

Dunster (Somerset) village walk

AFTER the Norman conquest, William de Mohun was given 69 manors in the West Country. He chose to make Dunster the administrative centre of his estates and the village grew in the shelter of his castle. By the 12th century it was a borough and by the 13th it had markets and fairs. It was sold to the Luttrells in the 14th century.

The village became a busy centre for manufacturing a heavy cloth known as Dunsters. Most households were involved in spinning or weaving and there were several fulling mills and dyeworks by the river. Trade prospered until the 18th century, when the area was outcompeted by mechanised centres in the north and east of England. Trades such as millers, tailors, saddlers, wheelwrights, smiths, watchmakers and candle-makers continued until the late 20th century. Minehead and Taunton are now the service centres and Dunster's shops have been given over to tourism. However, its comparative lack of recent development has preserved the village.

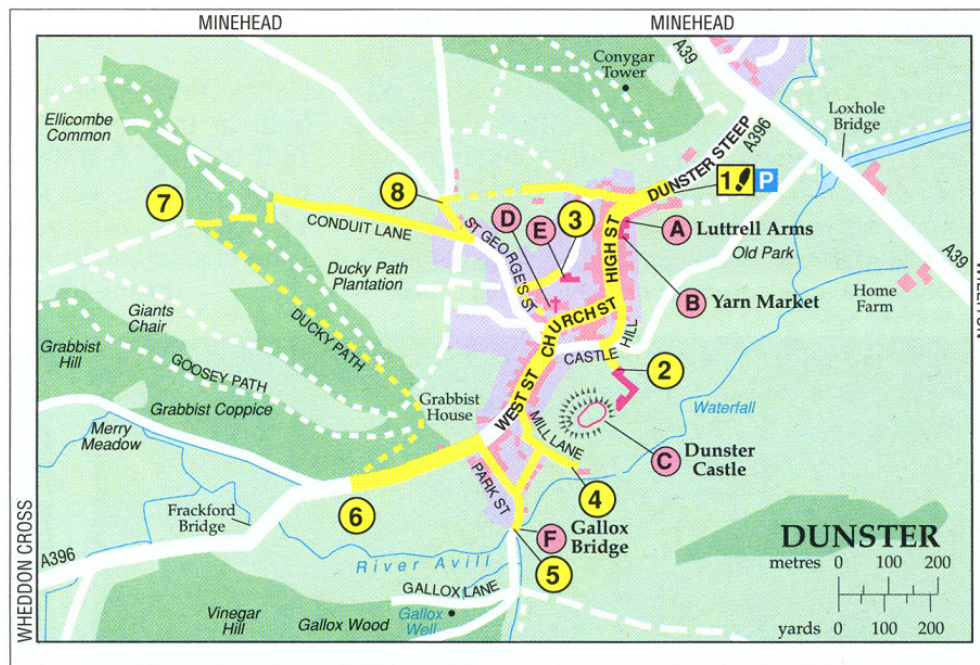
Walking directions

①

From the car park, turn left up Dunster Steep. Keep round to the left and walk down High Street, passing the Luttrell Arms and the Yarn Market.

• A •

Luttrell Arms. This was built in the 15th century as the guest house of the abbots of Cleve Abbey. Many medieval features include the hall and yard with carvings around the windows to the abbot's kitchen. In the 17th century it became an inn, and



stone from the ruined castle was used to build the entrance porch.

• B •

Yarn Market. This was probably built in 1547 by George Luttrell. It was restored in 1647 after being damaged in the siege of Dunster Castle. There is still a hole in one beam made by a cannonball fired from the castle. The belfry was used to signal the start of the day's market, and merchants spread their cloth on the wide oak-topped walls.

Go straight up Castle Hill to the castle.

• C •

Dunster Castle. Started by the de Mohuns soon after 1066, the oldest surviving part is the gateway (13th century). Many of the medieval buildings were remodelled in the 17th century when the house was enlarged. The castle was besieged between 1645 and 1646 and was held for the

King. Its defences were demolished but the house was saved and in the following century the grounds were landscaped by artist Richard Phelps, who built ornate bridges and Conygar Tower opposite. Reconstructed in the 1860s under architect Anthony Salvin, the internal features of the house are largely Victorian in character. In 1975 it was acquired by the National Trust, after 600 years of occupancy by the Luttrell family.

②

Return to the High Street and turn left into Church Street, passing the Nunnery, which was built soon after 1346, when the site was granted to the Abbot and Convent of Cleve. It was called High House until the 18th century and was never actually used by nuns.

Information

Length of walk: 2 miles
Approximate time: 1½ hrs

Terrain

Mostly level and easy going, with some uphill walking on the Grabbist section. Conduit Lane can be wet in places. Not suitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs.

Parking

Car park and toilets in Dunster Steep, near the junction of A39 and A396.

Refreshments

Selection of inns and cafés in the village.

Open

Dunster Castle (NT)
Dunster Mill

Continue to the end of the street to reach the church.



• D •

St George's Church. The church was conveyed to Bath Abbey by William de Mohun in the late 11th century and was rebuilt by the monks early in the 12th century as a priory church. Inside is an exceptional fan-vaulted roof screen, the longest in England, built about 1500 to separate the chancels of parishioners and Benedictine monks.

Leave the church and turn right, walking through the churchyard and out through the lych-gate. Turn right to the Priory.

• E •

Priory. Looking from the gateway, to the left is the Norman dovecote, restored in 1988 but still containing its original woodwork. Inside are about 500 nest holes for pigeons, which provided fresh meat in winter. After the dissolution of the priory in 1539 it became the property of the Luttrells, who would serve several hundred squabs (young pigeons) at castle banquets.

Ahead is the 16th-century tithe barn, used for storing rents in kind from church and priory ten-

ants - mainly wool in this case. To the right is a garage built for storing lime from kilns in Alcombe. Beyond is the prior's house, now a private property. Adjacent is the walled cloister garden, still with herbs as would have been used by monks, and the castle kitchen garden, now a park.

Take the doorway in the wall opposite the dovecote into the memorial garden.

③

Return to Church Street. (It may be possible to short-cut back through the church via its north porch.) Turn right and follow West Street to its junction with Mill Lane. Turn left and follow the leat to the mill. The working mill is possibly on the site of one of the two mentioned in the Domesday Book. The present building dates from the 17th century, and was extensively restored in 1780 and in 1980. Unusually, it has two overshot wheels.

④

Return up Mill Lane for 100 yds and take the path between the bungalows to the left. Keep to the left and continue to Gallox Bridge.

• F •

Gallox Bridge. Several packhorse bridges were built in this area from medieval times until the 18th century, mainly resulting from the woollen trade. This one was known as Doddebridge in the 14th century; its name was changed when gallows were erected at the crossroads beyond the bridge during the reign of Henry VIII.

⑤

Return straight up Park Street to West Street. Turn left and keep to the edge of this busy road, noting the village pond on the left and the toll house on the right.

⑥

At the road junction turn right and take the path doubling back through the woods. Keep ahead without forking. The path is joined by Goosey Path and gradually climbs through woodland along Duck Path.

⑦

Turn right down Conduit Lane. Just past the double bend you see St Leonard's Well on the right. Water from here was taken along pipes to the priory and through the arch in the churchyard wall, later occupied by stocks. It still feeds a well in St George's Street. The well-house is 16th century. At the junction, turn left up St George's Street.

⑧

At the Butter Cross, turn right and take the footpath over the field behind it. The cross once stood in the market place at the foot of Castle Hill where dairy produce was sold (hence the name) but was moved here about 1825 when wooden shops known as The Shambles and other market buildings were demolished. Continue along Priory Green and The Ball to return to the car park.

