

Ham Hill Audio Trails

This leaflet is designed to be used with the two Ham Hill audio trails, which are available to download for free online:

www.visitsouthsomerset.com/hamhill

(click on 'Accessibility')



You can also use this leaflet on its own - just look out for the audio trail markers around the park and learn more about Ham Hill!



ROUTE 1 NORTHERN SPUR

Ham Hill audio trail one is approximately 2 km of mostly fairly level walking, and should take approximately 1 hour to complete.

1 Ham Hill Centre

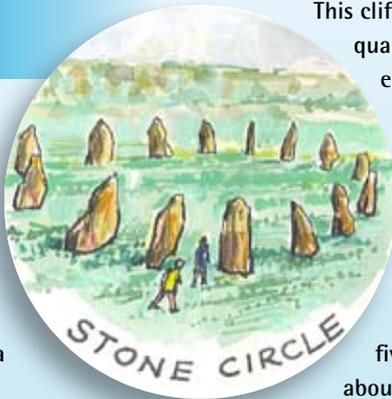


The Country Park is managed by a small team of Countryside Rangers employed by South Somerset District Council and also a dedicated team of volunteers. They look after everything from the birds in the sky down to the rocks under your feet, and everything that falls in between.

You are currently stood in front of the Ham Hill Centre, which houses the Ranger's Office, the Education Centre and toilets. Outside, the rangers keep up to date displays with various information, and there are a range of free publications available to you to take when the rangers are here.

2 Prince of Wales Public House

The Prince of Wales public house has been a pub for many years, however this building and others that stood in this spot here before it have had many different uses over the years. There used to be a chapel here around 1535.



From the 1100's onwards a fair began to take place here, and during the late 1700's there are records of a fair that was centred in and around a fair house that stood here, mostly used for the trading of various agricultural goods. In the field in front of the pub you will see two quite distinctive banks that run parallel to the woodland area above. These are terraces called strip lynchets, and have been formed by the continuous ploughing of the field in one direction. They were created during the medieval period when farmland was at a premium, therefore all land needed to be cultivated – even the steepest slopes.

3 Old quarry face



Look up to your right, and you will see a big craggy cliff that is made from hamstone, the unique rock type that is only found in this part of the country. Hamstone is a type of limestone, which was formed 170 million years ago in the Jurassic period – a time when dinosaurs were still walking the earth. Hamstone is different to other limestones due to its iron content, which creates its warm, golden colour. Because Hamstone is so unique, this area is designated as a Regionally Important Geological Site, or RIGS.

This cliff face is a relic of Hamstone quarrying during the Victorian era. The top of this cliff face is the original height of the land surface, the large dip you are stood in demonstrates just how much stone has been removed in the last 150 years. At points four and five you will find out more about Hamstone quarrying.

4 Stone circle



The impressive Hamstone blocks that you are stood next to were erected at the turn of the millennium by Richard England, whose family has quarried Hamstone from Ham Hill for three generations. The circle is a monument to all the men and women have worked in the Ham Hill quarries over the last 2000 years. If you look very closely at the standing stones, you should be able to see many crushed up seashells. Fossilised sea creatures you can spot include ammonites, belemnites and various bivalves.



6 War memorial



The war memorial is made out of Hamstone, and was erected in 1923 to commemorate individuals from the local villages who gave their lives in the First World War. Further names were later added of those who died in the Second World War and subsequent conflicts. The busy road running in front of you is the A303. The small section that you can see is part of the Roman road known as the Fosse Way, which used to lead into Ilchester, originally a Roman town. To the left in the distance you should be able to see the Blackdown Hills, and beyond them in the distance on a clear day you can see the Quantocks. Directly ahead the low ridge of hills are the Poldens, and right behind them the Mendips.

5 Victorian spoil heaps



In the Victorian times Ham Hill was a very different place to the park you see today. It was an industrial workplace employing up to 200 men in 24 small separate quarries, operating all over the hill, including where you are stood now. Imagine the noisy sounds of the steam cranes hauling up the large blocks of Hamstone into carts. Stone masons chipping away at the stone, horses hooves dragging the stone away in carts and people shouting loudly to one another to be heard above the noise. Out of every quarry, the valuable large blocks of Hamstone were removed, and left behind was the soil and rubble, which was heaped into hilly mounds. These mounds form the interesting and varied Ham Hill landscape you see today. These mounds are now covered with all sorts of grasses and rare plants – very different to the piles of bare earth you would have seen back then.

7 Frying pan earthwork



Looking inwards towards the Country Park, you will see a circular feature, which is known as the frying pan due to its shape. Starting on April 25th, which is St. Mark's day, a large fayre took place here on Ham Hill, historically lasting for up to 13 days. The fayre attracted people from far a field to buy and sell both domestic and agricultural items such as baskets, fabrics, pottery, tools and livestock. The constant parading of animals around a ring has created the recognisable feature you can see here today. This area was used in the late 19th century for fayres once again, but of a different nature. A local man named George Mitchell organised huge

rallies on top of Ham Hill based here. Thousands of agricultural workers marched up the hill singing songs to demand better pay and conditions, and politicians would give speeches here in the frying pan in favour of the labourers.

8 Good example of Iron Age ramparts



Hamdon hillfort is the Iron Age part of Ham Hill Country Park. It is the largest hillfort in Britain, with ramparts extending 3 miles, encompassing an area 200 acres in size. Ham Hill has two to three ditches and ramparts or ridges that were constructed by the Drurotriges Iron Age tribe many years ago, from around 750 B.C. to the 1st century A.D. It is difficult to make out these features all the way round the hillfort due to the natural build-up of earth and the growth of trees, so here is probably the best place to see them. Look down the slope of the hill and you will see some of these ramparts – certainly one of the ditches and one of the ridges or earth banks that is just in front of the line of trees are clearly visible. When Hamdon hillfort was occupied the ramparts would have been kept clear of trees, so that they could spot any potential enemy invaders.

Ham Hill; they were able to see if any enemies were approaching and prepare for battle. Occupants of the Hamdon hillfort would have defended their important settlement with sling stones – a weapon that is similar to a catapult. The people living in this part of Somerset at the time would always have chosen higher ground to settle on, as most of the land is only a few metres above sea level and would have been flooded for most of the year, apart from a few months during the summer.

9 Iron-Age interpretation panel



The views from here are superb – at the moment you are looking east towards Yeovil, which is hidden in a valley about four miles from here. The fact that you could see a long way into the distance was one of the reasons early settlers chose the natural high point of



Route 1
points 1 – 9, 1 hour listening approx. 2km

Route 2
points 1 – 9, 1½ hour listening approx. 3km

Listening points

Look out for...
the lumpy landscapes of Ham Hill on both audio trail routes. These mounds were created in the Victorian times when the hill was covered in quarries.

Feel out for...
the golden Hamstone on both audio trail routes where it can be found in the form smooth sculptures, monuments, rough old quarry faces and boulders. Also, have a feel of the bark of the many different types of trees.

Smell out for...
spring blossom, beginning with Blackthorn in March, followed by Hawthorn, then Elder as late as June. During the summer (June – Aug) fragrant herbs such as wild Basil and Marjoram also grow on the hill.

Listen out for...
Skylarks singing in the meadows on audio trail route 2. They have a distinctive, high pitched trilling/warbling song, which can last for up to 15 minutes without pause!

ROUTE 2

THE PLATEAU FIELDS AND WITCOMBE VALLEY

Ham Hill audio trail two is approximately 4 km of mostly fairly level walking, and should take approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes to complete.

1 Ham Hill Centre



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2 The Timestones



These Hamstone sculptures are called the timestones. They were created by local sculptor Evie Bodie and are placed on the route of the river Parrett trail. The stones were designed to reflect the spirit and past of Ham Hill and have been aligned so that on mid summer's morning when the sun rises, its rays are cast through the circular hole, lighting up the stone axe head behind. The standing stone

is carved in the shape of a bronze axe head that was excavated from the hill a number of years ago. Look at the carvings on the circular stone and see if you can identify the oxen heads; these shapes were copied from an ornate Iron Age bucket handle also found on an archaeological dig at the hill, which can now be found along with many other ancient artefacts such as Roman coins and Iron age tools in the county museum in Taunton.

3 Stroud's Meadow West - Iron Age Life



Now a peaceful field, this large flat meadow was once the hub of Iron Age society living on Ham Hill over 2000 years ago. Geophysical surveys of this field have uncovered extensive hut circles where thatched roundhouses would have stood. Extended families and their livestock would have lived here in the busy village. Specialist craft workers would have worked here, creating metal objects such as weapons and jewellery, baskets and clothes would have been woven, and pots would have been crafted and fired. Trade would have occurred with villages and hillforts from further afield, where they could acquire goods made from different resources.

4 Stroud's Meadow West - Wildlife



The three meadows visible from this point are known collectively as the plateau fields. They form a flat stretch of pristine archaeology and un-quarried land that is also fantastic for wildlife. The corner of this meadow harbours the best population of beautiful orchids

on site. In the early summer the meadow is usually awash with stunning purple blooms of pyramidal, early purple, common spotted and southern marsh orchids. The orchids are just one part of the diverse meadow flora that flourishes in the fields. The meadows are left to grow throughout the summer, then the grass is taken as a hay crop in late summer and is then grazed by sheep. Another species that benefits from this type of management is the skylark. Skylarks have become increasingly rare across the country. However the skylark population at Ham Hill is healthy as their habitat of rough grassland has been conserved. They are easier to hear than see - listen for their distinctive, high-pitched singing in the summer months and look up high to see them shooting up into the sky really fast as tiny dots.



5 The Warren Fields



This field has a hidden secret. In 1907 and 1912, archaeological excavations discovered the remains of a 19 roomed Roman villa. The villa was a substantial hamstone building, probably the centre of a large farm that operated under Roman control. Objects found during the excavations include coins, brooches and tesserae tiles from the floor mosaics, pieces of roof tiles and iron nails. For more information on the Roman villa and to see a reconstruction on how it would have looked, look at the interpretation panel in front of you. This field is actually known as the warren because during medieval times it was managed for rabbit breeding by the priory at Montacute. The peripheral dry stone

walls extend deep into the ground to stop the rabbits digging under them. They would have been caught both for the pot and for their fur.

6 Looking into Witcombe Valley



Looking down into the bottom of Witcombe valley you can see the shadowy earthworks of a deserted medieval village. During the 1400's and 1500's a small village existed at the bottom of the valley. Farming took place on the slopes of the Iron Age hillfort by creating terraces called strip lynchets, and the local woodlands were harvested for fuel.

Today the valley is much quieter, grazed by sheep to maintain the rough grassland habitat. At the bottom of Witcombe there is a large block of mixed woodland called Horse's wood, which is really good for wildlife as it is fairly undisturbed, although you are free to go in and explore. The large trees in the woodland provide nesting sites for buzzards, which you can often see and hear soaring on the thermals above the valley, looking for prey. Ham Hill Country Park extends across the far side of Witcombe valley into Pit wood as far as the eye can see and more! A walk in the woodlands is well worth it in the early spring to see the primroses, later in April to see the bluebells, and in the summer dragonflies are a common sight.

7 Butchers Hill



This flat field is known as butchers hill. For many centuries this field has been the industrial centre for the communities living on Ham Hill. Fire pits and old limekilns have

been excavated, showing that both the Iron Age and Roman villagers used the area for manufacturing. Today the only noise you can hear is from the large active quarry operating from the buildings on the other side of the hedge, and occasional cars passing by.

9 Deep Quarry



This incredible rock face is known as deep quarry. It exists because the Victorian quarry workers extracted large blocks of Hamstone down to quite a depth, leaving us with the vertical faces you can see today. Approach the rock and find the diagonal marks cut into the face. These are not natural, but were caused by the pick axes, or adzes, used by the quarrymen to extract the stone. Explosives cannot be used to quarry Hamstone because it shatters the stone. Today this rock face is designated as a geological site of special scientific interest, or SSSI, which means it's protected under law. It is protected because the Hamstone is unique and it demonstrates a number of interesting features like crushed sea shells and sedimentary layers. Bats roost in the large crack that extends across one face, so ivy is left over the top of this to prevent any disturbance to the animals. If you visit this area at dusk in the summer you might see the bats emerging and beginning their nightly hunt for insects.

8 Limekiln



The feature in front of you is a limekiln. The structure allows safe combustion of limestone (in this case Hamstone) and wood together to leave a residue of lime. Lime has a number of useful purposes, most likely the lime created on Ham Hill was for spreading on the farmland as a fertiliser or for use in cement. The mixture of Hamstone and coal would have been poured into the top of the kiln and down into the brick lined pot. After firing, the end product of lime would have been scraped out of the bottom from the draw hole. This particular limekiln is built of a mixture of stone and brick, and dates to the mid 1800's. There were more lime kilns located on Ham Hill but they were destroyed when the road was built through the site.

For more information or if you have any queries about Ham Hill Country Park please contact the Ham Hill Office on **01935 823617**, email hamhill@southsomerset.gov.uk or visit ...

www.visitsouthsomerset.com/hamhill

If you would like to join the mailing list to receive South Somerset District Council's Countryside Events leaflet annually, please contact 01935 823617, email hamhill@southsomerset.gov.uk or to download the events guide for free visit www.southsomerset.gov.uk/countrysideevents

If you need this information in large print, Braille, audio or another language, please contact 01935 462228

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