

A BOOT UP MID DORSET

Rodney Legg

Mid Dorset is dominated by the chalk massif of the Dorset Downs. This was sheep country, for a generation after Thomas Hardy's time, until most of the flocks melted away during wartime ploughing and the agricultural revolution of the 1960s. Many of the ancient monuments have escaped the plough but great expanses of Celtic fields and settlements lie under prairie-sized fields of grain.

It is on the escarpments and hilltop ridges where patches of natural downland have survived. The characteristic flora comprises distinctive chalkland plants which flourish on impoverished alkaline soils.

Several areas of open country, designated as such for public access, are crossed en route. Though the area is ringed by country towns its heartland is as sparsely populated as anywhere in Dorset. In places the road system is also minimal – which makes the paths network even more important.

The ten circular walks, ranging from 3 to 8 miles, suit the needs of families, groups of friends or individuals looking for a gentle stroll or a longer walk, and reflect the many varied facets of the area – its people, its history, and its working landscape and will help first time visitors to experience some of the great scenery the area has to offer. Many of the walks feature a pub along the route.

The ten walks are: Up Sydling and Batcombe; Cerne Abbas and Up Cerne; Godmanstone and Nether Cerne; Buckland Newton and Cosmore; Alton Pancras and Piddletrenthide; Piddletrenthide and Plush; Dorsetshire Gap and Bingham's Melcombe; Milton Abbas and Bulbarrow; Okeford Hill and Turnworth; Winterborne Stickland and Houghton.

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 area.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

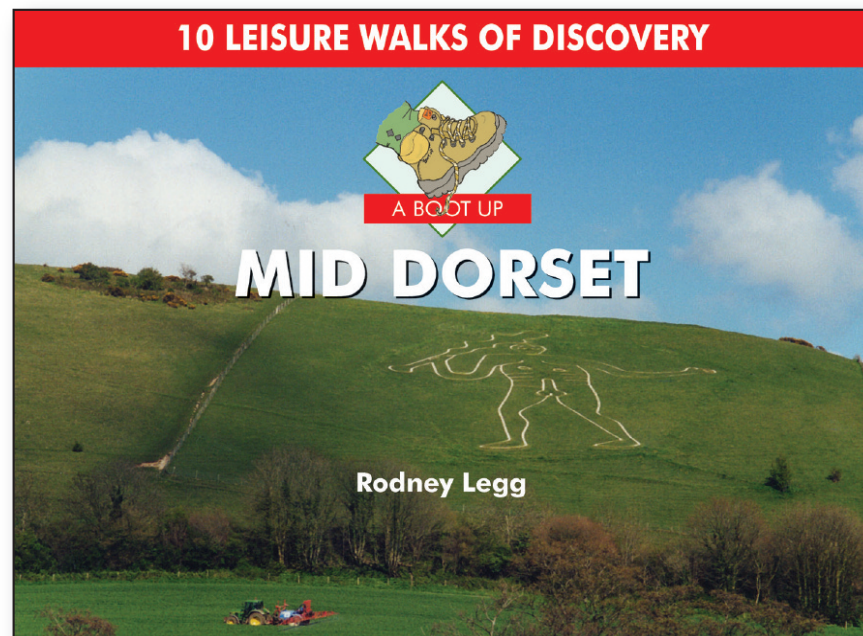
Rodney Legg is a prolific author and historian who has published hundreds of country walks. Nationally he is active in the environmental movement having been chairman of the Open Spaces Society since 1989 and a member of the ruling council of the National Trust from 1990 until 2009.

HALSGROVE CATALOGUE

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A BOOT UP MID DORSET



Downstream from Nether Cerne



Glebe Cottage and Church Lane



River Piddle



The Cerne Giant



Plush valley

6 Piddletrenthide and Plush

9 Turn right (SW), keeping the trees to your left, towards the right-hand ash tree in the corner of the field in 400 metres. Here the bridleway joins a flinty track along which we proceed straight ahead between the fields. In 1,000 metres we come to the road at the entrance to **Doles Ash Farm**.

10 Turn abruptly right (NW) without joining the asphalt road, along an unmetalled public road beside and parallel to the drive to **New Barn Farm**. Pass the farm in 150 metres, and then **Tokenhills Coppice**, which is also to your left. Bear right in 400 metres and do not enter the hazel woods.

11 Turn left (W) on reaching the road in 175 metres. Cross the bridge and follow the road up and around (SW) **Redlands Coppice**.

12 Fork right (N) if you are parked between Poachers line and the church. Alternatively bear left (S) for the Piddle Inn and the school in the lower half of the village.

Thinking at Plush

We descend into Piddletrenthide in 1,200 metres.

Plush as a place-name originated from the Old English "plasc" – or "plash" in some dialects – for a mossy pool.

7 Dorsetshire Gap and Bingham's Melcombe
A 5-mile circuit to a place of pilgrimage in the middle of nowhere

Level: 5 miles
Terrain: Paths easy and dry in the down; hill along through the valley undergrowth.
Park & start: In the vicinity of the junction between the Fox Inn and Old Brewery Hill at Bury.
Start ref.: ST 745 032
Postcode: DT2 7PH
Public transport: Southern National bus service 311 from Dorchester to Blandford.
Website: www.dorsetgap.co.uk
www.dorsetgap.com

Some rambles have a place of pilgrimage. Hikers preserve the memory of what was once the central hub of the county, at a former cross-roads where now only bridleways meet, among the butterflies and orchids of the Dorset Downs. Now only meowing buzzards and low-flying aircraft break the silence. This is the Dorsetshire Gap (or Dorset Gap to devotees) which is made special for walkers by the custom of providing a visitor's back for them to sit. It used to be in a biscuit tin lying in the grass but has graduated to the double protection of a sandwich bar inside a wooden road box. The nearest similar facility is in the middle of Dartmoor. In the name of Dorset is well large in the next valley, with

Bingham's Melcombe being dominated by its great huge hedge planted in 1550.

7 Dorsetshire Gap and Bingham's Melcombe

Example of a double-page spread.