

Escape from it all this Christmas

This month's walk is perfect for working off or escaping the excesses of the festive season. Simon Andrews, from North Somerset Council's Ranger Service, guides us on a route through Dolebury Warren which provides good contrast of dense woodland and open pasture.

It's not for the faint-hearted. It includes steep uphill rocky climbs and can get very muddy and slippery underfoot in places, so make sure you wear walking boots.

Difficulty: some steep climbs, several stiles – not suitable for buggies or wheelchairs

Duration: allow 2.5 hours including a pause for refreshment

Distance: about 3.5 miles

How to get there

By car

Park in Skinners Lane, Churchill, or the lay-by nearby on the A368

By bus

Bus route number 121 serves the village of Churchill

Begin the walk from Skinners Lane in Churchill, just off the A368, a few hundred yards west of the junction with the A38 (ST445597).

Walk up the lane, passing the second of two pubs on your right. At the end, cross the busy A38 carefully, and join the footpath ahead through the kissing gate. At the field, go straight across it staying in the same direction, go over the stile and turn right onto a wooded rocky path. Cross a second stile, and keep left on the path skirting the edge of the pine woodland.

After passing a field on the left, go through the kissing gate, cross the lane, go over the stile and turn right up the track. After a steep uphill rocky climb you'll arrive at a fork in the paths. Take the left-hand path of the three, downhill. After several minutes go over the stile and turn right onto another uphill track. Take the first footpath on the left following the public footpath sign, and bear right onto the track winding

Mendip Lodge

Mendip Lodge dates from 1787, and was built by the extravagant eccentric Reverend Thomas Walley in the Italianate style. It boasted an 84 foot-long verandah and many other fine features including terraced gardens.



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Start



uphill. You'll pass a derelict house on the right. Keep left and you will reach the ruins of Mendip Lodge on your right.

This is half way round the route, so is a good point to pause for a breather. There's an obliging fallen tree trunk beside the path for a brief rest.



Dolebury Hillfort

The double ramparts of the Iron Age hillfort are evident when you visit this site, and there is also a medieval rabbit warren. It's clear to see why the site was chosen for a fortification given its commanding position above potential invaders.

Retrace your steps past the lodge and take the left fork uphill. Go right at the sign (see left), over the stile and then left uphill along the rocky track. Just beyond the brow of the hill, turn right over the stile into Dolebury Warren.

Follow the wide grassy path ahead of you, go over the next stile and then take the right-hand path onto the 'Limestone Link'. This will take you onto the top of the hillfort where, on a fine day, you can enjoy far-reaching views to the Bristol Channel and beyond.

Continue in the same direction over the summit of the hillfort and drop down along the gravel track, passing through a break in the outer ramparts. Go straight on downhill and through the gate, closing it carefully behind you. Turn right and walk down the lane to the junction with the A38. Cross the main road and follow the footpath sign opposite into woodland. At the end of the path, turn right and walk downhill along the lane back to your starting point.

Call Weston-super-Mare Tourist Information Centre on 01934 888 800 for details of local walks