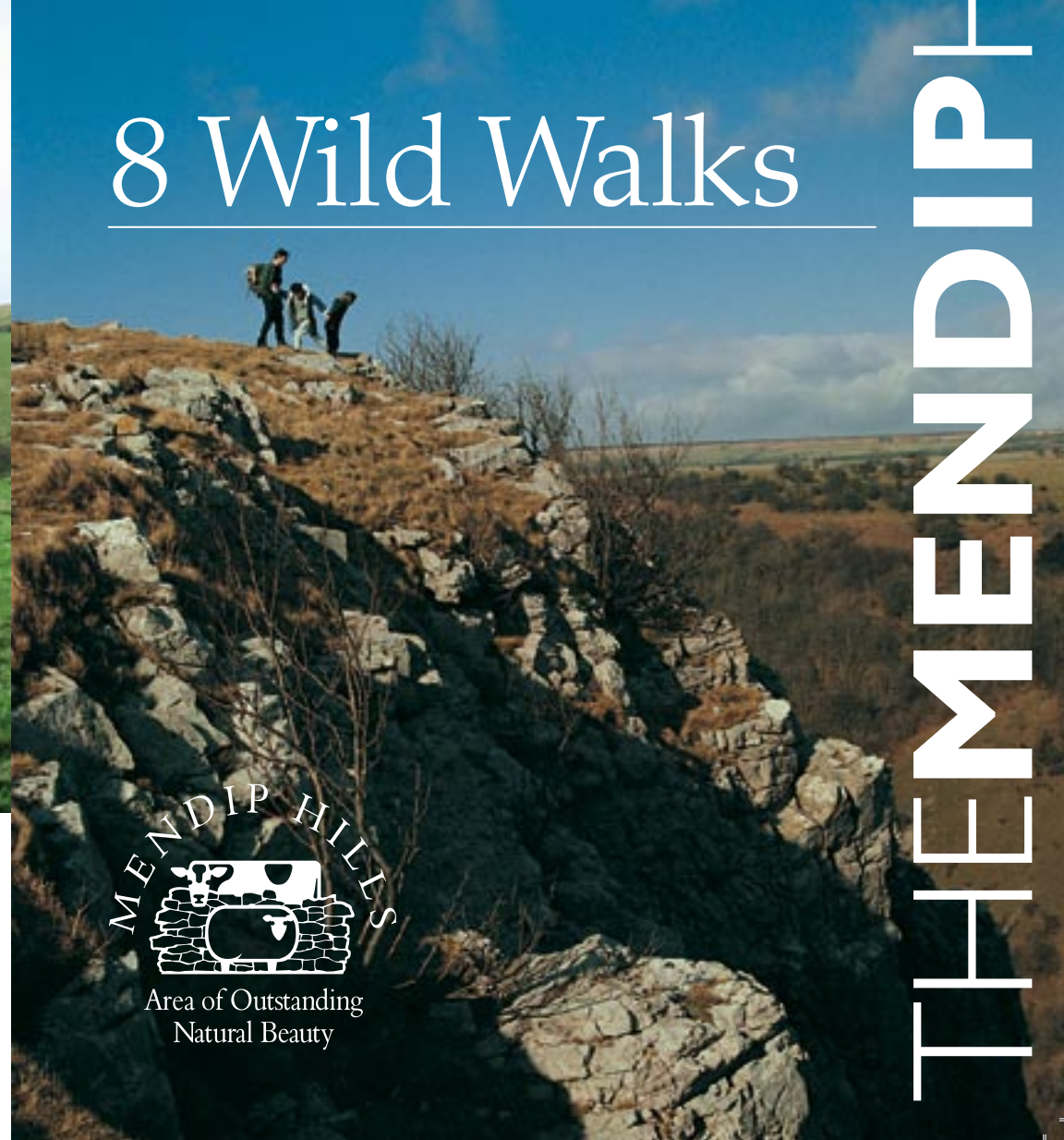


8 Wild Walks



- *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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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 A60M	Motorway	Service Area	Junction Number
A 35	Dual carriageway		
A 51(T) or A35	Trunk or Main road		
B 3074	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

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

SYMBOLS

	Place with spire, minaret or dome		Water		Mud		Land open to the public by permission of the owners. The agreement may be withdrawn.
	Place without such additions		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

Loose rock Boulders Outcrop Scree

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

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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.

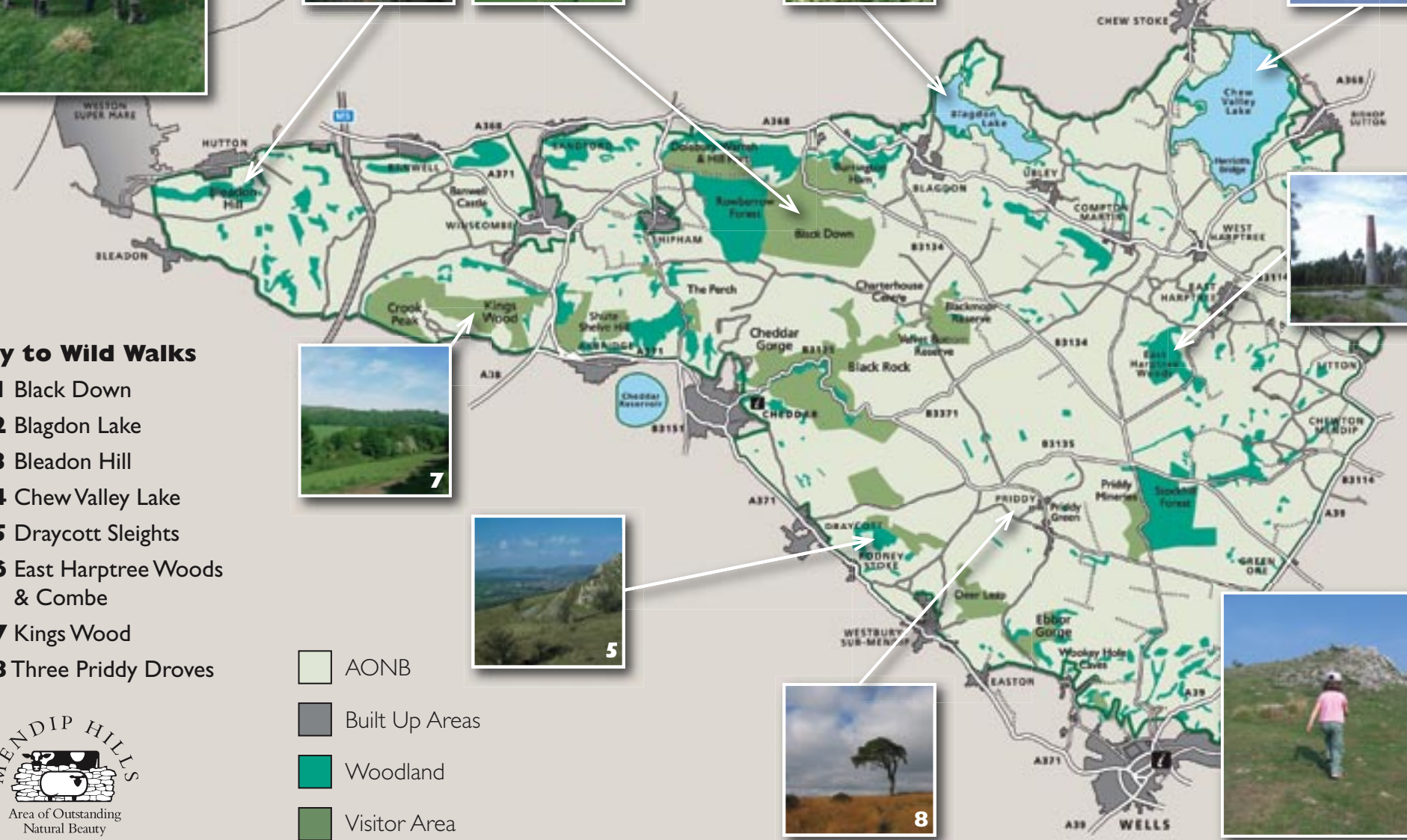
Spend a hot summer afternoon on Black Down, marvel at the autumn colours across Chew Valley Lake, have your spirits stirred by the winter mist in the Vale of Avalon when viewed from Deer Leap, and rejoice in the fresh spring greenery of the combes and gorges. There is always something new, always something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



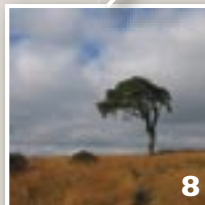
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty



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 Doves

- AONB
- Built Up Areas
- Woodland
- Visitor Area



BLAGDON LAKE:

Man-made, adopted by nature

If it weren't for the Victorian dam that runs for a third of a mile along its western end, you could be forgiven for thinking Blagdon was a natural lake. In fact this peaceful 440-acre reservoir has been there so long – the dam was built back in 1891 – that it has long since blended into the landscape of the northern flanks of the Mendips.

Blagdon takes its name from nearby Black Down. The work of building the massive dam took eight years – the larger materials had to be brought in on the Wrington Vale Light Railway Company's branch line. A large Gothic-style building was constructed to house four massive steam-powered beam engines to pump the water. They have now been replaced by electric motors, but two of the original engines were preserved and can still be seen at Blagdon pumping station.

A rich variety of wildlife soon colonised Blagdon and in more recent times it has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Its meandering 7 miles (11 km) of shoreline alternates sheltered bays, reedbeds, carr woodland and grassland. Reed sweet-grass, reed canary-grass and common reed populate the shoreline and there are aquatic plants such as flowering rush and shoreweed.

Species-rich meadows border parts of the north shore and these are home to saw-wort, wild carrot and pepper saxifrage. Many interesting insects, including a wide variety of butterflies and



Chris Newton

moths, frequent them in summer. The trout which have been stocked by the water company for anglers since the lake was created (predominantly the faster-growing rainbow trout these days) have a rich variety of food to choose from – particularly the larvae of insects such as damselflies, dragonflies, water beetles, midges and sedge flies (caddis flies). There are also sticklebacks, eels, perch and gudgeon.

The lake's rich supply of food ensures a thriving population of waterfowl. They include coot, moorhen, tufted duck, teal, wigeon, mallard, great crested and little grebe, reed bunting, sedge warbler, shoveler, goldeneye, ruddy duck, Bewick's swan, heron and kingfisher.

Devil's darning needles

That's just one of the old country names for dragonflies and damselflies. The two sub-orders are distinguished by the way they hold their wings – those of the dragonflies (*anisoptera*) are held flat like an aeroplane when perching, while the more delicate damselflies (*zygoptera*) bring their wings together.

Several species are common at Blagdon in summer including two of the largest dragonflies, the spectacular Southern Hawker (*Aeshna cyanea*) and the even larger golden-brown emperor dragonfly (*Anax imperator*).

The **ruddy darter dragonfly** (*Sympetrum sanguineum*) is locally common in the South of England and widespread at Blagdon (this one was photographed in Rugmoor Bay on the lake's north shore). The mature male has a blood red face and abdomen, with a marked constriction or 'waist' shape to the abdomen. Immature males and mature females have orange-brown abdomens, while both have black legs. They grow up to 35mm in length when mature and fly from mid-June to October.

Paul Glendell/Natural England



Chris Newton

The colourful life story of the ruddy darter

- The nymphs use plant stems to crawl up out of the water in the early morning. The skin then splits to allow the fully-formed adult to emerge
- Mature males occupy perches near breeding sites and defend small territories. They will try another perch if they fail to spot a female



- Females are intercepted as they approach, and the two mate on nearby vegetation
- The female lays her eggs while still in tandem with the male. She dips her abdomen in open water, on vegetation or in mud to deposit the eggs (damselflies may crawl deep into the water to lay their eggs)
- In high summer the eggs hatch within a few days, but if they are laid late in the season they will not hatch until the following spring
- The nymph feeds on the bottom for a year, hiding among the roots of water plants and gradually growing bigger. Small invertebrates and tadpoles are among their food.

Lakeside vegetation to look out for

Common reed (*Phragmites communis*)
This familiar lakeside plant is characteristic of shallow, freshwater margins, wet ground around ponds, marshes, lakes and slow moving rivers. It often forms large beds. When mature, this tall and elegant plant is topped with a large cluster of purple plumes.



The common reed used to be a far more economically important plant than it is now, as this is the plant that is used to make thatch for roofing. It is also home to two bird species which are named after it, the reed warbler and the reed bunting (the latter is common at Blagdon). It is a vital element in the ecology of Blagdon and neighbouring Chew Valley Lake, as it stabilises muddy areas and provides cover for many birds and invertebrates.

Other things to look out for at or near Blagdon Lake

- Blagdon pumping station (see right)
- Blagdon Village and Church
- Eldreds orchard

Blagdon Lake

Distance: 4km (2½ miles).

Time: About 1-1½ hours.

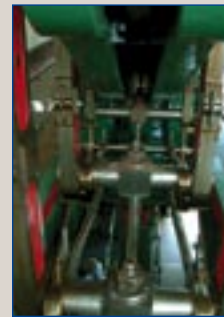
Starting points: Free car park next to Blagdon Village Club OS Grid Ref ST 501 591.

Terrain: Some steeper gradients on lanes, otherwise an easy, fairly level route on the footpaths.

Route: From the car park, walk north down through the village (1) – note the lane becomes steeper here. Turn right into Dark Lane (2). At the bottom, turn left along the road towards Blagdon pumping station (3). Follow the road across the dam; at the end on the right there is the entrance to a footpath (4). Take this footpath along the lake shore. At the very northern tip of the lake, look out for a footpath bisecting the path you are on. Take the left path (5) across two fields to Blagdon Lane (6) and return to the dam (7). Retrace the route you have already taken back to the car park.

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

O.S. Maps: Explorer 141: Cheddar Gorge & Mendip Hills West; Explorer 154: Bristol West & Portishead



Other Information:
Pubs in Blagdon: New Inn, Live & Let Live, Seymour Arms and Queen Adelaide. Village post office and stores in Blagdon.

Chris Newton

Richard Law



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

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RNID typetalk

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