



The Blackdown Hills Valleyheads Way

A 12 mile walk along Public Footpaths and quiet country lanes



This walk skirts the valleysides of the three rivers which define the Blackdown Hills – the Culm, the Otter and the Yarty. It offers a fascinating experience of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – one of the finest landscapes in England.

Use these notes in conjunction with the downloadable map of the route, also on the website.

Advice to walkers

The route will take the average walker around six hours to complete. It covers varying terrain, including some muddy and stony paths, and some steep ascents. Do not undertake it without good waterproof walking boots, warm, wet weather gear, and suitable refreshments.

Dogs should be kept under close control, and preferably on leads when walking across open farmland.

It is strongly recommended that walkers also use the OS 1:25,000 Explorer Map 128 (Taunton and Blackdown Hills) for reference, and this will also assist with finding return routes if only part of the Way is tackled.

The route is waymarked throughout and can be followed in either direction, but is described here from the Hemyock end.

Car parking: There is limited on-street parking in Hemyock - please park considerately. There is a public car park at Staple Hill.

Route description (For locations see numbers on map)

L = left, R = right, N, S, E, W = northwards etc

No. on map	Description
1	Start in Hemyock from the Victorian pump at junction of Fore St and High St. Sign at side of road directs you S up High St for 560m. Turn L shortly after Hemyock village sign along lane (signed No Through Road).
2	<i>After 300m, stile on L onto a Public Footpath provides short return walk back to Hemyock. Follow this down through fields to road near Culm Bridge, and turn L to return to village.</i>

3	½ mile from junction turn L onto Public Footpath, down through fields to Madford River. Cross footbridge, then minor road, and climb Lemons Hill. Cross another minor road and follow contour below hill and down wooded old lane, reaching large pond in trees below Lemons Hill Farm.
4 (1.75 miles)	Drop down to Kilbridge Bridge over Bolham River, and climb rough, tree-lined track up Ridgewood Hill, emerging into field. Veer up and L, to reach crossroads where 4 footpaths and a lane meet at Ridgewood Farm.
5	Take footpath running L, above trees, which runs along level edge of hill, emerging at viewpoint on brow of Ridgewood Hill.
6	Veer R around hill to reach Hemyock to Churchinford road, cross with care and follow short footpath across corner of field to lane at Wright's Cottage. Continue ahead on lane and turn L down another footpath on farm track.
7 (3.25 miles)	<p>50m down track take footpath to R, through pedestrian gate, across field and in front of a property called 'The Cottage' * to join lane. Follow lane downhill 200m and turn R along footpath below Carlingwark, turning R to rejoin road near Bolhayes Park. After 100m bear L at junction and follow road across River Culm at Clayhidon Mill Bridge.</p> <p><i>Second return route to Hemyock is available at this point, making 5 mile circular route. Stay on farm track and follow footpath N to reach Palmer's Farm. Turn L, and follow quiet road for 1 ½ miles back to village.</i></p>
8	Climb uphill for ½ mile before turning R, following signpost at roadside. Pass through Gollick Park farm, bearing R and up muddy old lane into woodland for 400m, turning L at junction of footpaths near top of Holmes Hill.
9	<p>After 300m, just beyond Cordwent's Farm turn sharp R at footpath junction. Continue due E across 2 large fields on plateau for 500m to reach Applehayes. Skirt farm buildings and cross Applehayes Lane.</p> <p><i>This is start of spur route to Half Moon Inn at Clayhidon. Instead of turning R, continue N for 50m before taking footpath off to L, through woodland and then fields for 500m to reach Clayhidon village.</i></p>
10 (5.5 miles)	<p>Drop across 1 field to enter woodland where path continues downhill for 300m to reach wooden footbridge across stream, a tributary of River Culm. This marks County boundary between Devon and Somerset, and is halfway point of route.</p> <p><i>Detour from here to Merry Harriers pub, 1 ½ miles away. Turn N along Willow Lane, stay R at road junction at Garlandhayes, continue for ¾ mile then turn R at Wiltown Cross, and continue for another ¾ mile to reach pub at Forches Corner.</i></p>
11	Path continues across Ringdown Nature Reserve, which is boggy in places. Head S then climb E up through Reserve, follow hedge boundaries of two fields to emerge at top of hill on Downlands Lane.

12	Turn R and follow lane for 200m. Turn L onto footpath which joins track through woodland, coming out onto farm track which after ½ mile leads up to Burnworthy Manor.
13	Path turns R to skirt buildings at Burnworthy, following main drive then branching off R in front of bungalow down old lane. Continue downhill to road just beyond stone bridge. Turn R and continue S along road to Churchstanton.
14 (8 miles)	Just beyond church, turn L (beside 'The Oaks') along footpath. Follow this E for 1 mile, along track through woodland, then running along S side of Trickey Warren airfield. After crossing large arable field path emerges onto road.
15	Cross this fast road with care, and follow short footpath past houses to emerge onto another (faster) road at T junction. Cross with care and continue E down minor road towards Otterford. After taking short cut across field, route emerges at Church Farm, next to church. <i>From Otterford Church there is a 1 ½ mile spur route to Churchinford village, where there is the York Inn and a shop. From church turn R and head E up steep hill 200m to Otterhead Lodge, then turn R downhill, through woodland and past Otterhead Lakes. Climb other side of valley to continue across fields, emerging on road just outside village</i>
16 (10 miles)	After church, path continues E along footpath at road corner, then climbs 3 fields before emerging at road junction at School Farm. Take great care crossing this fast main road.
17	Follow minor road opposite towards Fyfett, and after 500m road drops downhill and route turns onto footpath to R. Path then climbs steeply across 2 fields to emerge on lane.
18	Turn L here, then immediately R and follow Farm Lane uphill for ¾ mile. Just before reaching main road at top, turn R through pedestrian gate and along field boundary, to emerge opposite car park at Staple Hill. Take great care crossing fast road.
19	<i>Staple Hill car park gives access to the Herepath Trail, a 13.5 mile circular route through Neroche Forest and surrounding landscape, for walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers. For more details about the Herepath see separate download on www.nerochescheme.org</i>

Heritage features (For locations see letters on map)

A	Hemyock Hemyock is the largest village in the Blackdown Hills, with a population over 2000. The Castle dates from just after the Norman conquest. From the 1500s to the early 1800s much of the village's wealth came from the wool trade, and the village also housed the St Ivel factory until the 1990s.
B	Ridgewood Hill The viewpoint from the brow of Ridgewood Hill provides a wide vista across the

	Culm Valley, taking in Culmstock Beacon, built as part of a warning system to signal the arrival of the Spanish Armada, and the Wellington Monument, completed in 1854 in tribute to the Duke of Wellington's victory at the Battle of Waterloo.
C	Applehayes In the early 1900s Applehayes was owned by Harold Harrison, who hosted the Camden Town Artists Group, including Spencer Gore, Charles Ginner and Robert Bevan. Between 1909 and 1915 the group created works which captured a rural landscape unchanged for centuries. Many of these paintings are now held by the Tate and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.
D	Ringdown Nature Reserve Ringdown is a Somerset Wildlife Trust nature reserve. Much of the reserve is marshy, with colourful summer displays of orchids and Devil's-bit scabious. The old barn within the reserve was a subject in some of Robert Bevan's paintings created during his time at Applehayes. It was restored in 2009 with funding from the Neroche Scheme.
E	Burnworthy Manor Burnworthy Manor stands at the centre of a 1200 acre estate, owned by the Phillips family since 1923. The core of the manor house dates from 1270. In the 1920s the estate operated with 22 ground staff, two grooms and six house staff.
F	Churchstanton Church The Church of St Peter and St Paul at Churchstanton dates from the early-mid 14 th century. It was restored in 1719, and the west gallery was erected in 1830, with the rood screen added c1910. The pulpit is Jacobean and the font is Norman.
G	Culmhead Airfield RAF Culmhead was opened on 1st August 1941. It was occupied by No 2 Polish Fighter Wing and later by Czech units. Following D-Day Culmhead was used for training the first jet-engined aircraft in RAF service. Some of the surviving structures include aircraft control towers and two groups of pillboxes.
H	River Culm Just to the north of the route here, the River Culm rises at Culmhead. The Culm flows back down the Culm Valley to Culmstock, then to Uffculme and Cullompton, before joining the River Exe just outside Exeter.
J	Otterford Church The Church of St Leonard at Otterford dates from the 14 th century, restored with a nave wall rebuilt and north aisle added in 1860, and further restored in 1924. Inside is a tablet to William Brandon of Otterhead House.
K	Otterhead Lakes Otterhead estate was developed in the mid 19 th century by William Brandon, a Taunton surgeon, inventor and radical politician. The Estate was broken up in 1919 and purchased by Taunton Corporation in 1939 for use as a water catchment. The House was demolished in 1952. The Otterhead Estate Trust leases much of the land from Wessex Water and is conserving surviving heritage features.

L	River Otter The Otter rises in the willow woods above Otterhead Lakes, and flows south and west across the Blackdowns, past Honiton, to meet the sea at Budleigh Salterton.
M	Robin Hood's Butts There are 9 burial mounds in two groups on Brown Down, one here and one a mile to the S. Legend says that the barrows were used by Robin Hood and Little John to play quoits. Another tradition is that these mounds were created by giants throwing heaps of earth at each other.
N	The Yarty The route crosses the River Yarty, which rises ½ mile to the north on Yarty Moor. The Yarty runs south to join the Axe at Axminster.
P	Staple Hill and Neroche Forest Staple Hill forms part of the 1000ha Neroche public forest, managed by the Forestry Commission. The estate, which is open to public access, comprises a diverse mixture of ancient woodland, more recent conifer plantations, and a network of open space grazed by the Neroche herd of Longhorn cattle.



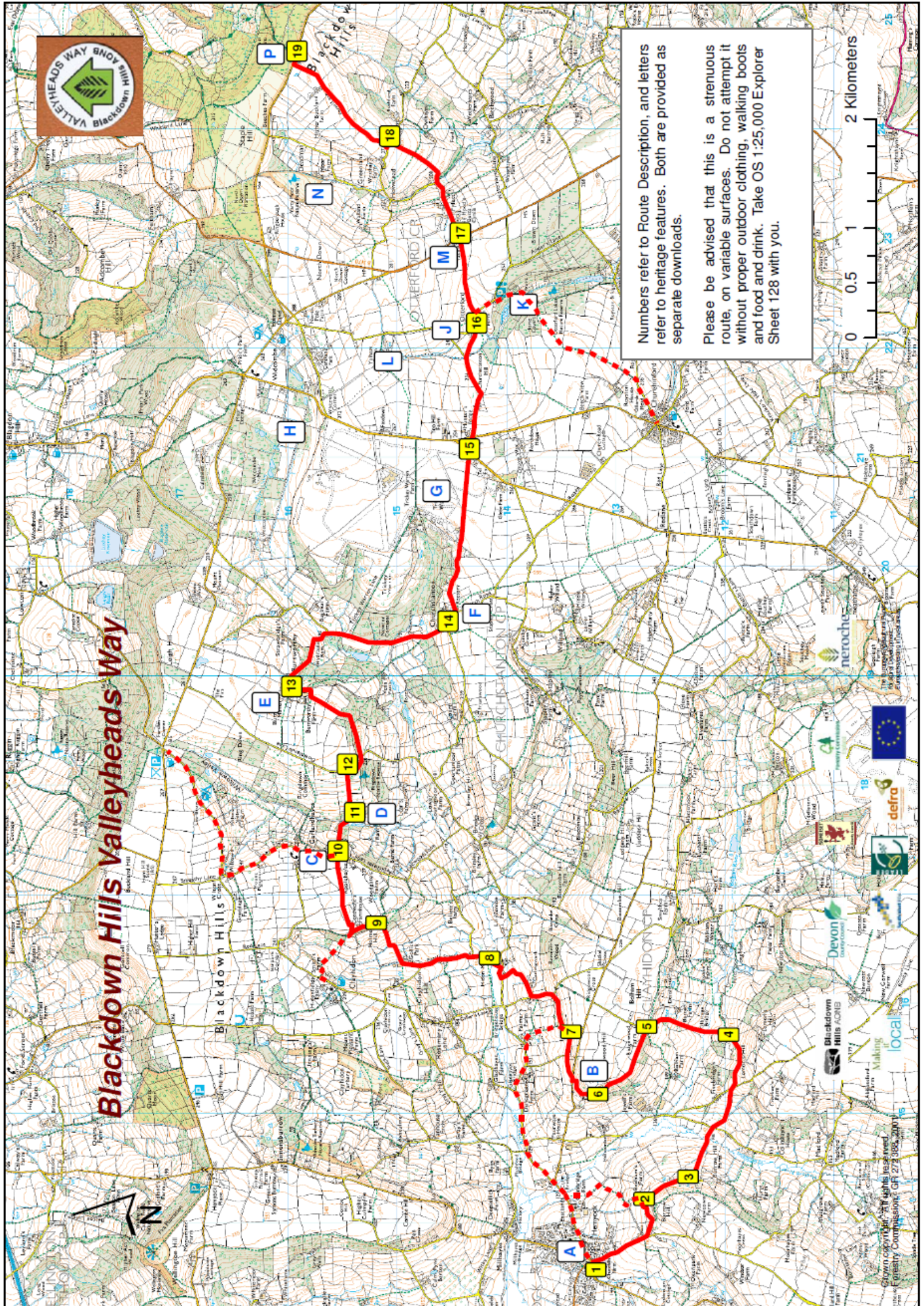
The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.

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Numbers refer to Route Description, and letters refer to heritage features. Both are provided as separate downloads.

Please be advised that this is a strenuous route, on variable surfaces. Do not attempt it without proper outdoor clothing, walking boots and food and drink. Take OS 1:25,000 Explorer Sheet 128 with you.



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