

HALSGROVE DISCOVER SERIES

SOMERSET

Exploring the Summerland

John Bailey. Photography by John & Tina Bailey

Extending for almost 70 miles from County Gate on the western border with Devon to Farleigh Hungerford in the east, the beautiful county of Somerset is unparalleled anywhere in Britain for its varied landscape. The uplands of Exmoor and the hinterland of the Bristol Channel contrast significantly with the Somerset Levels and the Blackdown and Mendip Hills, the latter forming a natural border to the north of the county. Somerset is dotted with small hamlets, villages and a scattering of larger areas of habitation. Inland are a myriad of ancient monuments, historic relics and the delightfully restored West Somerset Railway, once again providing a steam passenger service used by both locals and visitors.

The book offers a wonderful glimpse of the coastal regions, moorlands, hills and idyllic countryside uncovering numerous delights along the way. Setting out from where Exmoor meets the sea, the coastline runs for over 40 miles to Brean Down north of Burnham-on-Sea. East of Exmoor are the more gentle uplands of the Quantock Hills with delightful hidden hamlets and a rich literary past before we reach the historic county town of Taunton. To the south the landscape rises once more with the Blackdown Hills running parallel with the Devon border, a land where ancient monuments and historic houses can be found amid fantastic pastoral scenery. Heading north the Somerset Levels and Moors cover some 250 square miles, some below sea level, providing a unique landscape in stark contrast to the rolling uplands. Encircled by the Levels is the mystical Isle of Avalon with the spiritual town of Glastonbury at its heart. The impenetrable Mendip Hills, a bastion of the Roman Empire, were traversed by the Somerset & Dorset Railway in the nineteenth century. The Mendip Hills boast a wealth of attractions including the world famous Cheddar Gorge, Wookey Hole and are home to Wells, the smallest city in England.

All this and more is explored by John Bailey, who reveals this fascinating county through an informed text and more than 200 glorious images so that the reader can truly discover Somerset afresh.

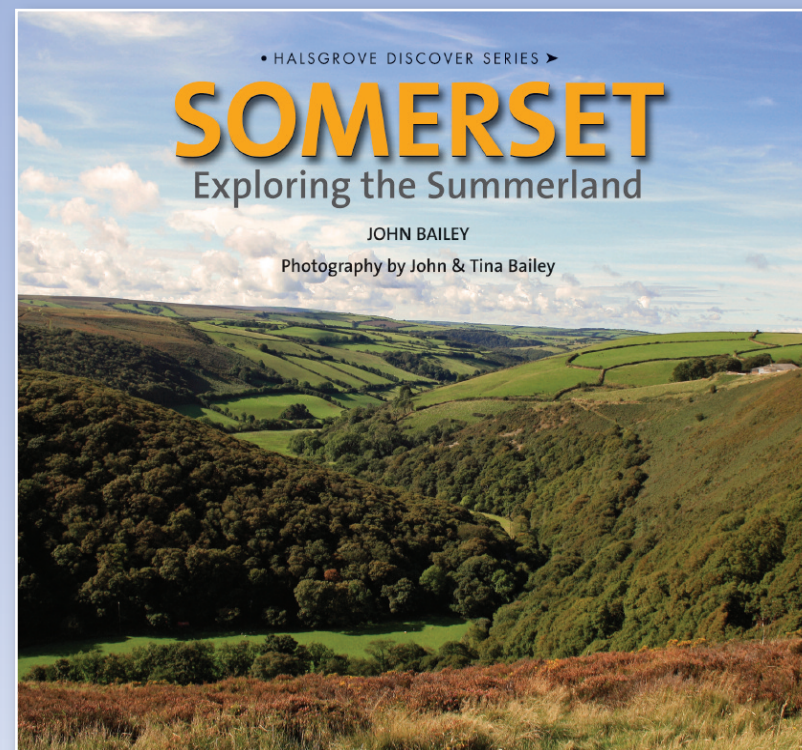
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Bailey began taking photographs over 35 years ago. His first book was published in 2009 and since then he has written and photographed several landscape studies of places as diverse as the Isle of Skye, and the Mendip Hills near his home in Somerset. John Bailey also has a deep interest in popular music: his pictorial celebration of the *Glastonbury Festival* was published by Halsgrove in 2013. This is his sixth book.

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SOMERSET – EXPLORING THE SUMMERLAND



The legend of the Witch of Wookey dates as far back as 6th century. The caves were formed by the actions of the River Axe which continues to flow through the caves.



Top right: *Eddystone* became a popular visitor to the West Somerset Railway.

Bottom right: North Hill rises abruptly from Minehead harbour marking the start of the Exmoor coast.

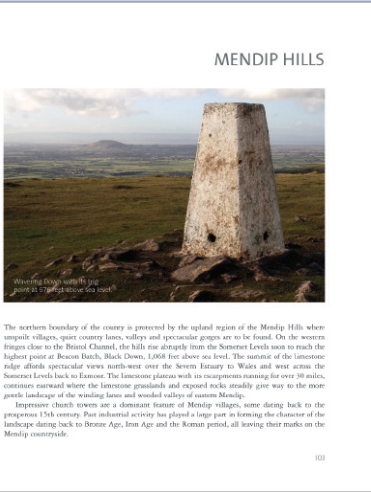
Below: Cheddar gorge with the early morning sun highlighting the northern cliffs. Beyond the gorge the average height of the surrounding countryside is only 20 feet above sea level in stark contrast to the Mendip Hills.



Example of a double page spread.



The bulk of the Mendip Hills is made up of an undulating limestone plateau but at Crick Post the limestone breaks through to provide a genuine summit with unobstructed views in all directions.



MENDIP HILLS

Whispering Down South is just one of 57 atmospheric sea coast

The northern boundary of the county is protected by the upland region of the Mendip Hills where unspoiled villages, quiet country lanes, valleys and spectacular gorges are to be found. On the western fringes close to the Bristol Channel, the hills rise steeply from the Somerset Levels some to reach the highest point at Beacon Batch, Black Down, 1,068 feet above sea level. The summit of the limestone ridge affords spectacular views north-west over the Severn Estuary to Wales and west across the Somerset Levels back to Exmoor. The limestone plateaus with its meagre vegetation for over 30 miles continues eastward where the limestone grasslands and exposed rocks steadily give way to the more fertile landscape of the winding lanes and wooded valleys of eastern Mendips.

Impressive church towers are a dominant feature of Mendip villages, some dating back to the prehistoric 15th century. Past industrial activity has played a large part in forming the character of the landscape dating back to Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Roman period, all leaving their marks on the Mendip countryside.