

Wildlife walks... 1, 1.4 & 2.3 miles

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

Fontmell & Melbury Downs, Dorset

These Downs were bought in memory of English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy, to protect the landscape in which his novels of the Blackmore Vale are set. Here you will discover an open expanse of flowery downland, excellent butterfly populations and breathtaking views.

Start: Car park – grid ref: ST886187 – maps: OS Explorer 118 or Landranger 183

How to get here & local facilities...

By bike: the North Dorset Cycle Way passes through Shaftesbury and runs just south of the estate, passing through the village of Fontmell Magna

By bus: from Shaftesbury take the Wilts & Dorset service 182 to Compton Abbas and Fontmell Magna

By car: from Shaftesbury head south on B3081 and follow signs to Melbury Abbas. There is a car park on the right at the top of Spread Eagle Hill, just before the left turn to Compton Abbas Airfield

Pub in Fontmell Magna and a restaurant at Compton Abbas Airfield. A great place for a picnic, but please help us to keep this area special by taking your rubbish home with you.

Things to look out for...

Stunning views

Savour the wonderful views which stretch for miles across the Blackmore Vale, with superb views to the north of the Saxon town of Shaftesbury.

Melbury Beacon

At 863 feet (263 metres) above sea level, Melbury Beacon is thought to have been one of the sites used for a warning beacon. It was also used to form part of a chain of beacons across Dorset to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

Grazing

Sheep and cattle graze the Downs to prevent grasses becoming dominant, allowing a variety of flowers to grow. Without management, beech or ash woodland would probably dominate the landscape. We work closely with our tenant farmers and volunteer groups to create the right environment for the plants and animals that thrive here.



Enjoy the far reaching views across the Blackmore Vale and out towards North Dorset as Hardy once did.

NT / Clive Whitbourn



One of the best displays of glow worms can be seen, if the weather is good, during June and July. There is also a wealth of butterflies, such as the Adonis blue (pictured here), chalkhill blue and marbled white.

© NT / Lucy Evershed



Join a guided walk to find out more about the natural and cultural history which can be explored here. Contact us on 01672 539167 for more information.

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'Marvel at the far reaching views, high on the chalk downs, while you explore a truly ancient landscape.'

Clive Whitbourn, National Trust Warden

Terrain and accessibility

Choice of 1ml (1.4km), 1.4ml (2.3km) & 2.3ml (3.7km) walks. Open access, so you can explore the whole area. Well used paths and tracks include steep slopes, with uneven surfaces which become muddy and slippery after wet weather. Dogs welcome under close control, as livestock graze the downs. Please dispose of dog mess responsibly.

Contact us: 01672 539167 / wiltshirecountryside@nationaltrust.org.uk

Routes and directions

All three routes start from the car park at the top of Spread Eagle Hill.

Red route... easy 1 mile (1.4km)

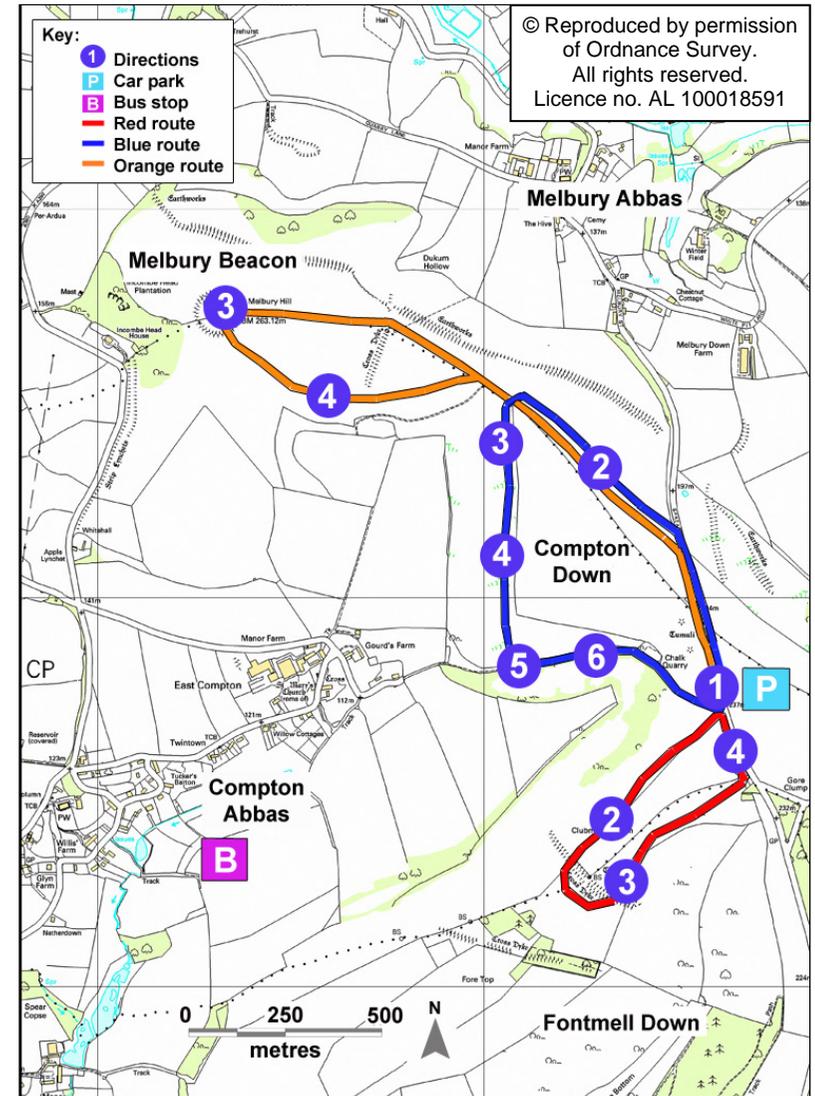
1. From the car park walk straight out across Fontmell Down
2. Cross over the cross dyke (a bank and ditch)
3. Once over the dyke, turn left and walk through the gate. Head left, back up the down, in a direction towards the main Shaftesbury/Blandford road
4. Finally you will come to a small wooden gate on your left. Go through the pedestrian gate and follow the path along the road which will bring you back to the car park

Blue route... moderate 1.4 miles (2.3km)

1. Turn left out of the car park and follow the road north to Shaftesbury for about 300m
2. Go through the pedestrian gate and continue straight on heading towards the Beacon.
3. As you drop down into 'the Saddle' turn left through the pedestrian gate
4. Head along the top of Compton Down in a southerly direction, with the fence on your left
5. Step over a stile (secluded within the thick hedge) and step down onto the track.
6. Turn left up the track in a westerly direction which will bring you back to the car park

Orange route... moderate 2.3 miles (3.7km)

1. Turn left out of the car park and follow the road north to Shaftesbury for about 300m
2. Walk through the gate and continue straight on, following the fence line towards Melbury Beacon. Drop down into the saddle and continue straight on up Melbury Hill.
3. Once on the Beacon take in the stunning 360° view of the Blackmore Vale, Vale of Wardour and Shaftesbury
4. From the Beacon head left over the stile, taking a more southerly route along the fence until you join the path back to the main road and to the car park where you originally started.



National Trust places to visit nearby:

Win Green Hill, Stourhead Estate, Dinton Park, Hod Hill, Turnworth Down

As a charity, independent of government, the National Trust relies on the generosity of its supporters to continue caring for our countryside and wildlife, so that everyone can enjoy the beauty of the outdoors for generations to come.

Find out more at www.nationaltrust.org.uk