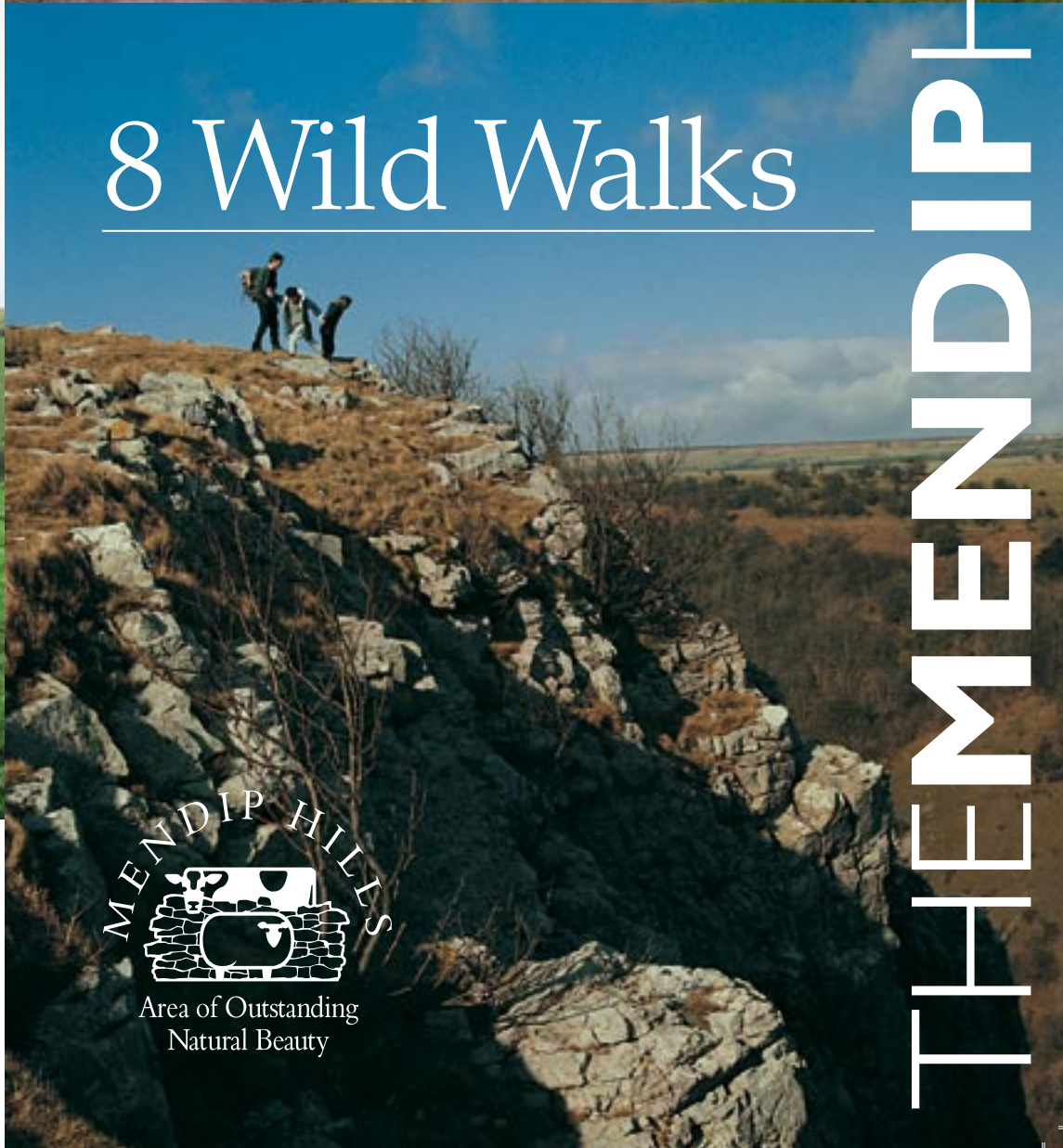




- *Explore the Mendip Hills – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*
- *Eight themed walks, each with fascinating background information*
- *Clear, easy-to-follow route descriptions for each Wild Walk*
- *Additional information on wildlife and wild flowers*
- *Includes a Wild Food Calendar: how and where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

# 8 Wild Walks



[www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk](http://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

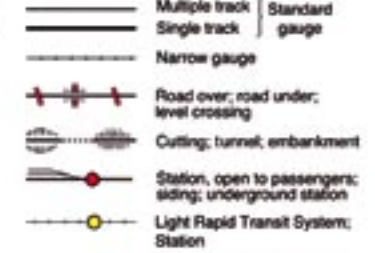
summer months it is advisable to wear a hat and carry spare water.

- 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



### RAILWAYS



### PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND OTHER ACCESS

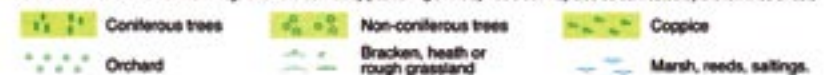


Public rights of way may not be evident on the ground. Rights of Way are not shown in Scotland. The representation on this map of any other road, track or path is no evidence of the existence of a right of way

### SYMBOLS



### VEGETATION



### HEIGHTS AND ROCK FEATURES

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



### GUIDE WALK SYMBOLS



### TOURIST AND LEISURE INFORMATION



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# 8 Wild Walks

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*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.

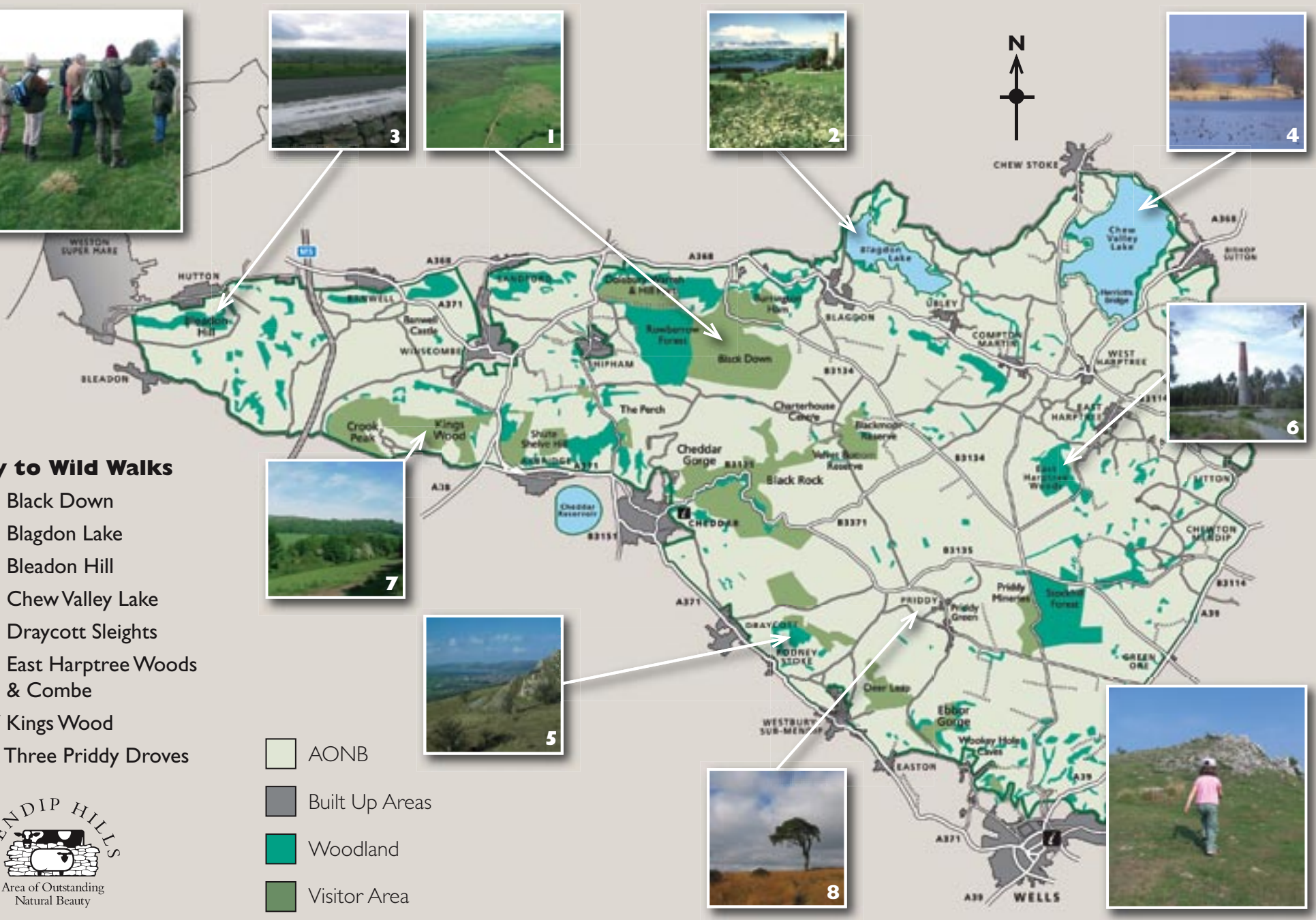
Spend a hot summer afternoon on Black Down, marvel at the autumn colours across Chew Valley Lake, have your spirits stirred by the winter mist in the Vale of Avalon when viewed from Deer Leap, and rejoice in the fresh spring greenery of the combes and gorges. There is always something new, always something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

- AONB
- Built Up Areas
- Woodland
- Visitor Area



# EAST HARPTREE WOODS & COMBE:

## Where ancient forest meets young woodland

Most coniferous woodlands in Britain have been planted for forestry purposes – as a crop which will one day be harvested as timber. Because conifers can grow up to six times faster than broadleaved trees, conifer plantations produce much higher yields of timber than slower-growing broadleaf woodlands. Conifer timber is known as softwood and is used for a huge range of products, from paper to furniture. Characteristically, conifer plantations tend to be planted at high density, which reduces the amount of light reaching the woodland floor. Broadleaf woods usually allow far more light through, which leads



to a greater diversity of ground flora.

Among conifers only the Scots pine, yew and juniper are considered native to Britain, and most of our conifer plantations are made up of commercially-useful introduced species such as the Douglas fir and the sitka spruce. Like most conifers these species are evergreen, so they do not shed their needles in winter.

East Harptree Woods is a relatively new conifer plantation which has been designed and managed with wildlife in mind. It has a wide ride to link areas of natural vegetation, such as heath and grassland. Once the area was important for lead and zinc mining, and the undulating terrain, known as 'gruffy ground', indicates old pits and spoil heaps. Much of the ore was processed and smelted at this site and you can see the restored Smitham Chimney today. In front of the chimney there is grassland, heath and a pond where dragonflies flit in the summer months.

Connected to the north-eastern end of the woods is a narrow gorge with a small stream running down. This is Harptree Combe, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its rich flora and fauna. In contrast to the conifers, this area contains deciduous oak and ash woodland, with old hazel coppice and rough, marshy grassland. The ash and hazel woodland here is rich in interesting ground flora with plants such as bluebell, dog's-mercury, herb paris, autumn crocus

and yellow archangel, and ferns such as scaly male fern, hart's tongue (see overleaf) and broad buckler fern as well as many moss and fungus species.

A wild walk in this area is an opportunity to enjoy the meeting of two contrasting but equally interesting wildlife habitats and to appreciate the contrast between young coniferous plantation and old ash, oak and hazel woodlands.

### Tracking the secretive badger



Chris Newton

#### Badger (*Meles meles*)

The badger's short but powerful limbs and strong claws, small head and eyes, short thick neck and wedge-shaped body make it perfectly adapted to underground living. The word 'badger' is believed to come from the French word 'bêcheur', meaning digger.

Badgers live in social groups called clans, each roaming over a home range which is large and varied enough to provide a reliable food supply. They are omnivores, eating both animal and plant items. Their staple food is earthworms, which they consume in enormous quantities. They particularly relish the young of mammals such as rats, squirrels and rabbits, and often dig the latter out of their underground stops, working by their exceptionally keen sense of smell. Frogs,

### The lifecycle of the badger

- Badgers use a phenomenon known as delayed implantation to ensure that whatever time of year the female is fertilised, birth is delayed until the following February (or thereabouts) so that the cubs have the best chance of survival. Actual development in the womb is only 7 weeks
- Commonly, there are 2 to 4 cubs in each litter
- The cubs do not open their eyes or gain their milk teeth until they are six weeks old
- Fewer than half the cubs born will survive to adulthood
- Cubs do not leave the sett until they are about 8 weeks old
- Once they leave the set they can hunt for food and no longer rely on the sow's milk for nourishment
- Though mortality in the first two years is very high, those that do survive may live to be as old as 10 years or more.

reptiles and birds are welcome additions to the diet when available, as are bee and wasp larvae, beetles, berries, cereals, nuts, seeds and fungi.

Secretive and nocturnal as badgers are (particularly where disturbed by man), the signs of their presence are easy enough to spot if you know what to look for. They are creatures of habit, relying on scent for navigation, and will repeatedly use the same meandering routes across fields and woods, wearing narrow pathways like miniature sheep tracks. In addition to the very obvious spoil heaps beside their setts, look for their distinctive, broad five-toed footprints (dogs and foxes have only four), their claw marks on trees and their latrine pits.

## By any other name...

Bee Nettle, Dumb Nettle and Yellow Dead Nettle are all Somerset names for the distinctive **yellow archangel**

(*Lamium galeobdolon*), a hairy perennial of woodland and hedgerows. This attractive plant grows up to 45cm in height, with nettle-like leaves that are toothed and oval. The bright yellow flowers are arranged in whorls around the stem above pairs of leaves and can be seen from May to June.



## Hart's tongue fern



It's not hard to see how the **hart's tongue fern** (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*) got its name – the leaf is exactly the shape of a deer's tongue. This evergreen plant of damp, shady woods and banks

grows in clumps. The fronds are bright green, undivided, and taper to a point with a heart-shaped base. Underneath the fronds, dark brown spore cases are found in rows. The spores ripen from July to August.

## Other points of interest around East Harptree Woods & Harptree Combe

- Prehistoric ochre mine
- Smitham lead mine chimney
- Views of the Chew Valley
- Richmond Castle

## East Harptree Woods & Combe

**Distance:** 6km (3¾ miles).

**Time:** About 1½-2 hours.

**Starting points:** East Harptree Woods car park, OS Grid Ref ST 557 541

**Terrain:** Uneven tracks, footpaths and lanes, with some steeper slopes.

**Route:** From car park (1), follow the forestry track through woods. Bear left (2), then right (3), then join a path (4) from the left. Continue to the open area near the chimney and pond (5). Walk out of the woods, cross the field and turn left before the lane onto the Monarch's Way footpath (6). Continue northwards to the lane, and walk left for a few metres. Take the path on the right (7) to Harptree Combe (8). Cross the first path that bisects it and take the second path that joins from the right (9). Follow this uphill towards East Harptree. Where a footpath crosses near the houses (10), carry straight on through the fields (beware of grazing animals) until you rejoin the lane (11). Turn right and left back on to the Monarch's Way footpath until point (6) is reached. Turn left and right on to the lane and return to the car park.

**Waymarking:** Look for the special waymark plaques wherever there are stiles, gates or changes of direction. This route follows part of the Monarch's Way footpath.

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

**Other Information:** Parking and picnic area in East Harptree Woods. Pub at East Harptree. Village stores and Post Office 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](http://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](http://www.jncc.gov.uk).

A Code of Conduct for the Conservation and Enjoyment of Wild Plants [www.bsbi.org.uk](http://www.bsbi.org.uk).

1993 Mushroom Pickers Code [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://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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**RNID typetalk**

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