

10 Leisure Walks of Discovery A Boot Up THE SOMERSET LEVELS

Rodney Legg

Gripes, gutters, ditches, rhynes, drains and rivers. These are the six stages of water management in the withy wetlands of Somerset. Formerly inundated by the sea – inland as far as Glastonbury – the Levels are a man-made landscape. Their creation goes back to the Neolithic period with the Sweet Track at Shapwick being dated by its tree-rings to 3806 BC – making it the oldest-known road in Europe.

Marshland continued to be drained for thousands of years. Monastic sea walls and causeways were followed by Parliamentary enclosure acts. Now the process is partially in reverse with much of the worked-out peatlands being encouraged to revert to nature in an extensive series of wildlife sanctuaries. Herons abound, the otter and the water vole are back, and great flocks of wintering duck and geese return each winter to Bridgwater Bay.

This is the easiest walking country going though it can be squelchy underfoot. Circuits of four to nine miles suit the needs of families, groups of friends or individuals looking for a gentle stroll or a longer walk and mainly follow low-lying tracks and drove-ways, though we sometimes venture away from the watercourses into its 'islands' and up to viewpoints. History ranges from monastic fish-ponds to the site of the Duke of Monmouth's Sedgemoor battlefield and the airfield from which the bombers took off for Australia to test Britain's nuclear weapons. Many of the walks feature a pub along the route.

Halsgrove's new-format guidebook, containing maps, photographs and useful information will ensure a great walking experience. Packed with colour, the book is an ideal reminder of a visit to the Somerset Levels.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rodney Legg is a prolific author and historian who has published hundreds of country walks. Nationally he is active in the environmental movement having been chairman of the Open Spaces Society since 1989 and a member of the ruling council of the National Trust from 1990 until 2009.

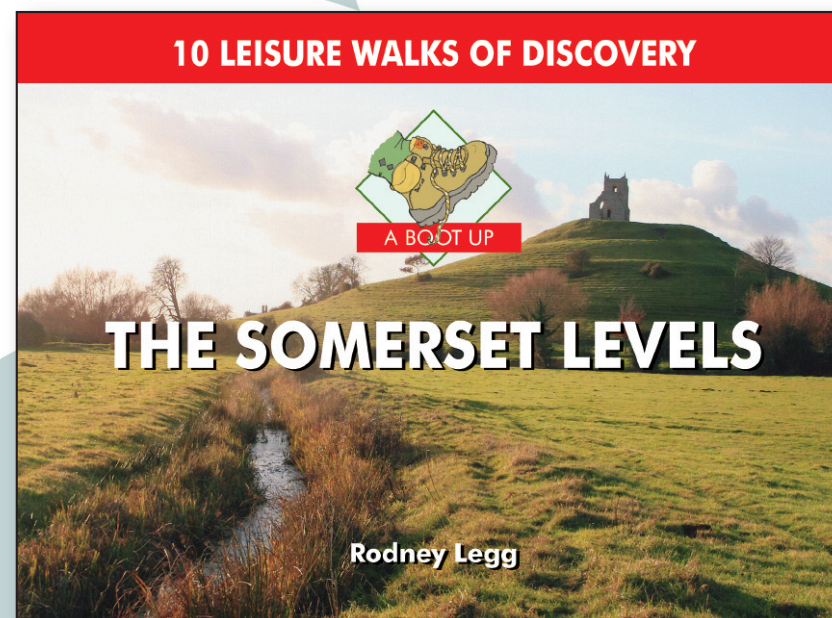
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A BOOT UP THE SOMERSET LEVELS



Otters at Westhay



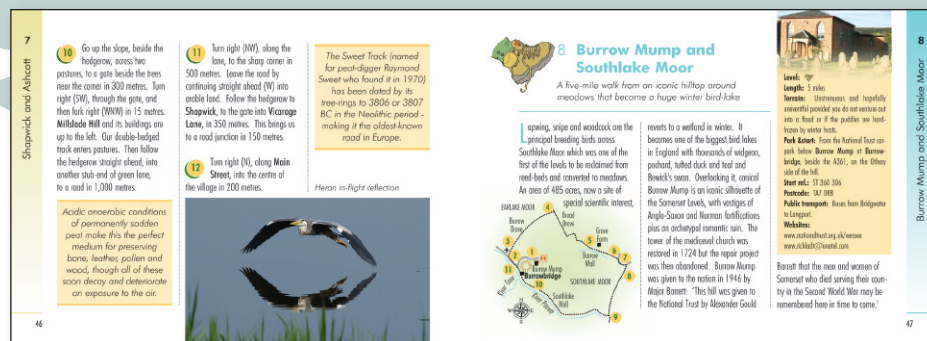
Chapel of St Columbanus



King's Sedgemoor Drain



Right: Shapwick Heath Nature Reserve



Example of a double-page spread.



Dundon Hill