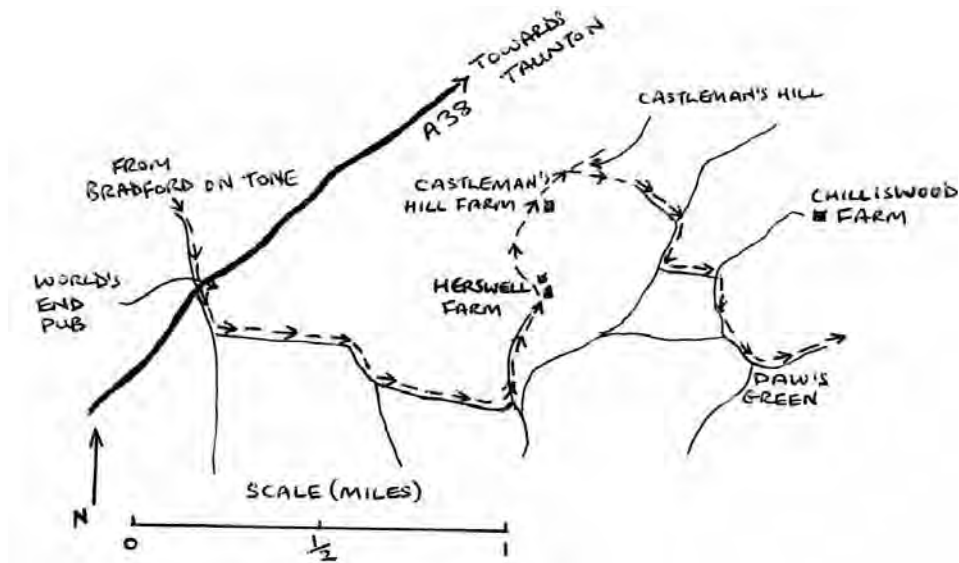


4.8 miles to Trull. From the Church of St Giles follow Regent Street in a southerly direction out of Bradford on Tone until you reach the junction with the A38. Cross with care and walk down Silver Street in the direction of West Buckland, past The World's End pub, where food is available between 12 noon and 9pm each day.

Take the first turn on the left by the cottage and carry on along the lane past Middle Stoford Farm and Stoford Manor. About 100m after crossing a bridge over a small stream there is a footpath on the left. This leads to Herswell Farm. I found the path hard to follow, so suggest staying on the lane. Take the left fork just past the footpath sign and go left again at the crossroads. This lane is a no through road, leading only to Herswell Farm.



## Over Castleman's Hill



Take the footpath which has been diverted to the left of the farmhouse and garden. Follow the gravel track through the farmyard to the back of the farmhouse and cottage. Go through the gate on the left and follow the path along the bottom edge of a sloping orchard to another gate. Continue along the track beyond up the slope to Castleman's Hill Farm on the brow of the hill. From here there are views back towards West Buckland Church and the Wellington Monument beyond.

Follow the main track through the farm between house and farm buildings. This leads to a junction of tracks at the summit of Castleman Hill.

Legend speaks of a dragon supposedly slain on Castleman's Hill although I have found no further details of the story. If you go left along the lane from the junction of tracks for 200m you reach the location in a field on the left where a cross is raised every Easter by the parish of Bishops Hull. The post which carries the cross is left in the ground through the year, perhaps piercing the dragon's heart.



Back at the junction of tracks, climb the stile opposite the entrance to Castleman's Hill Farm, (it may be obscured by the tree) located next to the double field gate and follow the path roughly east, along the track parallel to the fence until you reach Lipe Hill Lane. Turn right, then take the next left. Carry on past the turn to Chilliswood Farm down to Daw's Green. At the junction turn left following the lane signposted Trull 1½ miles.

Continue for ½ a mile to the junction at Higher Dipford Farm, head left again following signs to Trull, then take the footpath on the right just past Woodpecker Cottage. Cross the field to the left of the telegraph pole. At a gap in the hedge go over the footbridge. The footpath leads diagonally across the next field to the far left hand corner, then follows the hedge line on the left to a well maintained path which dissects two fields. Maps show the path dissecting the final field before reaching the road next to Thatch Cottage. Follow the field boundary to the left if crops block the path.

Turn left along the Honiton Road and follow this for about 400m. Turn right into Church Road near the village shop. Pass the post office and continue down the road to the church.

## Trull

All Saint's Church lies on the Mary Line. It is renowned for its 15th century "Dragon Window" set in the south wall of the sanctuary which portrays St Michael, St Margaret and St George all killing their respective dragons. May this be connected to the legend of dragon slaying at nearby Castleman's Hill?

The church contains some wonderful 16th century wood carvings. On the pulpit, one of the figures, St John the Evangelist holds a cup with the serpent. Many bench ends also date from this period, some carved with figures representing a church procession. One near the main door shows the implements of the Passion: cross; hammer; pincers; nails; thongs and ladder on top of which is perched a crowing cock. At a time when the population was largely illiterate, images both carved and created in glass were potent symbols of the Christian faith. These treasures were removed to a safe place during troubled times, action which would indicate their significance to local people.



2.7 miles to Corfe. Leaving the church turn left down Church Road and turn right opposite the Winchester Arms public house onto the footpath that runs alongside the playing field.



The Winchester Arms serves food lunchtimes and evenings and has B&B accommodation available from £30 single occupancy and £50 for a double room, 01823 284723.



Cross the steep sided Sherford Stream following the clearly defined East Deane Way. Continue over another footbridge and when you reach the lane turn right then after about 20m climb the stile on the left following the course of the stream in the direction of the increasingly noisy motorway.

Where the path divides by the weir, stay on the right bank of the stream and go through into the next field. About 100m past a bend in the stream head left through the hedge to a footbridge over the motorway. Cross the motorway, still following the East Deane Way heading in the direction of the wooded ridge of The Blackdown Hills.

Approaching the walled enclosure of Poundisford Park, stay to the right of the boundary wall and continue on past an avenue of lime trees to the lane. Here some more modern and modest houses indicate the outskirts of Pitminster village. Turn left along the lane away from the village centre and after about 50m turn right at the entrance to Pitminster sewage pumping station. It may not sound very inviting, but follow the hedge line on the left. The spire of Pitminster church is visible to the right also noteworthy are some of the ancient oak trees which seem to be a particular feature of this stretch of the walk, remnants of the former wood-pasture pattern of land management which stretches back to medieval times.

When you reach an old iron footbridge with a thatched cottage straight ahead, the line of the path is little obscure, particularly as the scrubby field is at times quite overgrown. Aim for the two large oak trees ahead of you on the left and beyond these to the corner of the field and stile. Maps indicate the right of way is diagonally across the next field which is also dotted with some ancient oaks. However, if obstructed by crops, follow the hedge on the right parallel to the lane and continue along the second side of the field next to the wood.

Where the trees end, go up the slope on the right and straight across the field. Now follow the hedge towards the cottages and road beyond into

the village of Corfe. Up the road to the right is the White Hart Inn which is open every day except Tuesday. Turn left to reach the church.

## Corfe

The name Corfe is of Saxon origin and means a cutting through the hills. There is record of a place of worship in the village from at least Norman times. The early Norman font, a portion of the chancel wall and two corbels supporting the nave roof are all that remain from this period although the Norman style was retained during the 19th century rebuild.

The church dedicated to St Nicholas is located on the Michael Line. It was in the stewardship of the Augustinian order based in Taunton up until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 and their influence in the affairs of the village is further indicated by the fact that the Prior owned buildings here which were subsequently incorporated into the large house of Barton Grange.



3.8 miles to Stoke St Mary. Walk down the lane that runs adjacent to the church, past Old Mill House and follow East Deane Way signs along the edge of two fields with the wooded ridge of the Blackdown Hills to your right. Cross the footbridge over Broughton Brook, a surprisingly deep cut valley and turn left heading in a north easterly direction until you reach a cottage where you join the lane.

Turn right by Hele House and continue along the lane for just under  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile. At a bend in the road, just before Mill House, turn right along the bridleway which soon changes from a tarmac to a cobbled stone surface. Follow this track up the slope until you reach a junction of paths at the woodland edge. Turn left following the sign towards Thurlbear Wood  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles and continue along the gravel track through woods down towards Netherclay Livery Centre where you turn right onto the lane.

At the junction, cross the road to the bridleway signposted Thurlbear Wood  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile. At the far end turn left onto the lane. Approaching Thurlbear, the church is visible amongst the trees. No longer used for services it is kept locked. A key is available from the school 100m further on.

Continue along the lane and at Greenway Farm turn left following signs to Stoke St Mary  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile. (If you are camping at Ashe Farm, see the information section below for an alternative suggestion.) Entering the village, turn right opposite the village hall, passing the Half Moon Inn which serves food lunchtimes and evenings. You walk past some attractive cottages and cottage gardens up the lane to the church which lies on the Michael Line.



Ashe Farm is a campsite just over a mile east of Stoke St Mary, but a little off route. If you are staying here, turn right at the junction by Greenway Farm coming from Thurlbear. This leads past Stoke Court Farm. At the junction, turn left and follow signs to Thornfalcon. The campsite on the left just before a bridge over the dismantled railway line, is open from the beginning of April to end of October and costs £6/person, 01823 443764. Just down the road, The Nags Head pub serves food at lunchtimes and evenings.



If you stay at Ashe Farm, to reconnect with the main route at Stoke St Mary, follow the footpath signs through the campsite, up the hill into the scrubby woodland. Go through the footpath gate and cross the field to a second gate in the opposite hedge. Turn left and walk up the slope around the edge of the field with expansive views north over the Vale of Taunton Deane. At the top of the field follow the footpath sign on the left directing you along the wooded track. This brings you out at Stoke Hill Farm. Turn right and follow the lane for about 400m (past the footpath signs). At a sharp bend in the road turn left along the bridleway, over the top of Stoke Hill, down through the woods, past Stoke House to the church.

## Stoke St Mary

The church of St Mary's has a tranquil and welcoming atmosphere allied with some very striking modern stained glass in three windows on the south side of the nave. The work is by Patrick Reyntiens who collaborated with local artist John Piper.

If locked, keys for the church are available at Slaps Meadow, 4th bungalow along Henlade Road from the church.

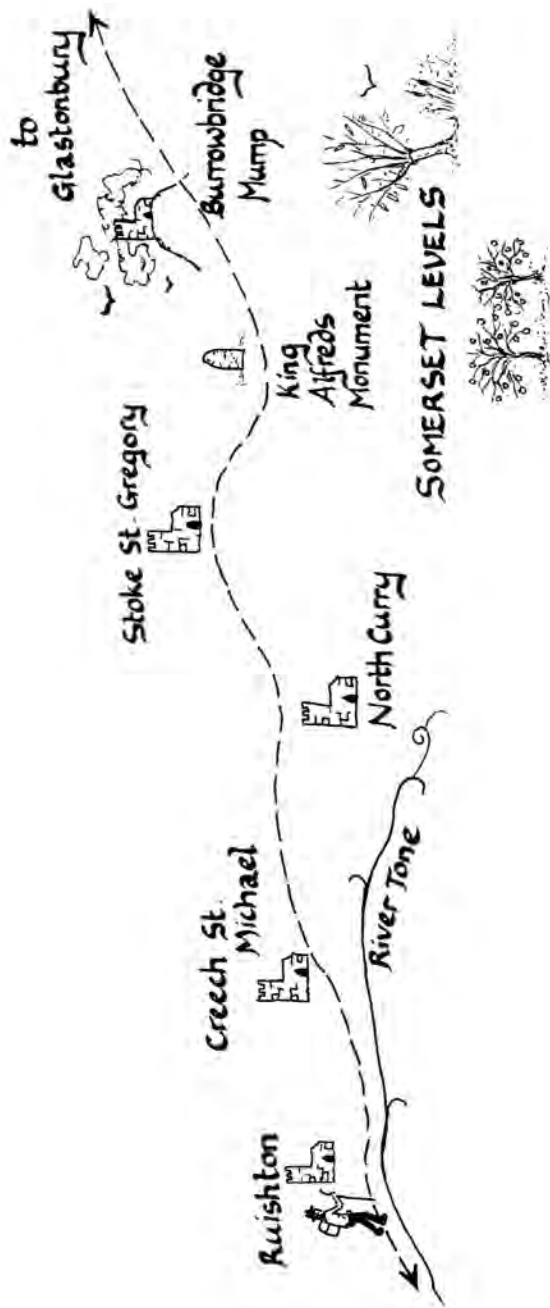


2.3 miles to Ruishton. From the church, turn right up the lane past the thatched cottage. At the entrance to Stoke House, follow the bridleway on the left to the junction of paths and turn left along the footpath, climbing steeply straight on up through the woods following the fence line on the left to the summit of the hill where the path leads left, around the edge of a field before joining a tarmac drive. Turn right and at the end of the drive go left along the lane for about 200m, past the entrance to a Woodland Trust reserve on the right. Just beyond this, follow the footpath on the left and climb the stile into the field.

There are expansive views across the valley and in the near distance Ruishton village and church, (our next port of call) are clearly visible. Follow the hedge on the right down the slope towards the old orchard. On a clear day you can see Glastonbury Tor in the distance away to the right. Walk around the edge of the orchard to the bottom corner of the field and climb the stile. Keep to the left of the drainage channel and pond and go over another stile to reach the lane opposite Toad Hall. (The Mount Somerset Hotel and Spa is on the left. Rather pricy for the average pilgrim although the idea of sauna, steam room and massage may be appealing for weary limbs.)

Our route is to the left, past Henlade Lodge where you fork left at the junction. Opposite Bridge Cottage cross the little concrete footbridge and follow the field boundary on the left to a gap in the hedge. Continue left around two sides of the next field until you reach a kissing gate. Go through and follow the hedge on the right to the corner of the field. Go through the gates ahead of you. Turn right past the farm buildings, walking down to the main road (A358) at Bushy Cross. Cross straight over. Take care, it is a busy road and can be a tricky crossing at times. Bushy Cross Lane leads into Ruishton, to The Ruishton Inn and the church beyond.





## Ruishton

The church is dedicated to St George, that other great dragon slaying saint, whose image is carved into the frame of the notice board in the churchyard. The church, built from Monkton Sandstone and Blue Lias, has been open each time I have visited, although a 16th century Flemish painting was stolen in 1981, giving some justification to the concerns that lead to churches remaining locked.

The tower is described as its chief glory, with an elaborate design, an array of angel busts and what looks like the carving of a hare. Its completion is thought to have been prevented by the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The church was previously dedicated to the Virgin Mary whose guild apparently flourished in the village prior to the Reformation. There is evidence that an ancient altar formerly existed in the south aisle, which intriguingly matches the flow of the Mary Line through the church.

The Rood screen is no longer there but the stairway that served the Rood loft remains with two tiny windows depicting two angels in medieval stained glass that have survived the centuries. The richly carved font is also old, dating from about 1380.

In the church, I observed during one visit, a candle burning to commemorate soldiers killed in Afghanistan. There were also photographs of those who had died. It was a poignant memorial, the most recent in a long line of monuments to conflict woven into the fabric of the pilgrimage. In the church guide there was also mention of 11 villagers implicated in the Monmouth Rebellion which was to reach its bloody conclusion at the Battle of Sedgemoor in 1685.



0.9 mile to Creech St Michael. Walk along Church Lane to the junction. The Ruishton Inn is on the corner, it serves food lunchtimes and evenings. Turn left past the pub and then left again down Barton Lane. After a few



metres turn left onto the footpath (45), which brings you back to the banks of the river Tone, with the church of Creech St. Michael visible in the distance. Close to the river is a different kind of memorial to war, the remains of Pill Boxes, part of the Taunton Stop Line a defensive precaution in the event of invasion during the Second World War. Continue under the bridge, which carried the old railway line and along the river bank to the road. Turn left towards the village of Creech St Michael.

## Creech St Michael



In the village, there is accommodation at Creechbarn, an old converted Somerset Longbarn, prices from £65/room/night or £50 single occupancy, 01823 443955. There is a combined shop/post office open 8am until 8pm, except Sunday when it is 9am until 5pm and a pub, the Bell Inn. Food is available at lunchtime and each evening apart from Sunday.

The church of St Michael dates back to the 13th century and came into the ownership of Montacute Priory in 1362. It has several medieval wall paintings and was dowsed as a crossing point of the Michael and Mary Lines by Hamish Miller, the first since the church of the Holy Cross in Crediton. The Sun and the Serpent mentions the belief that the church was built on a site previously used for pagan worship. The churchyard is of interest with an ancient yew tree, estimated at more than 1000 years old below which is a set of stocks with 7 holes.

Close to the church is a building, also of monastic origin, where monks brewed their ale and gave food and shelter to passing travellers. It was run as a pub, though not I think staffed by monks, until the 1980's.



3.5 miles to North Curry. Turn left out of the churchyard heading towards Brickyard Farm. Follow the footpath signed Ham, 2/3 mile along the river bank (46). Cross over the footbridge into Ham and turn left along the lane.

Ham was once a busy settlement, the terminus for cargo being transported along the River Tone between Bridgwater and Taunton. There was insufficient depth of water for boats to safely proceed further up river.

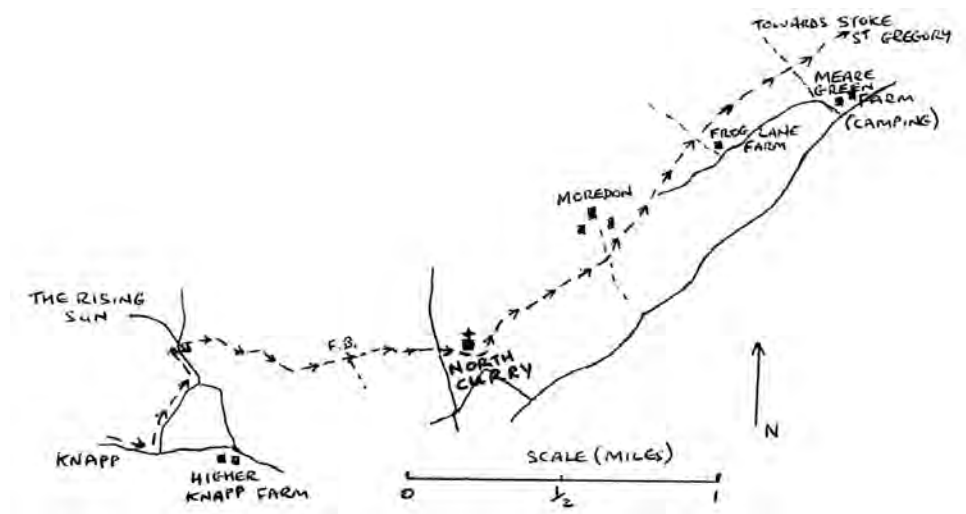
It was superseded by the building of the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal which opened in 1842.

At Ham Mills take the footpath (47) which passes just to the right of the private suspension bridge which provides access to Coal Harbour House. On the riverbank I passed two fishermen, who had just landed a 16lb pike.

After about 200 metres there is a footpath on the right (48) which heads up the hill towards Knapp. The path brings you through an old orchard to emerge at a junction of lanes. Head in an easterly direction past Knapp Farm and The Cider Barn and carry on along this lane to Higher Knapp Farm. Turn left opposite the farm and walk down hill towards Lower Knapp and at the bottom turn left.

Along the lane is The Rising Sun pub which bucked the trend of decline in country pubs re-opening a couple of years ago. It serves lunches and evening meals each day. Just beyond the pub, take the footpath on the right (49). Climb the hill, walking in an easterly direction. There are distant views of Burrowbridge Mump and Glastonbury Tor along the way. Nearer at hand is the church of North Curry, the more immediate destination.

### From Knapp via North Curry to Stoke St Gregory



I use the term hill rather loosely in this context as the hill just mentioned is on a contour of 25 metres. This area lies on the edge of the Somerset

Levels, where large swathes of land lie close to sea level. Indeed much of the inland moor lies below the level of peak tides and is only kept from regular inundation by sea defences and land drainage. The name of the county, Somerset, derives from its early human occupation, when much of the land was only accessible in the summer time.

Use the church of St Peter and St Paul in North Curry as a direction guide and avoid taking the footpath which leads off to the right at the small footbridge. The appropriate path comes out onto Moor Lane, almost opposite the church which is situated on the northern edge of the village. In the neighbouring field stands a healthy looking mature elm tree.

## North Curry

There is a large churchyard with an impressive yew and cherry tree avenue and an open vista to the north overlooking Curry Moor. Its location and the Golden Ham Stone, from which it is predominantly built, give the church a sense of spaciousness and light both inside and out. It was built on the site of an earlier church in about 1300, a period of prosperity judging by the size of the church, which is referred to as the Cathedral of the Moors.

The oldest object in the church is a chest which stands close to the font. It is thought to have come from Athelney Abbey and dates from before 1200. There is also an interesting chest tomb in the north transept with carved figures holding rosary beads.

A chapel in the north transept is dedicated to Our Lady, with an altar originally from the church of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage. In the south transept is a chapel dedicated to St Michael with a statue of the Archangel looking sorrowful in the process of slaying a dragon.

North Curry and the neighbouring Stoke St Gregory were both part of the royal estate from Saxon times, but were sold to the Dean and Chapter of Wells by Richard I, to help fund the ransom demanded for his release by the German Emperor Henry IV, after he was captured on his way home from the Crusades.



It is an attractive village with well stocked shop and post office; The Bird in Hand public house, 01823 490248, serves food lunchtimes and evenings each day. B&B is available at Trevarrick House with prices from £80/room or £50 single occupancy, 01823 491319.

There is also a local real ale brewery next to the church. In the shop window the performance of a Mummers Play was advertised. Traditionally this happens at the turn of the year, around the winter solstice and features a fight between St George and The Black Knight, figures which symbolise the light of summer and the dark of winter. The first evidence of Mummers plays being performed in England is in the 18th century. Its current re-emergence in North Curry dates from 1990.

Passing the Victoria memorial close to the shop I noticed St Michael vanquishing the dragon represented there too.



2.4 miles to Stoke St Gregory. Walk to the north east corner of the churchyard and through the kissing gate. Continue diagonally down the slope past remnants of an old orchard, to the far corner of the field (50) and follow the path up the hill towards Moreden. At the driveway, cross straight over directed by the arrow marked Farm (51), with pheasant rearing pens all around and pick up signs for the East Deane Way. At the gateway beyond the last rearing pens, the way ahead can be confusing. Take a sight line to Burrowbridge Mump, visible just to the north of the ridge of hills ahead of you and use this to guide you across the field, along the brow of the hill. You come to a stile, initially hidden from view and the path continues from here, just north of Frog Lane Farm.



There is accommodation available at Meare Green Farm, which is situated further along Frog Lane. Options are: camping, £5pppn, (plus option of breakfast for additional £5, B&B from £40 single £75 double). Pack lunches are available, 01823 490759.



If you are not stopping at Meare Green Farm, continue following East Deane Way signs through a copse of young trees, at the far end of which is a sculpture entitled Resurgence, with carved seeds and symbols of local wildlife. Turn right (52) at the end of the wood and walk down the track past the willow sculptures and through The Willow and Wetland Visitor Centre, 01823 490249.

Willow has been grown here by the Cope family since 1819. The visitor centre has a tea room and is open Monday to Saturday 9.30am to 5.00pm.

Admission is free and it is worth taking time to visit the Levels and Moors presentation to gain some understanding of the history and traditions associated with this unique, ecologically rich landscape.

Exit through the main gate and cross the road, taking the footpath to your right. Follow the track through the first field, then after climbing the V shaped stile follow the field boundary left around two sides of the second field. The church in Stoke St Gregory is prominent before you whilst to the south east, beyond West Sedge Moor, stands the Burton Pynsent monument.

This monument was erected by William Pitt the Elder as a memorial to Sir William Pynsent, who had left the estate to Pitt in thanks for his opposition to a proposed tax on cider. Stairs to the top were closed after a cow managed to climb to the viewing platform and unable to back down fell to its death.

Cider used to be a hugely significant aspect of the rural economy in Somerset. In 1874 the county had 24,000 acres of apple orchard, by 1973 less than 2,500 acres remained. At a time when clean drinking water could not always be guaranteed, cider was the common drink of the people and was part of a farm labourer's wage, regularly making up 15% of his income.



Cross the stile and bridge over a small ditch and follow the left path onto Huntham Lane opposite Sturts Barn. Turn left and walk along Huntham Lane into the centre of the village. Turn right at the Royal Oak Pub. The church dedicated to St Gregory lies just beyond the village shop.



There is accommodation available at the Rose and Crown, Woodhill, about ½ a mile east of Stoke St. Gregory. Prices are from £65 single and £85 double, 01823 490296.

## Stoke St Gregory

The village is one of a series on the ridge of higher land, with Curry Moor and the River Tone to the North and Sedgemoor to the South. As at North Curry, the church stands on a site where there has been a place of worship since at least Saxon times.

The church of St Gregory has an eight sided tower. The medi-  
eval statues on it were destroyed during the Reformation and  
replaced in Victorian times. As at Creech St Michael, there are  
stocks in the churchyard which were used to punish people  
who misbehaved in church. The smallest holes suggest that  
they could accommodate children as well as adults.

Inside, the church is light and bright. It has an elaborately  
carved Jacobean pulpit, with figures representing Faith, Hope,  
Charity and Time. The font, carved from Ham Stone, seems  
remarkably contemporary in style, considering the fact that it  
dates from the 14th century.

The Mary Line passes through the church.



3 miles to Burrowbridge. Leave the churchyard and turn into Dark Lane to  
the right of the Royal Oak pub. Turn left into Church Close and follow the  
road to the right. The footpath passes between two houses in the corner  
of the cul de sac. The path, historically known as Ash Path leads across a  
field to a lane. Cross over and down the driveway of Slough Court (53), an  
11th century moated farmhouse. You get a view of the moat between the  
farmyard buildings before taking the path to the left of the bungalow.

Beyond the farm buildings turn right onto the track and just beyond the  
silage clamp turn left and follow the track down to the field boundary,  
where it joins Stanmoor Mead Drove. This runs between two hedges each  
with an associated drainage ditch which become more pronounced open  
water rhynes (as they are called in Somerset). When you reach an inter-  
section of these channels, turn left over the bridge and through a gateway.  
There is a line of mature apple trees, heavily laden with mistletoe which  
marks the line of the path to the road. At the road, turn right towards  
Athelney, cross the railway at the level crossing and turn left into Cuts  
Road where it is signposted to Lyng and Durston.

Over the bridge, turn right and walk along the riverside path to  
Burrowbridge and the Mump, which is attractively framed in front of you.  
There is a small diversion on the left to the memorial to King Alfred, which  
also marks the site of the monastery he founded in 888AD.

## Athelney

This is where Alfred took refuge after his first unsuccessful campaign against the Danes and from where he emerged to begin his successful reconquest of Wessex. It was where he is supposed to have burned the cakes, although this story is a Victorian fiction.

Athelney Hill at about 12 metres above sea level, has the distinction of being the site of the lowest known Iron Age hill fort in the UK. Its value as a defensive position came from its relative inaccessibility due to the waters which surrounded it. Athelney means the island of the princes, suggesting that it was a significant site even prior to Alfred.

After he defeated the Danish king Guthram at Edington in 878AD, Alfred brought the king and some of his men back to the nearby settlement of Aller, where they were baptised as Christians. It was after this victory that the Abbey at Athelney was established. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the monks didn't move far, but went on to build the church in the adjacent village of East Lyng.



Accommodation is available in East Lyng at The Rose and Crown from £55/room, 01823 698948. There is also a campsite, which costs £6pppn, breakfast can be provided. It is reached by carrying along Cuts Road ½ a mile west from Athelney.



From Athelney continue along the river bank path to Burrowbridge and turn left along Stathe Road to the crossroads. Turn right here, cross the bridge and walk past The King Alfred Inn and chapel. The footpath up to Burrow Mump is a few metres further on, discretely signposted on the right just past a cottage.

*"Everything passes and what remains of former times, what remains of life is the spiritual."*

Paul Klee

## Burrowbridge



The pub no longer offers B&B, but meals are served at lunch times and evenings except Monday. B&B is available at Rosewood House from £75/room, 01823 698034. This is located to the right along Stathe Road as you approach Burrowbridge from Athelney.

The Mump is a dramatic feature, rising out of the flat landscape of the Levels, a strategic point overlooking the confluence of the rivers Parrett and Tone. There is evidence of a Norman motte and the discovery of Roman remains predating this. A medieval church on the Mump was dedicated to St Michael and linked to Athelney Abbey. It was used as a temporary refuge for Royalist troops during the Civil War. The current ruin is a more recent structure, never completed because of a lack of funds.

It was identified as a crossing point of the Michael and Mary Lines by Hamish Miller and was pivotal in the development of John Michell's original theory of an alignment of significant sites stretching right across England connected by the St Michael ley line.



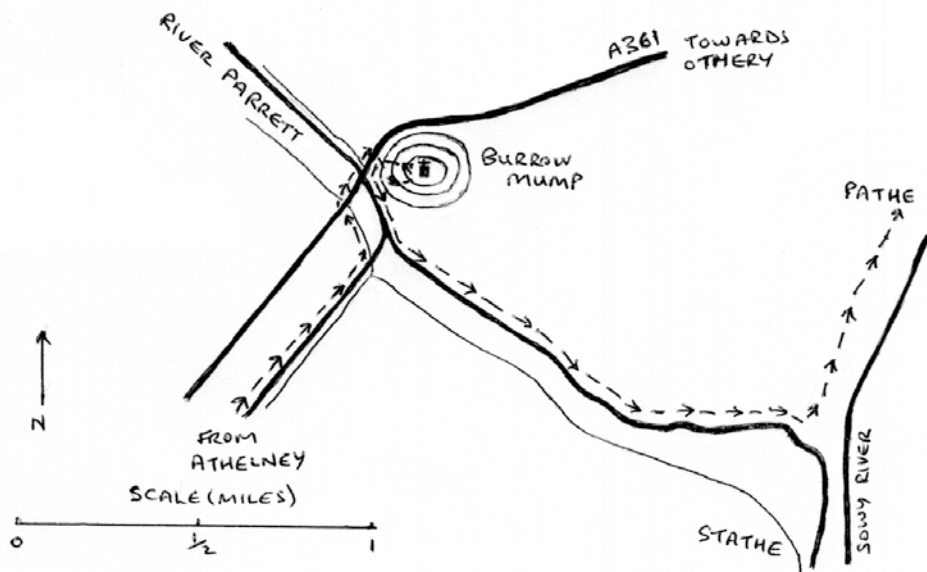


## Stage 8: Burrowbridge to Glastonbury (20 miles)



Facilities include a shop and pub at Othery and the same in Middlezoy; B&B, pub and shop at Westonzoyland; campsite near Sutton Mallet and a pub at Moorlinch. Pub and shop in Ashcott and B&B at Pedwell. All facilities in Glastonbury.

### Route through Burrowbridge



3.1 miles to Othery. From the Mump, retrace your steps back past the pub, but turn left before the bridge and follow the permissive path through the gate alongside the river. This route is shared by the East Deane Way and Macmillan Way, but the companionship is short lived. Beyond the glass-house on the far bank and at a junction marked by a sharp bend in the river, just over a mile from Burrowbridge, pass through a field gate (54) and turn left away from the river, to follow the line of the Sowy River north east towards Pathe.

Cross the footbridges and join the lane, walking north east. The road to the right, leads to Aller, site of King Guthram's baptism after his defeat by Alfred. Intriguingly the church of St Andrew's, Aller has a rare Saxon font, suggesting the possibility that it could have been the one used in that historic ceremony.

Follow the lane from Pathe to Othery and cross the A361 to the 12th century church of St Michael, which lies on the Michael Line.

## Othery

The sculpture of The Archangel Michael slaying the dragon above the door of the church has been described as looking more like dentistry than combat. Inside the church, there are other representations of Michael and a human headed dragon on floor tiles in front of the altar, perhaps representing the eternal, internal struggle to face and transform the base elements of our human nature.

Prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries the living at Othery belonged to Glastonbury Abbey. A significant symbol of this relationship was found in 1897 when a monk's cope was discovered hidden beneath the pulpit of the church. This highly decorated 15th century ceremonial robe, known as the Othery Cope is now displayed in the museum at Glastonbury Abbey.

There is also an interesting memorial, to the Chard brothers. It was John Chard who led the defence of Rourke's Drift during the first Zulu war in South Africa, an action which earned him the Victoria Cross.

*"You will find as you look back on your life that the moments when you have truly lived are the moments when you have done things in a spirit of love."*

Henry Drummond

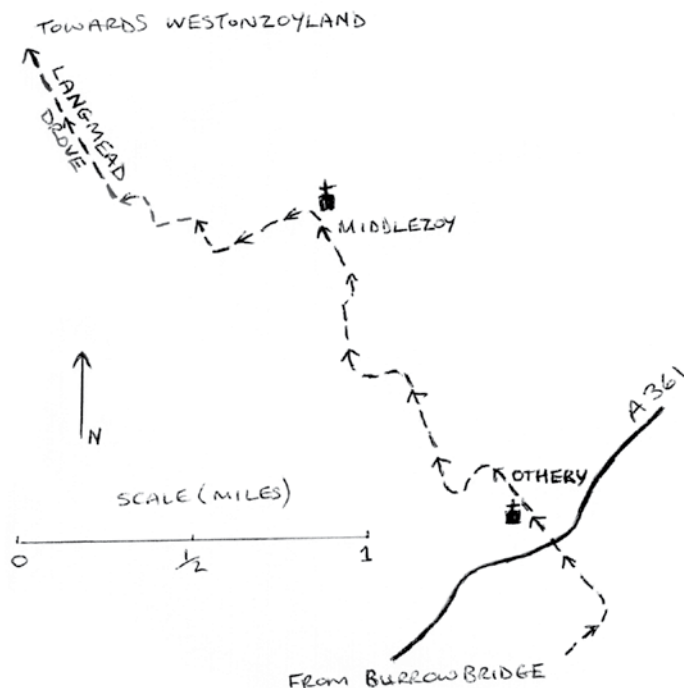


Othery has a pub, The London Inn but no food is sold. Opposite is the village shop which is open between 8.30am and 5.30pm Monday to Friday and 9am until 1pm on Saturday, 10-12am on Sunday.



1½ miles to Middlezoy. The footpath to Middlezoy runs along the north east side of the churchyard (55). It follows a zigzag progression between rhynes in a predominantly northerly direction, with the church of Middlezoy a useful marker to help keep you on track.

## Othery to Westonzoyland



### Middlezoy



The Church of the Holy Cross is on a hill at the end of Church Road on the northern edge of the village. There is also a pub, The George, which is open Tuesday to Sunday but only serves food Wednesday to Saturday. A community run post office and shop operates from a portacabin next to the Methodist Chapel. The shop is closed on Sunday and has half day opening on Wednesday and Saturday.

Sowry from which zoy derives, is an old word for island, indicating land that stood above the flat lands of the levels. In 705AD, Ina, an early Christian king, gave all rights and privileges over the Sowys to Glastonbury Abbey. Middlezoy remained under Abbey jurisdiction until the Dissolution.

In the church porch, an information board commemorates the Battle of Sedgemoor, the last battle fought on English soil. Middlezoy stood a little way from the battle site, but was a base for the king's Somerset and Dorset militia. They were kept in reserve possibly because they had proved unreliable in earlier skirmishes, many defecting to the Duke of Monmouth. Inside the church is a memorial stone to a French officer who fought on the side of King James II. He was killed in the battle and buried in the church.

In the corner of the churchyard is a tree, abundantly laden with small, sweet, yellow plums in the summer.



2 miles to Westonzoyland. To the west of the church follow Holloway Lane (56), staying on the main track and ignoring footpaths off to the left. This leads down a slope to a number of small, gated paddocks. Turn left between the paddocks and walk along Langmead Drove which you follow into Westonzoyland, passing some reed beds on the way. These offer good cover for deer which you may observe grazing in the surrounding marshland, particularly near dusk.

## **Westonzoyland**

Westonzoyland is not aligned with either the Michael or Mary lines, but it is a necessary diversion in order to cross King's Sedgemoor Drain without resorting to a busy main road. It is of interest as the nearest village to the Battle of Sedgemoor site at Bussex Farm.

At the end of Langmead Drove, cross over the A372 and walk down Liney Road. As the road curves to the right, there is a smallholding, The Kitchen Garden, next to the road. On the right is a footpath which leads across the edge of an abandoned World War II airfield. This is the route from Westonzoyland, but if you wish to visit the Sedgemoor battle site, keep following Liney Road round to Bussex Farm.

There is also an informative display about the battle in the church of St Mary the Virgin near the centre of the village which can be reached by following the way marked route from Bussex Farm.



Near the church is a general store, open from early morning until late evening every day and a pub, The Sedgemoor Inn. There is B&B accommodation at Hill View on Liney Road, 01278 699027, with prices from £85/room or £60 single occupancy.

In brief, the Battle of Sedgemoor on 6th July 1685 was the climax of a rebellion led by the Duke of Monmouth to overthrow James II. The Protestant Duke was persuaded to lead the rebellion against his uncle who was a Catholic. Concerns about possible religious persecution was one of the triggers for the rebellion which was widely supported in the south west, with its strong non-conformist tradition.

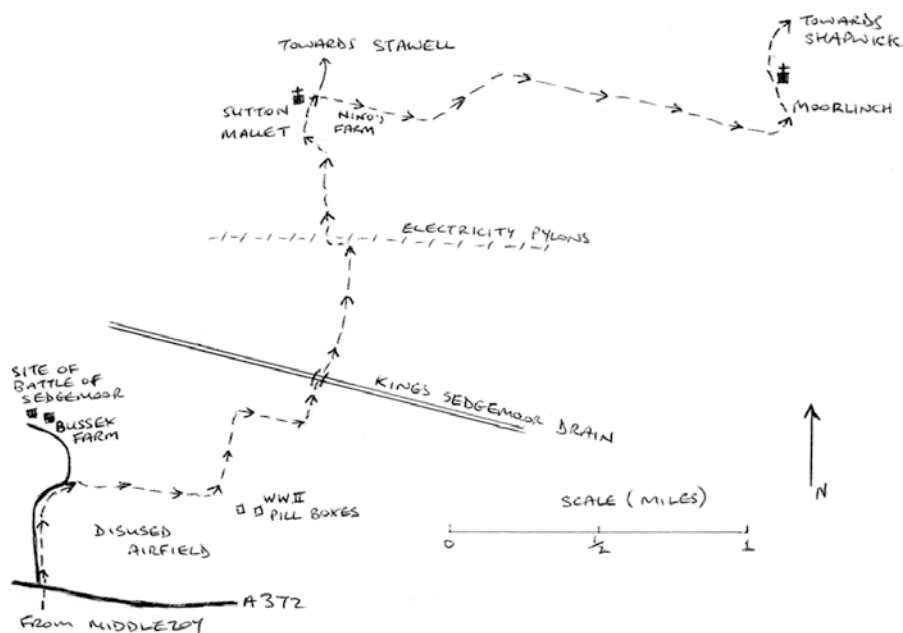
After some initial success, the rebellion lost momentum and the defeat at Sedgemoor was a crushing blow. Monmouth was caught and executed and about 330 of his supporters were hanged and others punished severely in Judge Jefferies' assizes. These cruel measures did much to undermine James's position leading to his being dethroned 3 years later to be replaced as monarch by the protestant William of Orange.



4 miles to Moorlinch. The route from Westonzoyland follows the northern perimeter of the old airfield along the footpath off Liney Road (57). Initially this is a metalled surface. As the main track curves right, take the subsidiary path on the left. As this track narrows and curves right follow the path to the left which is grassed over. Thus you stay as close as possible to the boundary of the airfield, with farmland on your left hand side beyond a rhyne. This brings you to a gate and clearly marked footpath (58). Cross the rhyne on your left, close to the Pill Boxes situated on the slope to your right and follow footpath signs through a patchwork of water meadows and rhyne to the major footbridge over the King's Sedgemoor Drain.

This area was farmed as common land when owned by Glastonbury Abbey. After the Dissolution it was divided between a number of owners. Commoners resisted the draining of the land, fearing a loss of rights but in the end lost out. The King's Sedgemoor Drain was constructed in the late 18th century. This remote part of the Somerset Levels though drained, retains high value for wildlife, with an RSPB reserve on its northern side.

## Westonzoyland to Moorlinch



After the main drain, cross two smaller footbridges and head for a line of electricity pylons which run along the bottom of the Polden Hills. As you approach the pylons, the path comes to a T junction. Turn left and follow the drove road up the hill to Sutton Mallet.

This is a hamlet with a small church no longer used for regular worship. It has no individual dedication, but was one of 5 chapelries, subsidiary places of worship to the mother church at Moorlinch.

1

There is no accommodation in Sutton Mallet but there is a campsite at nearby Stawell. To reach this, take the left fork along the lane from the church and cross straight over at the T junction onto the footpath. Follow this past Goosegreen Farm. The path follows a diagonal line up the slope to the left of the copse of trees on Ball Hill and leads into Stawell next to the Old School. Turn right along the lane leading out of the village. The campsite at Flichtet Farm (The Hideout) is about 400m east. Pitches cost £8/night, 01278 723677. There is a shortage of accommodation between here and Glastonbury, which is about 11 miles away, so bear this in mind during planning. Return to Sutton Mallet to continue your journey.



From the churchyard at Sutton Mallet, turn right at the junction and just beyond Nino's Farm follow the by- way (59) for 1½ miles along the crest of the ridge to Moorlinch. Entering the village, there is a footpath on your left which leads up to the church of St Mary the Virgin. If instead, you carried straight on, you arrive at the Ring O Bells pub which serves food, lunch times and evenings, except Monday, 01458 210358.

## Moorlinch

The church lies in a prominent position overlooking the village and Kings Sedgemoor. If locked, a notice gives the names of key holders, Fiona Hixan 01458 211096 and Mr and Mrs Mainhood 01278 723461, with a request to give the key holders some advance warning.

As a mother church over a number of surrounding subsidiary places of worship, St Mary's has some of the characteristics of a Saxon minster, but the oldest part of the present church is the nave which dates from the 12th century, this is also the period from which the font survives.

Close to the church is an ancient looking house called Pilgrims Rest which is mentioned in the church guide. In the churchyard I met the current owner of the Old Vicarage who said that Moorlinch Church lay on the old pilgrimage route to Glastonbury. It was dowsed by Hamish Miller as aligned with the Mary Line. Moorlinch means "happy hillside." How influential is the Mary earth energy in making it so?



1.7 miles to Shapwick. Leave the churchyard via the kissing gate in the northwest corner. The path passes through an old orchard before coming out onto the road just below a row of houses. Cross straight over and follow the lane opposite along the side of Knoll Hill. The road reduces to a track. About 50 metres beyond the last house (Finches) turn left along the footpath (60), which leads through a wood. The path is boggy in places, but with banks either side of the track and an alignment which is heading straight towards Shapwick, it is clearly a route with a long history of use. The path brings you out on the verge of the A39. Cross carefully and carry on down Wood Lane to Shapwick which is about 1 mile from here.

## Shapwick

St Mary's Church dates from the 14th century and is aligned directly with the Mary Line. A church leaflet describes a charter of 725AD during the reign of King Ine, which states that Shapwick and Moorlinch will come directly under the authority of the Abbot of Glastonbury. Thus there was very likely a place of worship in the village from at least the 8th Century. The location of the earlier church is  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile east of St Mary's, at Beerway Farm, which is visible from our route out of the village. The influence Glastonbury Abbey had in the village is also indicated by Shapwick House now a hotel, which dates from about 1475 and was the residence of Abbey officials.

North of the village lies one end of an ancient causeway called the Sweet Track, constructed nearly 6000 years ago, thought to have been part of a network of ancient timber track ways that crossed the levels from the Polden Ridge to the Isle of Westhay.

A rare stone axe was found buried near here. What is extraordinary is that this axe was made from Jadeite, quarried high in the Italian Alps. These axes were a very finite resource and thus highly prized ceremonial items with a value extending far beyond mere utility. Many remained in pristine condition, passed on through generations or buried with people of high status. One theory suggested by Tom Cadbury, the Keeper of Antiquities at the museum in Exeter, is that the journey to attain such an axe was a "Rite of Passage."

Such evidence suggests a sophistication of society and a level of mobility amongst people that has perhaps in the past been under estimated, with their motivations to travel encompassing a ritual or spiritual dimension alongside a trading function.





Two other facts make Shapwick memorable for me. First was the discovery in 1998 of one of the largest hoards of Roman silver coins found in Britain. Further research disclosed that there were four lesser hoards found around the village between 1936 and 1938 and another find in 1978, which seemed a remarkable concentration of good fortune for one small parish.

Second, Shapwick was identified as one of the "Thankful" villages, so called because all the men who went to fight in the First World War returned alive. There were only about 50 such villages in the whole of England and Wales. Pitifully few when you consider there are about 16,000 villages in England alone.



7 miles to Glastonbury. From the church at Shapwick, turn right at the crossroads and after about 100m turn left down Vicarage Lane and carry straight on along the footpath to the road. Follow this in an easterly direction for a ¼ mile, passing Beerway Farm, site of the "Old Church" to the north. Take the first footpath, a left fork enclosed between two hedges (61). Be warned the fingerpost marking this path along with our way-marker has been uprooted on more than one occasion!

Follow the path over a series of stiles, staying alongside the hedgerow on your right. Continue in an easterly direction until you reach a junction with a track heading uphill in front of the cottage. Follow this to the road and turn right into the village of Ashcott. To continue on the way, take the left turn at the crossroads as you enter Ashcott and go left again where the lane forks, following Stagman Lane. Glastonbury Tor should be clearly visible at times in front of you.



In Ashcott, there is a general store/post office and a pub, The Ring O' Bells, which serves food. Just beyond at Pedwell there is B&B at Sunnyside from £30pppn, 01458 210097.

Follow Stagman Lane to a T junction and walk along the driveway (63) through West Park Farm and Sharpham Park. The estate was conferred to the Abbots of Glastonbury by the soon to be King John in 1191. The path is diverted south of Abbots Sharpham, along the top of Small Moor before coming out onto Sharpham Drove. Turn left along the drove road with Abbots Sharpham on your left and carry on as far as Sharpham Bridge.

Take the path on the right through the RSPB reserve (64) with the reed beds on your left. The reed bed is roughly square in shape. Walk along two sides of the square, then follow the path right towards Cradlebridge Farm. B&B accommodation is no longer available here, it has been converted to self-catering, with a minimum stay of a couple of nights which may be of interest to some, 01458 831827.

Walk down the track to Cradlebridge and cross over the River Brue, turning right immediately to follow the river bank path (65) to Pomparies Bridge. Cross the A39 at the pedestrian crossing and follow The Roman Way around the bottom of Wearyall Hill. The footpath onto the hill is about 100 metres along this road, on the left, (beyond Kingfisher). At this point in the journey, Wearyall Hill may seem appropriately named.

Wearyall Hill is strongly associated with Joseph of Arimathea. Legend says that after the crucifixion of Jesus he arrived here by boat across the inland sea. Coming ashore he plunged his staff in the ground, where it took root, inspiring him to choose Glastonbury as the site of the first Christian church. The original Holy Thorn which grew from that staff had the characteristic of flowering twice a year, at Christmas and Easter, reflecting the birth and death of Christ. The Thorn became a significant site of pilgrimage. It or a descendant was reportedly chopped down by a puritan soldier during the Civil War. One account describes the culprit being blinded by a splinter of wood as he chopped.

Cuttings of the original were preserved and the most recent in the line was planted on Wearyall Hill in the early 1950's. In December 2010 it suffered the fate of its forebear when its branches were hacked off by a vandal one night. After some initial regrowth the tree seems to have succumbed, with the bark beginning to be shed. Another Holy Thorn sapling was planted close by to replace it, but this too has been targeted, with the tip snapped off.



Continue along the ridge following the Michael Line. The historic route is somewhat marred by some ugly modern urban fringe development to the North. The earth energy current flows through the Thorn which before it was vandalised was hung with ribbons and feathers, which fluttered in the

wind like Tibetan Prayer Flags. Now ribbons cloak the protective iron tree guard. Close by, a stone marks the site of the original miraculous sprouting of Joseph's Staff.

From here with the view across the old town and to the Tor it is possible to imagine how awe inspiring the Monastery must have looked to pilgrims, at the height of its influence and prosperity.

*"The sense of treading ground made holy by past events is crucial. The experience of the pilgrim in actually walking in the way of others enables them to become a participant in all that has happened. The pilgrim becomes one with all that has gone before."*

Martin Robinson

## **Glastonbury**

Glastonbury has much to offer the spiritual seeker. I will give a thumbnail sketch of some prominent landmarks and encourage you to immerse yourself in the experience of the place.

The earth energies dowsed here are complex and intriguing. I recommend *The Sun and the Serpent* by Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst for a clear overview of what they discovered in Glastonbury. The Michael and Mary lines connect sites including St John's Church, Glastonbury Abbey, Chalice Well Garden and Glastonbury Tor.

The development of Glastonbury as a place of Christian pilgrimage is rooted in the traditions associated with Joseph of Arimathea. One version, immortalised in William Blake's poem *Jerusalem*, invokes the belief that in an earlier voyage he brought the young Jesus here, another is how after the crucifixion he carried the Holy Grail containing the blood of Christ which was buried under Chalice Hill.

This weaves in with that other potent myth with which Glastonbury is associated, of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, who quested to recover the Grail in order to restore the health of the King and of the land he ruled.

Whatever truth lies at the heart of these myths, they clearly have lasting appeal. Their persistence suggests they fulfil some deep need within us. Something in the landscape of Glastonbury provokes a response that challenges us to suspend belief narrowly defined by facts and rational explanations and instead speaks to the mystical and poetic in human nature.



Proceed from the Holy Thorn along the crest of the hill. The path comes out onto Hill Head Road. Turn left and walk to the junction with the main road (A361). Turn left again and then straight on into Magdalene Street which leads towards the Abbey ruins and High Street. A suggested route through Glastonbury, visiting some of the significant places of interest follows after some details about available accommodation.



There is a wide range of both camping and B&B available in Glastonbury. Camping options include:

Old Oaks, Wick Farm, 01458 831437, west of Glastonbury Tor, is for adults only. Prices vary from £15-£24/pitch depending on time of year but requiring a minimum 3 night stay during high season. There is a £5 single person discount and £1 discount for backpackers and cyclists. The site is open January to mid November and has a shop. Directions to the site are included in Section 2 of this guidebook (Glastonbury to Avebury) as the campsite is on our route out from Glastonbury.

Isle of Avalon Campsite, Godney Road, 01458 833618. Situated north of the town. It's a 10 minute walk to the High Street. £19 for a pitch, with a £2 single person discount. It is open all year and also has a shop.

Paddington Farm Trust, Maidencroft Lane, 01458 832752 is my preferred campsite in Glastonbury, but has limited availability. Camping costs £7pppn. To reach Paddington Farm, walk to the top of High Street and cross the Wells Road into Bove Town. Follow the lane up the hill into Wick Hollow and take the next turn on the left into Maiden Croft Lane.

The plentiful choice of B&B accommodation includes:

Apple, 25 Norbins Road, 01458 834547, from £29pppn or £40 single occupancy; Pilgrims 12/13 Norbins Road, 01458 834722, from £30pppn or £45 single occupancy; Apple Tree, 27 Bere Lane, 01458 830803, from £60/ double room or £40 single; Belle Vue, 2 Bere Lane, 01458 830385, £70/ room in high season or £40 single occupancy.

Shekinashram, Dod Lane, offers a wide range of B&B options including single rooms in the house from £32, doubles from £55 or cabin, yurt and bell tent alternatives ranging from £19pppn, 01458 832300. Berachah House, 1 Well Lane has single rooms from £40 and doubles from £80, 01458 834214. Both lie on our route through Glastonbury (see below).

For more information on available accommodation contact the Glastonbury Tourist Information Office, which is located in the Tribunal, a Grade 1, 15th century building in the High Street.

## Glastonbury Abbey

The legend of Joseph of Arimathea marks Glastonbury Abbey as the site of the earliest Christian foundation in the British Isles, the place where he and his followers built the first simple wattle and daub church. History does record such a structure standing here in 600. The Abbey grew to become the most influential and wealthy in England, drawing pilgrims from far and wide, its reputation earning it the title of "The Second Rome". St Patrick, St Bridget and St David are all reputed to have visited along with Kings of England, some of whom were buried here so revered and sacred was the spot considered to be. It was also where the bodies of Arthur and Guinevere were supposed to have been discovered late in the 12th century, though the timing of this soon after a disastrous fire which destroyed much of the Abbey, when funds were being urgently sought for rebuilding seems highly fortuitous.

St Dunstan, who went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury, was Glastonbury's most celebrated Abbot. With the dissolution of the Monasteries, the Abbey was abandoned and plundered for building materials.

The Abbey is still a living church with regular services in St Patrick's Chapel, with its remarkable acoustics; or during summer months, in the Lady Chapel which was built on the site of the original church. The Abbey is open every day except Christmas Day from 9am to at least 4pm opening hours extending in the summer, 01458 832267.

*"If we approach myth as fact it is clearly ridiculous. We don't really think that a god named Zeus had a splitting headache from which Athena sprang... It is not as fact but as metaphor that the mythic stories speak to us. To approach myth as fact is to miss the point. Similarly to view your life as nothing but the facts is to miss an opportunity for a marvellous adventure, a conscious encounter with the universal energies and dilemmas of the human drama. In this encounter, we take the hero's journey."*

Lawrence G. Boldt

Beyond the Abbey walls a guest house was built in about 1475 to accommodate the number of pilgrims who flocked to Glastonbury. Now named The George and Pilgrim Hotel, it is situated just down the High Street from the parish church of St John, through which the Michael Line flows before entering the Abbey grounds. In the churchyard of St John's is another of Glastonbury's Holy Thorns, thought to be descended from the original. By tradition a flowering sprig is sent to the British Monarch every Christmas.

The Church of St John the Baptist was rebuilt in the 15th century, although it is thought that a church was on this site from Saxon times. Inside is a funeral pall, said to have been made from a cope worn by Abbot Whiting, the last Abbot of Glastonbury. In the stained glass windows above one image is that of Joseph of Arimathea and the legendary Holy Thorn.



Directly opposite the church of St John is Silver Street. Follow this past the ruins of the Abbey up to the junction with Chilkenwell Street and turn right. This leads directly to the Chalice Well Garden. For a more attractive route, having turned into Chilkenwell Street, turn left along Dod Lane opposite Abbey House Retreat Centre. Continue past Shekinashram (the footpath runs along the drive). Outside the ashram are a line of Tibetan prayer wheels, which are traditionally turned clockwise by passing pilgrims, sending prayers out into the world. The ashram offers a range of B&B options which were listed above.

Follow the path up Bushycombe, past Chalice Hill on the right. At the lane, with views of the Tor directly in front of you turn right. At the T junction turn right down Well House Lane which leads to the White Spring on the left. This is situated in the Old Pump House, directly across the road from the Chalice Well Garden.

There are interesting contrasts between the adjacent springs, one touched red with iron, the other white with calcite. Both are aligned with the Michael Line.

## White Spring

The Spring is situated in the cavernous dark Victorian well house where a reservoir was built in 1872 to supply water to the town. This supply was a short lived initiative as the high calcium carbonate content of the spring water soon resulted in the pipes becoming blocked resulting in the scheme being abandoned.

These days candles light the interior vaulted roof and along with the echoing sounds of perpetually flowing water creates a 'temple' like atmosphere. The White Spring is open five afternoons a week (not Wednesday or Thursday) 1.30pm to 4.30pm. Entrance is free.



At the bottom of Well Lane turn right along Chilkwell Street to reach the entrance to Chalice Well Garden, or follow the footpath on the left after Berachah House B&B up to the Tor.

## Chalice Well

This ancient spring, with its surrounding gardens, is managed by The Chalice Well Trust, founded in 1959 by Wellesley Tudor Pole. It is a World Peace Garden. The care and attention with which it is managed sustains a profound and restorative peace. The Trust welcomes a wide range of spiritual traditions which are in tune with its core aims.

The water flows at a constant rate and temperature, has reputed healing properties and is rich in iron which gives it its reddish tinge. As well as drinking the water, there is the possibility for pilgrims to bathe their feet in the healing pool located in King Arthur's Court. This area of the Garden is where Hamish Miller identified a crossing point of the Mary/Michael Lines.

*"Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground."*

Exodus 3: 5-6



The Chalice Well Gardens are open every day except the first Saturday in June which is Companions Day. Winter, 10am-4.30pm; Summer, 10am-6pm, 01458 831154.

The red colouration relates back to the spring's mythic association to the Holy Grail. The story suggests that after the crucifixion of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea came to Britain, bearing the Holy Grail - the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper and later by Joseph to catch his blood at the crucifixion.

For safe keeping, Joseph is said to have buried the Holy Grail close to the Tor at Chalice Hill. Shortly after he had done this, a spring, now known as Chalice Well, flowed forth and the water that emerged brought eternal youth to whosoever drank it.

Return to Well Lane to follow the footpath up to Glastonbury Tor.

## The Tor

The Tor rises to about 520ft (158m). Its cap of hard sandstone prevented its erosion leaving it towering as an island above what was formerly and on occasion still is, the flooded landscape of the Somerset Levels. The word Tor is of Celtic origin and means hill.





The site is believed to have been a place of pilgrimage for 10,000 years although much of the human impact on the Tor that is still evident today including the terracing around the slopes and the tower on the summit date from Medieval times. The tower dedicated to St Michael is all that remains of a 14th century church, which itself replaced a previous church, destroyed by an earthquake in 1275. It is interesting that reports suggest the original priory buildings on St Michael's Mount were destroyed in the same event.

The Tor was the scene of the execution of Richard Whiting, the last Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey. Along with two of his monks he was found guilty of treason and was hung, drawn and quartered on 15th November 1539. His dismembered body was boiled in pitch and his head fastened over the gate of the Abbey. With his death came the demise of the Abbey which had to this point survived the Dissolution of the Monasteries and was the last remaining monastery in Somerset. Its estates which included most of the buildings in the town and at its peak extended over 15,000 acres, employing some 3,000 agricultural workers were forfeit to the crown. The Abbey like its Abbot was dismembered, with the lead stripped from the roof and stone taken from the walls for other building projects.

Sites on high places are often dedicated to St Michael the Archangel. According to various writings, St Michael was said to have miraculously appeared in over 400 places throughout Britain and Europe during the 4th and 5th centuries. At some he was supposed to have slain dragons, perhaps a metaphor indicating the overthrowing of previous pagan beliefs, defeated by the new Christian religion.

If you look closely it is possible to see above the arch on the west face of the tower, a carving of the Archangel Michael holding the scales in which souls are weighed, replicating the image in stained glass at Brentor. On the other side of the arch is a weathered relief of a cow being milked, a symbol often associated with St Bride, bringing a balance of masculine and feminine spiritual presence to the summit.

Dragons and serpents in pre-Christian spirituality symbolised the mysterious forces of the earth. There is much ancient iconography depicting them sinuously wound round the great Earth Tree whose roots reach into the underworld.

The remarkable inter-weaving of the Mary and Michael currents on the Tor that was identified by Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst seems to resonate both with the interpretation of there being a “mating” of these energies and with the esoteric symbolism of the grail. The currents they dowsed here appear with the Mary current like a double lipped cup within which the male energy was enclosed, although the node point itself is off to one side, discrete and largely unnoticed.

Whether this is where you are completing your pilgrimage or if you are carrying on along the next section towards Avebury, the Tor offers an opportunity both literally and metaphorically to look back from where you have come and to look ahead to the next step on life's journey.

Perhaps before you descend from the Tor give thanks for the insights you have gleaned from this journey and for guidance and support you have received along the way.

Standing on the Tor overlooking Glastonbury and the landscape beyond disappearing into the distance at the horizon, the words of Wellesley Tudor Pole seem to offer a fitting conclusion:

*“Honour your holy places once more and let them and their unseen guardians be remembered in your hearts and minds and prayers...darkness cannot overwhelm the world as long as light continues to radiate by reflection from the hearts and minds of all who dedicate themselves to this high purpose. Learn also to reflect the light from each holy place to which your pilgrim steps are led.*

*Look within for your guidance and inspiration, go forth in faith and courage and return in peace.”*

## Getting Home

If you are completing your pilgrimage in Glastonbury, the following alternatives are available connecting with mainline train services. All buses leave from Magdalene Street close to the entrance to the Abbey.

1. Buses to Castle Cary - No. 667, 5-6 buses a day. Trains from Castle Cary are to and from Paddington.
2. Buses to Taunton - No. 29, about every 1 ½ hours. Connect to Taunton station
3. Buses to Wells - 5 buses /hour. From Wells there is a ½ hourly service, No. 376 to Bristol Temple Meads station.



## Distances – Glastonbury to Avebury

Measurements to nearest 0.1 miles

(C) indicates where there is a campsite on or close to that stretch of the route

	Distance (miles)	Running total (miles)
Glastonbury Tor to North Wootton (C)	6.3	6.3
North Wootton to Pilton	2.3	8.6
Pilton to Shepton Mallet	4.4	13
Shepton Mallet to Doullting	2.2	15.2
Doullting to Stoke St Michael (C)	3.4	18.6
Stoke St Michael to Coleford	2.3	20.9
Coleford to Vobster	1.8	22.7
Vobster to Mells	2.3	25
Mells to Great Elm	1.6	26.6
Great Elm to Buckland Dinham (C)	1.7	28.3
Buckland Dinham to Lullington	4.3	32.6
Lullington to Rode	2.6	35.2
Rode to Trowbridge	6.8	42
Trowbridge to Bowerhill	6.3	48.3
Bowerhill to Devizes (C)	6.2	54.5
Devizes to Oliver's Castle	2.5	57
Oliver's Castle to Cherhill	5.1	62.1
Cherhill to Windmill Hill	3.4	65.5
Windmill Hill to Winterbourne Monkton	1.3	66.8
Winterbourne Monkton to Avebury Circle	1.8	68.6
Avebury circular walk via Silbury Hill, West Kennett Long Barrow and The Sanctuary	5.5	74.1

Total Distance 74.1 miles

## Section 2 Glastonbury to Avebury

*"Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free the world before me,  
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.*

*Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,  
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,  
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms  
Strong and content I travel the open road."*

Walt Whitman, "A Song of the Open Road"

### Stage 1: Glastonbury to Shepton Mallet (13 miles)



Facilities include: campsite "Old Oaks" on route out of Glastonbury; campsite near North Wootton; pubs at West Pennard, North Wootton and Pilton; a wide range of facilities in Shepton Mallet.



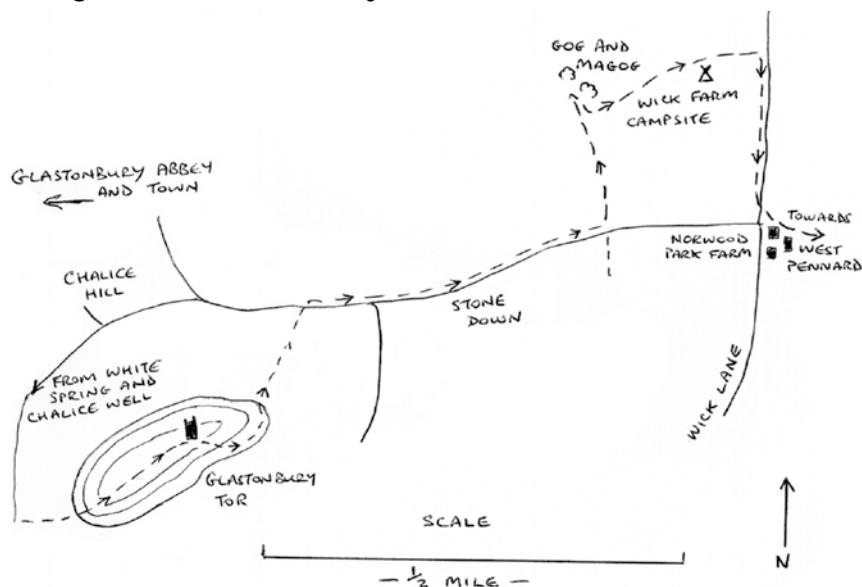
6.3 miles to North Wootton. We start this section of the journey where we left off in Section 1, on the summit of Glastonbury Tor.

To the north lies the cathedral city of Wells, below the ridge of the Mendip Hills. Our route heads east, first towards North Wootton and then on towards Pilton, a journey which up until the 13th century would have more easily been undertaken by boat. A road linking Pilton and Glastonbury was only completed around 1235.

The way begins with a flight of steps just to the south of the tower. The path winds down the slope of the Tor and joins the lane on the north side. Turn right and just beyond the bus stop take the left fork past Stone Down, following the flow of the Michael Line as dowsed by Hamish Miller.

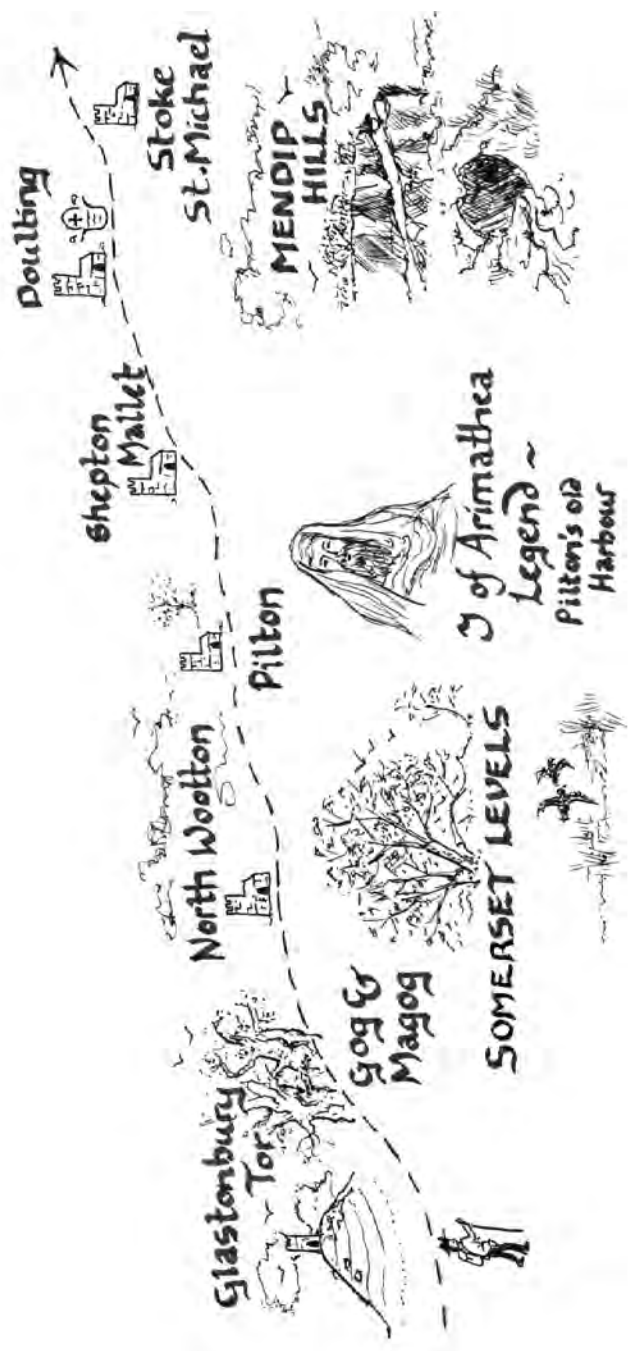
Continue down the lane which diminishes to a sloping track. The hedge-rows either side seem to offer a favoured hunting ground for dragonflies during the summer months. Just after the track flattens out, there is a junction of paths. Heading left, leads to the ancient oak trees Gog and Magog and the campsite known as "Old Oaks" previously described, which lies about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from the Tor. If you choose not to make this detour, continue straight on to Norwood Park Farm.

## Heading East from Glastonbury Tor



The path to Gog and Magog is to the left as you approach the perimeter hedge of the campsite. After paying your respects at the gnarled giants, follow the footpath through the campsite past the shop and parallel to the driveway down to the lane. Turn right and follow the lane towards Norwood Park Farm, (your destination if you chose not to turn left at the junction of paths which led to Gog and Magog).

I have seen Gog and Magog described as remains of a sacred Druidic grove or the last remnants of a ceremonial avenue of oaks which led to the Tor. A number of the other relics of this avenue are said to have survived up until Victorian times when they were cut down by a zealous farmer. Of the two remainigiants one succumbed in a recent winter of hard frosts, leaving its neighbour as sole surviving witness of 2000 years of history. By chance arriving at the campsite late at night during a trip to survey the route of the pilgrimage it was only in the light of the following morning that we discovered our pitch was as close to the ancient trees as it was possible to be.



Take the footpath on the north side of the farmhouse and farm buildings which skirts around the edge of the farmyard before joining a concrete track on the east side. Looking back towards the farm, you can see the house itself is quite a handsome building. It was built as a palace for Abbot John de Selwode in the mid 15th century and restored from dereliction in 1959.

Follow the main concrete track east in the direction of Pennard Hill, nestled beneath which is West Pennard Church. When the concrete track peters out continue straight on along the footpath through a series of low lying fields. Cross the bridge over a drainage ditch and veer right towards the nearby East Street Farm. Pass through the farmyard and onto East Street. At the point where two lanes converge, keep right and follow the lane to the junction with the main road (A361).

Turn left along the pavement and 200m past the Lion Inn turn left down Page Lane.



The Lion Inn, West Pennard offers B&B accommodation from £45.95/room. Food is served lunchtime and evenings apart from Monday lunch-time, 01458 832941.

Follow Page Lane to Old Farm and turn left into Pennard Lane. Cross Whitelake Bridge and carry on along the road to Redlake Farm. At Redlake turn right along the bridleway just before the bridge and follow the bank of the rhyne (local term for drainage channel). When the track opens out into a field, continue along the bank of the rhyne close to the hedgerow on your left.

Pass under the power lines and carry on along the track (Mead Lane), ignoring footpaths off on the left. The track leads to a junction at Meadow Farm. Cross straight over and follow the lane up to Crossways.



Crossways is a restaurant/pub which does offer B&B accommodation, from £53pppn. Food is served lunchtimes and evenings with the exception of Monday when there is no lunchtime service. Coffee and tea is available at other times of day, 01749 899000.



Turn left at Crossways and walk down Stocks Lane, then take the first turn on the right into Tanyard Lane. About 100m up the hill turn left along the footpath by Upway Cottage. The path leads to North Wootton church, just beyond the picturesque little stream with its bridge and ford.



## North Wootton

The church of St Peter's lies on the Michael Line. For many centuries it was a chapelry of the larger church at Pilton. Originally under the authority of Glastonbury Abbey it later passed to that of Wells Cathedral.

The "Chalice" font (so called because it resembles a contemporary chalice) is a striking feature, described as "drunken" in the Sun and the Serpent, a reference to its distinctive lean, probably resulting from a clumsy repair. Anyone who has read preceding guidebooks about this pilgrimage route will be familiar with my fascination with fonts and how they regularly pre-date the rest of the church. In North Wootton, the font is described as transitional Saxon/early Norman which makes it more than 300 years older than the fabric of the church around it.

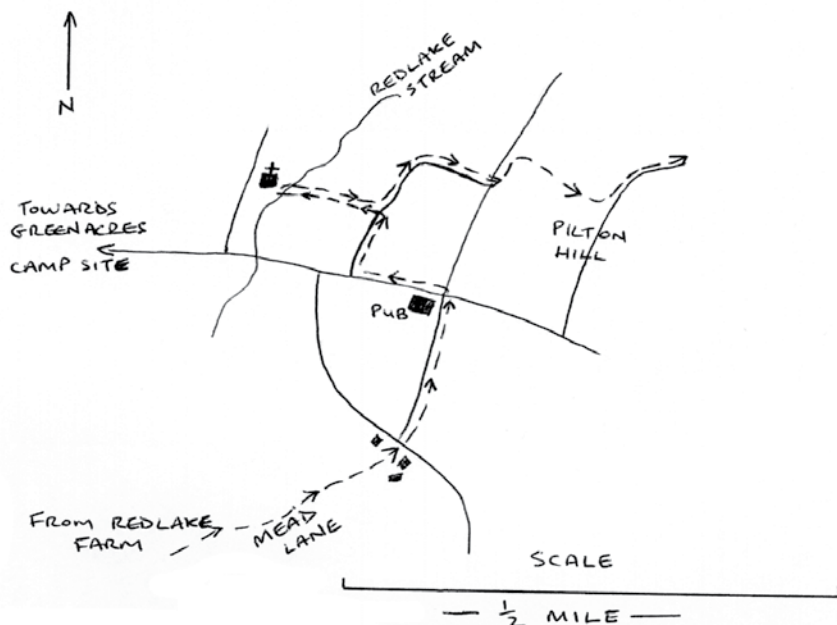
The local church guide was particularly helpful in explaining the symbolism and location of different features within a church. It described how the font often stood near the door, symbolising entry into the church through baptism. The journey through life was then continued in the nave (navis is the Latin for ship), leading to the sanctuary where peace and harmony awaited.

The traditional east/west axis of a church with the congregation facing the altar and the rising sun in the east was a daily reminder of the resurrection. Graves too tended to be aligned to face east so that at Judgement Day people raised up would be turned towards the sunrise and the final coming of God's Kingdom. It is also perhaps another example of Christian practice assimilating pagan traditions associated with the sun and its seasonal manifestations and life giving properties.



There is a campsite, Greenacres about ½ a mile west of the village centre. It is open from the beginning of May to September and costs £9pppn, 01749 890497. From the church return to Stocks Lane and turn right (left would lead back to Crossways). Follow Barrow Lane to the campsite.

## Route through North Wooton



2.3 miles to Pilton. To continue on your way towards Pilton, retrace your steps from the church back over the stream and along the footpath to Upway Cottage. Turn left up the lane and at the junction go left but after a few metres look for a gap in the hedge on the right and climb the stile. Briefly our route shares the path with the Monarch's Way a walking trail of over 600 miles that seeks to follow the journey made by the future Charles II in his escape after defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

*"I am seeking, I am hesitant and uncertain. O God watch over each step of mine and guide me in your way"*

A prayer of St Augustine

It's a steep climb up the slope of Pilton Hill, with expansive views back over the Somerset Levels towards Glastonbury Tor. Stay close to the fence line on the left. At the top of the field our route diverges from the Monarch's Way and turns left up the lane which soon becomes a grassy track which in turn opens into a field. Keep left here following the field boundary up the slope to a gate, beyond which you continue up the slope with the hedge/fence on your left.

Just before you reach another gate, there is a restored stone barn away to your left. Continue straight on, so that the hedgerow is now on your right. The path becomes a more clearly defined track, Folly Lane, at the south west corner of a wood. A walking group I encountered along the way indicated that they thought this formed part of an ancient Roman track along the ridge, a suggestion which seems highly probable bearing in mind the proximity to Pilton which had a history of Roman settlement. The nearby Fosse Way was a major route during the Roman occupation.

Tracks such as Folly Lane may have an even older heritage, with the Romans making use of existing networks of links between settlements already established by previous civilisations.

Continue to follow the track along the woodland edge to the lane. Turn right and then at the junction, left along Stoodley Lane. About 200m beyond the junction take the footpath on the right down the slope of the field to the far left corner. Beyond a ditch and stile, the path divides, take the left fork and continue along the top side of the field following the hedge line above you.

Carry on in the same direction following the field boundaries, making a gradual diagonal descent. The path brings you to the start of a track and secluded cottage. Pass this and walk along the track to the lane. Turn down the hill into Pilton, passing the Crown Inn on the left, where food is served lunchtimes and evenings except on Monday.

The general store on the corner of Totterdown Lane recently closed, with the property becoming a private dwelling, as is the former post office over the road. Take care crossing the main road and head down Shop Lane opposite (it could be more aptly renamed Shopless Lane). This leads to the parish church of St John the Baptist, although St Mary's lane off to the left keeps alive memory of the previous dedication of the church prior to the Reformation.



## Pilton

By tradition, Pilton was once a harbour where merchants from all over sailed to collect lead and copper mined from the Mendip hills. Legend suggests that Joseph of Arimathea was one such merchant and that after Christ's death and resurrection he built a small wattle church above the harbour. Nothing remains to give credence to the story although it is thought that Pilton harbour was situated just below where the current Manor House stands.

The oldest part of the present church is the south door, of Norman origin. Within the church are a number of interesting features. The font was dowsed by Hamish Miller as being aligned directly with the Michael Line, this despite the fact that it was lost for many years only to be discovered being used as a horse trough in a village hostelry, from where it was restored to the church.

In the north aisle is a tithe chest which would have originally stood in the porch to receive gifts for the church. The iron rings are thought to have been used to tether live offerings.

In Saxon times Pilton was part of the extensive estates of Glastonbury Abbey and it is believed that the Abbot had a residence at what is now Pilton Manor, just below the church where there was also a renowned holy well. A second spring at Monks Mill to the south of the church could also have had sacred importance.

Although the abbot would have likely reached the manor at Pilton by boat the problems experienced by medieval undertakers are entertainingly illustrated in the church guidebook. At that time burial rights were jealously guarded by religious institutions, with the closest burial grounds at Glastonbury and Wells. Consequently undertakers from as far as Shepton Mallet had to cross the bogs and quagmires below Pilton, resulting in bodies often being lost on route. In 1189 Pilton was finally granted rights to its own graveyard.

The estates at Pilton transferred to Wells Cathedral in 1174 after a complex power struggle between abbot and bishop. Displayed inside the church is a 15th century embroidered cope which belonged to a member of the cathedral clergy. It was found hidden under the tower in the church, perhaps to avoid its destruction at the time of the Reformation or Civil War. It still sustained some damage as a result of spider activity.

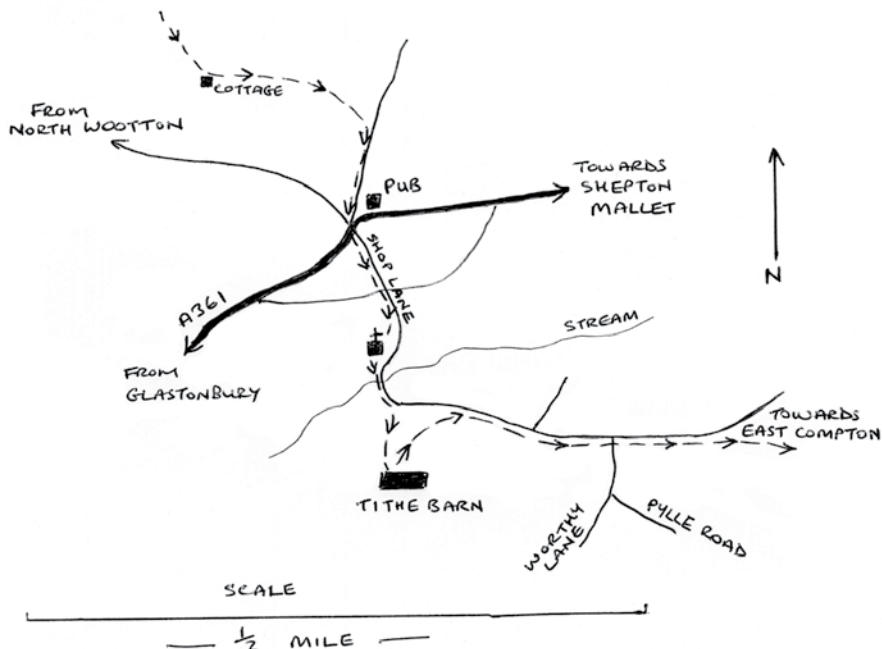
On the exterior of the church the decorative beasts are known as "Hunky Punks." This is Somerset dialect thought to derive from the old English "hunkers" meaning haunches and "punchy" meaning short legged. They serve no functional purpose unlike gargoyles which drain water through their mouths, although some theories consider that they contribute to the balance of good and evil created in church design to remind worshippers of the narrow path they tread. This meant that for every good and benign creature such as a saint or an animal to signify purity, there had to be an opposite to bring out the fear of evil.



4.4 miles to Shepton Mallet. Head down the steps on the south side of the church and continue down the lane between Pilton Manor and Monks Mill. The lane is lined by tall poplar trees festooned with mistletoe. Just beyond the stream take the footpath on the right leading to the tithe barn.

The tithe barn was built in the early 14th century on the order of Adam of Sodbury, then abbot of Glastonbury. The 120 foot long barn is usually open and it is worth having a look inside. The barn was severely damaged by fire in June 1963 following a lightning strike and it remained roofless for over 40 years. In 1995 Michael Eavis (better known for establishing the Glastonbury Festival), who had witnessed the destructive fire, brought the barn and donated it to the Pilton Barn Trust, enabling the subsequent restoration to begin.

## Route through Pilton



From the tithe barn, follow the track right, back to the lane. Continue along here heading east out of Pilton, passing Ford Lane on the left and Pylle Road on the right.

At the brow of the hill known as Mount Pleasant, take the bridleway on the right, (not the footpath which forks off to the right of this). The track leads to a house named Fox Orchard where the bridleway continues to the left. Follow it as far as the lane and turn left and then almost immediately right along the footpath. The path crosses a stream and joins the lane next to Riverdown Cottage.

Turn right and pass by the footpath signposted on the left opposite East Town Farm. Instead take the bridleway about 20 metres beyond, also on the left. Climb the slope and at the top of the field turn right following the gently ascending bridleway between two hedges.

Stay on the bridleway which opens out into a field and follow the line of the hedge on the left. As you continue up the slope, traffic noise from the A361 East Compton Road becomes more audible.

The final field before the main road has a small, steep sided valley off to the right. Aim diagonally towards the far left hand corner of the field, cross the road and walk down the driveway which leads to East Compton House.

At the end of the drive turn right. The way passes along the back of the estate buildings and continues straight on to a gate. Across the next field is East Compton Farm. Don't follow the track which leads towards the farm, instead aim just to the left of all the farm buildings where a stile is located next to a mature ash tree.

Continue diagonally across the next field to a second stile which is initially obscured by the dog leg line of the hedge opposite. From here, carry on through a series of fields, keeping close to the boundary hedge on the right. The path dissects the final field, leads through a farmyard to the left of a barn and joins Church Lane which lies on the route of the old Roman road, The Fosse Way. Turn left down the lane and continue on past the Highwayman Inn.

The Fosse Way linked Exeter in the south west to Lincoln in the north-east, and was built in the middle of the 1st century AD. The western boundary of Roman controlled Britain was protected by a defensive ditch along this axis. The word Fosse comes from the Latin word for ditch (Fossa). Whether the ditch was filled in and the road built later, or whether the road was built to follow the ditch is a subject of much conjecture. What is certain is that the road got its name from the ditch.

The Roman reputation for building straight roads is apt with regards to the Fosse Way. Between Lincoln and Ilchester in Somerset, a distance of 182 miles (293 km), it is never more than 6 miles (10 km) from a straight line.



At the Highwayman Inn, 01749 331247, accommodation is available, costing from £42 for a single room and £54/ double.



Turn left away from the busy A37. Take the right fork past Manlease Caravan Park. At the junction with the main road, cross straight over and take the footpath ahead of you through a modern housing estate.

The path between the houses is generally straight (a mini Fosse Way), at times functioning as both cycleway and footpath. Continue on past the monument and around the boundary of Field Farm with its railing fence and leylandii hedge. Follow the line of the fence which curves around to the front of the farm buildings and towards a small green surrounded by houses. Ahead is a space between the houses through which an old stone wall is visible. Walk in this direction and follow the line of the wall left, to a point of entry into Collett Park on the right.

Walk through the park past the duck pond and up towards the children's play area beyond the bandstand. Turn right out of the park at the gate next to the public conveniences and continue down Park Road. This brings you out opposite the Tourist Information Office. Turn right along the High Street, heading in the direction of the Market Place and nearby church of St Peter and St Paul.

## Shepton Mallet

Shepton Mallet is an historic market town, thought to have been a trading centre on the Fosse Way during the Roman period, although there is evidence of even earlier Bronze and Iron Age occupation in the area. A charter of King Ine of Wessex dated 706 AD records the granting of the area to Abbot Berwald of Glastonbury Abbey.



There are all the facilities of a small market town including shops, restaurants and a choice of accommodation. A couple of places to stay are passed on our route through town (see below). The Dusthole, aka The King's Arms, is a 15th century coaching inn on Garston Street. Double rooms are from £79.50, 01749 343781. Maplestone Guest House is situated on Quarr, the road name I assume deriving from the fact that this was the site of an old quarry. Maplestone is also an historic building, originally built in the 17th century as weavers' stone cottages. Double rooms cost from £80/night, 01749 347979.



Shepton derives from the Saxon sceapton. Sceap means sheep and tun meant farm, estate or settlement, so Shepton was a place known for sheep, whilst William Malet was a Norman lord of the manor who leased the estate from the Abbey around 1100.

In the Middle Ages the town was a prominent wool trading centre and later there were more than 30 mills situated along the River Sheppey powered by the water. The wool industry declined but was replaced by brewing which continues in the town today, in particular the production of cider.

The first charter granting rights to hold a market dates from 1219 and there is still a weekly Friday market in the area known as the Shambles where there is an ornate old Market Cross dating from about 1500. One of the wooden tresses where butchers used to display fresh killed meat at the market remains and has been restored.

Many in the town backed the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion and after his defeat at the Battle of Sedgemoor (see the pilot section description), 12 local supporters were executed in the market square.

The present church, which is on the Michael Line, is built on the site of a previous, smaller Saxon church. The Saxon font has been restored to its rightful place having been recovered from a local garden.

The oak wagon roof, made up of 350 panels of different designs, separated by 396 carved foliage bosses (supposedly every one different) and with 36 carved angels along the sides, was described by historian Nikolaus Pevsner as "the finest 15th century carved oak wagon-roof in England."

During the Civil War this finery caused offence to members of the Roundhead army resulting in some musket shots being aimed at it. It is thought some musket balls are still lodged there.

## Stage 2: Shepton Mallet to Mells (12 miles)

*Walking, ideally is a state in which the mind, the body and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters in a conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord.*

Rebecca Solnit



Facilities include: pub and B&B at Chelynch; campsite near Stoke St Michael (at pub); B&B near Stoke St Michael; shop and pub in Stoke St Michael; pub at Coleford; B&B/restaurant at Vobster; shop, pub cafes and B&B's in Mells.



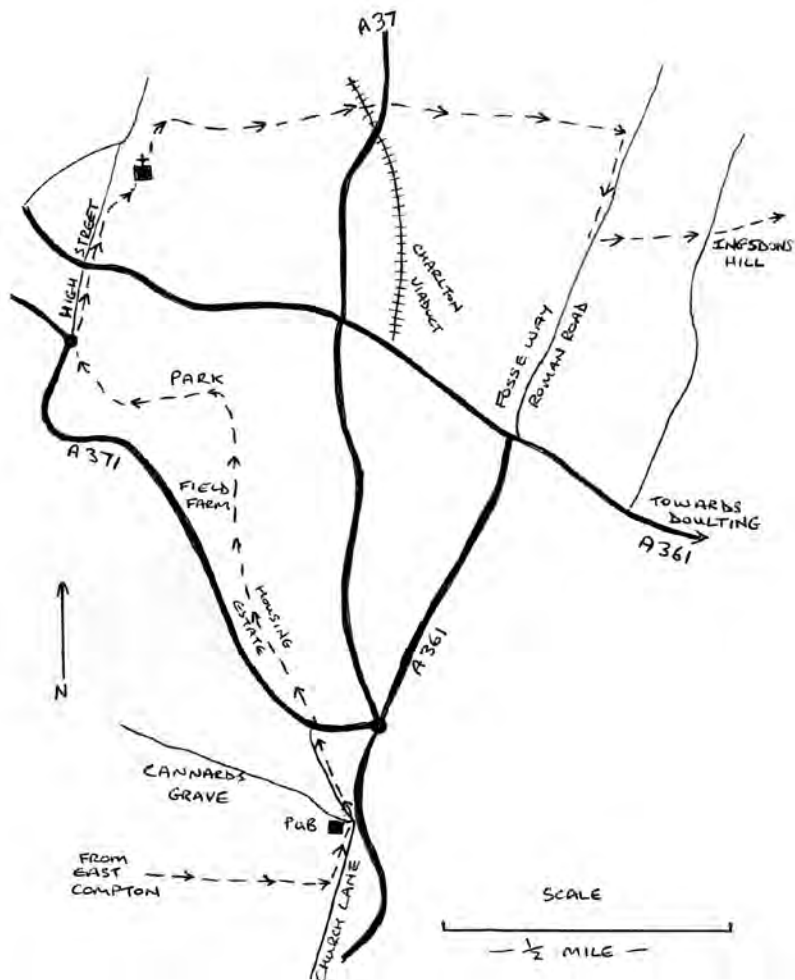
2.2 miles to Doultong. Turn right when leaving the churchyard in Shepton Mallet and follow the paved path between houses around the north side of the church and turn right out of Church Lane into Peter Street. Continue down the slope and take the second turn on the left up past The Dusthole/ King's Arms. Turn left up Quarr at the bottom of Garston Street. Just past Maplestone Guest House is a footpath. Follow this, turning left at the kissing gate. The path leads up some steps into a wood at the back of Showerings Factory, where Babycham is still produced. Where the path splits, take the right fork, joining the East Mendip Way. The route passes under the old railway and comes out alongside the busy A37 at Kilver Street Hill.

Turn left along the pavement then cross the road and follow the path just above Ivy House Farm. A series of paths fan out from the farmyard. Our chosen route is past the farm buildings and through the gate on the right. Now walk straight across two fields (ignoring the stile on the right) to a gateway next to a gas pumping station. Turn right down the track which is on the line of the old Fosse Way and follow this for about 300m, before taking the next footpath on the left over a stone stile which reconnects our route with that of the East Mendip Way.

Keep towards the left side of the field through the remains of an orchard. At the far side of the field, climb the stile, cross the lane and climb a second stile. Continue along the path following the hedgerow on the right up Ingsdons Hill. Walk through an area of rough grassland as you approach the brow of the hill and look for the stile at the end of the hedge on your right.

The path now carries on to the left, in the same approximately easterly direction along the ridge from where there are views back towards Glastonbury Tor. As you continue, Doultong village and church become visible in the valley on the right. This is our next destination.

## Route through Shepton Mallet



Where the main track turns sharply left and the East Mendip Way leads straight on through a kissing gate, climb the stile on the right and head downhill towards the far left hand corner of the field which is directly in line with the church spire. At the corner of the field follow the hedge on the right down the slope. In the final field before the village again use the church spire as a direction guide across the field. This brings you to a kissing gate and a path between ponds. Ahead is St Aldhelm's Well. The well itself is hidden behind a wall through which the water flows into a trough.

St Aldhelm was a former bishop of Sherborne and Abbot of Malmesbury, he was taken ill at Doultong and died here in 709AD. He was nephew to King Ine of Wessex and after Aldhelm's death, the king gave the local estate to Glastonbury Abbey. Aldhelm is said to have come to the well to meditate and pray and after his death it became a place of pilgrimage and reputed healing.

In earlier years the water was also reputed to cure quarterail (cattle paralysis), but not if the cattle had been stolen.

## Doultong



From the well, walk up the track and opposite the Old Bell House follow the public right of way leading directly to the church of St Aldhelm passing some beautiful, gnarled tree roots hugging the stone wall on the way.

On one visit I noticed a poster pinned to the gate leading into the churchyard advertising a talk about the life of Silas Davis, a Victorian rural postman who had worked in the area. He walked 17 miles a day for 40 years on his round, six days a week and every other Sunday. He then had 33 years of long and fruitful retirement. This seemed an excellent advertisement for the benefits of a good walk.

There have been several churches on this spot over the centuries, marking where St Aldhelm is said to have died. It was originally a wooden structure but that was replaced by one of stone at a time when the church was under the authority of Glastonbury Abbey. The present church is mainly 15th century although the unusual hexagonal spire was rebuilt in 1869.

Doultong Stone has been quarried locally since Roman times supplying stone for the building of this church and Wells Cathedral and later additions to Glastonbury Abbey besides. There is still an active quarry operating at Doultong.

The Michael Line runs diagonally through the church and over the interior arch two dragons stare down. There is also a carving of a Green Man incorporated into the porch vaulting and some noteworthy gargoyles adorning the exterior.

Across the main road which runs alongside the churchyard is another tithe barn, built in the 15th century to store agricultural produce for the ecclesiastical landlord, Glastonbury Abbey. This one is located at Manor Farm.



3.4 miles to Stoke St Michael. From the church, turn right into Church Lane then take the first left. Almost immediately on the right, opposite Doultling Lodge is the path to follow which leads along the back of the school. Beyond the school grounds continue in the same direction staying close to the hedge on the left. Just beyond the point where a path leads off to the right, climb the stone stile in the hedge on your left but maintain the same direction of travel. To your left is a small, steep sided valley. The path leads to Pitts Wood and skirts along the right side of the woodland edge to Chelynch. Here the path passes along the back of some houses before reaching the lane, where a lake is visible on the left.

The Michael Line passes through here. Don't get too close, as it is described in *The Sun and the Serpent* as "a pool of water, which has a mysterious eerie quality about it as if something strange lives in its depths." (Miller and Broadhurst 1989).

Follow the path, straight across the lane and through the field to the right of the pond. The path then continues diagonally to the right across a second field and joins the driveway leading to Hurlingpot Farm where B&B is available (see below for details). If you are not staying, turn right along the drive and at the road turn left to continue on your way along King's Road. This is a straight road which you follow for about 1½ miles, making a gentle ascent towards Beacon Hill and crossing straight over the two cross roads you encounter along the way. Next to the second crossroads, The Waggon and Horses pub has camping facilities.



At Chelynch, if you turn right out of Hurlingpot Farm, it is about 100m to the pub, The Poachers Pocket, which serves food lunchtimes and

evenings every day. At Hurlingpot Farm, B&B costs from £60/room or £45 single occupancy, 01749 880098.

At The Waggon and Horses pub, camping costs £9 for a 2 person tent, 01749 880302. 100m on from the pub towards Three Ashes B&B is available at Knapp Farm, costing from £80/room, £60 single, 01749 880022.



After the long straight climb along King's Road from Chelynch to Beacon Hill, continue on past The Waggon and Horses pub and Knapp Farm. At Three Ashes turn right along the bridleway. This becomes less clearly defined as you progress, with paths off to the left and right. Stick to the bridleway as far as the gate where you turn left down the attractive wooded green lane known as Red Lane (perhaps so named as a result of the numerous old cherry trees that line the way!). At the road, turn right into Stoke St Michael.

## Stoke St Michael

In the centre of the village is the post office/shop which has long opening hours and just beyond the Knatchbull Arms, a pub named after the 18th century owners of the manor. Turn left at the pub to reach the church. Across the road from the pub is an attractive little village green, originally the site of a village pond, with a spring fed stream flowing through.

In a now familiar tale for this part of Somerset, the manor and lands around Stoke St Michael historically formed part of the Glastonbury Abbey Estates.

Only the tower remains of the medieval church of St Michael's. The rest was demolished and rebuilt in the 1830's. The Michael Line was dowsed by Hamish Miller passing through the south porch. A window inside depicts the Archangel slaying a serpent – a memorial to those killed during World War II.

*Walking - I am listening in a deeper way  
Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me  
"Be still" they say*

*"Watch and listen you are the result of the love of thousands"*

Linda Hogan



2.3 miles to Coleford. Leave the churchyard and follow the narrow lane to the left that skirts around the south side of the church. When the lane divides, turn right by the water pumping station and continue up the lane past Cook's Farm.

The footpath through Cook's Farm was one possible route explored as it passes through an attractive valley, past one of a series of caves, Slocker Hole, which make this part of the Mendips a draw for the caving fraternity – however the connecting path to the next stage of our route was hard to distinguish thus I recommend staying on the lane past the farm.

At the junction turn left along the ridge with quarries either side of the road. The one on the left is visible intermittently between the trees. The one on the right is fenced off. The flooded quarry beyond has in the past tempted people to swim and dive in from the cliff edges – tombstoning. Security is now intent on preventing this after a number of accidents.

Just beyond the old quarry entrance on the left which is blocked off with boulders, the lane bends sharp left. Follow the footpath off on the right at this point. The path cuts across the narrow corner of a field towards a stile and leads over a footbridge through a small copse of trees where the ground is marshy underfoot. Climb a second stile and head diagonally towards the far right hand corner of the field. Walk down the slope towards the bungalow. Here the path leads along the right edge of the garden.

At the lane, turn right and then left opposite Hurdlestone Lodge into the field. The line of the path is towards the far right hand corner of the field and a stile tucked away at the woodland edge. Follow the path through the woodland of alder and willow crossing first one small brook before you reach a bridge over the Mells stream. It is worth pausing here to enjoy the tufa spring.

The small cascading waterfall is a feature specific to limestone rich geologies. Tufa is formed when water from underground which is saturated with calcium carbonate emerges on to the surface. The calcium carbonate is precipitated out as a soft creamy coloured spongy rock which encrusts all that it flows over such a moss, sticks and stones and producing a series of small cascades and pools as is found here. The envy of any budding landscape gardener.



Cross the bridge and turn left over a subsidiary stream and then a second bridge on the left. (Alternatively you may choose to follow the streamside path towards Coleford. This can be very muddy at times although I was told that some of the meadows alongside the river are worth seeing, being rich in wild flowers in early summer).

If you crossed the second footbridge, turn right up the wooded slope. The path cuts diagonally across a field to a raised embankment. Follow the line of the embankment through the wood. These are some of the visible remains of the Dorset and Somerset Canal an ambitious engineering project that was never finished.

The Canal was intended to link Poole in Dorset with the Kennet and Avon Canal near Bradford on Avon which would have opened up a route from the Bristol Channel to the English Channel, potentially a safer and easier navigation avoiding the treacherous coastline around Devon and Cornwall.

Collieries in the Mendips were to be served by a branch line off the main canal and about 8 miles of this was built passing through Coleford and Vobster. However money ran out and work was never completed. The project was abandoned in 1803.

Emerging from the woods, follow the well-used path across fields into Coleford. At the lane turn right down the hill into the old part of the village. Continue past Mill Lane on the right which leads down to the old Packsaddle Bridge, (the route into the village if you had followed the streamside path from the tufa spring).

## Coleford

This seems a quiet backwater now, but the village is an ancient settlement listed in the Domesday Book. Many of the houses along High Street were once shops at a time when the village was a centre for coal mining.

As you walk down High Street, behind some of the houses on the left is an impressive aquaduct, known locally as the "Huckyduck" which was to have formed part of the Dorset and Somerset Canal network.



One resident I met told me of an old chapel which had existed along the High Street of which there are scant remains. The Michael current runs close by and she told me how the previous owner of her house, a practicing meditator used to sleep in the back bedroom of the house because he said it connected with the energy lines from Glastonbury. She had lived in the village 15 years and thought it a very relaxing place to live, leaving her feeling as if she was always on holiday.

To reach the church, turn left up the steep hill at the end of High Street, past the former Methodist Chapel.

The Church of the Holy Trinity is relatively modern church built in 1831. It is aligned with the Michael current and has a soothing atmosphere. There is an interesting window to the right of the altar dedicated to William Marchand Jones a former choir-master and well-known local photographer.

Having visited the church, retrace your steps back down the hill but opposite High Street go left towards The King's Head pub which is open every day from noon, serving snacks but no cooked food.



1.8 miles to Vobster. The path to follow is on the left just before the pub and runs along the back of the houses. When the path comes out onto the lane turn left and proceed on past the last house where there is a foot-path on the left. Follow the fence line on the right up the slope and where the path divides take the right fork, which curves along the contour of the hill and into the woods with the valley below on the right.

Cross a bridge constructed of railway sleepers and turn right down the hill to the woodland edge. Follow the path left through two fields staying close to the woodland fringe. At the far end of the second field, don't follow the track, but instead climb the stile just to the right of it. The path leads back into woodland, initially along a raised embankment before turning left away from the stream and up the slope.

Climb a second stile out of the wood and walk through a rough grassy meadow towards the hedge on the left. Part way along is a stile. The lane beyond can be busy so be attentive as you cross to the stile in the hedge opposite, which I found a bit overgrown.

Follow the hedgerow on the right past the house and garden. The path follows the perimeter of the garden, down the slope to the bridge over a little stream.

Cross and head up to the left where there is a secluded old chapel aligned with the Michael Line, hidden amongst the trees. This has been sympathetically converted into a private dwelling which I was told was now the residence of a local artist.

The path leads up in front of the chapel through a short avenue of alder trees. Turn right in front of the cottage and go through the kissing gate onto the lane. Visibility is restricted by the bend in the road so take care. Turn left up the hill and opposite the driveway entrance to the chapel and cottage, cross the road onto the footpath. From here, it is worth taking a short detour to the Vobster Inn and the old bridge next to it, as well to a viewing point which looks out over Mells Park.

Look for a gap midway along the hedge on your right where there is a stile and following the woodland edge on your left go down the steps to the pub.

## Vobster



The Vobster Inn dates from the 16th century and was used by James II and his royalist army prior to the battle of Sedgemoor in 1685. Accommodation is available 7 days a week but the bar and restaurant are closed Sunday evening and all day Monday. Rooms cost from £70 or £60/ single occupancy, 01373 812920.

Next to the pub car park is the old bridge spanning the Mells River. On the far side an old cast iron water fountain is a reminder of when there was the communal water supply for the village in the time before mains water. I was pleased to see this fountain still worked and to meet an old resident of the village who remembered when it was still in daily use supplying water to the row of cottages beyond.



2.3 miles to Mells. Climb back up the steps by the pub and once over the stile, turn right to follow the permissive footpath. This leads via a footbridge to Tor Rock where there is a viewing point overlooking Mells Park, a Grade II listed landscape and part of an estate which belonged to the Horner family for many generations. Mells Park House was rebuilt in 1924 after a major fire, on plans drawn up by Sir Edwin Lutyens.

Retrace your steps over the footbridge to join the main path. Initially my preferred route towards Mells was close to the boundary wall then skirts around the northern edge of Lily Batch Wood on the right. However in late summer, the path beyond proved impenetrable, hence the somewhat circuitous route chosen.

Follow the line of the hedge that abuts the lane coming up hill from the Vobster Inn to the top corner of the field where there is a stile and finger post. Continue along the road verge to Vobster Cross, where signs indicate the way to Vobster Quay, a flooded disused quarry which is now a diving and open water swimming centre.

Turn right along the road towards Mells and after about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile (just beyond Stoneash Farm), turn left along Pople's Lane which leads towards Edney's Farm. After about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile, take the footpath on the right which heads in a south easterly direction diagonally across the field in the direction of Mells Church, the tower is visible in the distance amongst the trees.

Cross the driveway which leads to Branch Farm and continue in the same direction as before across the field towards Mells. Go through a gap in the hedge at the far corner of the field and turn right, following the line of the hedge behind which lies a fish pond. The area is thought to have been the site of a Saxon village. Further along you access the grassy bank by a second pond, an attractive spot.

Follow the direction of flow of the stream, to a stile on the left and walk through an avenue of lime trees to the footpath gate in the corner of the field. Go through and turn left along Selwood Street past the 16th century manor house which stands on the site of what had been a medieval monastic manor house. Keep on the road to reach the centre of the village.

## **Mells**

There is much to admire in Mells, with an unusually large number of listed buildings, most of which are constructed from the local honey coloured oolitic limestone. The name Mells may well derive from the latin word "mellis" meaning honey.

The Talbot Inn dates from 1470. It offers atmospheric accommodation set off its cobbled central courtyard with rooms costing from £95, 01373 812254. Other B&B accommodation is available in the village includes: Garston Gate Cottages, £85/room/night, 01373 812499 and Great Green Cottage with double rooms from £60/night, 01373 812857.

Opposite the pub, The Walled Garden plant nursery and tea garden is beautifully laid out within a 17th century walled garden. It is open 10am-5pm from 1st March to 24th December, although opening times may be shorter later in the season. A wood fired pizza oven adds another dimension at weekends, 01373 812597. There is also a post office/shop in the village, open 7.30am-6pm from Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm Saturday and 9am-4pm on Sunday. The proprietor runs a café here in the summer.

Mells was part of the estate of Glastonbury Abbey from Anglo Saxon times. Selwood Street relates to a 15th century Abbot of Glastonbury who was influential in the development of the village. The picturesque rows of cottages which line New Street and lead up to the church were part of a settlement he planned which was to have been in the shape of a cross, although in the end New Street was all that was completed.

The Manor was seized by the crown with the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539. John Horner had been closely involved in the management of the Abbey estates prior to the dissolution and his speedy acquisition of the manor at Mells is sometimes thought to have given rise to the nursery rhyme.

*Little Jack Horner sat in a corner  
Eating a Christmas Pie  
He put in his thumb  
And pulled out a plum  
And said what a good boy am I*

The story goes that Richard Whiting, last Abbot of Glastonbury sent his steward Horner to Henry VIII with a Christmas gift, a pie in which were secreted the deeds for 12 manors, in an attempt to appease Henry as the threat of dissolution loomed. Horner took out the deeds (the plum) for Mells before proceeding to the king.

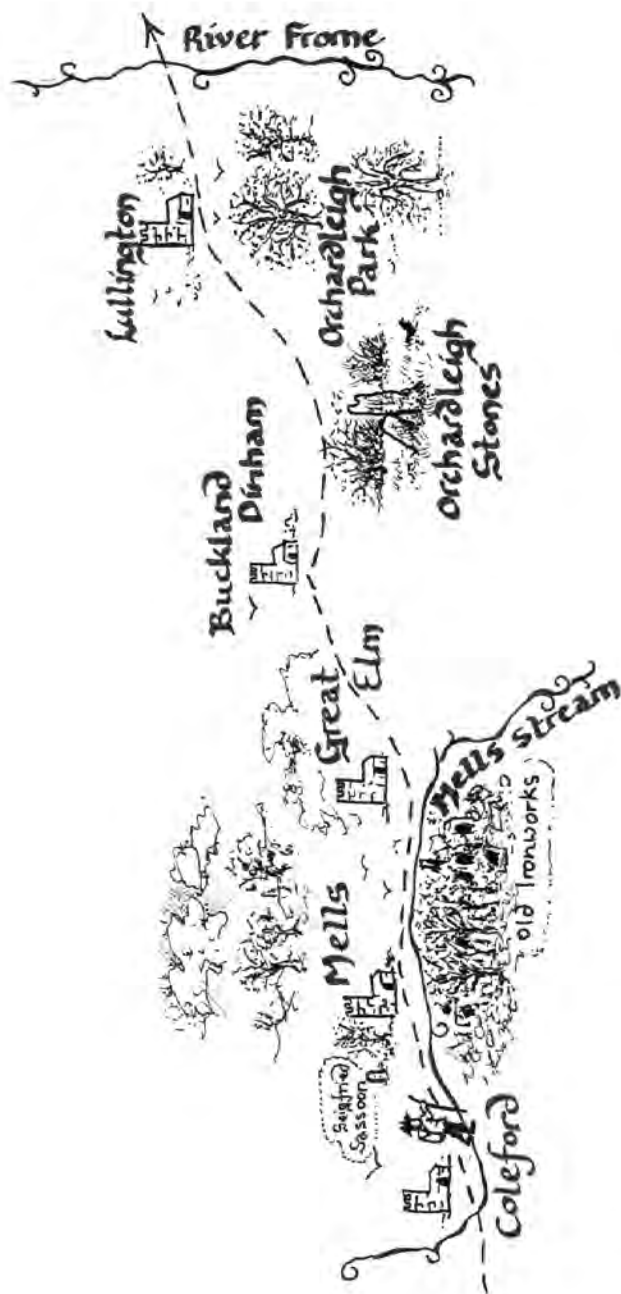
The truth of the transfer of ownership is more prosaic. The Horner family bought the manor from Henry after the dissolution. Previous experience of the Abbeys' land holdings may have given them an eye for plum properties worth acquiring.

The church of St Andrew is an elegant structure mainly dating from the 15th/16th century. The tower contains a faceless clock which strikes the hours and the quarters. Every three hours, beginning at midnight it plays one of four tunes.

Amongst the graves on the east side of the churchyard, is that of Siegfried Sassoon, writer, poet and soldier, probably best known as one of the poets whose work laid bare the true horrors of the First World War. His poem, "Everyone Sang" written soon after the signing of the Armistice treaty on November 11th 1918, has been recited more than once on one of our group pilgrimages. It describes the joy and relief tinged with grief of those who survived the carnage of the war.

*Everyone suddenly burst out singing;  
And I was filled with such delight  
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,  
Winging wildly across the white  
Orchards and dark-green fields; on - on - and out of  
sight.  
Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;  
And beauty came like the setting sun:  
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror  
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone  
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will  
never be done.*

Inside the church, the font and part of the altar are evidence of an earlier Norman church. The Horner family influence is evident in the number of memorials bearing the name. Particularly striking is the equestrian statue of Edward Horner, the last direct heir of the Horner estate who died in France in 1917. The statue is the work of Sir Alfred Munnings with the plinth designed by Lutyens. There is a range of Lutyens' work in Mells, including the avenue of clipped yews on the north side of the church, various grave stones, the gate piers at the entrance to Mells Manor, a stone triangular shelter close to the village shop and the war memorial crowned by the figure of St George slaying the dragon. The Michael Line flows along the axis of the church.



## Stage 3: Mells to Trowbridge (17 miles)

*Wandering re-establishes the original harmony which once existed between man and the universe.*

Anatole France



Facilities include: campsite, pub and B&B at Buckland Dinham; B&B at Lullington; shop and pub with accommodation at Rode with other B&B nearby; range of facilities in Trowbridge.



1.6 miles to Great Elm. Having taken nourishment both spiritual and temporal in Mells, continue along Selwood Street past the 14th century tithe barn on the right and the war memorial on the left. Carry on past the shop and take the 2nd turn on the left signposted to Great Elm. Pass Wadbury Farm and follow the bridleway on the right through the Wadbury Valley. The track, initially tarmacked, follows the Mells River through the steep sided valley where some of the exposed rock faces offer challenging ascents to climbers. There is also evidence of the industrial past that once dominated this now peaceful valley.

In the 18th century the Fussell's family became a major supplier of edged agricultural tools such as scythes and hooks which were produced in their forges and workshops at Wadbury and exported all over the British Empire. The metal works were described by one visitor in the 18th century as "like looking into the gates of hell."

The factory was initially powered by water and then steam. It closed at the end of the 19th century as technology moved on.



Continue along the main track following the River Mells downstream. Avoid the bridleway which forks off to the left close to a house with an imposing wooden veranda. Instead stay on the footpath following the course of the river. Don't cross the footbridge further downstream.

Near this bridge I watched a father and his children catching crayfish with the sort of equipment and bait normally associated with crabbing at the seaside. The crayfish about 6 inches long, looking like miniature lobsters, emerged from beneath stones and the riverbank attracted by the bait.

The Signal crayfish is an alien species which has escaped from aquaculture enterprises. Its spread has had a significant impact on the ecosystems colonised. It is a fast growing, highly fecund, aggressive species, with few natural predators once it reaches maturity. Being omnivorous they eat most small aquatic fauna and flora. They also burrow, causing extensive damage to riparian verges and subsequently to the whole ecosystem. They predate on and out-compete a number of native species, such as bullheads and stone loach, amphibians, and invertebrate species including our own native white-clawed crayfish.

Catching, cooking and eating the Signal crayfish could be seen as a contribution to restoring balance to the ecosystem.

Beyond the footbridge, the path meanders beside the river for another few hundred metres before diverging to ascend the side of the valley. At the stile, turn left onto the lane and cross over the main road to reach the church of St Mary Magdalene, Great Elm, which lies on the Michael Line.

## Great Elm

The church dating from the 12th century is an attractive grade 1 listed building. Its style would not be out of place in rural Normandy or Brittany. On the south facing wall there is not only a sun dial on the tower, but the much older markings of a Mass dial, close to the main door about 4 feet from the ground.

Mass dials (scratch dials) are medieval. About 8 or 9 inches across and roughly cut, they come in a variety of designs, from semi-circles of dots to complete circles with associated radii.

The gnomon (projecting piece that casts the shadow) is invariably missing. It pointed straight out horizontally thus the dial would not record the same hours at all times of the year and could not offer a reliable indication of the time of services.



The church interior is light and uncluttered. It has old box pews, some Jacobean, each with a carved door. The gallery where the choir and organ used to be located dates from Elizabethan times. It is approached via an external staircase.

During one visit to the church I was privileged to be the audience whilst a singer went through some of her repertoire of "Chanson Triste." She was warming up in preparation for a recital at the nearby Jackdaws Music Education Trust. The stillness in the church seemed profound at the end of her singing as if reflecting a deep appreciative listening by the fabric of the building.

The church is usually open during daylight hours, but if you find it locked, a key is kept at Church House, situated on your right as you approach the church.

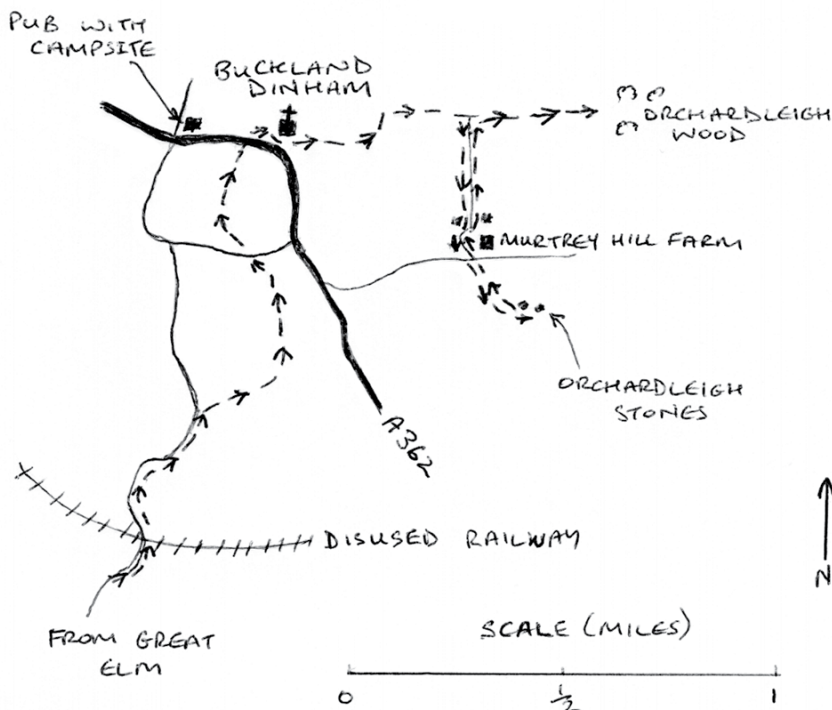


1.7 miles to Buckland Dinham. Retrace your footsteps down the lane from the church and turn left before the main road, following the footpath through Glebe Farm. At the farmyard, turn left into the field and aim for a stile just to the left of a small building (perhaps housing a water pump) located east of the church. Cross a second field to another stile and continue across a third field. Turn left along the lane which takes you under a bridge which carried the old railway line. The decommissioned route now serves a different function as The Colliers Way, a 23 mile recreational track, part of the National Cycle Network being established by Sustrans.

Carry on along the lane, past a footpath on the right and a path sign-posted on the left. A second path on the right, close to a mature oak tree is the one to take. You may notice Macmillan Way logos along this section of the route, through Buckland Dinham and towards Lullington. The main Macmillan Way runs from Boston on the Lincolnshire coast to the Dorset coast at Abbotsbury. All funds raised by people undertaking sponsored walks along the route are donated to Macmillan Cancer Support.

Follow the path across the field and down the slope to the far left hand corner. Cross the track, go through the field gate and aim diagonally left in the direction of Buckland Dinham Church which is visible on the horizon. Cross a bridge and continue up the slope to the lane.

## Route through Buckland Dinham leading to Orchardleigh Stones



Go straight across, climb the steps into the field beyond and walk up the slope towards the top left hand corner of the field. Climb the stile and follow the hedgerow in the right into the village. Cross the main road. Turn left for the pub. For the church and our route on from Buckland take the path to the right of the row of cottages in front of you. Initially this runs parallel to the main road before entering a cul de sac, the entrance to which is near the church.

### Buckland Dinham



The Bell Inn at Buckland Dinham is a useful resting place for camping pilgrims. The small camp site is open all year round, with fairly basic facilities of a loo and cold shower. It costs £8/person/night. No meals are available in the pub on Monday and Tuesday, 01373 462 956. Taumata Guest House is situated close to The Bell Inn on Cock Road. B&B costs £70/ double room or £40/single occupancy, 01373 471351.

Our route has strayed slightly from the Michael Line here, although the church is dedicated to the Archangel. The imperative was to avoid a busy stretch of main road.

In front of the church is a lock up where those who breached the peace were traditionally put to sober up. If the church is locked up, a key may be found in a small black box on the doorstep at Court Orchard, along the drive opposite the church.

The oldest parts of the church are Norman, including the font with its interesting carved patterns. An earlier church dating back to the 7th century is thought to have existed here.

The church and tithes of the manor were given to Wells Cathedral by Oliver de Dinan who came over from Brittany with William I. He was granted the manor soon after the conquest and evidence suggests his descendants retained a connection with the village. Sir John Dinham endowed the church with funds to build a chantry chapel and to maintain a chaplain to give divine remembrance for his soul forever. He died in 1332. His effigy and that of his wife lie in what was his chantry chapel on the north side of the church.

On the south side of the church is the Lady Chapel. Stairs from here lead to a priest's chamber situated above the porch. Outside there are mass dials either side of the main door. These are fainter and harder to discern than the one at Great Elm.

In the churchyard along with the ancient yews whose green boughs symbolise immortality there is an old plough, a reminder of the historic tradition of Plough Sunday. On the second Sunday in January, the plough was blessed, marking the beginning of the agricultural year, a custom kept in many rural churches until World War I and still maintained in some places.

Along with the dedication of the church to St Michael, there was a long held Michaelmas fair dating back to 1239. I'm not sure if this is still marked in the village. Perhaps it has morphed into Buckfest, an annual festival held at the pub in August!



4.3 miles to Lullington via Orchardleigh Stones and Orchardleigh Church. The footpath to follow is on the left as you leave the churchyard. Walk down the slope to the far left corner of the field, cross the footbridge and follow the path left around the edge of the field. At the corner, head up the slope with the hedge on your left.

A track leads off to the right, climbing steeply towards Murtrey Hill Farm. This is not a public footpath, but leads towards the Orchardleigh Stones. I was told that the farmer is happy for people to visit the stones, but do ask permission as they are situated on private land. To reach the stones, thought to be remains of a long barrow, walk through the farmyard. At the start of Murtrey Hill Lane to the right, walk straight on following the field boundary on the left. After about 200m the Orchardleigh Stones are visible on the left in a patch of rough grassland.

The barrow is composed of a low mound with one large monolith and a second stone leaning against it, which were dowsed by Hamish Miller as being on the Michael Line. Other stones are part buried around the site. One article I read suggests that Murtrey may have derived from mortuary, indicating this as a place of burial.

There are other legends associated with the stones. In one, the site was said to be haunted by a Lady in White, whilst another suggests that the stones are so deeply embedded in the earth as to be immovable and that a golden coffin is buried beneath.



Retrace your way back through the farmyard and down the track to reconnect with the footpath from Buckland Dinham. Turn right and walk up the slope following the hedgerow on your left to the stile and gateway which mark the entrance to Orchardleigh Woods.

In the woods, the path merges with a number of other tracks. Carry on in a predominantly easterly direction until you reach a major intersection of tracks with some farm buildings and two cottages situated off to the right. Cross over the main track, taking a lesser path which is easy to follow, but not necessarily identified as a public footpath. This leads through to the edge of the wood. Ahead is a driveway with a cattle grid to the left. This

marks the entrance to Orchardleigh golf course. Follow the drive through the golf course.

It is worth taking a detour to the Church of St Mary's. For this turn right off the main drive just before the stable block and follow signs to the church. It is located on an island in Orchardleigh Lake and linked to "the mainland" by a footbridge. Built in the 13th century, it underwent extensive restoration in 1878.

Designated a Grade I listed building, it includes sculptures from the 14th century and stained glass from the 15th. The church has no electricity supply, services are candlelit and the organ is pumped by hand. Unfortunately the church is frequently locked.

There is a footpath which runs along the back of the lake but this is often very muddy. I recommend returning to the main drive by the old stable block and continuing on past Orchardleigh House. The building is an example of the briefly fashionable architectural combination or possibly confusion of Elizabethan and French styles, often described as "nouveau-riche." It is now a hotel and conference centre. Continue down the drive past the golf clubhouse and Temple Lodge.

At the bridge just before the turreted Gloucester Gatehouse, (through which the Michael Line passes), turn left along the footpath. This is joined by a second path from the left before coming out onto a lane. Turn left and then left again. At the village green, cross the road up to the church of All Saints, Lullington. If the church is locked, a key is available at Court Farm next to the church.

## Lullington

This beautiful Norman church seems well suited to the picture postcard look of the village. There is some impressive carving, including that above the north door of "Christ in Majesty," which dates from about 1160. Inside the church, the ornamented tub font originates from the same period. The Latin inscription translates as "in the waters of this holy font all sins are washed away." The pillars along the nave are carved with amongst other things a Green Man and a range of mythic creatures.



B&B is available at Lullington House with a double room costing from £80/night, 01373 831406. The owners are also key holders for the church. The lodges, cottages and gatehouses on The Orchardleigh Estate are available to rent and range upwards from £160/night for a cottage sleeping 4 people, 01373 472550.



2.6 miles to Rode. From the church, turn left by the old village water pump and follow the lane past Lullington House and towards the Gloucester Gatehouse. Turn left towards Woolverton, signposted 1½ miles. About half way to Woolverton, just beyond the Henhambridge Brook, go through the gate on the right. In late autumn, the route did not look promising, with high nettles obscuring any footpath. The going was easier down towards the brook. Follow this for about 50m then climb the steep bank on the left towards the pine tree.

Here on a misty late autumn afternoon I stood and watched a barn owl hunting, quartering the ground close to the river, systematic and silent over the rough grassland a habitat where field voles a major prey species of the owl can be numerous. It seemed unconcerned by my presence.

Just beyond the pine climb the stile on the left. The path now follows the ridge parallel to the River Frome which flows through the valley on your right. When you reach a fence, go left up the slope, over the stile and cross the field where inquisitive alpacas may be in residence to a stile just below Toll Gate Cottage. Go through the gates on the drive (no toll is currently levied) and turn right crossing the road bridge over the River Frome.

The A36 is busy and although the narrow verge gives some protection, do proceed with care. Having negotiated the bridge, cross the road opposite the entrance to Shawford Mill and walk down the lane. Almost immediately go through the kissing gate on the left.

The path now follows the right bank of the river. Pass just above the remains of a Second World War pill box and continue on through a series of kissing gates recently installed by Mendip Group Ramblers along the riverside path.

Beyond Merfield House which is attractively situated on the right overlooking the river valley, the path deviates from the course of the river and crosses a field ending at a lane. Turn right along the lane into the village of Rode. At the junction turn left past the primary school and pub.

## Rode



The Cross Keys serves food lunchtimes and evenings and accommodation is also available from £80 for a double room and £50 single occupancy, 01373 830900. There is a post office/shop situated on High Street. This is open until 5.30pm Monday to Friday and lunchtime on Saturday. B&B is also available at the nearby Seymours Court, 01373 830466. This is a Grade 1 listed 15th century farmhouse once owned by the powerful Seymour family. Jane Seymour was the third wife of Henry VIII and mother of his heir Edward VI. Seymours Court is reached by following our route out of the village in the direction of The Devil's Bed and Bolster, but at the back of St Lawrence Church, continue in a southerly direction past Moberley Pond.

Rode covers quite a wide geographic area with distinct areas of settlement which may reflect the complexity of historical land ownership. The Domesday Book records that the Bishop of Coutances, chaplain to William I held manors here whilst Reinbold the priest had an additional separate manor. Until 1937 the village lay partly in Wiltshire and partly in Somerset.

The village was a thriving centre for cloth production through the later Middle Ages when there was also a Benedictine Priory here. Many buildings in the village including the pub date from the 17th century reflecting the prosperity of the period.



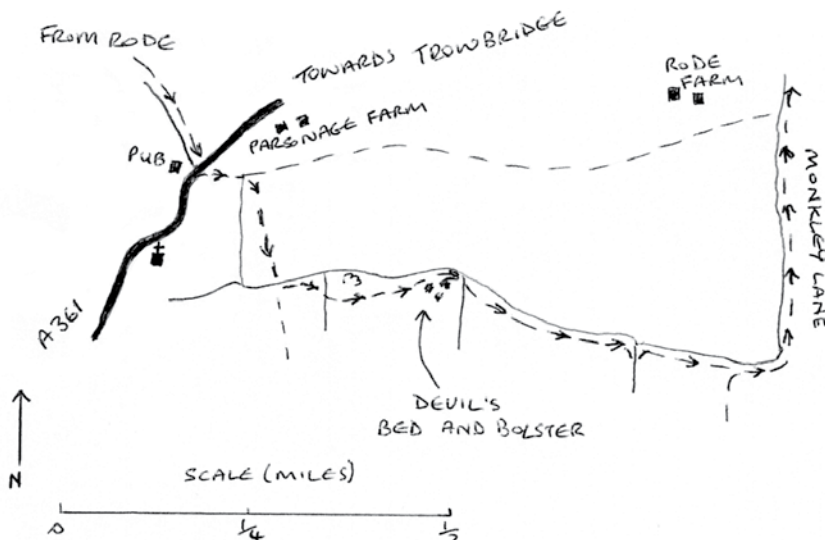
Turn right along Church Lane just after the pub and follow the lane to the junction with the A361. Turn right past the Bell Inn to reach the church of St Lawrence. There is pavement all the way, but it is quite dispiriting to see how the busy main road cuts the church off from the rest of the village. The crossing point on a bend is an uncomfortable experience. The church has been locked on the days I have been there, as if visitors outside the times of formal services were not really expected. It does lie on the Michael Line.

The church dates from the late 14th century, although it is likely that there was a previous church on the same site and some fragments of a Norman doorway survive.

It is thought that the village originally grew up around the church, but that a fire in the 15th century destroyed all the wooden houses, leaving the stone church alone intact. Perhaps rebuilding on the same site was considered bad luck. It is apparently still possible to see evidence of where the houses stood, their location marked by the grass which grows lush on the land fertilised with wood ash from the fire.

The church is the setting for an annual ceremony known as Clipping the Church. An ancient custom probably pagan in origin, traditionally held on Easter Monday or Shrove Tuesday. The word "clipping" is derived from the Anglo Saxon "clyp-pan", meaning "embrace" or "clasp". Clipping the Church involves either the church congregation or local children holding hands in a ring around the church. At Rode the circle faces inwards, participants dance left and right before rushing inwards cheering.

### Way to Devil's Bed and Bolster and beyond







6.8 miles to Trowbridge via Devil's Bed and Bolster. Retrace your steps back past the Bell Inn. Cross the main road and follow the footpath opposite through a field to a stile in the hedge. Here there is a choice of paths. Take the one on the right up to the gateway in the far corner of the field. Beyond the gateway a cottage is ahead of you whilst if you look back, the church of St Lawrence is visible.

There was formerly a permissive path along the edge of the field which formed part of a Countryside Stewardship agreement. This enabled access to The Devil's Bed and Bolster, the remains of a long barrow aligned with the Michael Line. The agreement ended in September 2014 as a result of problems caused by riders whose horses had caused damage to some of the field margins and dog owners not having their dogs under control. However the farmer I spoke to is willing to allow access to continue, providing this is done so with respect and dogs are kept on leads until the brideway at Monkley Lane.

If you meet these criteria, turn left through the gateway and follow the field boundary to the entrance into the next field. Continue through and pass the first clump of trees on the left, identified on maps as Mount Pleasant. The stand of trees beyond this marks The Devil's Bed and Bolster.

Nine large stones are all that remain of the Bronze Age barrow. Here Hamish Miller and Paul Broadhurst (1989) noted that

*"above the large slab that marked the centre of the Michael line, energy was pouring off exactly like a heat haze on a hot summer's day."*

On the Modern Antiquarian website a brief entry about the Devil's Bed and Bolster suggests that the name may derive from the barrow's proximity to the church of St Lawrence, symptomatic of an insecure Christianity needing to defame alternative beliefs associated with such ancient sites. The author continues

*"if the devil has all the best tunes, then he also seems to have the best places, as I'd much rather be here in this magical place than in the cold dour surroundings of the local church."*



From the Devil's Bed and Bolster walk through the gateway in the corner of the field on the left. Remember access at this point continues to be at the discretion of the farmer. Follow the hedgerow on the left (you should be able to make out the Westbury White Horse cut into the hillside in the distance) and at the far corner of the field look for a gap in the hedge about 20 metres to your right, go through and continue following the field boundary on the left in the same predominant easterly direction.

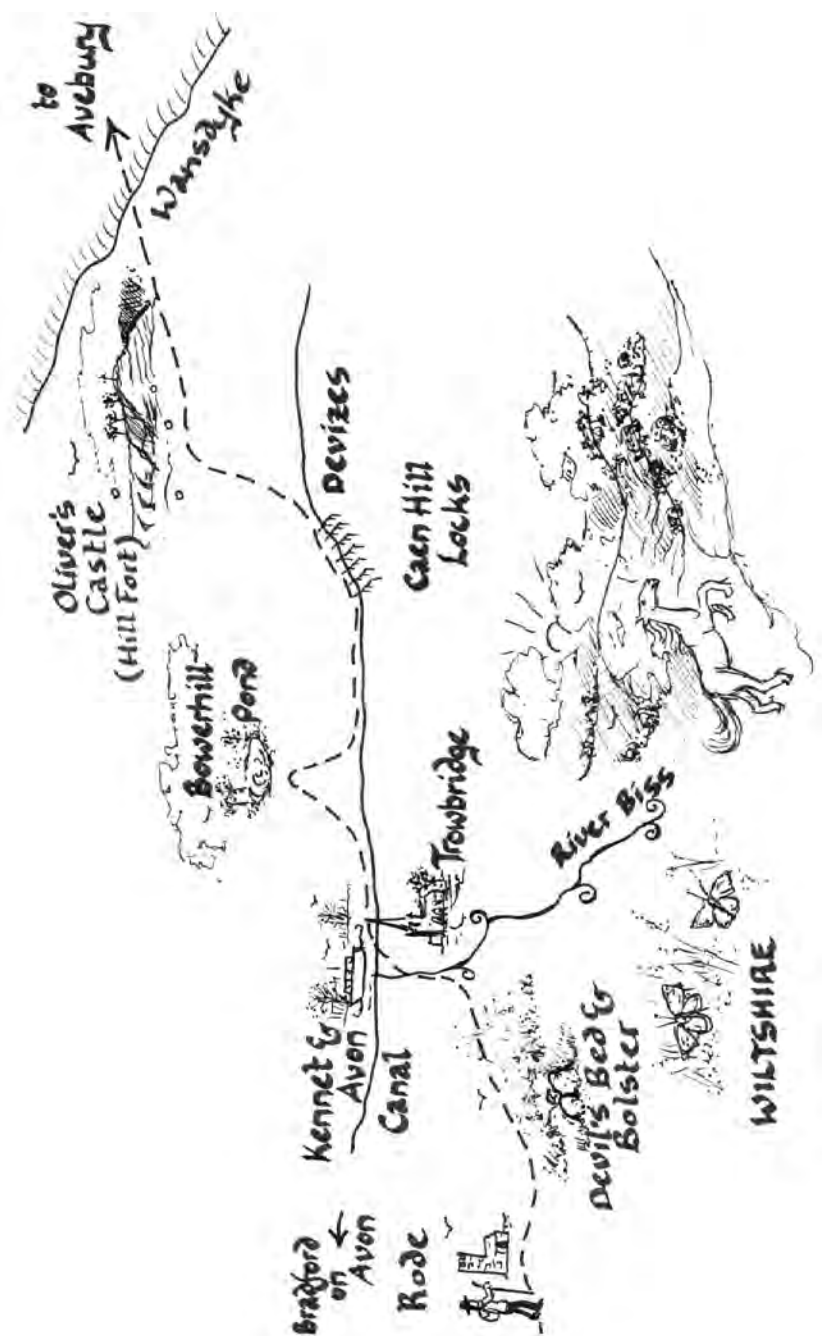
On entering a copse of trees, join the bridleway coming from the right. The route is not through the gate, but instead follows the hedge line on the left for another 200m where it joins the tree lined track known as Monkley Lane.

Follow this until it joins a tarmac lane. Carry straight on past two houses, turning right along the footpath just after "The Lodge." Climb the stile into the field then go through the gateway about 20m ahead on the left. The path runs diagonally across the next field, to the left of the electricity pylon towards a gateway near the far corner of the field. From here, head towards Whittaker's Farm. Keep to the right of the farmhouse and climb the stile into the first of two paddocks, the location of a Caravan Club campsite. Turn left along Hooper's Lane, cross the main road (A361) and walk down Green Lane in the direction of Hoggington.

Continue straight on where the lane reduces to a track until you reach a junction of bridleways. Here there is a choice. Either turn right along the bridleway leading to Manor Farm, (this track can be very wet after heavy rain) or take the slightly longer route straight on past Odessa Cottage and at the T junction turn right. This links to the top of Hoggington Lane.

The alternative possibilities rejoin at the junction of Manor Farm drive and Hoggington Lane. Follow the footpath directly opposite the Manor Farm turn, across the field and over a stile. Here the path forks. Follow the left path alongside the hedge. At the next stile there are again two alternatives. Choose the right fork this time and aim towards the stand of mature oak trees in the middle of the field. With the trees on your left there is a stile midway along the hedgerow in front of you. This is the first of a series of stiles to negotiate. The path takes you past some farm buildings on your right and leads to a track with houses ahead on both sides (School Lane).

Climb a stile on the left before the houses and head to Southwick allotments. Skirt left of the allotments and keep close to the paddocks on the right through the area of Southwick Country Park known as Brunts Field.





Turn right onto the all-weather path. This leads to The Squirrel Café on the right, (open 8.30am-4.30pm) and the main car park in front of you.

Facing the information board by the car park, follow the gravel track on the right through Lambrok Meadow. The Lambrok Stream forms the eastern boundary of Southwick Country Park and beyond is a modern housing estate, Upper Studley. At the north east corner of Lambrok Meadow, cross the footbridge over the stream. The course of the stream is a useful guide to follow into the centre of Trowbridge.

Initially the path skirts along the northern edge of the housing estate with the Lambrok Stream on your left. At certain points the path cuts through between houses but stay aware of the direction of the stream. At the end of Lambrok Close, turn left. This brings you back close to the stream bank following a wide grass verge down to Studley Green where Lambrok Road meets the A366.

Cross the main road and continue down Brook Road which is just off to the right as you approach the junction. Brook Road goes over the Lambrok Stream. Follow the tarmac path on the right along the far bank of the stream so that the stream is now on your right. This path leads almost to the centre of Trowbridge.

At the electricity sub-station leave the riverbank, pass Tesco Express and turn right along the road. Turn right again over Troyle Bridge. After the bridge take the first turn on the left down Innox Road which is signposted to the Kennet and Avon Canal Towpath.

At the end of the road, the path/cycleway leading to the canal is straight on, under the railway bridge and then left. Alternatively for the railway station, town centre and Church of St James which is aligned with the Michael current, turn right and walk through the park following the boundary fence on the left. At the far end, the entrance to the station is ahead of you.

Cross the pedestrian bridge over the tracks. From here the spire of St James Church is visible ahead of you. Walk through the railway car park towards Stallard Street but just before the main road turn left following the pedestrian access route past the derelict factory. This brings you to the main road opposite Trowbridge County Court.

At the pedestrian crossing, note the signs that indicate the footpath and cycleway link on the left towards the canal towpath, the route to follow on

the way out of Trowbridge. Cross the main road and head over the River Biss and past the Blind House – where drunks were housed to sober up.

## Trowbridge

Trowbridge was linked with the manufacture of high quality woollen cloth as far back as the 14th century and the last factory associated with this industry closed in 1982. Production at the mills was dependant on the River Biss. One interesting building which spans the river on your right is the Handle House. It looks rather like a large air brick and served much the same purpose maximizing the flow of air in order to dry the teazles which were stored inside. These were used to raise the knapp on woollen cloth.



Trowbridge has a railway station which makes it a convenient point to join or leave the pilgrimage route. Accommodation options include, The Polebarn Hotel on Polebarn Road near the centre of town, single rooms cost from £50/night, doubles from £60/night, 01225 777006 and Sue's B&B, 25 Blair Road on the west side of town, close to our route in through Studeley Green. Rooms cost £35 - £55pppn, 01225 764559.



Follow signs to the town centre up the hill and along Fore Street into the pedestrianized area of town. Turn left down Church Walk to reach the church of St James which is closely hemmed in by shops. Its impressive spire, rising to a height of 160 feet seems rather like the waving hand of a drowning man amongst the sea of commerce.

St James, the patron saint of pilgrims, is particularly associated with the pilgrim routes to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. The earliest record of a church on the site is in 1125, but it is likely that there was a church here before as Trowbridge was recorded in Domesday with a population at the time of 100. Much of the current structure dates from the late 15th century when the town was gaining wealth from cloth and benefactors gave generously resulting in this impressive and uplifting church.

George Crabbe, the rector between 1814 and 1832 was well known in his lifetime as a poet. His works including "The Village" and "Tales of the Hill" appealed to a wide audience at the time. Today he is best remembered for that section of his poem The Borough on which Benjamin Britten's opera Peter Grimes is based.

*Old Peter Grimes made fishing his employ,  
His wife he cabined with him and his boy,  
And seemed that life laborious to enjoy:  
To town came quiet Peter with his fish,  
And had of all a civil word and wish.  
He left his trade upon the Sabbath day,  
And took young Peter in his hand to pray;  
But soon the stubborn boy from care broke loose,  
At first refused, then added his abuse;  
His father's love he scorned, his power defied,  
But, being drunk, wept sorely when he died.*

In 1847 when the chancel was being rebuilt workmen came upon Crabbe's grave with the coffin decayed but the skeleton still intact. His skull was taken and sold to a student of phrenology. Finding that it was Parson Crabbe's skull he was horrified and tried to return it, but the floor had already been relaid. The skull remained in his reluctant possession tied up in a silk handkerchief and kept in an iron chest for nearly 30 years before further work on the chancel floor allowed the skull to be reinterred.

Another interesting feature in the church is two medieval gravestones, found during development work at the Cooperative store in the shopping precinct. Rather than an early example of Cooperative funeral services, the location of the find probably indicates the site of the burial ground of the Norman Motte and Bailey Castle. Nothing remains of the castle although Fore Street is thought to follow the line of the original castle ditch.

## Stage 4: Trowbridge To Devizes (12.5 miles)

*"Wanderer there is no road, the road is made by walking."*

Antonio Machado



Facilities include: pub and B&B at Semington; shop and pub at Seend; campsite and pub at Sells Green; campsite and tea room at Caen Hill; range of facilities in Devizes



6.3 miles to Bowerhill. From the church of St James, retrace your steps to the bridge over the river near the Blind House, cross the main road at the pedestrian crossing and follow the path signposted to the canal between the disused factories. Walk under the first low bridge but stay on the right hand side of the railway track. Follow signs for the National Cycle Network which runs parallel to the railway line until you reach the Kennet and Avon Canal, about 1 mile from the centre of town.

Cross the canal and turn right along the towpath in the direction of Melksham (5 miles) and Devizes (10 miles). Our route follows the towpath all the way to Devizes apart from one short diversion to Bowerhill on the outskirts of Melksham. Thus it is hard to get lost on this stretch of the route so relax and enjoy the scenery and slower pace of life of the canal and its environment.

The Kennet and Avon Canal completed in 1810 was constructed to connect the river Avon at Bath to the river Kennet at Newbury, enabling the vital and lucrative trade between Bristol and London to flourish. However considering the huge feat of engineering and prodigious labour involved in digging the 57 miles of canal and associated tunnels, locks and aqueducts, the commercial pre-eminence of the canal did not last long.

The arrival of the Great Western Railway in 1840 heralded the decline in usage and in 1877 the canal recorded a deficit and never subsequently made any profit.

Petitions to parliament prevented total closure in the 1950's. From the 1960's to 1980's fundraising and restoration was underway. The canal re-opened to full navigation in 1990.

In the autumn I harvested an abundant blackberry crop and late season damsons as I walked, saw kingfishers and on one occasion a grey heron daredevil style flying close to the water under a bridge the arch of which was not much wider than its wingspan.



There is a range of potentially useful facilities alongside the canal catering for the combination of walkers, cyclists and canal boat passengers who frequent the canal and towpath. Between Trowbridge and Semington (about 3 miles) these include The King's Arms pub, Wyke Road on the outskirts of Trowbridge. In the village of Semington is The Somerset Arms which is open from 10am each day. B&B is available here from £80 for a double room, 01380 870067. Bridge House B&B, is situated adjacent to the canal, on the edge of the village. Rooms cost from £31 single occupancy and £54/ double, 01225 703281.



Beyond Semington, continue to follow the towpath. Less than 1 mile after the aquaduct which carries the canal over the A350, you reach the swing bridge near Seend Park Farm. This is the point where our route briefly deviates from the canal to visit the pond at Bowerhill, the location of one of the node points where the Michael and Mary currents cross.

Turn left opposite the swing-bridge and entrance to Seend Park Farm and follow the bridleway through Giles Wood. At the far side of the wood the path follows the line of the hedge on the left. Go through the bridleway gate situated to the left of the main track and follow the hedge on the right to the corner of the field, past the allotments.

Keep left following the bridleway which merges into Bowerhill Lane and skirts around the edge of the housing estate. Keep following the lane past Little Bowerhill Farm, at which point the lane turns sharp left. Just after this bend, visible through a gateway on the right are some ancient willows. These border an old farm pond in the corner of the field.

A rather inconsequential and neglected looking place its shaded waters mark the node point. Perhaps the earth energies influenced the choice of resting place of the black cat I saw curled up in a patch of sunlight on the bank of the pond beneath one of the willows.

6.1 miles to Devizes. Retrace your way back down Bowerhill Lane to the point where the tarmac ends. Turn left here (just before the allotments) and follow the bridleway back to the canal. Here our route runs briefly



south of the Michael and Mary Lines and instead continues to follow the canal. A choice largely influenced by the attraction of including the remarkable spectacle of Caen Hill Locks on our way. We reconnect with the energy currents at Oliver's Castle, north of Devizes.

Returning to the canal, turn left towards Sells Green and continue along the towpath as far as Devizes.



Between Bowerhill and Devizes, facilities include The Barge Inn at Seend, which overlooks the canal. There is also a shop/post office in the village. There is a campsite at Sells Green linked to the pub, The Three Magpies. Here camping costs from £8 for a small tent, 01380 828389. Close to the bottom of Caen Hill is another campsite at Lower Foxhanger's Farm, where pitches cost £11-£15 depending on season, 01380 828254. Attractively situated at the top of the main flight of locks is the Caen Hill Café which is open between 10.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday and 10am to 5pm weekends, (weather permitting).



Continue along the towpath through the outskirts of Devizes. The centre of town, with all the facilities you would expect of a market town is most conveniently accessed if you continue along as far as the Canal Trust Wharf Centre. Here there is a museum and café which is open daily. The town centre is signposted from here on the south side of the canal.

Caen Hill Locks provides an insight into the engineering innovation needed to build and maintain the canal. The main flight of 16 locks, which take 5–6 hours to navigate in a boat, is part of a longer series of 29 locks built in three groups: seven at Foxhangers, sixteen at Caen Hill, and six at the Devizes end of the flight. The total rise is 237 feet in 2 miles. The locks were the last part of the canal to be completed. Originally the locks at Caen Hill were illuminated with gas lamps allowing passage to proceed right through the night. This no longer happens. The lock gates are literally locked each evening.



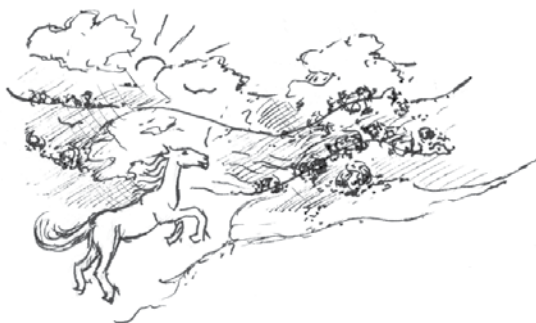
## Devizes

A castle was built in the 11th century, located on the boundaries of the manors of Rowde, Bishops Cannings and Potterne. It became known as the *castrum ad divisas* or "the castle at the boundaries", hence the name Devizes.

The Wiltshire Museum on Long Street is home to one of the best Bronze Age archeology collections in the country, with exhibitions telling the stories of the people who built Avebury and Stonehenge. The museum which doubles as the Tourist Information Office is open daily, 10am-5pm, Monday to Saturday and 12am-4pm on Sunday, 01380 727369.



Accommodation in Devizes includes Asta B&B, 66 Downlands Road, from £30pppn 01380 722546, Dorchester House which is located within the old castle grounds costs £60 for a single room and £100/double, 01380 722123. There is also a B&B at Southdown, Folly Road, Roundway. This is close to our route on from Devizes. Rooms cost from £80 for a double, £47 single occupancy, 01380 726830.



## Stage 5: Devizes To Avebury (14.1 miles)

*"The longest journey a man must take is the eighteen inches from his head to his heart."*

Anon



Facilities limited. B&B at Roundway just outside Devizes otherwise nothing until Avebury where there is a pub, café, shop and B&B options.



2.5 miles to Oliver's Castle. Whether or not you stop in Devizes, the route continues along the towpath past the Canal Trust Wharf Centre to the next bridge (number 139), which you cross. Go past the lodge house, through the wrought iron gates and along the tree lined track heading north away from the canal. This path known as Quaker's Walk is part of the White Horse Trail, a long distance route connecting together some of the 8 white horse figures cut into the Wiltshire Downs.

I found nothing to indicate a specific historical link between the Quaker spiritual tradition and the path, although it is probably a route of great antiquity connecting Roundway village and its farmland to the market in Devizes.

When you reach the road, cross straight over and continue along the footpath. On the hillside ahead is the latest addition to the stable of "white" horses cut into the downs. This one, a rather drab grey dates from 1999, created as part of the millennium celebrations. Known as the Devizes White Horse it replaced an earlier version cut in 1845.

The footpath rises gently up the slope, becoming a wider farm track. Approaching the cottages, go left in front of the first cottage garden and continue along the path up the middle of the field, initially following the power lines until you reach the hedge which you then follow to the lane. Turn left along the lane and beyond the entrance to Roundway Farm, take the footpath over the stile on the right. The path leads to the far left corner of the field, then straight up the steep slope of Roundway Hill to the right of the hedge and prominent electricity pylon.

At the top of the field turn left along the lane following signs for the Mid Wilts Way. The tarmac road soon gives way to a gravelled by-way. Continue along here to a parking area on the left close to the entrance to Oliver's Castle.

Climbing the escarpment leading to the plateau of the Downs you enter a dramatically different landscape. It is drier, with a different mix of vegetation, is sparsely populated with large arable fields and feels like an older world order still holds sway.

*"... and the path that looks  
As if it led on to some legendary  
Or fancied place where men have wished to go."*

The Path, Edward Thomas

To the left of the car park is Roundway Hill Covert a wooded nature reserve, managed by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. To the right of this is the path leading to the Iron Age hill fort known as Oliver's Castle.

The fort dates from about 500BC. It is a superb location with dramatic perilous escarpments and expansive views particularly to the west. It is thought that the site was probably never permanently occupied and although there is evidence of a dewpond in the middle of the enclosure it is debatable whether this was a later addition. The lack of an adequate source of water on these exposed hill top forts would have made them difficult to defend.

Oliver's Castle was the backdrop (literally for some) at the Battle of Roundway Down in which the Royalists gained their most convincing cavalry victory of the Civil War. Some parliamentary cavalry fleeing in panic as the battle was lost died falling down the steep slopes of the gullies either side of Oliver's Castle as they were pursued by the Royalists. The area beneath became known as Bloody Ditch as a consequence! However the majority of parliamentary casualties - about 600 - were infantry men killed elsewhere on the field of battle. The name Oliver's Castle derives from this event but is a misappropriation as Cromwell himself was not present at the battle.



The centre of the enclosure is not only a node point where the Mary/Michael Lines cross but is also a rare convergence with the ley line around which the earth currents weave also crossing here. It is clearly a special place and perceived as sacred by many. On one visit I saw a hawthorn bush on one embankment decorated with red roses in remembrance of a person whose ashes had been scattered nearby.

At the foot of the escarpment, on the western flank of the "castle" hidden within a small copse of trees is a water source. Maps refer to it as 'Mother Anthony's Well'. It is thought there was a Roman villa nearby and that a Roman shrine was possibly associated with this spring. To visit this, go through the kissing gate between the nature reserve and the entrance to Oliver's Castle and follow the valley down between wood and hill fort to the copse at the bottom of the slope. Hidden within the copse numerous springs arise and coalesce into a chalky stream. There is no right of way, but the kissing gate at the top of the valley suggests public access is tolerated



5.1 miles to Cherhill Monument. Return to the car park and follow the byway at right angles to the track you came along on the approach to Oliver's Castle. This leads in the direction of the tree topped Morgan's Hill before turning sharp left along a chalky, straight track. After about ½ a mile turn right onto a tarmac lane and at Hill Cottage turn right again following signs for the Wessex Ridgeway and Mid Wilts Way.

The lane becomes a rough track again and leads past a large barn on the right. At the next junction of tracks turn left, still following signs for the Wessex Ridgeway. This brings you to a road with North Wiltshire Golf Clubhouse on your left. Cross straight over and through the gap in the hedge onto the golf course.

Watch out for golf balls hit from your right as you cross the fairway heading towards a group of pine trees. From the trees the footpath is marked through the golf course. It follows the slope in a northerly direction to the left of the wireless masts on Morgan's Hill and to the right of one of the fairways which has a north – south orientation.

The path is through an area of unimproved grassland alongside the fairway. This is a rich habitat for flora such as vetches, harebells and yellow rattle which benefit from the lack of fertilizers, although the densely thatched vegetation is probably quite taxing for wayward golfers.

Having reached the northern boundary fence of the golf course go left behind the tee and through the bridleway gate. This leads onto the Wansdyke and its associated footpath which runs parallel to the fence at this point.

The Wansdyke may not be as familiar to many people as Offa's Dyke or Hadrian's Wall, yet it is one of the largest linear earthworks in the UK with a bank up to 4 metres high in places and the ditch running alongside up to 2.5 metres deep. It stretches for about 45 miles across the Somerset and Wiltshire countryside although significant gaps exist.

The eastern part around Morgan's Hill was probably built during the 5th or 6th century, after the withdrawal of the Romans and before the dominance of the Anglo-Saxons, as such it has at times been linked to Arthurian legend. The ditch is on the north side, so presumably it was used by the British as a defence against West Saxons encroaching from the upper Thames Valley into what is now the West Country.



Our route crosses diagonally over the Wansdyke, keeping the wireless masts on the right. Follow the bridleway down the hill towards an area of woodland on the side of the valley and turn right joining what was an old Roman road along the northern side of Morgan's Hill. To the left, the escarpment drops away steeply.

Follow this track for just over a mile as far as the second shelter belt of trees on the right. Ahead you will see the Cherhill Monument a very prominent landmark on the next ridge, whilst to the right the landscape is dotted with tumuli (burial mounds).

Opposite the second belt of trees, turn left following the Wessex Ridgeway and White Horse Trail up Cherhill Hill to the summit which is topped by

Oldbury Hill Fort. To the left of this is Cherhill Monument. The area is managed by the National Trust.

*"...The path, winding like silver, trickles on,  
Bordered and even invaded by thinnest moss  
That tries to cover roots and crumbling chalk  
With gold, olive, and emerald, but in vain..."*

From "The Path " by Edward Thomas

The Iron Age hill fort covers 22 acres. It sits upon an earlier Bronze Age settlement, with the remains of a long barrow. Archeological finds have included Bronze Age tools. There is also evidence of subsequent Roman occupation. Like much of Wiltshire, the area is teeming with prehistoric remains, including the field systems on Cherhill Down.

The Lansdowne Monument was erected in 1845 by the Third Marquis of Lansdowne. The 125 foot tall stone obelisk is clearly seen for miles around. Consisting of three high steps, pedestal and main shaft, the base of the monument has now been fenced off with nets to catch stonework which is being shed as a consequence of erosion on this exposed spot.

To the north of the monument on one of the west facing slopes of the hill is another of the White Horse carvings. Cut in 1780 it is the second oldest and had the unusual feature of a glass eye formed by pressing upturned bottles into the ground to reflect sunlight. These had all disappeared by the late 19th century, but were replaced in the early 1970s as part of a local youth centre project. Sadly these bottles also disappeared and the eye is now made from stone set into concrete.



3.4 miles to Windmill Hill. Retrace your steps back through the centre of the hill fort and follow the bridleway to the right of the area of woodland. As you proceed over the top of the ridge there are views of Avebury and the distinctive mound of Silbury Hill to the east.

Carry on down the hill past a rusting old barn on the right and about 200 metres before the main road, turn right along the byway which is marked on maps as the Old Bath Road. The fenced in track runs parallel to the modern Bath Road. Follow this for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. Go through a gateway, past a tumulus on the left, then after another 200m where the path widens, turn left down the slope towards the stand of Beech trees known as Cook's Plantation. Cross the main road and follow the byway straight ahead. This leads directly to Windmill Hill, which lies just over a mile from the main road crossing. There are turnings off the main track to left and right, but keep straight on following the byway past a small woodland on the left. The track then begins to rise steadily towards the wooded slopes of Windmill Hill.

As you approach Windmill Hill, there is a track off on the right. Walk on past this for another 200 metres, go through the bridleway gate on the right and climb straight up the hill to the summit from where there are extensive views towards Avebury and Silbury Hill.

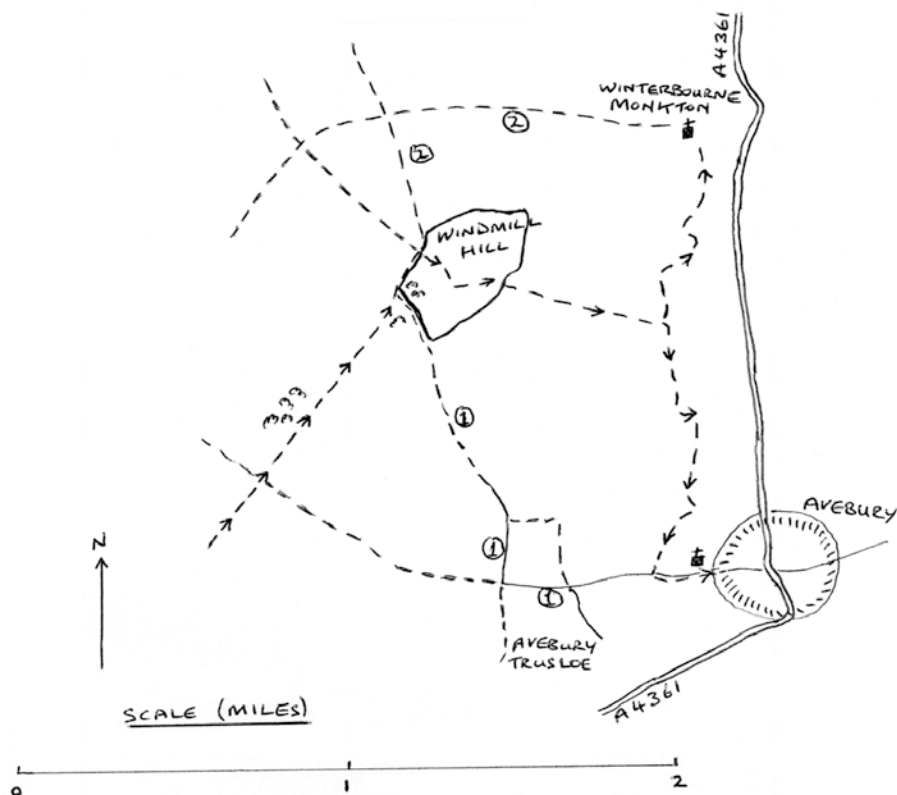
Windmill Hill is a Neolithic causewayed enclosure. Ditches were dug with sections left uncut, the causeways over which people passed into and out of the enclosure. There is evidence of occupation from about 5500 years ago.

It was probably a seasonal settlement, but large quantities of animal bones and other artefacts found here indicate it was a place of feasting, trading or ceremony, perhaps all three. Such evidence suggests that by the time the massive monuments of Silbury Hill and the Avebury Henge were built hundreds of years later, a sophisticated culture was already in existence. Stone axes from rock outcrops hundreds of miles away and fine pottery from Cornwall show trade and travel were widespread.

There are a number of tumuli within the enclosure of Windmill Hill. At the centre of the large barrow on the summit is a node point where the Michael and Mary lines cross, suggesting something more than coincidence accounts for its position.



## Windmill Hill to Avebury



1.3 Miles to Winterbourne Monkton. Continue in an easterly direction over Windmill Hill following the Whitehorse Trail. The path leads downhill along the edge of two large fields. At the bottom of the second field turn right over the stile for the path to Avebury, or left towards Winterbourne Monkton, where the church, situated on the Mary Line is worth a visit.

Before I give more detail of these routes, a word of caution. This path from Windmill Hill brings you to land which is prone to flooding, a recurring problem over the last few years. Hence on the map - Windmill Hill to Avebury - two additional more indirect routes, both less vulnerable to flooding have been marked. Route 1, to Avebury follows the track south east from Windmill Hill in the direction of Avebury Trusloe. Route 2 is the byway that leads north from Windmill Hill before turning east to Winterbourne Monkton.

If the ground is dry enough, having descended from Windmill Hill as previously described, the path to Winterbourne Monkton is through the gateway on the left. Follow the hedge on the left to the far end of the field where it narrows and climb the stile on the right. Cross the lane and climb a second stile.

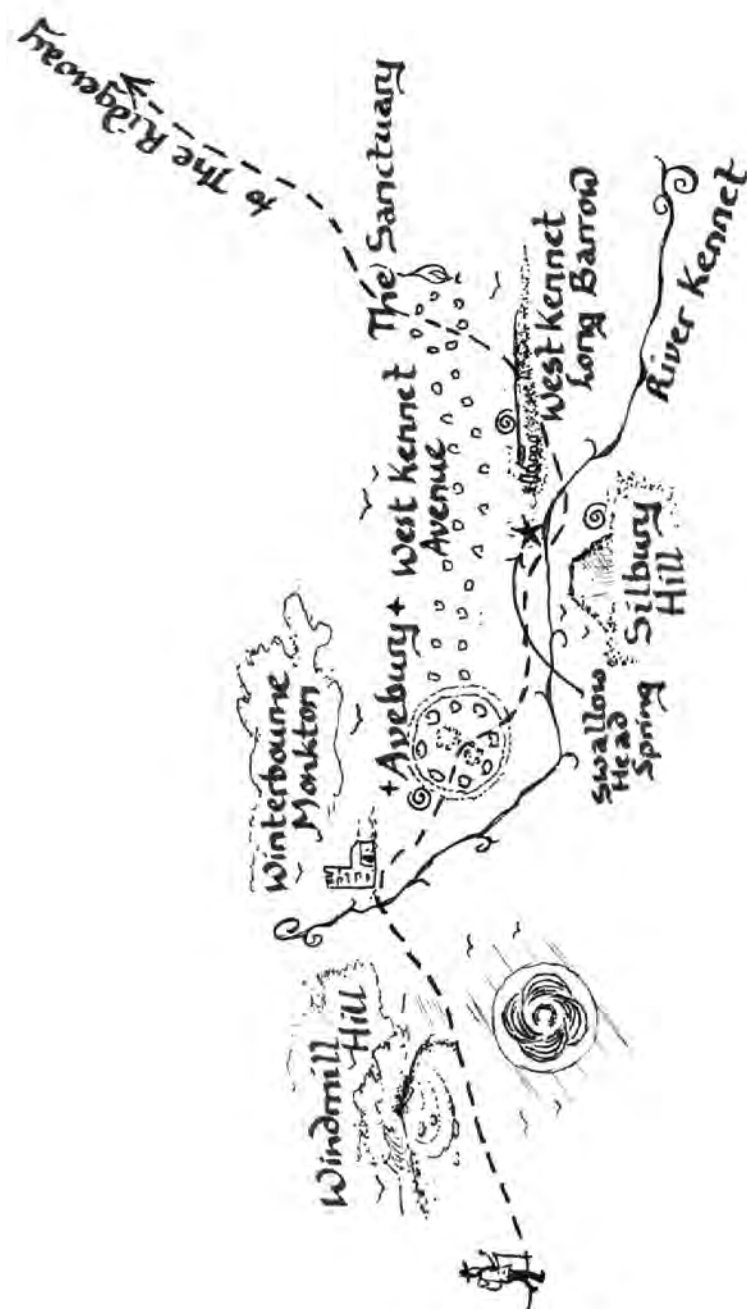
The path marked on Ordnance Survey maps follows the meandering course of the brook to the far right hand corner of the field. Common usage has created a more direct route. Cross the lane by the bridge and follow the stream side path. At the junction with the tarmac path turn left to reach the church.

## **Winterbourne Monkton**

By the 9th century the head of the River Kennet had already become known as Winterbourne; 'Monkton' was added to the name of the village as a result of the influence of Glastonbury Abbey. The estate was given to the Abbey in 928 and in Domesday it is recorded that the Abbot held 25 hides at Monkton. At the time of the Dissolution it reverted to the Crown.

It is intriguing to see how the influence of Glastonbury Abbey has been such a constant throughout this leg of the pilgrimage. The church of St Mary Magdalene dates from the 12th century. The chancel survives from this period as does the font with its irregular carved patterning. This was originally brightly painted and some evidence of this still remains.

In the churchyard is a large Sarsen stone below the chancel window which marks the burial place of the Rev. Brinsden, long time vicar of the parish who died in 1710. The stone is thought to have been removed from an ancient barrow just north of the church and seems a curiously paradoxical gesture, whether indicating disdain or some sympathy for the older beliefs.





1.8 miles to Avebury. Turn right out of the churchyard and follow the lane. Just before the bridge is the footpath on the right which you followed to reach the village. Retrace your way back across the fields to the junction with the White Horse Trail from Windmill Hill.

Walk straight on following the clearly defined path towards Avebury, approximately a mile away. As mentioned, the fields through which the path passes are low lying and prone to flooding. At the outskirts of the village, turn left along the lane, passing the church to reach the stone circle and henge. I will say more about the church later.

## Avebury

Avebury is the largest stone circle in the world, covering an area of 28 acres (11.5 ha), constructed within a henge or surrounding bank and ditch. The bank is thought to have originally been about 18 feet high and an estimated 200,000 tonnes of chalk were excavated to construct it.

The circle remained largely unchanged for 3,500 years until around 1320 when many of the stones were deliberately toppled and buried seemingly at the behest of the Benedictine Priory which had been established close by. In the 18th and 19th centuries the destruction escalated with many of the megaliths broken up and removed for building material. In the 1930's Alexander Keiller, who had made a fortune from marble, bought the land and began a process of restoration, re-erecting many fallen megaliths and putting in concrete markers to indicate the original position of others.

One of the original functions of the circle is thought to have been as a sophisticated measure of astronomical alignments, with for example the southern inner circle acting as a sundial in which the central obelisk cast shadows over particular stones. Throughout Britain such shadow lines were skilfully encoded into numerous ancient sites, guiding the actions of people whose survival and wellbeing was so intimately connected to the seasons.

It seems logical to think that the henge at Avebury was purposefully linked with the other Stone Age monuments in the vicinity including Silbury Hill, West Kennet Long Barrow and the stone avenue leading towards the Sanctuary. Michael Dames' research and writing about the area makes a persuasive case for the integrated purpose these sites fulfilled for the Neolithic people who constructed them as places of ritual with each landform symbolising some specific quality.

Dames concluded that as worshippers of the Great Goddess, early farmers and pastoralists commemorated different aspects of the cycle of life at different sites. From consummation at Beltane at the Avebury Henge, the drama moved to the harvest hill of Silbury, a landform image of the Neolithic pregnant goddess to the winter realm of goddess as hag at West Kennet Long Barrow.

This cycle of ritual would then be synchronised with farming activities and corresponding events in the human life cycle, creating a sense of integration between the earth, heavens and humanity which we seem far from in our modern disconnected and fragmented lives.

A spanner in the works of this elegant theory is provided by the fact that the different sites included in this cyclical ritual journey were constructed during different periods of time. Some separated by hundreds of years. So doubt and mystery remain. As Adam Thorpe expressed in his book, *On Silbury Hill* "what we are left with is only the debris of a vast imagination."

It is interesting to see how the Michael and Mary currents seem to mirror and perhaps give added credibility to the picture of harmonious interdependence of the ancients' ceremonial landscape. All the major monuments are linked by the flow of these energies. To ancient people the earth was the mother of all things, from the earth came the spirit which gave life to all things and to which all returned at death. The earth energy currents can be seen as one manifestation of this life spirit which was revered and nourished through the annual cycle of rituals.

Approaching Avebury from the north, having crossed at the node point on Windmill Hill, Michael and Mary meet again within the henge. First at the Cove in the northern inner circle which is suggested was a lunar temple, before passing together through the location of the obelisk and out between the massive entrance stones, the Devil's Chair and its partner on the southern edge of the circle.

From here the Michael current follows the course of the West Kennet Avenue out to the Sanctuary while the Mary current flows through Silbury Hill, Swallowhead Spring and West Kennet Long Barrow before meeting the Michael current again at the Sanctuary.

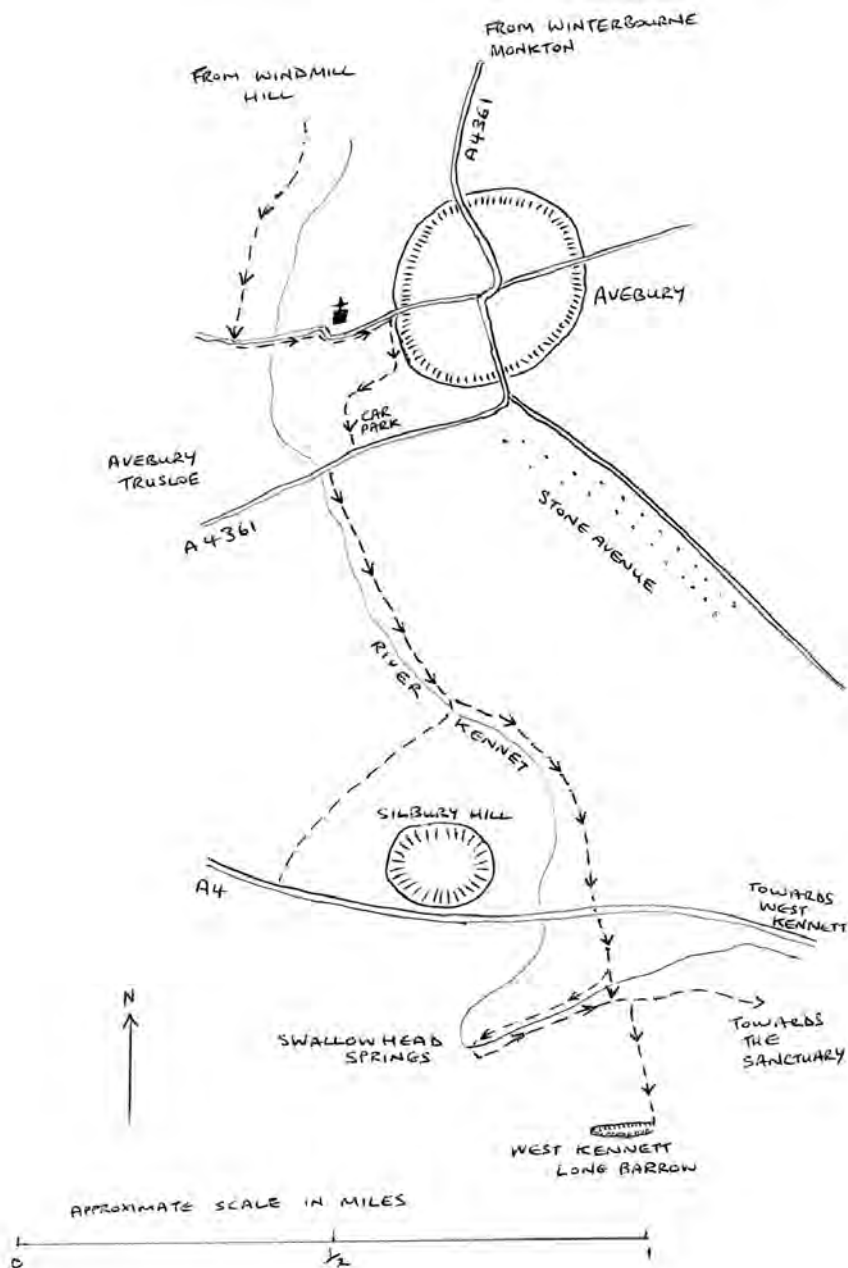


5.4 miles circular walk from Avebury Henge via Silbury Hill, Swallowhead Spring, West Kennet Long Barrow and Sanctuary returning to Avebury along the West Kennet Avenue.

Leave the circle on the west side and follow the path on the left just outside the henge bank, to the main visitor car park. At the entrance to the car park turn right. 20 metres along the road is a bridleway on the left along the bank of the fledgling River Kennet, although depending on time of year this may be a dry ditch. Follow this in the direction of Silbury Hill. Where the bridleway turns right over a small bridge as you approach Silbury go straight on along the footpath following the stream.



## Avebury to West Kennet Long Barrow



Silbury Hill is fenced off and although some people do climb to the top this is discouraged as erosion has been a problem. One of the largest man-made mounds in Europe, Silbury Hill compares in height and volume to the roughly contemporary Egyptian pyramids. It is estimated to have taken 18 million man-hours to construct and was probably completed in around 2400BC.

It is now a common belief that Silbury Hill was built deliberately to be surrounded by water as a result of seasonal inundation. Is it more than coincidental that Glastonbury Tor was similarly surrounded by water when it was first in use during the Neolithic?

Each could have represented a Primal Mound, of life emerging from watery chaos, or a symbolic pregnant figure of the Earth-mother herself. The seasonal 'moat' around Silbury charged with energised water from the nearby springs could be seen as both cleansing and restoring vitality to the earth.

The flat summit of the hill also suggests it could have been a gathering place where ritual could be conducted, beacons lit and astronomical alignments observed. Whatever its exact purpose it remains a wonder and a reminder of the ambition, organisation and skills of our distant ancestors.



With Silbury Hill to your right, continue along the footpath next to the stream. At the main road, cross with care and at the far end of the layby go through the kissing gate and follow the path in the direction of West Kennet Long Barrow which is visible on the hill in front of you. Cross the bridge and follow the main path up the slope.

Alternatively, if you feel drawn to visit Swallowhead Spring, turn right just before the bridge and follow the field boundary on the left along the bank of the River Kennet. At the corner of the field is a stile and beyond this some stepping stones across the river. On the far bank some ancient cracked and twisted willows are a repository for a variety of offerings. The spring rises just above the willows.



Swallowhead Spring is a tranquil spot somewhat less frequented than some of the other Avebury sites although its prominent marking on older maps suggests that historically it was a revered place. Michael Dames describes the way the spring dries in the late autumn in a delayed response to the lower rainfall and greater evaporation of the summer months.

"By Winter Eve the Kennet goddess has swallowed her own river head and turned her river bloodstream into stone...the Swallowhead is left dry as a bone." This he sees as symbolic of the process of ageing and withering after the fecundity and harvest represented by Silbury.

The regularity of seasonal flow and dryness may have been a reality of the Neolithic period but recent years have seen greater unpredictability. For example, the spring was dry in March 2012 but flowing freely after heavy summer and autumn rains in November and December, the expected dry season. Is this an aberration, a consequence of the combined influence of excessive water abstraction and climate change and thus another symptom of our disconnection from the natural order of things, or is the spring's flow just more erratic than Dames thought?

*"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."*

John Muir



You can retrace your route back over the stepping stones and along the field edge to the point where you left the main path leading to West Kennet Long Barrow. Alternatively, climb the stile situated up the slope to the left of the willows and follow the field boundary on the left back towards the junction with the path. From here it is straight up the slope to the Barrow.

From the barrow you can look back towards Silbury Hill, Avebury and Windmill Hill beyond and east towards Overton Hill and the Sanctuary. West Kennet approximately 5,500 years old predates Silbury Hill by 1000 years. It is one of the longest barrows in Britain although all its five chambers are situated at the eastern end. The opening towards the east is the usual orientation of burial chambers in the area, suggesting some significant link with the sunrise. At certain times of year as the sun rises above the horizon it shines right into the back of the main chamber.

Excavations reveal it was a communal tomb used over a thousand year period, although the relatively small number of skeletons found suggest it was more than a depository of the dead. It is thought that bones were rearranged or removed perhaps as part of a ritual practice and that about 4000 years ago the tomb was filled in and blocked off with the gigantic Sarsen boulders that now guard the entrance. This event may have signified a change in the focus of belief and religion.

Borrowing from Michael Dames' theory which interpreted each manmade feature in the Avebury landscape as relating to a particular season and ritual, West Kennet Long Barrow is the place of the winter realm, of death and in death of return deep into the earth.



Walk back down the hill from the barrow and at the bottom of the slope turn right along the White Horse Trail following the course of the river. At the lane turn right. Just past the farm buildings turn left along the by-way. Follow this until you reach the next lane ignoring any impulse to re-join The White Horse Trail where it crosses the by-way.

At the lane turn left, cross the white bridge and go through the gate on the right. Follow the hedge line on the right along the bottom of the field. At the far corner, turn left following the steep track which leads up to the main road (A4). Straight over, the Ridgeway Trail beckons but to the left lies our immediate objective, the Sanctuary.

Markers show the original pattern of the timber and stone circles that once stood at The Sanctuary, though it is quite hard to imagine the extent of these. The atmosphere of the place is also significantly diminished by the speed and noise of traffic on the main road.

The first stage of activity at the site is believed to have consisted of six concentric rings of timbers erected around 3000BC. A series of increasingly elaborate timber structures was eventually superseded around 2100BC by two concentric stone circles which stood within a third timber structure.

The Sanctuary is linked to Avebury Circle by the 1½ mile long West Kennet Avenue indicating a strong ritual connection. William Stukeley, the 18th century antiquarian considered that the stones at The Sanctuary represented the head of a giant pagan serpent marked out by the Kennet and Beckhampton Avenues. The Michael Line closely follows the line of the avenue leading from the Sanctuary to Avebury Circle, giving an extra dimension to Stukeley's belief.

In 1724 he witnessed the destruction of much of the site by local farmers who dragged away the stones.

*"This day I saw with grief several of the few stones left on Overton Hill carried downwards towards West Kennet, and two thirds of the temple plow'd up this winter, and the sods thrown into the cavities, so that next year it will be impossible ever more to take any measure of it."*

So complete was the destruction that it was only with excavation in the 1930's that the accurate location of the Sanctuary was rediscovered. Of the Avebury monuments it is certainly the one most abused and degraded.



Leave The Sanctuary and cross the busy main road to join The Ridgeway. After about ½ a mile turn left down the byway towards the clumps of beech trees which cover some round barrows. Ignore the permissive

path to your left and keep going along the byway, down the hill. At the crossroads of the byway and a farm track, turn left along the track, a permissive footpath. This leads down to a clump of trees and the remains of Faulkner's Circle, a small Neolithic stone circle. It is thought to have originally consisted of 10-12 stones, only one remains.

Carry on down to the road. Cross over and go through the gate. The standing stones of what remain of West Kennet Avenue are on your right. Follow the avenue back to Avebury and the re-uniting of the Michael and Mary Lines.

Before completing this section of the guidebook I want to return to the church of St James, which is rather overshadowed by the unsurpassed collection of Neolithic sacred sites in the area. It seems apt that the church is dedicated to the patron saint of pilgrims.

There is a beautifully carved Norman archway around the main entrance. Within, is an early Saxon tub font from the 8th or 9th century on which are carved two winged dragons either side of a Christ figure. These were added later and are a common medieval depiction. As with the font at Winterbourne Monkton, traces of paint suggest it was once brightly coloured.

On the floor of the tower is a stone coffin, one of three found in the chancel probably made for the priors of the nearby Benedictine Priory who were seemingly responsible for ordering the toppling of many Avebury megaliths

So much destroyed and lost and yet so much remains. Old symbols and ritual consumed and integrated in the new. Within a matter of yards of the great solstice temple of Avebury where the pagan rebirth of the sun was marked at winter Solstice, the Christianised version continues to be celebrated with Christmas, the birth of Jesus, the coming of the light. Meanwhile in death the easterly orientation favoured for the laying out of bodies in churchyards up and down the country merely replicates the alignments of many ancient burial chambers, facing the new dawn, the new beginning in the cycle of life.

*"And I rose up, and knew that I was tired and continued my journey"*

Epitath on Edward Thomas Memorial



There are a range of facilities in the Avebury area, including pubs, shops and accommodation. However at busy times of year it can be hard to find somewhere to stay close by. The Tourist Information Office in Avebury is now closed but the little shop in the village does have some details of local accommodation. It is open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 6pm on Saturday and 10.30 to 4.30pm on Sunday and has basic provisions.

The Red Lion pub situated within the henge is open every day serving meals and snacks throughout the day. The National Trust Circle Café is also open daily serving food and drinks. It is situated alongside the Alexander Keiller Museum which houses important collections from excavations in the Avebury area.

B&B is available at Manor Farm inside the stone circle. Prices from £90/room or £70 single occupancy, 01672 539294. Other accommodation near to Avebury includes 5 Trusloe Cottages, Avebury Trusloe which costs £80/ double or £45 /single room, 01672 539644; Isobel Cottage, Beckhampton, double rooms cost from £72.50, a single room £45, 01672 539534; Old Forge, East Kennett (close to the Sanctuary), rooms cost from £75/night, 01672 861686.

## **Travelling on from Avebury**



This guidebook concludes here although for some the journey eastward may continue along those most ancient byways, the Ridgeway and Icknield Way. Whether we will follow and produce another book to guide pilgrims along the next section of Mary/Michael Pilgrims Way, time will tell. At the very least there will be a prolonged pause before more is written.

At this point all I can do is advise of the public transport services from Avebury and wish all who have completed their own pilgrimage blessings in your ongoing journey.

*"Every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home."*

Matsuo Basho

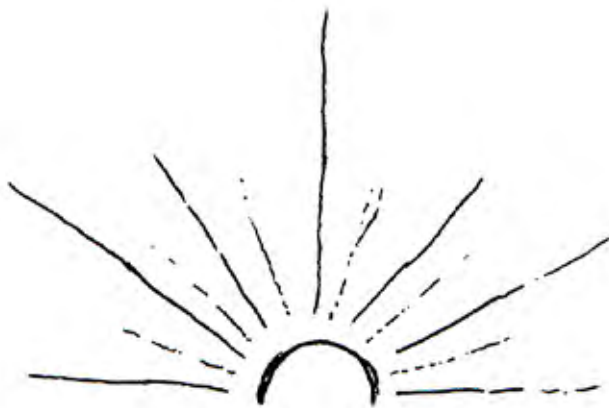
Avebury is linked to the railway stations at Trowbridge and Swindon by the 49 bus service, Swindon - Avebury - Devizes - Trowbridge. This is an hourly service Monday to Saturday. On Sundays and Bank Holidays it runs every 2 hours between Devizes - Avebury and Swindon only. Ring Traveline on 0871 200 22 33 for more information.

The Connect2 Wiltshire Line 4 runs between Calne and Marlborough via Avebury every day except Sundays and public holidays. On this service you need to book your seat by calling 08456 525255 and select option 1.

### **From 'A PASSIONATE MAN'S PILGRIMAGE'**

*GIVE me my scallop-shell of quiet,  
My staff of faith to walk upon,  
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,  
My bottle of salvation,  
My gown of glory, hope's true gage ;  
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.....*

Sir Walter Raleigh



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