

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

VISITOR GUIDE



Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty




STEP BACK IN TIME

The landscape of steep hillsides with flatter land around provided our ancestors with good vantage points from which to protect their communities. We can see evidence of this at Culmstock Beacon, Castle Neroche, and the Iron Age hillforts at Hembury and Dumpdon.

A significant number of medieval buildings and distinctive field patterns tell of the area's medieval history. The Wellington Monument stands tall on the Blackdown Hills' northern ridge, a homage to the late, great Duke of Wellington. The estate of the former Otterhead House has been transformed into a nature reserve around the two remaining Otterhead Lakes.

The second world war has left a visible impact on the landscape too. Three airfields were constructed, Culmhead (Trickey Warren), Dunkeswell, and Upottery (Smeatharpe). As well as the runways, a wide range of structures survive at all three sites, including defensive pillboxes, aircraft dispersal pens, technical and domestic buildings.

 www.blackdownhills.org.uk/history

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

On the map overleaf, you'll find the main roads to (and through) the Blackdown Hills - and nearby train stations. There are a few bus services through the Blackdown Hills AONB but they are limited, so see our website for advice.

 www.blackdownhills.org.uk/travel


CYCLING

Route 33 of the National Cycle Network skirts the eastern border of the Blackdown Hills AONB. This area offers excellent on-road cycling for experienced riders, mainly on quiet country lanes. See our website for routes.

 www.blackdownhills.org.uk/cycling

HORSE RIDING

Blackdown Hills AONB is a great place for horse riding. Explore ancient woodland, river valleys, commons and pastures. See our website for horse-riding route ideas.

 www.blackdownhills.org.uk/riding

BLACKDOWN HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB)

Just a stone's throw from Taunton, Wellington, Honiton, Axminster and Chard, this is a tranquil, relatively isolated place – perfect if you like to get off the beaten track.

The unique geology of the Blackdown Hills – its steep ridges, high plateaux and deep river valleys – create a remarkably diverse landscape that spans just 15 miles. Villages, hamlets and small farms are tucked away amongst an intricate patchwork of ancient pastures and meadows, winding lanes and high hedge-banks.

A KALEIDOSCOPE OF COLOUR

Feast your eyes on the imposing, deep-blue northern ridge, the cheerful rainbow of springtime flowers and summer meadows, and majestic oaks silhouetted against rich pink sunsets.

HEATHLAND

Curllews, nightjars and adders make their home in the heathland areas of the Blackdown Hills. In late summer you can see the purple hues of heather as it comes into flower.

WOODLAND WONDERLAND

Well-connected woodlands, copses and hedgerows provide habitats for hazel dormice and a variety of bats. Woods are fabulous places for us to unwind too. Enjoy bluebells in the springtime and vibrant autumn colour.

GO WITH THE FLOW

Clear streams meander through the valleys, flowing into the Culm, Otter and Yarty rivers, all of which have their source in the Blackdown Hills. These provide habitat for otters, dippers and the endangered white-clawed crayfish.

BRING YOUR WELLIES!

Continually flowing springs, deep quaking bogs and permanently wet soils provide excellent conditions for fritillary butterflies and plants including rare orchids and sundews – but it can get muddy underfoot!



SETTING OFF FROM...

Here are some suggestions of places you could visit that aren't too far from home. See the map overleaf for more details of the places mentioned.

TAUNTON

The Neroche Forest is a fabulous place for a family adventure or a woodland wander – try Staple Hill Easy Access Trail or Castle Neroche. Looking for a place to take a breather? Try Otterhead Lakes Nature Reserve.

WELLINGTON

Wellington Monument is only two miles from Wellington town centre and there are footpaths all the way. Head over to Culmstock to enjoy a delightful walk along the River Culm. If you're feeling more adventurous, take a walk through Sampford and Black Down Common over to Culmstock Beacon where you can enjoy stunning views across the Blackdown Hills.

HONITON

Challenge your family or friends to a hillfort hike! Even if you don't make the climb there some beautiful views of Hembury and Dumpdon Hillforts from the countryside around Honiton. At Dunkswell or Upottery you can delve into second world war history at one of the Airfield Heritage Centres. Explore Honiton Bottom Community Nature Reserve without even leaving town!

AXMINSTER

Tucked away between the villages of Dalwood and Kilmington you'll find Loughwood Meeting House, a delightful 17th century Baptist chapel. Burrow Farm Gardens are also just a stone's throw away. If you're interested in wildlife, pull on your wellies and head on over to Stockland Turbaries.

CHARD

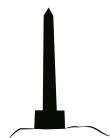
Close to Chard you'll find plenty of opportunities to enjoy the countryside. Pick up a Chardstock Wildlife Trails leaflet to find routes around the village or head on over to Ferne Animal Sanctuary to explore the nature trail and wildlife ponds.



WELLINGTON MONUMENT MEANDER



Grid Reference: ST142167 | Nearest postcode: TA21 9PA



This striking monument stands as a tribute to the Duke of Wellington and his victory at the Battle of Waterloo. It is surrounded by a wildlife rich meadow – a perfect place for a picnic or to fly a kite.

EASY: 1 MILE (1.6KM) - - - -

From the car park to the Monument and back, along the level pathway lined with beech hedgerows.

SLIGHTLY MORE CHALLENGING: 2 MILES (3.2 KM) - - - -

At the Monument, take the steps down to the right, loop round anti-clockwise through the woods, and climb the steep slope back up.

WALK FROM WELLINGTON TOWN - - - -

Footpaths from Wellington town centre will take you all the way to the Monument via Wellington Castle Fields, a Somerset Wildlife Trust nature reserve. Please take care as you cross the A38.



LOOKING FOR A LONGER WALK?

How about a walk through Blackdown Common to Culmstock Beacon?

STAPLE HILL EASY ACCESS TRAIL



Grid Reference: ST247160 | Nearest postcode: TA20 3RA
Loop walk: just over $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile (1km)

This is the highest point in the Blackdown Hills. From here you can see spectacular views across the Vale of Taunton – on a clear day you can see all the way to Wales!

As the name suggests, Staple Hill Easy Access Trail allows everyone, including those with limited mobility, to enjoy some of the beautiful countryside area has to offer. The kissing gates are big enough for wheelchairs and pushchairs, there is a wide, compacted pathway with no steep gradients and the viewpoints have picnic benches and seating.

Staple Hill is part of the Forestry England woodlands and one of the points on the Staple Fitzpaine Herepath.



NEARBY WOODLAND

The woodland at Castle Neroche is great fun for your family to explore – including your four-legged friends! Peek through the trees for spectacular views.

OTTERHEAD LAKES



Grid Reference: ST224140 | Nearest postcode: TA3 7EF

Loop walk: Approx 1 mile (1.6km)

A beautiful nature reserve on the site of a former Victorian estate. This circular walk will take you around the various semi-natural habitats including wet woodland, dry deciduous woodland, grassland, and freshwater streams.

Dormice, badgers and bat species live in the woodland. The lakes and streams support otters and birds including kingfishers, dippers and wagtails. There are signs that beavers may be making use of the reserve too!

Birds nest on the ground here – please keep your dog on a lead.

The route is mostly flat, although there is a gradual slope from the car park down to the lakes and a steep section of a few metres half-way round. Bear in mind that some of the pathways are a little bumpy and, at times, can get quite muddy.

OTHER SITES FOR WILDLIFE

The Blackdown Hills has an exceptionally diverse range of habitats which makes it particularly fascinating for nature spotters.

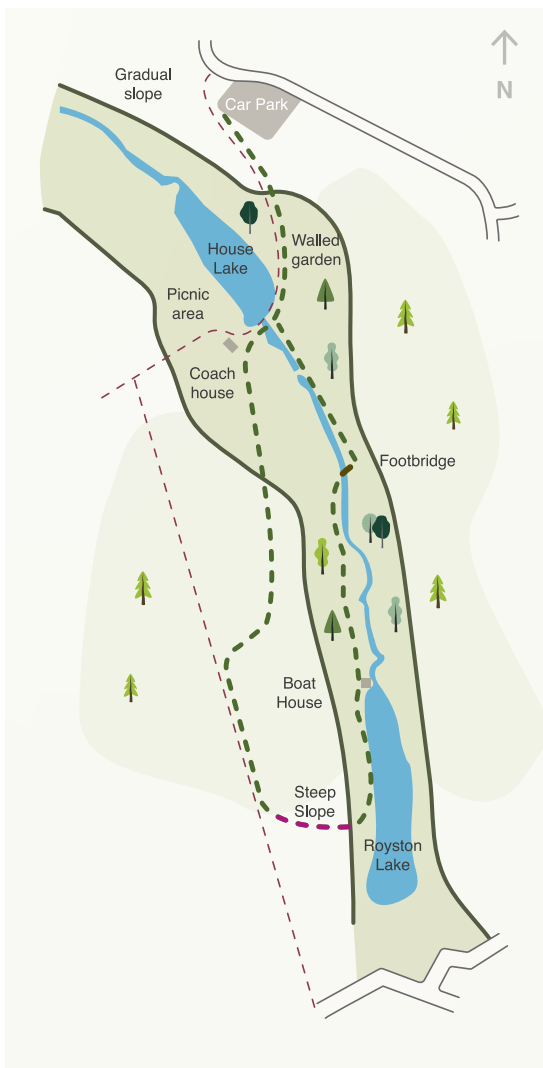
For a list of wildlife sites in the Blackdown Hills, along with details of the species found there visit

www.blackdownhills.org.uk/wildlife

MORE WALKS ONLINE

In this guide we've included just a few simple walks to get you started but our website has dozens of walks for you to enjoy. Visit

www.blackdownhills.org.uk/walks for details.





PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK*

- 1. Aviator Coffee Bar and Restaurant, Dunkeswell
- 2. Braziers Café, Coldharbour Mill
- 3. Broadhembury Tea Room
- 4. Burrow Farm Gardens Tearoom
- 5. Candlelight Inn, Bishopswood
- 6. Catherine Wheel, Hemyock
- 7. Churchinford & District Community Coffee Shop
- 8. Common Loaf Bakery and Tearoom
- 9. Cotleigh Inn, Wembrook
- 10. Culm Valley Inn, Culmstock
- 11. Drewe Arms Inn, Broadhembury
- 12. Eagle Tavern, near Buckland St Mary
- 13. Flintlock Inn, Marsh
- 14. George Inn, Chardstock
- 15. Grazing Cow café, Offwell
- 16. Greyhound Inn, Staple Fitzpaine
- 17. Home Farm hotel and restaurant, Wilmington
- 18. Half Moon Inn, Clayhidon
- 19. Holman Clavel, Culmhead
- 20. Kings Arms Inn, Stockland
- 21. Lamb and Flag, Blagdon Hill
- 22. Otter Valley Ice Cream and Field Kitchen
- 23. Route 303 American Diner
- 24. Royal Oak Farm Tea Rooms, Cotleigh
- 25. Sidmouth Arms, Upottery
- 26. Strand Stores café, Culmstock
- 27. Tuckers Arms, Dalwood
- 28. Viceroy Tawa
- 29. White Hart, Corfe
- 30. Yarcombe Inn
- 31. York Inn, Churchinford

*Before visiting, we recommend that you check details, reviews and opening times online. Inclusion in this guide does not constitute an endorsement by Blackdown Hills AONB.

PLACES TO SEE

This is just a selection of the great places to visit in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Some of these locations are off the beaten track with limited parking and access; others are much more accessible with plenty of facilities. So, we strongly advise you to read more detail online before you set off. You can find out more about these and other places to visit on our website: www.blackdownhills.org.uk/places

A. BISHOPSWOOD MEADOWS

Somerset Wildlife Trust nature reserve. Lime-rich grassland, marshy meadows and the River Yarty. Attracts an interesting range of species.

B. BLACKBOROUGH WOOD

Blackborough Wood was one of the places where whetstones, used for sharpening tools, were mined from the 17th to the 19th century. Remains of the old pits are still visible along the footpath running above the village.

C. BURROW FARM GARDENS

These beautiful landscaped gardens, extending to nearly thirteen acres feature superb views of the surrounding countryside – a fitting backdrop to the spacious lawns, lush borders and unusual shrubs and trees.

D. CASTLE NEROCHE

A majestic forest, managed by Forestry England, including the earthen ramparts where an Iron-Age hillfort and a Norman Castle once stood.

E. CHARDSTOCK

Explore wildlife trails around the village of Chardstock – pick up a leaflet or visit our website for details.

F. COLDHARBOUR MILL

Relive the sights and sounds of the industrial revolution and see traditional textile techniques at one of the UK's oldest woollen mills.

G. COMBE WOOD

This tiny wood is less than a mile from Honiton town centre towards Combe Raleigh – a great place to escape the bustle and enjoy a tranquil woodland walk.

H. CULMSTOCK AND THE RIVER CULM

From the village of Culmstock you can enjoy a stroll along the River Culm, home to the endangered white-clawed crayfish. Bring a picnic or enjoy lunch at one of the local eateries.

I. CULMSTOCK BEACON

Culmstock Beacon was used in Elizabethan times for lighting fires to warn of advancing enemies. Great views, particularly in late summer when the heather is in bloom.

J. DUMPDON HILLFORT

The climb up to this impressive Iron Age hillfort is well worth the effort – you'll be rewarded with spectacular views across the Blackdown Hills.

K. DUNKESWELL ABBEY

Close to the Madford River and the village of Dunkeswell are the remains of one of Devon's major Cistercian monasteries, founded in 1201. While you can view it from a public footpath, part of the Abbey site is on private land, so please check access details on our website before you visit.

L. DUNKESWELL AIRFIELD AND HERITAGE CENTRE

Discover the history of this second world war RAF base at Dunkeswell Airfield Heritage Centre (open Easter to October). At Dunkeswell you can watch the aeroplanes and parachutists, or even book your own sky dive for a birds-eye view of the Blackdown Hills!

M. FERNE ANIMAL SANCTUARY

Say hello to an ever-changing menagerie of animals, including dogs, cats, horses, pigs, goats, sheep and rabbits, and explore the nature trail and wildlife ponds.

N. HEMBURY HILLFORT

The finest prehistoric hillfort in Devon, with massive defensive ramparts and impressive woodland. It's an excellent site to introduce children to life in the Iron Age. Educational materials are available on our website.

O. HEMYOCK CASTLE

The remains of a rare, moated, late 14th-century castle surrounding a much older manor house. This privately-owned residential site is usually opened to the public on Bank Holiday Mondays between Easter and September.

P. LOUGHWOOD MEETING HOUSE, DALWOOD

Now owned by the National Trust, Loughwood is one of the earliest surviving Baptist churches in the UK. Founded in secret during a time of great persecution towards non-conformists, it has remained virtually unchanged since the 18th century.

Q. OTTERHEAD LAKES

A beautiful nature reserve on the site of a former Victorian estate. The lakes and woodland, once part of a formal garden, now provide a range of habitats for wild birds, animals and plants.

R. QUANTS NATURE RESERVE

Well known for its butterflies and bats, roe deer, badgers and adders are also found here. Ancient woodland and lime-rich grassland provide habitat for a range of native wildflowers. Managed by Butterfly Conservation, Forestry England and Somerset Wildlife Trust.

S. RINGDOWN NATURE RESERVE & CLAYHIDON TURBARY

It is easy to see how the countryside around Clayhidon and Ringdown inspired the Camden Town Artists. Their colourful post-impressionist paintings pay homage to an idyllic rural scene just before the first world war. At Ringdown Nature Reserve you'll find a mixture of habitats, including exceptionally species-rich wet heath and springline mire. Managed by Somerset and Devon Wildlife Trusts respectively.

T. SOUTHEY AND GOTLEIGH MOORS

One of the best examples of valley mire in the Blackdown Hills AONB at the headwaters of the River Culm and Bolham River.

U. STAPLE HILL EASY ACCESS TRAIL

The highest point in the Blackdown Hills, with a short, accessible trail to follow, a place to picnic with fantastic views.

V. STOCKLAND TURBARTIES

A rich range of plants and animals, some nationally rare, make their home in the mix of wet heath, bog and woodland of Stockland Turbaries. The land is privately owned but there is some access via public footpaths.

W. THURLBEAR WOOD

Walk the woodland paths dotted with colourful flowers, such as spotted orchids, wild dog violets, bluebells and primroses. This ancient woodland takes in part of the circular Neroche Herepath. Part of it is a Somerset Wildlife Trust nature reserve.

X. UPOTTERY AIRFIELD HERITAGE CENTRE

The Upottery Airfield Heritage Centre documents the major role the airfield (also known as Smeatharpe) played during the D-day operations.

Y. WELLINGTON MONUMENT

At 175 feet, Wellington Monument is the tallest three-sided obelisk in the world! Cared for by the National Trust, the Monument pays tribute the Duke of Wellington and his victory at the Battle of Waterloo. A great spot for kite flying, walks and picnics.

Z. WOLFORD CHAPEL

Donated to the people of Ontario in 1966, Wolford Chapel is the burial place of John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. Its interior has many fine examples of Jacobean workmanship.

WILDLIFE

VIEWS

CAR PARK

HERITAGE

EASY ACCESS

LEAVE NO TRACE

We are sure you'll love your visit as much as we love the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Please leave it just as you found it – outstandingly beautiful!

- Be a responsible tourist and follow the Countryside Code
- Follow the footpaths unless wider access is available
- Leave gates and property as you found them
- Keep dogs on leads around livestock and areas where there may be ground-nesting birds
- Take litter home with you

For your own safety and enjoyment, please wear appropriate clothing and footwear, take care on steep or slippery paths and pay attention to any signage in the places you visit.

Advice and information to help you get the best from your visit:
www.blackdownhills.org.uk/visit

HOW TO CONTACT US...

Blackdown Hills AONB
01823 680 681

Email: blackdownhills@devon.gov.uk

WWW.BLACKDOWNHILLS.ORG.UK



Landscapes
for life
.org.uk

BLACKDOWN
HILLS
One of the
AONB Family



Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Blackdown Hills is one of 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These are nationally important protected landscapes, each with their own special characteristics.

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is funded by Defra, Devon and Somerset County Councils, as well as East Devon, Mid Devon, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset District Councils.

Photo credits. Cover: Liam Marsh. Other photos by Kate West, Jilly Ould, James Maben, Liam Marsh and Rob Jones. Artwork by children from Buckland St Mary and Membury schools.