

MENDIP RING LEG 3. SECOND SECTION. BATCOMBE TO DEERWOOD COMMON. 7.3 MILES.

Start Point Grid Ref. ST690 390

1 Take the kissing gate opposite the church into the field and over the style ahead. Walk down through the field to the style at the bottom by the derelict brick building. Cross the stream and turn right down the road. Take the first road on the left (Seat Lane) and walk about 0.5 miles up to the path on the right at ST 698 383. Just before the bend.. Continue through the fields over 4 styles and then cross the A359

2 Walk down the lane opposite and take the left fork down Hassock's Lane. Continue on toward Float Bridge and just before you get to the bridge take the lane on your left ST 717 377. About 200 yds down the lane take the next path on your right over a style and into the field. Cross over the style and plank bridge at the other side of the field and then turn left. Do not go through the gate but continue around the field edge. Cross the style in the top right hand corner over another style and then go diagonally across the next field to a field gate in the top corner. Continue until you come to a field gate on to the road. Turn right and pass the sewage works cross the bridge over the railway line and pass the entrance to Downs Farm. Continue down the lane until come to a fork about 300yds past Bungalow Farm. Take the left hand lane that leads into Canwood Lane.

3 Follow this lane the pass through a wood. Eventually you will come to a lane. Turn left up the lane to climb Drury Hill. Take the path into the woods just before the green grit bin. Pass through the woods until you come to the road. Turn right and walk up the hill. Do not take the McMillan Way on your left but continue up the hill and take the path on your left by the lodge. Pass through two gates into the wood. Keep on the top path through the woods to end at Deerwood car park.

Points of Historical Interest

SECTION 1

Sait Farm, also called Seat House, is pre-1700 and Grade II Listed. The Bisse Arms mounted on the house are those of the notable local family associated with Batcombe between 1524 and 1613.

At the top of Seat Hill, Brent Knoll?? is visible some 15 miles to the west. To the east is the White Horse at Westbury in Wiltshire. This is an 18th century replacement for an earlier horse. Beyond is the smooth bump of Cley Hill. 784 ft tall and on the outskirts of Warminster, it is a chalk outcrop on the western edge of Salisbury Plain. This landmark will be visible for most of the next two Legs of the walk.

SECTION 2

The A359 Bruton to Frome road is on a trackway described, even in medieval times, as an Old Way. It was turnpiked by the Bruton Trust in 1810.

The western edge of the Royal Forest of Selwood is at about this point. These were woodlands where hunting was specifically vested in the Crown or some grantee of the Crown, with appropriately severe punishments for anyone caught trespassing or poaching. Some of the boundaries are still marked by places such as Hardway Gate, Yarnfield Gate and Forest Gate. The last still actually had a gate in the 18th century.

Upton Noble was Opetone at Doomsday. The name of the landowner, John Le Noble had been added by the late 13th century. Later the lands belonged to the Priory of St Radegund at Longleat and so passed in the 16th century to the Thynne family. The medieval church, named for St Margaret became St Mary Magdalen after the Reformation. The Wesleyan Chapel was built in 1818. It closed in 1995.

The Pound, originally for stray livestock, has been made into a small commemorative garden for the Silver Jubilees of King George V and Queen Elizabeth II.

There is a short history of the village and the church on sale in the church.

Strap Lane. This name is believed to derive from 'Estropp' which was the medieval name for a group of outlying farms stretching as far as North Brewham to the east or 'Est' of the manor of Bruton. *In the will of Richard of Bruton in 1417, there is money left to repair the way from the 'house of the sheepfold', now possibly Sheephouse Farm, 'belonging to the Prior of Bruton to Esthropp and beyond'.*

The railway bridge here passes over the Great Western line between Frome and Castle Cary. There was a Strap Lane Halt here until the 1930's.

SECTION 3

Cannwood Lane. At a spot near Bungalow Farm, where Cannwood Lane crosses the boundary into Witham Friary, there was once the entrance to the King's Park and the Royal Hunting Lodge of Brucomb, *traditionally associated with King John and now represented by Brewham Lodge Farm*

to the southeast. This spot on Cannwood Lane was also the entrance to the Carthusian Monastery enclosure and lands at Witham, of which more later.

Cannwood Farm has also been called Cannwood House. In the Royal Forest perambulation of 1276 there is mention of 'the house of Gilbert of Northfolke (possibly a member of the Arundel family) which is within the Forest'. Research suggests this is where the farm now stands, but the name Cannwood itself is not mentioned before 1550. At the disafforestation, it was granted to the Berkeley family. The present house, which is privately owned, is Grade II Listed and dated 1760.

The source of the River Brue is in this area and is variously described as in the fields on the right hand side of the track beyond Cannwood Farm, just where the land starts to rise, or two miles north of South Brewham in Kings Wood. The River Frome rises here at Cannwood and flows down through Witham.

There is an archaeological site recorded as Druley Deserted Medieval Village in the open fields on the left.

The curve of the road at Druley Hill is new; the track originally ran behind Druley Farm. The farm itself was, at about 1900, an inn called The Beckwith Arms.

The word 'druley' may derive from the celtic word *drewyth*, meaning Oak Man. The word 'druid' is from the same source.

From Yarnfield Gate the walk is on the Huntersway, a very old track which ran through the Royal Forest from Kingsettle Hill, now the site of Alfred's Tower, to Timbers Hill (Leg 4) near Corsley. By the 18th century parts of the Huntersway had become the eastern edge of the forest. At Yarnfield Gate the land on the south of the track belonged, and still does belong, to the Duke of Somerset.

On the Huntersway above Witham Park Farm and looking north, it is possible to see the site of the Carthusian monastery. A railway line now runs through the middle of the site, so a passing train may help to identify it.

The monastery was founded by Henry II in 1179 as part of his penance from the Pope following the murder of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury. An austere order, the Carthusians led lives of prayer and meditation. The most notable Abbot was St Hugh of Avalon, who became the Bishop of Lincoln. It was said that he returned every year in retreat, to the austerity of the settlement in the forest. The monastery was dispersed at the Dissolution in 1539.

In the foreground on the left of the track is a small wood called Pound Copse. A Tiger Moth airplane from RAF Abingdon crashed here on 8th April 1942 killing one of the crew.

In the background at 1 o'clock is Marston House.

The Marston estate was bought in 1641 by Richard Boyle, the Earl of Cork, an Anglo Irish title that later became Cork and Orrery. *The original design for the house was by the Elizabethan architect, John Smythson. The centre block with its recessed front represents this house. It was updated in 1751 and again in 1776 when the 7th Earl added the East and West wings. In the mid 19th century the 9th Earl went for a major rebuild turning the house back to front with a new entrance to the south. At the same time the West Wing was rebuilt to include a ballroom, a terrace and a conservatory.*

In 1905 it was sold by the 10th Earl to the Bonham Christie family.

The Army requisitioned the house for the Coldstream Guards during WWII and, as with other stately homes, it was badly damaged by that occupation. Almost derelict in 1984 it was bought by the quarry company Foster Yeoman Ltd as its headquarters. The house has now been sensitively restored.

Stone has been quarried on the Mendips for centuries. In many places where maps show a quarry, the stone will almost always have been for immediate local use. It was not until the coming of the railways in the 1850's, that large scale extraction and distribution became possible, particularly for the growth markets of south east England. Most of the industry is now in this eastern part of Mendip between Frome and Shepton Mallet.

If Marston House is not clearly visible from this point, it can be seen from the grounds of St Michael's church, Gaer Hill at the beginning of the next Leg.