

WINDSOR FOREST TRs
PROPOSED TOUR OF THE MENDIP HILLS
19th – 21st May, 2023

Background

The Mendip Hills is a ridge of hills that run from Frome in east Somerset west to the Bristol Channel at Brean Down Fort between Burnham-on-Sea and Weston-super-Mare.

Established in 1972 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty this 30km ridge is made up of limestone which is riddled with gorges and cave systems. Cheddar Gorge is the best known but it's only one of a number of smaller but similar features and landscapes all of which are very impressive in their own right.

The hills are mainly meadows with wooded areas and are home to birds, butterflies and mammals. Orchids grow on the steep hillsides and bluebells adorn the woodlands in the spring. To the north is Blagdon Lake and the Chew Valley with its lake and to the south is Cheddar Reservoir, all of which support a variety of wild life and birds.

Steeped in history the remains of Cheddar Man were found deep in the cave systems and since the Iron Age the area has been inhabited. The Romans mined the area for iron and the remains of the mine workings can be found on the plateau. More recently Brean Down Fort was built as a Palmerston Fort looking out over the Bristol Channel.

From the Mendips there are spectacular views across the Somerset Levels to Glastonbury Tor and the Somerset Coast with South Wales in the distance across the Bristol Channel.

Tour

The proposed Windsor Forest tour of the Mendips will take place over a long weekend from Friday, 19th May to Sunday, 21st.

The detailed planning for our tour has yet to be completed but the initial thinking is that we would start our tour on the morning of Friday, 19th May, starting at 9.00am from the car park in Hartley Wintney, to arrive in the Shepton Mallet area around lunchtime.

After a light lunch we will visit Revington TR in the nearby village of Middlezoy, to arrive around 2.00pm.

We will be hosted there by Operations Manager Dan Allen for a tour of their premises and operations. My initial contact with Neil and Dan have been very positive - they have been very welcoming to our proposed visit and have since put us in touch with the local TR Group, Apple County TRs who have offered their assistance and local knowledge for our tour.

Following our visit to Revington's, if there's any time left we'll take a short road run through

the surrounding countryside before heading back to explore more of the delightful village of Shepton Mallet before heading to our hotel, The Manor House Inn and dinner in the nearby village of Ditcheat.

Saturday will be a drive to and through Cheddar Gorge and to the lesser known but no less beautiful Burrington Combe and Ebbor Gorge. Time can be spent in this area to follow up individual interests, either to visit the caves, chief of which is Gough's cave, the home of Cheddar Man, a visit to the cheese factory and the local cafes. There are also a number of short easy walks including on the top of Cheddar Gorge to look down from above.

After lunch we will press on to the North to explore Blagdon Lake and the larger Chew Valley and its lake, another area of outstanding natural beauty and home to a range of wild birds. Then back to our hotel in Ditcheat before dinner in Wells that evening.

On Sunday morning we will explore the City of Wells, the smallest city in England and its fabulous and historic cathedral, near to which is the oldest, complete medieval residential street in Europe. We will stay in Wells for lunch before travelling on a short distance to Glastonbury, a place of myth and legends where we'll first visit this small town with its High St of eclectic individual shops and equally interesting people and with a hint of mysticism in every corner.

There are ancient wells and the abbey with stories of King Arthur and Guinevere very much alive and flowing. Tradition has it that Glastonbury is the ancient Isle of Avalon where King Arthur fought his last battle and is buried nearby. Then on to ascend Glastonbury Tor – it can be seen from miles around and is another site of mystery and legend with fantastic views around.

The hill rises 158 metres above the surrounding flat Somerset Levels and is a combination of 'natural hill' and man-made terraces. Many believe there is a hidden cave under the hill through which you can pass into the fairy realm of Annwn. Whether or not this exists, two wells that arise from the base of the Tor run with very different coloured spring water. The Chalice Well has very deep iron rich red waters and less than 100 meters away is the White Spring with its sweet tasting calcium rich white water. It is also believed that Joseph of Arimathea travelled to Glastonbury and left the Holy Grail in the area and later returned with Jesus. So, just as well we're visiting on a Sunday.

From here it's time to return for the run home - with our heads filled with awe, magic and mystery.

JeffR

7/3/23