

Taunton to Longaller

- Exploring Taunton Deane



General Information

Distance of Walk: 6.5 kilometres / 4 miles

This is an easy walk starting in central Taunton, along the banks of the River Tone and across the water meadows to the west of Taunton.

OS map - Explorer 128, Taunton and Blackdown Hills. Grid ref: 225 247.

Terrain - Flat

Parking - Public car parks are at Castle Street, Enfield or Tangier.

Refreshments - Not available on the route, but in Taunton, Bishops Hull (0.25km detour) and Norton Fitzwarren (0.5km detour).

Landscape character of the walk

- River Flood Plain

A low lying area, from 6m to 50m above sea level, in the catchment area of the River Tone and the Sedgemoor Old Rhyne. Wellington marks the western end of this corridor of land with Taunton situated midway along its length.

The land is well treed with open river edges and with extensive flood plains which are liable to occasional flooding. Typical tree species are oak, ash, grey and black poplar, white and crack willow, aspen (high canopy) and alder and downy birch (middle canopy) with an understorey of blackthorn, goat willow and grey willow. Land use in the area is mainly permanent grassland suitable for stock rearing and dairying with some cereals where the flood risk is low.

The soils are mainly alluvial and clay with some overlying peat.

A large area has recently been given over to public open space.

Directions

A From the Market House, cross the main road and walk a short way up the west side of North Street. Turn left to go under the archway and past the Castle Hotel. Walk diagonally right across the square to the glass bridge. Walk down beside the castle and museum and across the small footbridge into Goodland Gardens. Then turn right along the path and cross the large wooden bridge spanning the River Tone. Go left along the river bank, into French Weir recreation ground. Follow the path along the top of the park to the narrow path signposted Two Counties Way.

B Follow the path for a quarter of a mile with the River Tone on your left. Then bear left down the wooden ramp and follow the riverside path (with the river on your left). Go over a small wooden bridge, turn left and then continue towards a large white house, formerly Roughmoor Farmhouse. (Where the track bends right, go straight ahead and then left to the lane to walk past the white house). Follow the high-hedged lane ahead and then turn left and follow the road around to the right on to the main road.

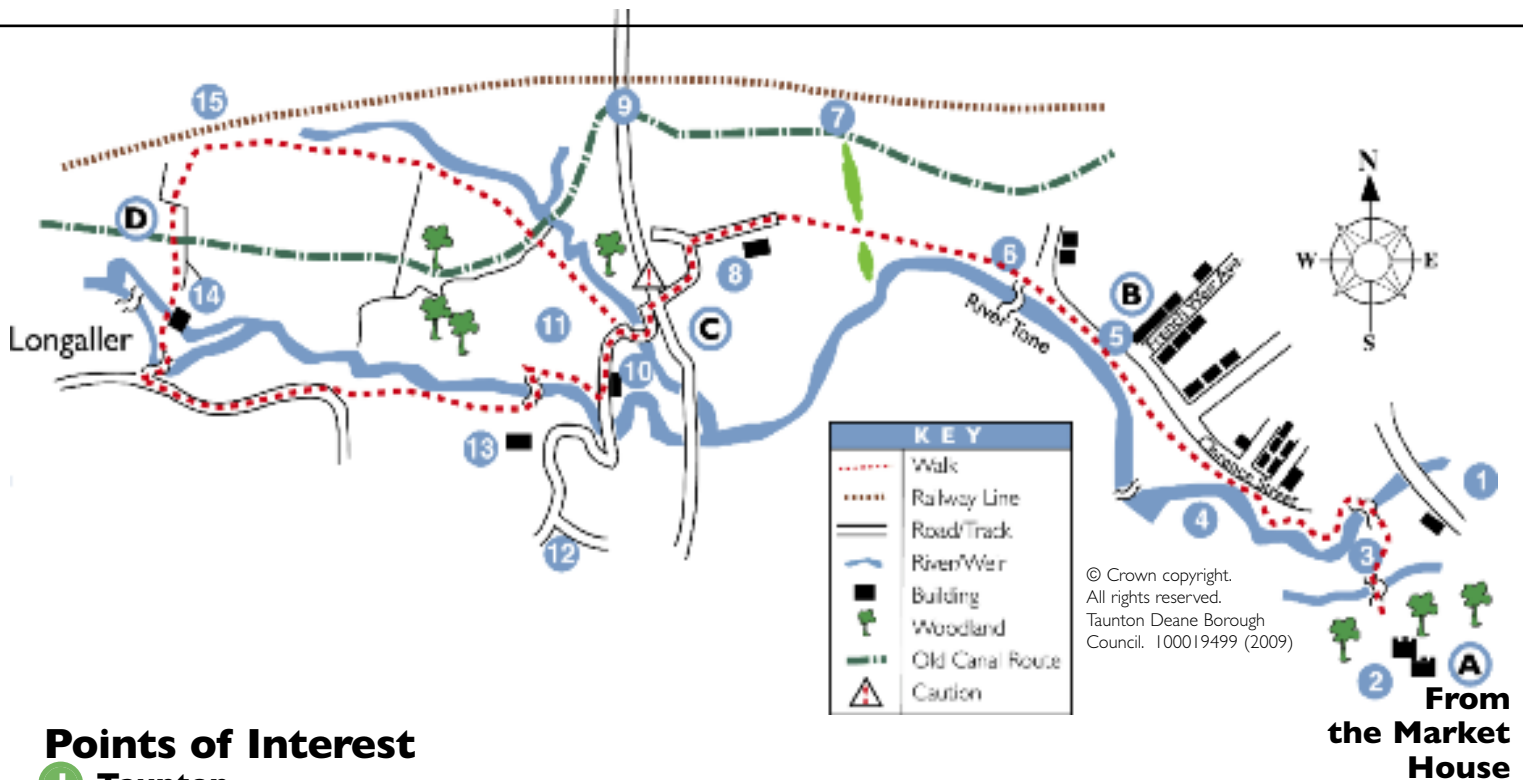
C At the main road cross with care to the minor road opposite and continue along the lane until you reach a gate on the right opposite The Old Mill. Go through the gate and follow the path by the River Tone until you reach a footbridge.

Cross the river and bear right along the path past Netherclay House and some farm out-buildings. Continue along a narrow high-hedged path leading over a stile into a field where you walk with the River Tone on your right. When you enter the next field, follow the left hand hedge until you reach the road. Here, turn right and follow the road for 350 metres and take the second right, signed Longaller Mill.

Cross Longaller bridge, pass Longaller Mill (now a private residence) and go through the gate into the field. Follow the path over the field until you reach a stile (ignore the stile on the right).

D From here proceed directly ahead towards the railway footbridge and bear right follow the path alongside the railway. Go across fields with Norton Brook on the left, and back onto the lane. Turn left, cross carefully over the main road to the lane opposite and follow the outward route back to Castle Green.

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Points of Interest

1 Taunton

'Town on the Tone' - The county town of Somerset, founded by King Ine in the 7th century, has had a turbulent past at the centre of many violent uprisings, notably the determined anti-royalist stance the town took during the Civil War (1642 - 1652) and later the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion in 1685. Set in the Vale of Taunton, rich in orchards and pastures, the town was once dependent on the local agricultural economy, symbolised by the 18th century Market House at the Parade in the centre. Industry developed around wharves by Tone Bridge or on tributary streams of the navigable River Tone.

The medieval trade and manufacture of wool was succeeded in the late 18th century by the manufacture of silk, lace and cotton. Imported bar iron led to the establishment of foundries and the suitability of the water encouraged several breweries to flourish.

2 Taunton Castle & The Museum of Somerset

An important Norman castle, originally that of the Bishops of Winchester. The bishop's hall was converted into a castle between 1107 and 1129 by Bishop William Giffard. His successor Henry of Blois added the keep in 1138. Many additions and alterations have been made throughout history, notably the building of the Great Hall by Bishop William Raleigh between 1245 and 1249. It was in this hall that assize courts were held, famously the 'Bloody Assize' of 1685 when Judge Jeffreys condemned over 500 supporters of the failed Monmouth Rebellion to death or transportation.

Castle Green was formerly the large outer bailey of the castle added in 1215-16 and was also the site of Taunton's only burial ground from Saxon times until the 12th century. A Saxon minster is believed to have stood here. The castle now houses The Museum of Somerset, open Tuesday to Saturday and Bank Holiday Mondays 10 - 5pm. Admission free.

3 Goodland Gardens

Named after the Goodland family who played a major role in the water-borne coal trade locally and were involved in the work of the Tone Conservators who annually inspected the river to ensure that it was navigable. The gardens were laid out in 1971 on the site of the town's original fulling mill built in 1219.

4 River Tone

The river flows for 33km down from Beverton Pond in the Brendon Hills, north of Clatworthy Reservoir, due south at first before turning east to flow into the River Parrett at Burrowbridge. This then continues out to the Bristol Channel through Bridgwater. It is an important wildlife corridor through the Borough and notable species to be seen are kingfisher, bank vole and otter, as well as the more common grey heron, moorhen, and mute swan.

5 Parliamentary Cut

This was the name given to the short length of canal built in 1834 and intended to connect the Grand Western Canal to the River Tone.

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6 Weirfield Riverside

This section of the old canal, between the River Tone and the site of the old Weirfield School, has now been designated a Local Nature Reserve. Recolonisation has created habitat for a wide variety of mammals, birds and insects. The mixture of vegetation heights forms 'edge' habitats much loved by dragonflies, butterflies and other invertebrates.

7 The Grand Western Canal

This short-lived canal was one of the few canals in the country to employ mechanised lifts and inclines to overcome steep hills. Born of a plan in the late 1700s to build a waterway to connect the English Channel with the Bristol Channel (thereby saving the small wooden freight ships from a treacherous journey around Lands End), the canal was not actually started until 1810 when work began on the 17.5km section between the limestone quarries at Lowdwells (near the Devon and Somerset border) and Tiverton.

It was not until the 1830s, once the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal had been completed, that work continued to take the canal across the 22.5 hilly kilometres of Somerset to reach Taunton. Opened in 1838, the Grand Western Canal Company did not enjoy the commercial success it had anticipated, and the building of the railway between Taunton and Tiverton ten years later quickened the demise of the canal, which was abandoned in 1867.

8 Roughmoor

Formerly Roughmoor Farmhouse, this late 18th century building was for a time the HQ for English Nature in Somerset, a Government agency that champions the conservation of wildlife and geology throughout England.

9 Silk Mills Road

The name of this busy road remembers the importance of silk weaving in this area from the late 1770s until the mid 1800s. Isaac Hawkins set up a silk-throwing factory at former cloth works near here in 1810, and continued production until 1860.

10 Bridge House (The Old Mill)

Mill and millhouse dating from the late 18th and early 19th century.

11 Netherclay Community Woodland

Taunton Deane has purchased this four hectare site to create a new community woodland.

12 Bishops Hull

A short detour will take you into the village of Bishops Hull, where the church of St Peter and St Paul is chiefly noted for its 13th century octagonal tower and 16th century bench ends.

13 Netherclay House

A grade 2 listed Georgian house built late 18th century.

14 Longaller Mill

This flour mill was converted in 1823 to replace the previous fulling and tucking mill. It retains all its machinery and its low breastshot wheel, which was built in Wellington in 1880 and is 3.6 metres in diameter and 1.8 metres wide. It was fed by a leat from the River Tone and was described in 1828 as being "very powerful and roomy".

15 Railway Branchline to Minehead

From the iron railway bridge can be seen the start of the branchline to Minehead, now operated by the West Somerset Railway from Bishops Lydeard. It is Britain's longest 'heritage' railway. For more details Telephone (01643) 704996 or look at www.West-Somerset-Railway.co.uk.

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If you require further information please contact:

Taunton Visitor Centre
Market House, Fore Street, Taunton TA1 1JD
Tel: 01823 340470
tauntonvisitorcentre@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk
Web: www.visitsomerset.co.uk/taunton

Taunton Visitor Centre

For comments regarding the condition of the paths, stiles, gates etc. please contact Rights of Way at Somerset County Council.
Tel: 0300 123 2224

