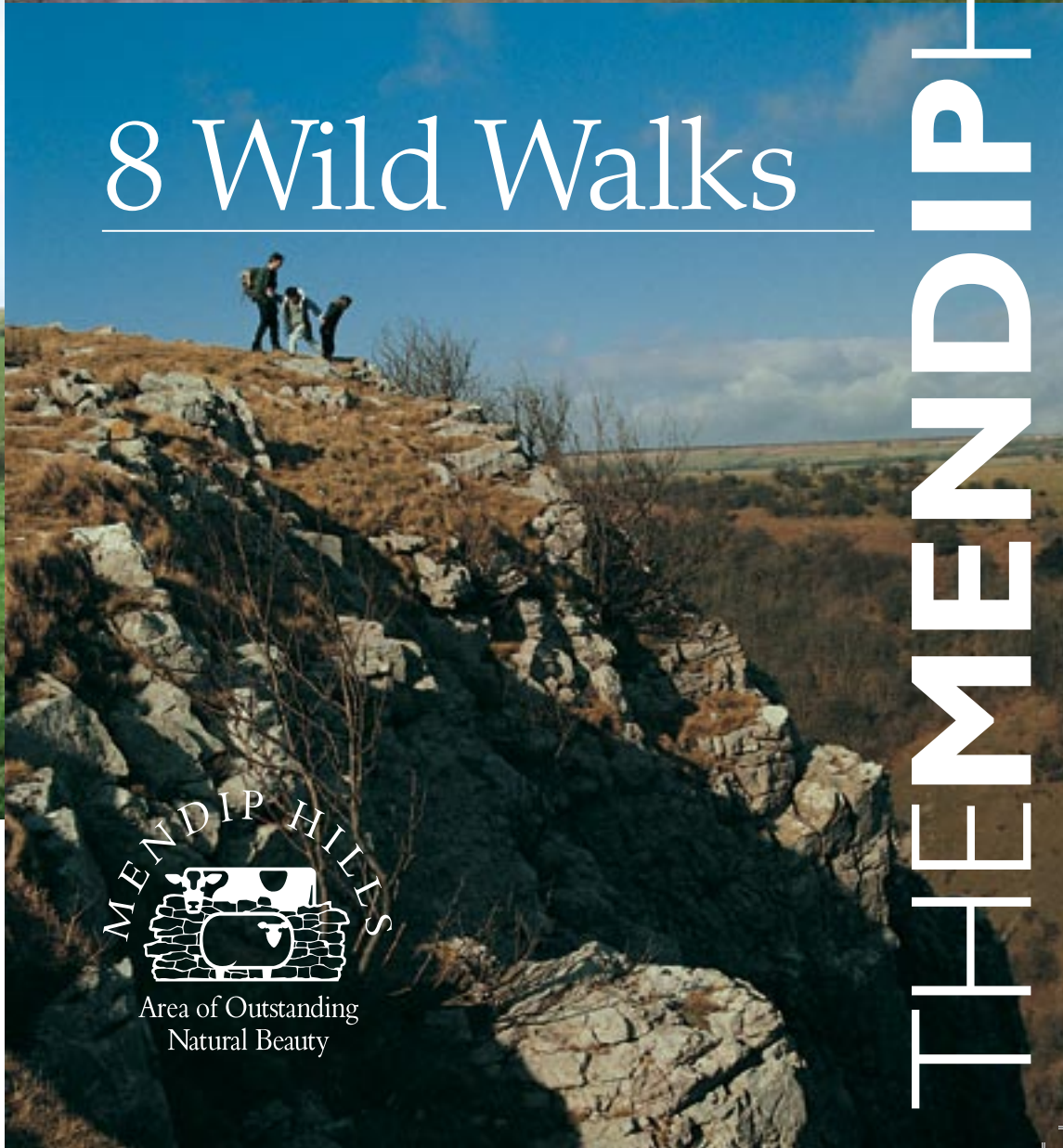




8 Wild Walks



- *Explore the Mendip Hills – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*
- *Eight themed walks, each with fascinating background information*
- *Clear, easy-to-follow route descriptions for each Wild Walk*
- *Additional information on wildlife and wild flowers*
- *Includes a Wild Food Calendar: how and where to safely pick wild produce throughout the year*



www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk



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£5.00



Walking the Mendip Hills in safety

All eight Wild Walks in this book are suitable for any reasonably fit person, but the less experienced walker should try the easier routes first. Following the route directions should be straightforward, but you will find that the relevant Ordnance Survey map is a useful addition to the information presented here. Carry a compass as well – just in case you lose your way.

Each walk has been carefully researched to minimise any danger to walkers but it should be stressed that no walk is completely risk-free. Walking in the countryside will always require an element of common sense and judgement to ensure that it is as safe and pleasurable an activity as possible.

Walking is great exercise for people of all ages and the perfect way to keep fit and healthy. For the occasional walker it's not really necessary to spend a fortune on the basic equipment, although a sturdy pair of comfortable boots or shoes and a reliable waterproof jacket is a must. Experienced walkers wear layers of clothing which can be put on or taken off as conditions change. The secret is to maintain a comfortable and even temperature throughout your walk.

Carry a small rucksack with a spare top, hat, gloves and waterproofs and it's a really good idea to take a drink and some food with you to keep liquid and energy levels up. Walking is exercise, after all, and you'll need to refuel as necessary.

A few words to the wise...

- Take particular care on upland areas where the consequences of a slip or fall could be serious.
- Several of the Wild Walk routes use or cross busy roads. Please be aware that even country lanes and unclassified roads are not traffic-free.
- Take particular care around farm machinery or livestock, especially if you are walking with children or dogs.
- Our weather is very unreliable and conditions can change very quickly. Check the forecast before you set out and ensure that you are equipped with suitable warm, waterproof clothing and appropriate footwear. In the

- summer months it is advisable to wear a hat and carry spare water.
- Carry a torch and a fully-charged mobile phone in case of emergencies.
- Respect the working life of the countryside and follow the Country Code at all times.
- Protect plants and animals and always take your litter home with you.
- Be careful not to disturb ruins and historic sites.
- Fires can be as devastating to wildlife and natural habitats so be careful not to drop a match or smouldering cigarette.

ROADS AND PATHS

Not necessarily rights of way

M1 or A66M	Motorway	Service Area	Junction Number
A35	Dual carriageway		
A31(T) or A35	Trunk or Main road		
B3074	Secondary road		
	Narrow road with passing places		
	Road under construction		
	Road generally more than 4 m wide		
	Road generally less than 4 m wide		
	Other road, drive or track, fenced and unfenced		
	Path		

RAILWAYS

	Multiple track	Standard gauge
	Single track	
	Narrow gauge	
	Road over; road under; level crossing	
	Cutting; tunnel; embankment	
	Station, open to passenger siding; underground station	
	Light Rapid Transit System; Station	

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND OTHER ACCESS

	Public paths	Byway open to all traffic	Road used as a public path
	Bridleway		
	Permitted Path	National Trail or Recreational Path	
	Permitted Bridleway	Other routes with public access	
	Off road cycle route		
	National Cycle Network Number		

DANGER AREA
Firing and test ranges in the area
Observe warning notices

Public rights of way may not be evident on the ground. Rights of Way are not shown in Scotland. The representation on this map of any other road, track or path is no evidence of the existence of a right of way

SYMBOLS

	Place with spire, minaret or dome without such additions		Water		Mud		Land open to the public by permission of the owners. The agreement may be withdrawn.
	Place with spire, minaret or dome		Sand; sand & shingle		National Park Boundary		National Trust, always open; limited access - observe local signs
	Building: important building		Gravel pit		National Trust for Scotland, always open; limited access - observe local signs		Woodland Trust
	Electricity transmission line		Other pit or quarry		Forestry Commission		Other Access Land
	Triangulation pillar; mast		Sand pit		Access Information Point		
	Youth hostel		Landfill site or slag heap				
	Bunkhouse/camping barn						
	Bus or coach station						
	Lighthouse; beacon						
	Site of antiquity						
	Well, Spring						
	County Boundary						

VEGETATION

Limits of vegetation are defined by positioning of the symbols but may also be delineated by broken lines or dots

	Coniferous trees		Non-coniferous trees		Coppice
	Orchard		Bracken, heath or rough grassland		Marsh, reeds, sittings.

HEIGHTS AND ROCK FEATURES

52 - Ground survey height
294 - Air survey height
Contours are at 5 or 10 metres vertical interval

GUIDE WALK SYMBOLS

	Start point of walk		Featured walk		Walk reference point
	Route of walk		Alternative route		

TOURIST AND LEISURE INFORMATION

	Information centre (all year)		English Heritage		Country park		Caravan site
	Information centre (seasonal)		Historic Scotland		Picnic site		Camp site
	Visitor centre		Parking		Viewpoint		Golf course or links

8 Wild Walks

*A fully illustrated guide to eight
Wild Walks in the Mendip Hills – an
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
– including a fascinating Wild Food
Calendar*



Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

THE MENDIP HILLS

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Exploring the wild and ancient beauty of the Mendip Hills

Through their long history, the Mendip Hills have been all things to all people: a place to live and raise our families, a place to farm crops or hunt for food, a place to worship or a fortress to defend, a place to dig out a living through mining and quarrying, a place to enjoy our leisure time.

Each of these uses has left its own mark on the land. A visit to the Mendips is a journey through time – a chance to experience the remarkable variety of scenery this fascinating area has to offer throughout the seasons. This is a layered landscape, with modern agriculture overlying medieval field systems, with Roman towns and Saxon settlements built above the ancient cave systems that gave shelter to early man.

Look back further and you realise that this peaceful corner of England has been made over hundreds of millions of years by unimaginable forces; forces that have repeatedly created rocks and destroyed them again, moulding, squeezing, crushing, folding and grinding to leave us with the

familiar range of bare peaks, green-clad slopes and undulating ridges we see today.

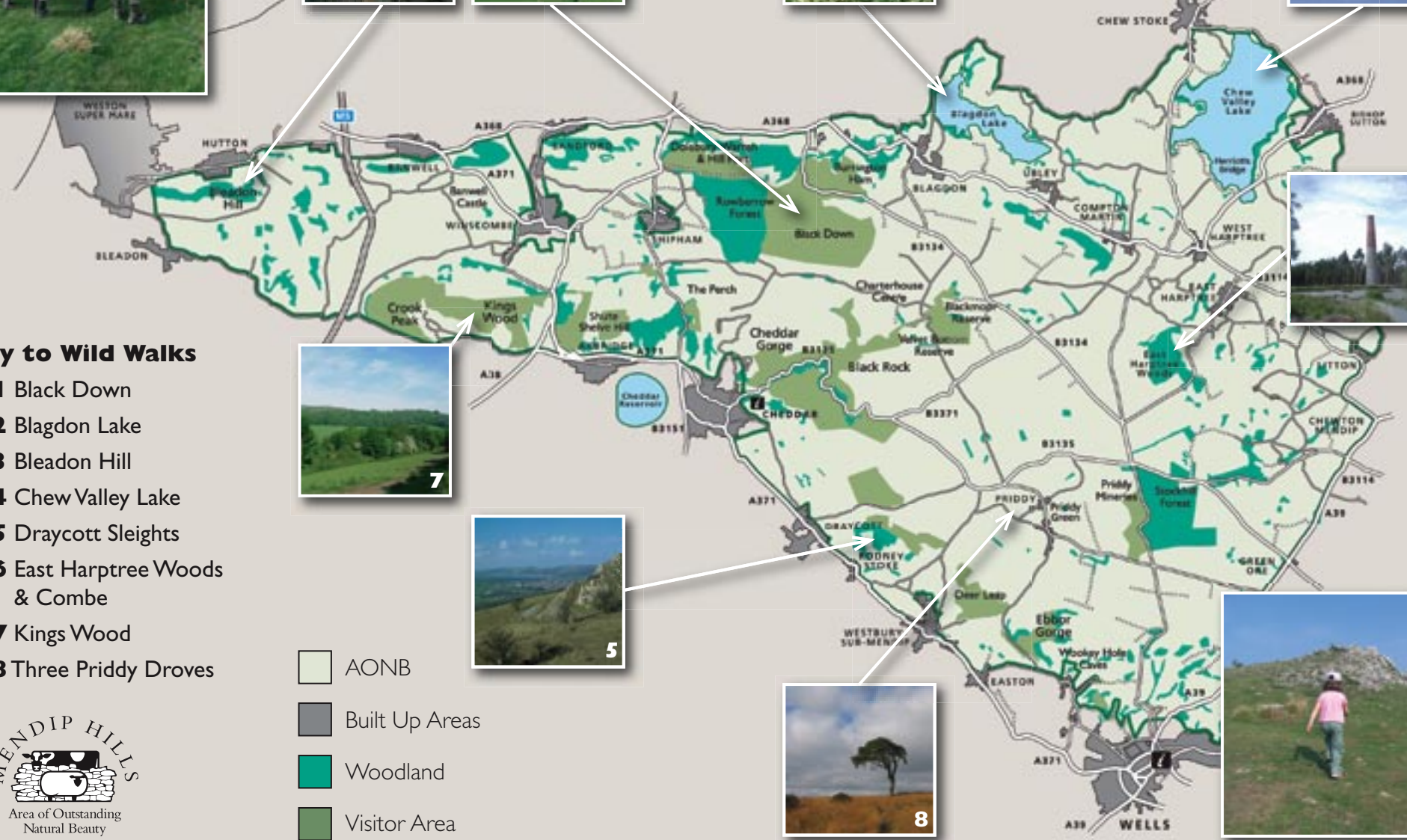
Spend a hot summer afternoon on Black Down, marvel at the autumn colours across Chew Valley Lake, have your spirits stirred by the winter mist in the Vale of Avalon when viewed from Deer Leap, and rejoice in the fresh spring greenery of the combes and gorges. There is always something new, always something remarkable.

Valuing and protecting our heritage

Outstandingly beautiful, universally valued – the Mendip Hills is a place of such exceptional scenic quality that in 1972 it was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. (AONB) This recognises that the Mendips are one of England's finest landscapes, an area treasured by everyone and deserving the special protection and management of the Mendip Hills AONB Service.



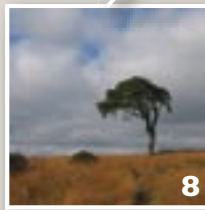
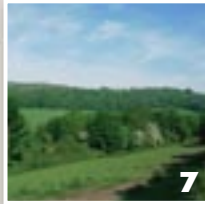
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty



Key to Wild Walks

- 1 Black Down
- 2 Blagdon Lake
- 3 Bleadon Hill
- 4 Chew Valley Lake
- 5 Draycott Sleights
- 6 East Harptree Woods & Combe
- 7 Kings Wood
- 8 Three Priddy Drove

- AONB
- Built Up Areas
- Woodland
- Visitor Area



CHEW VALLEY LAKE:

A birdwatcher's paradise



than 30 species of mammals live around its shores, including numerous species of bat as well as the occasional otter.

The level of the lake falls by several feet during most summers, to be replenished by winter rainfall. In spring, Chew becomes home to birds returning from hotter climates and those looking for somewhere

Peter Roworth/Natural England

The largest lake in south-west England, Chew Valley Lake was created in the 1950s as a water supply reservoir for Bristol. In the half century since, this 1200-acre lake was created it has acquired such importance for its natural history that it has been classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Protection Area (SPA).

The lake's 10 miles of shallow and reedy shoreline supports a huge population of waterfowl and other birds – more than 260 species (one of the longest lists of birds recorded at any inland site in the UK) have been recorded here.

The southern end around Herriotts Bridge is a nature reserve where islands, lagoons, bays and channels have been created to provide safe areas for birds to roost, nest, feed and shelter.

The rich waters of the lake teem with aquatic insects and water plants, which provide both protection and food. More

to mate, nest and breed. The greatest variety of birdlife is recorded in the autumn, when many species stop over on their journey south.

The stately mute swan

The **mute swan** (*Cygnus olor*) breeds in lakes and slow-flowing rivers across the UK. Its long neck helps it to reach aquatic vegetation from the bed of the lake. It also eats grass, worms, small fish and even frogs.

The mute swan has long enjoyed a special status as a royal bird. Every year, an official swan keeper appointed by the Queen carries out a symbolic ceremony on the Thames, which also has a practical use in monitoring the swan's health and numbers.

A pair of swans will mate for life, although (contrary to popular opinion) if one of the birds dies the remaining swan will often find another mate.

A year in the life of a mute swan

SUMMER

- The female (the pen) builds the nest in a suitable waterside location while the male (the cob) hunts for sticks, rushes and dried grasses as nesting material
- Between late April and early May, the female lays up to seven eggs. The parents take it in turns to incubate them and they hatch after 35-41 days
- The fluffy chocolate-brown cygnets stay with their parents for 4-5 months, often riding on their parents' backs.

AUTUMN AND WINTER

- During late autumn or winter the cygnets' plumage becomes predominantly white, at which point the adults begin to drive them away. Some young birds will travel with their parents to join the flocks in an overwintering area.

SPRING

- When the adults return to the breeding area the following spring, the young birds will stay with the flock. They begin to breed at two years old.



Adrian Boots

Chris Newton

Other wildfowl to look out for

Chew Valley Lake's plethora of waterfowl species includes snipe (common and

jack snipe), lapwing, teal, wigeon, pochard, mallard, tufted duck, shelduck, goldeneye, coot, moorhen, ruddy duck and shoveler. The secretive water rail is found here, while in winter you might be lucky enough to see – or hear – the rare bittern in the reed beds. Raptors seen regularly include the hobby and the peregrine falcon, and in spring and summer there are countless songbirds.

Wild flowers of Chew Valley



Devil's bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) grows in damp meadows and marshes. Its rounded blue-purple flowerheads provide a rich source of nectar for insects from August through to October. It is important as the

food plant of the marsh fritillary, one of our most rapidly-declining butterflies, which is still locally common in the Mendips.

The plant got its name from the legend that the devil bit off its root. Devil's bit scabious has the reputation for being able to cure any illness. Tea made from the plant is said to help in the treatment of coughs, fevers and internal inflammations, and it is also reputed to ease skin conditions such as scabies – hence the name.

Cowslip (*Primula veris*) is a close relative of the primrose. It is one of our most familiar country plants and goes by many other local names, including bunch of keys, fairy bells, tisty-tosty, mayflower and palsywort. Less poetically, the standard name is derived from 'cowslop', an old form of 'cowpat'.

The familiar bright yellow, scented



flowers – which can be seen in enormous numbers on some roadside embankments – make a delicate country wine, and the plant was used traditionally to treat rheumatism, paralysis and cramps.

Other attractive waterside flowers to watch out for

- Orchids (common spotted, marsh and heath spotted)
- Purple loosestrife
- Yellow flag
- Marsh marigold

Other things to look out for at or near Chew Valley Lake

- Drowned Roman villa and road – when the level is low in the late summer you may be able to see the roadway and humpback bridge from Heron's Green on the west shore.
- The lake is an internationally important trout fishing venue and has a fleet of motor boats for anglers, who may be seen most days from March to October casting their flies for the rainbow and brown trout, of which around 40,000 are caught each season.

Other information

- Woodford Lodge on the north-western shore has a restaurant, bar, toilets and tackle shop.
- There is a tea shop and a picnic area on the north side of the lake.

Chew Valley Lake

Distance: 8km (5 miles).

Time: About 2-2½ hours.

Starting points: Herriotts Bridge, OS Grid Ref ST 571 581

Terrain: Uneven footpaths, mostly level with little in the way of slopes. Footpath can be very boggy in places. Mostly level, easy going lanes. Take care when crossing A368.

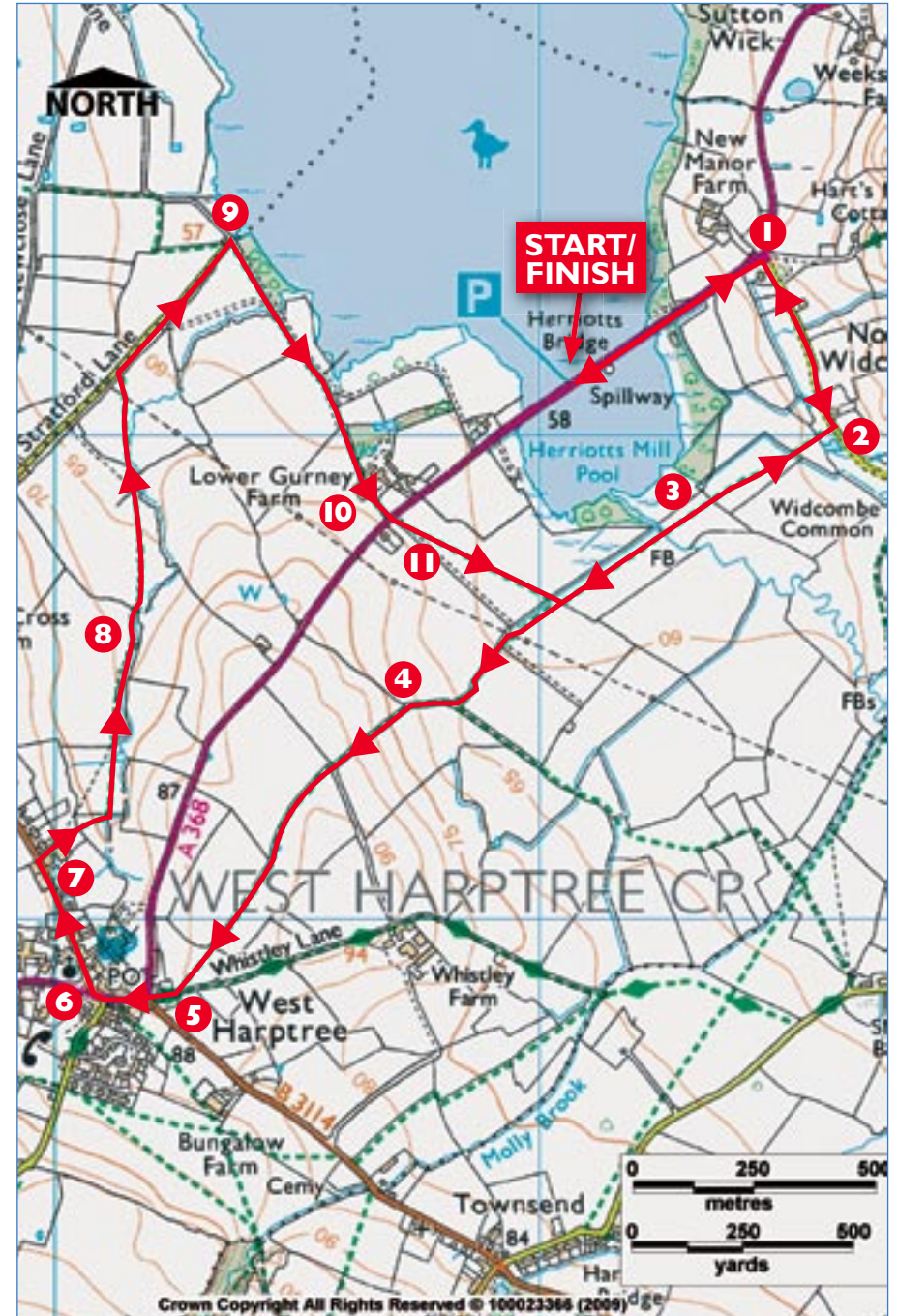
Route: Starting from Herriotts Bridge car park, follow the footpath north-east alongside the A368 and turn right down the lane (1) towards North Widcombe. Opposite the cottages, turn right (2) and follow the marked footpath along the back of Herriotts Mill Pool (3). This section of the footpath can get very boggy so be prepared to walk around any problem areas. Continue along waymarked footpath (4) until you reach West Harptree. Turn right into Whistley Lane (5). Walk past the village shop, cross the A368 and bear right on to the B3114 (6). After 200m look for the public footpath sign (7) and turn right following waymarked path (8) to Stratford Lane. Bear right and walk to the end of Stratford Lane (9), turn right and follow marked footpath to Lower Gurney Farm (10). Cross A368, take footpath opposite and rejoin path behind Herriot's Pool (11) to return to car park.

Waymarking: Look for the special waymark plaques wherever there are stiles, gates or changes of direction.

O.S. Map: Explorer 141: Cheddar Gorge & Mendip Hills West.

Other Information: Ice Cream van at Herriotts Bridge car park. Pub and village shop at West Harptree.

Adrian Boots



Wild Food Calendar

					Bolete mushrooms
		Rosebay willowherb			Heather
		Ground ivy		Wild strawberries	
			Raspberry leaves	Raspberries	
		Ramsons, wild garlic			
			Bramble stems	Comfrey	
			Hawthorn leaves	Blackcurrants	
			Dandelion flowers		
		St George's mushrooms	Lime leaves	Lime blossom	
Sorrel					
Chickweed					
Nettles					
Dandelion leaves					
January	February	March	April	May	June

Rules and precautions

10 guidelines for gathering wild food

There is always a risk associated with gathering wild food. Here are some points to remember:

1. If in doubt, do not pick or eat it.
2. Only pick small quantities from plants growing in profusion, so as not to diminish populations.
3. Never pick protected or rare plants.
4. Sustainability, care, responsibility and respect is key for the environment, wildlife and other countryside users.
5. Be 100% sure of your identification. Have a good quality ID book with you and/or consult an expert who can identify species for you.
6. Avoid fields with crops growing in them as chemicals may have been used – look out for yellowing of plants.
7. Avoid main roads and areas known to be heavily used by dog walkers.
8. Do not pick or eat any poisonous plants, or plants known to produce an allergic reaction.

9. Do not pick more than you need. If you take everything, there will be none available for next season.

10. Only collect the best leaves, fruit and nuts. Any showing signs of mould, being eaten by animals, bruising, browning or rot should be left.

Make sure it's legal

The aim of this series of wild walk guides is to increase your enjoyment, appreciation and awareness of our native wild food plants within the Mendip Hills AONB. You should not assume that you are allowed to gather the wild foods in this guide without checking your right to do so.

Wild plants are protected by various pieces of legislation, primarily the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. More information can be found on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee website www.jncc.gov.uk. Please read this to understand the legal aspects of wild plants. Generally, it is illegal to uproot or destroy any wild plant without the

						Hawthorn-berries
					Bolete mushrooms	Crab apples
						Wood sorrel
					Heather	Hazel nuts
					Wild strawberries	Sloes, Blackthorn
					Raspberries	Rose hips
					Meadowsweet	Blackberries
					Comfrey	
					Bilberry	Silverweed
					Field mushrooms	Sweet chestnut
					Lime blossom	Elderberries
					Sorrel	
					Chickweed	
					Nettles	
					Dandelion leaves	
July	August	September	October	November	December	

landowner's permission. You are however, allowed to pick leaves, fruit and nuts along public rights of way.

A Code of Conduct for the Conservation and Enjoyment of Wild Plants has been produced by the Botanical Society of the British Isles and the Forestry Commission has produced the 1993 Mushroom Picker's Code. While the advice and information in this guide are believed to be true and accurate, neither the author nor the Mendip Hills AONB Service can accept any legal responsibility or liability for any harm or injury arising from the content of this guide.

Finding out more

Visit the Joint Nature Conservation Committee website at www.jncc.gov.uk.

A Code of Conduct for the Conservation and Enjoyment of Wild Plants www.bsbi.org.uk.

1993 Mushroom Pickers Code www.forestry.gov.uk.

Useful books

Wild Food by Roger Phillips.
Published by MacMillan

Food for Free by Richard Mabey
Published by Collins

A Cook on the Wild Side
by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall
Published by River Cottage

Wild Food by Ray Mears
and Gordon Hillman
Published by Hodder & Stoughton

Collins Pocket Guide: Trees of Britain and Northern Europe
by John Mitchell and Alan Wilkinson

Collins Pocket Guide: Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe
by Marjory Blamey, Richard Fitter and Alastair Fitter

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Mendip Hills AONB Service

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While every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the route directions, we cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions, or for changes in the details given. The countryside is not static and is subject to changes to field boundaries, footpath routes, and property ownership resulting in the closure or diversion of concessionary paths. We have taken all reasonable steps to ensure these walks are safe and achievable by walkers with a reasonable level of fitness. However, all outdoor activities involve a degree of risk and the publishers accept no responsibility for any injuries sustained to readers whilst following these walks.



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Working together for equalities

This document is also available in Braille, large print, on tape or on disc and we can translate it into different languages. We can provide a member of staff to discuss the details.



RNID typetalk

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