



Devon's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

This leaflet is part of a series of themed trails in Devon's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); helping you get out there, enjoy, and learn more about the landscape around you.

Trail themes include

- Coast in Conflict,
- Man and the Landscape,
- Trade and Settlement and
- A Colourful Landscape.

Have a look at these websites for further leaflets in the series, and ideas for other ways of enjoying yourself out and about!

See www.southdevonaonb.org.uk,
www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk,
www.visitsouthdevon.co.uk and
www.discoverdevon.com

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is the Government's designation for Britain's finest landscapes; there are 40 in England and Wales. Together with Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks, Devon's 5 AONBs cover 35% of the County. AONBs share a common commitment to secure sustainable living landscapes. Each AONB has been designated for special attention because of the quality of their flora, fauna, cultural and historical heritage, as well as beautiful scenery.

Their care has been entrusted to local authorities, organisations, community groups, individuals who live and work in them and those who value them.

Please recycle this leaflet by passing it onto a friend when you have finished with it. Don't let Devon go to waste.

Avon Valley - Woodleigh and Topsham Bridge

Horse Riding Route

- **Start/Finish:** Preston Cross / Moreleigh Mount
- **Distance:** 7.5 miles (12 km)
- **Circular ride:** Yes
- **Grade:** Moderate
- **Terrain:** Quiet country lanes; bridleways; green lanes
- **Toilets:** There are no public toilets along the route.
- **Parking:** Parking on road verge 500m south west of Moreleigh Mount towards Preston Cross
- **Other Facilities:** Public payphone by Church House, Woodleigh
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Kingsbridge Tourist Information Centre 01548 853195 or www.kingsbridgeinfo.co.uk or www.discoverdevon.com/site/where-to-stay
- **OS map:** Explorer 0L20
- **Grid ref:** SX 751524
- Follow the Countryside Code: for more information www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk





Man and the Landscape

The Devon countryside has been shaped and affected by man for thousands of years, and the land has a fascinating tale to tell.

From scratching at the earth with sticks and bones, to flicking switches in today's sophisticated farm machinery, we have left our mark as we have sought to meet our needs from the land. The result is an epic story of quiet heroism and struggle, ambition and desperation, and triumph and defeat, etched indelibly into the Devon landscape.

Thousands of years ago ancient Celtic tribespeople were creating enclosures and huge earthworks. Saxon settlers imported their unique systems of agriculture, and medieval farmers set out to claw the land back from nature. Clearing heaths and woods acre by hard-won acre for cultivation, they made strides which have been built upon by generations of farmers and workers right up to the present day.

The characteristic hedgebanks which enclose Devon's fields are jewels in the county's crown. Many of them date back over 800 years and some, incredibly, are up to 4000 years old. These sturdy and beautiful boundaries, spangled with wildflowers in spring and summer, are a haven for wildlife of all kinds.

Thousands of years of toil and muscle have produced the patchwork landscape of field and farm you see today. The earth has been cut, dug, ploughed and moved for as long as man has been here, and it is no exaggeration to say that, as you look out over the countryside, Devon's history really is laid out before you.



Directions

Numbers in brackets refer to Points of Interest.

1. From parking, as you face the road, and moor beyond, turn left along road
2. At junction at Preston Cross follow road round to left. After 20m bear left at Preston Fork, signed for Capton and Lowerdale. Turn immediately right through metal gate and follow fenced-in grass track along field edge to left (1,2,3)
3. Where track ends at farm storage area, turn right down road (4,5)
4. As you climb out of dip, just before right hand bend turn left through gate onto Woodland Trust land and follow path
5. After 100m, just below 5-bar gate turn left to follow public bridleway down through woodland plantation
6. Cross stream and follow bridleway up and around to right of Coldharbour Wood
7. Just as you reach small hamlet of Grimpstonleigh (6), turn right opposite wooden carport to follow track along green lane
8. As track levels off at top of climb after ½ mile (7), turn right back onto Woodland Trust land at Watkin and Centry Wood (8). Follow permissive bridleway up to left. Bear left when you reach the trees to skirt edge of plantation
9. After ¾ mile, exit plantation through gate by 'Public Bridleway' sign. (9) Turn right along road
10. By farm at bottom of dip turn left in front of Hendham House. Follow lane down hill (10)
11. Do not cross river at Topsham Bridge(11) but follow lane straight on signed 'To Farm Only – No Through Road'
12. After 300m, by Yeo Farm, bear right up old green lane (12,13)
13. At the junction at Preston Cross go straight on signed 'Moreleigh'. Parking is 500m along road



Points of Interest

1. This permissive bridleway was at one time part of the training facility for the National Hunt stables at nearby Wood Barton. Jennifer and David Barons trained over 850 winners here, and the many



horses to have ridden these gallops include the Grand National winner Seagram.

2. Looking down the valley to the right from here you can see Bedlime Wood and Aveton Wood cloaking the shoulders of the Avon Valley. The high point behind and to the right is the site of Blackdown Rings, originally an Iron Age hillfort built with massive earth ramparts. During their conquest of the Westcountry in 1068, the Norman invaders built a 'motte and bailey' castle on the same site.
3. The land here is included in the Countryside Stewardship scheme. Among the measures, unsprayed margins are being left around fields for the benefit of birds, insects, and small mammals. Overhead, you can hear the beautiful trilling song of the skylark in spring and summer. It is an increasingly rare bird in agricultural areas, so its presence here is a sign of a healthy landscape for wildlife.
4. Part of the land over the hedgebank to the left here, at Lowerdale, was given over in 1786 for the benefit of the parish poor. Fields were rented out and the proceeds distributed amongst the needy, a practise that was still ongoing in the early 20th century.
5. The abundance of wildflowers in the hedgebank alongside the lane includes Primrose, Celandine, Wild Garlic, Bluebell, and Navelwort. There are also the small pink blooms and finely-cut leaves of Herb Robert, Sorrel with its spurred spade-like leaves and reddish tasselled flowerheads, and Dog's Mercury, green in

leaf and flower. Later in the season Hedge Parsley and Foxgloves bloom, and White-flowered Cleavers and fragrant Honeysuckle both ramble and tangle their way among the other plants.

6. The tiny settlement of Grimstonleigh was an estate at the writing of the Domesday Book, and would have been a manor back in Saxon times. Called Lege in 1086, its name developed into Grymeston cu' legh by 1340. The estate was at one time in the ownership of notable local landowner Robert de Grimeston.
7. Woodleigh in 1086 was a manor known as Odelea. It boasted 100 acres of woodland, 2 acres of meadow, and 30 acres of pasture. There were 32 men and their families on the estate in those days, living in varying degrees of servitude. Woodleigh was clearly a place on the up at the time. It is recorded as being worth 60 shillings, having fetched just 40 when the lord of the manor Robert had acquired it.
8. The young woodland here was planted by the Woodland Trust, a charity dedicated to protecting our native woodland

heritage. Part of this area is named in memory of the Trust's founder, Kenneth Watkins. Centry Wood, meanwhile, bears the site's old field name. It is thought to be derived from 'sanctuary', the name given to the field following the discovery of a stone coffin here in the 1960s.

For more information on the Woodland Trust visit www.woodland-trust.org.uk



9. Down a drive to the left here stands Wood Barton. This ancient abode was for centuries home to a branch of one of Devon's grand old families, the Fortescues. In 1901 the house and estate became a Cistercian monastery. The monks came from France, bringing with them an industrious self-sufficient lifestyle, and apparently only one luxury – a taste for snuff! One of the brothers even served as a judge at local shows as the monastery became part of the local community. However, when World War I broke out, the monks returned to France. Most did not return again, and the monastery was wound up in 1921.

10. The valley side across to the right is an illustration of the way the farming landscape continues to change, even in this seemingly timeless Devon countryside. A century ago eighteen fields occupied that flank of land, where only nine now remain.
11. The River Avon rises up on Dartmoor and flows under Topsham Bridge on its way to meet the sea at Bantham and Bigbury. Few ancient British names have survived in Devon, but Avon means 'river' in the old Celtic tongue. This is a good place to see Grey Wagtails. Yellow bibbed and grey backed, they potter about the water's edge bobbing their long tails busily. The brown, white-breasted Dipper, meanwhile, is often to be seen in whirring flight low over the water.
12. Surveys of agriculture in Woodleigh parish were carried out in 1949 and 1958. They give a vivid picture of the pace of change here as agriculture industrialised following World War II. The total numbers of livestock in the parish increased in those nine years from around 3000 to over 5500. In the same period the number of people working on the land decreased significantly, and the number of horses being used in agriculture dropped from 25 to just 7.
13. The ridge across the valley to the left marks the northern boundary of Woodleigh Parish. The existence of this small parish was threatened in 1981 when proposed changes would



have led to it being merged with neighbouring Buckland-Tout-Saints. However, the locals dug in their heels and won the day, preserving their independence.

Refreshments

There are no refreshments directly on route. Nearest refreshment options as below

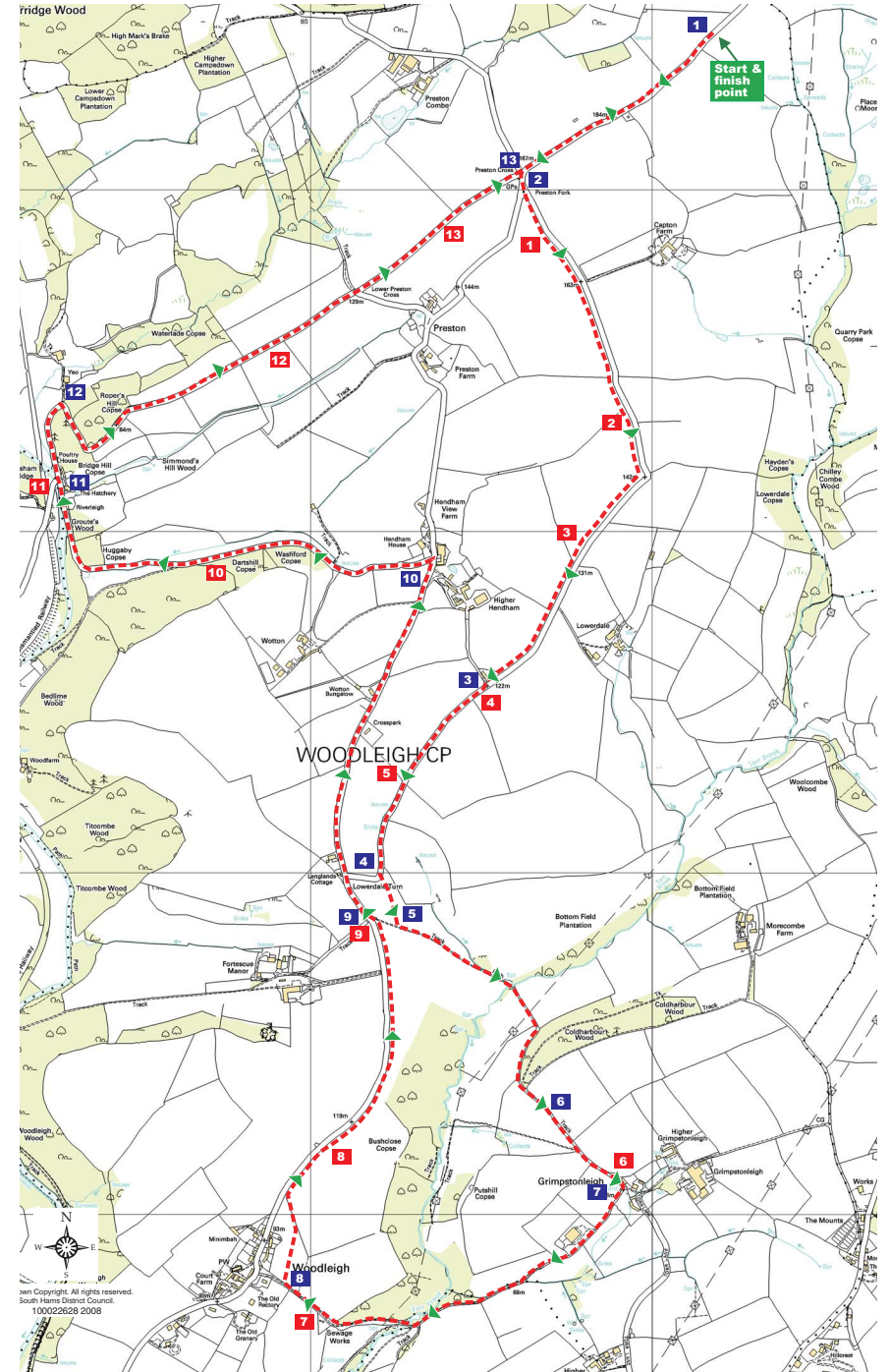
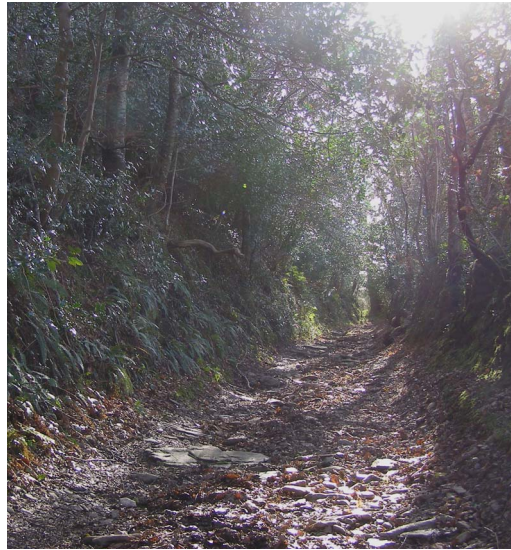
Avon Mill Café and Garden Centre,
 Woodleigh Road, Nr Loddiswell
 01548 550066
www.avonmill.com

Café serving drinks, snacks and meals, including homemade soups, quiches, salads and sandwiches, and Devon cream teas. Open seven days a week

Loddiswell Inn,
 Loddiswell
 01548 550308

www.loddiswellinn.co.uk

Pub serving real ales, with food lunchtimes and evenings



Key		Horse riding route suggested ride direction
		No. refers to directions
		No. refers to Points of Interest

