

U P H I L L W A L K S

One of a Series of Healthy Walks Around and About Uphill

Walk Eleven

BREAN DOWN WAY

9 miles / 4.5 hours

This is the longest of this set of walks and requires full walking apparel and liquid refreshment.

Start at Uphill Wharf Café and Bar and follow the path past the quarry and through Walborough nature reserve to Wayacre Drove. Then follow the stone dust path to Brean Cross sluice. Continue across the sluice (the River Axe). Here you will see a bird screen which has been constructed to prevent disturbance to birds in the estuary.

Follow the route around Diamond Farm Caravan and Camping Park onto Weston Road. Follow the shared-use path to the end of this road. You will then need to cross Warren Road and take the bridleway (which is sign posted) down to the beach. You can walk along the beach to Brean Down and the National Trust Café. Please note that on a high spring tide it is not possible to access the beach at this point.

Follow the road from the café towards the headland until you reach some fairly steep steps. These will lead you up onto the Down. Alternatively carry on down Warren Road to the café and then carry on to the steps as above.

This rugged headland is the site of archaeological remains from the Iron Age. A hillfort was first built here in about 300BC to defend the entrance to the River Axe, which was an important trade route for lead coming out of the Mendips. The large whaleback headland is an extension of the limestone rocks of the Mendip Hills. The vegetation on its steep, rocky southern slopes and cliffs contrasts with that on the gentler slopes of the north side where the soil is deeper.

Once on the Down, take the path to the left, along the southern slopes. Wildlife thrives here due to the rocky limestone grassland and warm south facing cliffs. Continue along the path until you come to the site of a Romano-Celtic temple. It was built around AD 340, close to a Bronze Age burial mound. Rock from a quarry on the Down provided some of the stone for the building.

Many butterflies love the limestone cliffs and do very well on Brean Down. The common blue, chalkhill blue and marbled white can often be spotted during the summer months. The chalkhill blue butterflies love the limestone cliffs. Further along the path you will come across the remains of a Celtic field system, a series of small rectangular fields.

To preserve the rich variety of vegetation on the Down, grass and scrub need to be cut back otherwise they can overwhelm more delicate plants. Cattle and rabbits help to mow the turf. Feral goats do a good job at trimming it back too. Grazing goats help to preserve the rich vegetation on Brean Down.

Continue up towards the fort, which is located on a small hill. Here you can take a closer look at the remains of the fortifications. In 1862 four acres were requisitioned at the tip of Brean Down to build up fortifications to protect access to Bristol and Cardiff in fear of the growing strength of France under Napoleon III. No shots were ever fired in action, but regular drill and gunnery practice was part of the routine. The fort was re-armed at the start of the Second World War.

Brean Down Way is also a permissive cycle route.

Both Uphill and Walborough nature reserves are grazed by cattle during the summer, please follow the countryside code of conduct and the CROW act and ensure all dogs are kept under control/on short leads when passing through and gates are kept shut unless otherwise directed.

Continued

