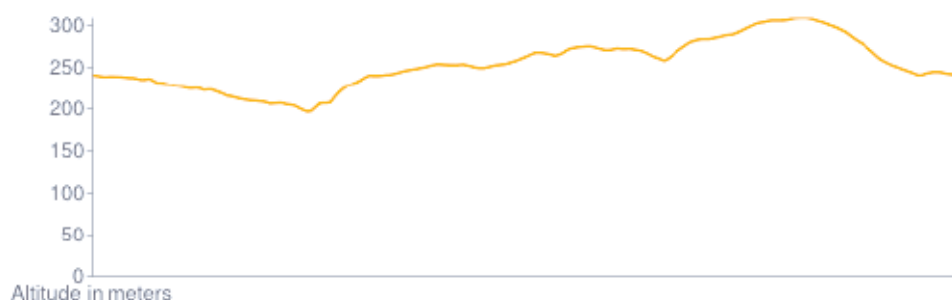


My Favourite Walk – No. 4

Charterhouse, Velvet Bottom and Wireless Station

Forty years ago, when my children were quite small, one of our very favourite places was Charterhouse. As well as playing in the old flues (now fenced off for health and safety reasons) we fished for tadpoles in the ponds and walked down Velvet Bottom to see the dams. It's still a favourite place today and some years ago I turned the walk into this circular walk for greater variety.



START: After parking the car in the fairly-limited space available, walk back up the lane for a few yards in order to take the footpath leading to Velvet Bottom. After a few minutes you reach the road (where there is also car parking space available), cross the road and follow the path down the valley. These are old mine workings (gruffy ground) with evidence of buddles (see notes) and it makes an interesting walk with lots of opportunity for children and dogs to let off steam.

DAMS: In the old mining days, the valley was flooded and the water stored in a number of dams. Periodically the water was released and swept through the workings, clearing out the rubble and exposing fresh areas in which digging could be carried out. The layout of the dams can still be seen quite clearly and the path needs some care when descending from one level to the next.

WEST MENDIP WAY: When reaching the end of Velvet Bottom you will encounter a footpath running right and left. This is the West Mendip Way, which runs from Uphill to Wells. Turn right at this point and head towards a stretch of woodland called Long Wood. After going through a gate into the wood the path divides into two. Our way is the path to the left which climbs

up out of the woods and into a large stretch of meadowland. The path follows the left-hand hedge of the field until it reaches a farm lane. Turn right onto the lane and follow this past Charterhouse Farm to the road. At this point we leave the West Mendip Way, which turns to the left, and we go right for a short distance along the road. After a hundred yards or so, take the path to the left and walk up to the field ahead.

BLACKDOWN: You will see Blackdown (or as it is commonly named Black Down) ahead of you. However, turn right and follow the fence along the bottom of the field until you meet a collection of trees. There is an exit here from the field into a small gully. The path is sometimes slippery, so take care. Follow the path down to some stepping stones and cross the little stream which is usually just a trickle. Climb the path up the other side of the gully, moving slightly to the right. You will soon see a stile. Climb over the stile and immediately turn left. You have now joined a path which also leads up from the lower end of Velvet Bottom, (providing a shorter walk if required). Go over another stile and go forwards through a little area of vegetation and into a large open field. The path ahead roughly parallels the

stream which then bends towards the path as you see a stile ahead.

WIRELESS STATION: Go over the stile and turn right. This is a very-widely used bridleway between Beacon Batch and the Wireless Station and is especially liked by cyclists. It is also prone to flooding in wet weather, so care should be taken if the conditions are wet. Normally this path is fine but it just suffers from excessive traffic. Follow the road down Rains Batch. Underneath the humps and bumps of the land to your right is a buried Roman Settlement, see notes. At the bottom turn right and then left at the next stile. The path leads down the right-hand side of a field to a stile leading into Blackdown Reserve. From here follow the path across to the main path and back to your car. **Bob Rischmiller**

Notes

GRUFFY GROUND: This is the Mendip term for the old mining areas which are characterised by grooves and hummocks resulting from the mining that was carried out with picks and shovels. It is thought that the term came from the groovy nature of the remains.

BUDDLES: These were used to process lead-ore before it could be smelted. The lead ore was washed and concentrated in these circular pits known as buddles. They were small stone-lined convex circular pits which once contained rotating brushes. These washed the lighter impurities off with water and left the heavy lead ore behind.

ROMAN SETTLEMENT: Aerial photography has revealed that a Roman fort was built on the hillside left of Rains Batch. Archaeological digs have confirmed this and also revealed the existence of an amphitheatre. Various digs have taken place on the site (including one by Time Team) but the site has never been open to the public owing to the contamination by such elements as Cadmium. It has been decided that re-covering the excavations is the safest way to preserve both the evidence and the health of the population.

