

MENDIP RING LEG 3. FIRST SECTION. SUTTON TO BATCOMBE. 7 MILES.

Start Point Grid Ref. ST633341

1 From the start point walk out to cross the A371 and follow the track signed to East Hill Dairy Unit, when you reach the end of the concrete track keep straight ahead through a gate onto a dirt track taking you out to a road, turn right then just after Wyke Farm on the left look for and cross a stile, aim half right up the hill to the telegraph post then aim for the hedge at the top of the field where you will find a well hidden stile, once over this aim half left for the dogleg in the hedge on the far side of the field where you will cross a stile onto a lane. Turn left down the lane, when you reach a sharp bend to your left turn right by the cottage and follow the bridleway up to the top of Lamyatt Beacon.

2 On leaving the Beacon do not follow the path into the woods but drop down to a bridlegate to follow the edge of the wood now on your left, to pass through another gate, turn right down the field to exit onto a road via a bridlegate. Cross over the road through the gate and follow the bridleway round the top of the hill. When you can see a large gap in the hedge at the bottom of the hill start to make your way down towards it, a little to the right you will see a stone track through the hedge go through this and up the slope to pass through a gate onto a metalled drive, turn right and on reaching a gate on your left go through this then straight ahead through the remains of a hedge to turn left up the hill. At the top turn right and follow the hedge to pass through a gate with a sign telling you to watch out for the Rabbits! Now follow the path across this field to reach Snakelake Lane, turn right and at the bottom of the hill turn left into Whaddon Wood. Follow the path through the wood to reach a stile at the end then follow the stream on your left to cross a bridge after which you turn right and walk up through the farm yard. At the end of the barns turn left, pass the cottages and follow the drive up to the road.

3 Turn right then left over the stile follow the hedge across the field to another road turn right and take the left hand fork. Proceed down the hill and you will see a path on your right take this and work your way down the hill through a gate, aim for the church this will take you into a track at the bottom of the field, go over the stile round to the left then follow the lane on your right up the hill to reach the road, turn right to reach Batcombe Church.

Points of Historical Interest

SECTION 1

East Hill Lane is an old drove road and a continuation of the track through from Wake's Covert in Leg 2. The large cream coloured building at 1.00 o'clock at the end of the valley is Sunny Hill Independent School for Girls on the edge of Bruton.

East Hill is approximately the western edge of the ancient Forest of Selwood. The Celts called it *Coit Maur* - the Great Wood - and so it was. In the east it spread from beyond Frome down to Gillingham with other woodland stretching out to Devizes. To the north it reached Malmesbury 40 miles away and in the west its edges were on the rim of the marshes. It has been suggested that the Fosse Way followed, at a distance, the western edge of the woodland. This great forest remained a formidable barrier to travellers until quite recent times, not least because of the outlaws who hid out there. In 894 the Saxon Bishop Asser calls the forest *Selwudu*. Further along, this walk passes into the area that became the Royal Forest.

In this immediate area on East Hill there was woodland called Fairwood, which was part of Wyke Manor. It had probably been converted to arable by the end of the 16th century.

In the area around the track and stream crossing at OS 651 347, there was an Anglo Saxon settlement. In 1308 it is recorded as Wykmanstyle.

The Dismantled Railway marked by posts on either side of the track was part of the Somerset and Dorset Line, known locally and possibly unfairly as the Slow and Dirty. This section was between Evercreech Junction to the north and Bruton to the south. There was a halt at Wyke Champflower. The line was closed in 1966.

Wyke Farms is a long established family cheese making business based at Wyke Champflower. They are the biggest independent cheddar cheese maker in England and export across the world. The name of the village derives from Luke le Champflower, the 12th century Norman French landowner.

A step aside moment

The Wyke Farms Shop is at White House Farm about three hundred yards along the road after the exit from Easthill Lane. It is identifiable by the silos and is open every day.

In the field above Hill House Farm are earthworks including house platforms and field boundaries. This may be an early village of Wyke Champflower.

The word Creech is from the celtic *criic* meaning hill. Some of the villages visible from Lamyatt Beacon started life as wattle and daub mission huts established in the forest by St Aldhelm during his perambulations in the late 7th century.

To the east, on Selwood Ridge is Alfred's Tower. Completed in 1772 by Henry Flitcroft, for Henry Hoare of the banking family, it commemorates King Alfred's victory over the Danish invaders in 879. It is triangular, 131 feet high and carries a statue of Alfred under a canopy with an inscription. It was damaged in 1944 when an American aircraft crashed into it killing the crew. The tower has been recently restored.

To the south is Bruton on the River Brue. Just visible is the church tower of St Mary the Virgin, founded by St Aldhelm. Also of special interest are a 15th century packhorse bridge, a medieval dovecote (Leg 7) and Sexey's Hospital established in 1638. The Priory of Austin Canons, founded in 1142 and surrendered at the Dissolution, was a major landowner in the area. Bruton has a Tourist Information Office and a Museum

SECTION 2

The Beacon area itself has been consistently associated with many strange beasts and ghosts, in particular a huge black dog.

At the top of the hill is the site of a Roman Temple. It is in a clearing in an Ash wood and has no surface features except a slight undulation. Despite being a Scheduled Monument, a radio mast has recently been erected on part of the site.

There are a number of beacon sites on the hills around Mendip, for example Beacon Hill above Shepton Mallet and Beacon Batch on the Mendip Hills (Leg 8). They linked lines of similar sites to the east and west. The firing of the beacons was more than a general alarm; they could only be lit on the order of a Justice of the Peace and were the signal for a prearranged series of troop movements. During the reign of Elizabeth I these defence measures remained constantly at the ready until after the defeat of the Armada. They were lit again in 1988 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of that event.

There was a Home Guard Auxiliary unit based at the Beacon in WWII.

At the B3081, the area down to Milton Cleveland was, in 1256, covered by 300 acres of woodland known as Ridgewood. In 1905 the woodland was still recorded as covering 276 acres.

There was at one time a mill on the brook near Green's Combe Farm. The farm is an early 17th century building, remodelled in the 19th century.

By Combe Brook the fields display the medieval terracing for agriculture known as strip lynchets, with field boundaries that lead down towards Bruton.

At the entry into Snakelake Hill there was a toll bar in the mid 18th century, when this road was turnpiked by the Bruton Trust from Bruton to Batcombe and beyond. Snakelake Hill is a Hollow Way in places 20 feet deep, which given the academic criteria of a hundred years for every two inches of wear, suggests a possible usage of 1200 years. As the walk route turns left and into a copse with a small stream on the right, there was a manmade pond. The shape is still just visible. The pond was used by the Priors of Bruton for raising eels, hence the name Snake Lake. The present footpath was the original roadway into Henley Grove Farm.

Henley Grove Farm dates from about 1800. The chapel like building ahead in the farmyard has the initials of the builder, John Harding, and the date 1802 over the door. The Tithe map of 1838 shows a large area of woodland called Henley Wood which ran from the farm, up the hillside to the top of Cuckoo Hill. It was part of the Bruton Priory estate before the Dissolution and later belonged to the Berkeley family (Leg 4). Henley Wood had been cleared by 1884.

SECTION 3

Copplesbury (Cobblesbury) Lane. A guide to local place names says that words ending in 'bury' mean either a hill from the celtic word '*beorg*', or a fort from '*byrig*', or both. So, it is suggested, that Copplesbury could mean a hill fort, coupled with the name of a local chieftain.

Ahead towards Batcombe Cranmore Tower, flanked by two BT masts, is on the horizon. The tower is an Italianate folly some 306 ft high and built in 1865, following a fashionable trend, by a member of the Paget family from nearby Cranmore Hall. The Hall is now All Hallows Independent School. The Tower was used by the Home Guard and the Royal Corps of Signals during WWII. It stands on Pen Hill which is said to be the most easterly of the Mendip Hills.

Batcombe is almost entirely a Conservation Area. There is a Somerset Vernacular Buildings Research Group publication on the village.

In the 14th century this was an important wool producing area; the mills specialising in fine cloth and stockings. There are still several clothiers' houses of the 15th to 17th centuries here. The Old Cider House in Kale Street is a Listed Building now considered to be At Risk.

St Mary's church was built in 1540 on the site of an earlier building. On the tower is the badge of the Earls of Arundel (Leg 4). There is a history of the church in the church. In the churchyard is a Yew Tree described as Ancient and Venerable in the Tree Register of the British Isles. The Wesleyan Methodist chapel built in 1861 is now a private house.