

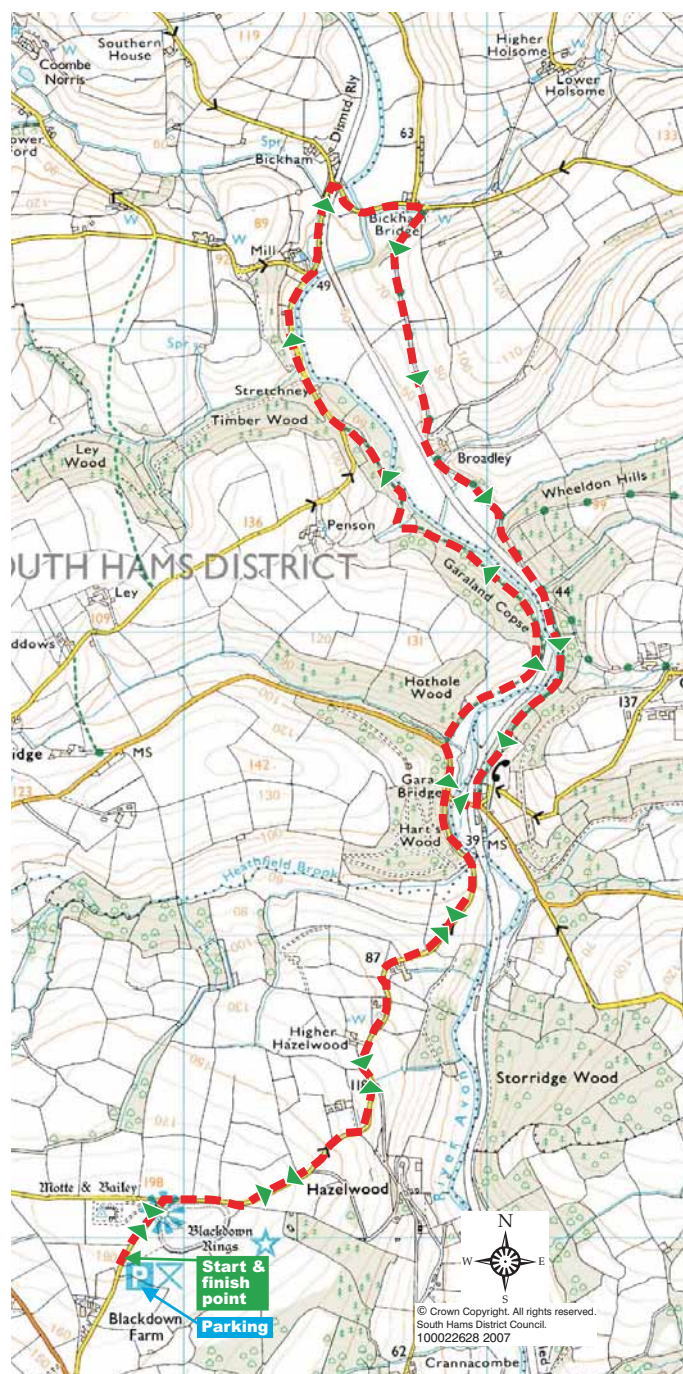
Blackdown Rings and the Upper Avon Valley

The peaceful wooded Avon Valley, rich in wildlife and wildflowers, is a blissful spot. Explore the vale on this walk, with the river for company, taking in the superb Iron Age hillfort and sweeping views of Blackdown Rings.

Start:	Blackdown Rings car park
Distance:	6.25 miles
Circular Walk:	Yes
Grade:	Moderate
Terrain:	Footpaths and green lanes, reasonably even underfoot but muddy in places in wet weather; surfaced roads.
Obstacles & Steep Gradients:	No stiles; no steps; 1 steep ascent. This route is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs.
Public transport:	For information on public transport call Traveline on 0871 200 22 33 or www.traveline.org.uk
Refreshment stops:	Hazelwood House. Cream teas; lunches (bookings only). Just off road from Blackdown Rings to Gara Bridge. Use upper and lower drives to loop back onto walk route. 01548 821232.
Toilets:	Nearest public toilets at car park in Loddiswell.
Parking:	Blackdown Rings car park. Free.
Accommodation:	Please contact Kingsbridge Tourist Information Centre 01548 853195 www.kingsbridgeinfo.co.uk
Other facilities:	Public payphone at Gara Bridge: 30m on left from where the return path meets road.
OS map:	Explorer 0L20
Grid Ref:	SX 718519

Directions

1. To visit Blackdown Rings hillfort, go through kissing gate from car park and bear round to left.
2. To continue with walk, return to car park and turn right along road. At the next junction turn right. Bear left and follow road down to Gara Bridge.
3. Turn left by the bridge. Turn right after 200m onto public footpath in front of Hothole Cottages. Take left fork once in woods.



4. Where path rises and meets the road, turn right. Road passes over a small bridge. At the following junction turn right over a dry bridge signed 'Diptford Cott, Diptford and Moreleigh'.
5. Just past a left turn, turn right in front of Willowbrook along the lane towards Broadley. Walk through farm and along green lane following the river, ignoring left turns up Wheeldon Lane and Secret Hill.
6. Walk through courtyard of old mill to the road. Turn right, and then, just over the bridge turn left. Follow the road back uphill.
7. Bear left at the junction at the top of the rise and return to the car park.

Further Interest

Heritage

Gara Bridge once had its own railway station, during the life of the 'Primrose Line' which opened in 1893 and ran from South Brent to Kingsbridge. Despite still making a profit, the line fell victim to the rail closures which followed Dr Beeching's famous recommendations. The last train ran in 1963.

The land around Gara Bridge was used extensively during the war for ammunition storage prior to the invasion of Normandy in 1944.

During the 1920s a car – a Daimler Laundette – ran off the road near Gara Bridge in mysterious circumstances. Over the years since then, there have been several reported sightings of that very car along this section of the B3207. It is said that a ghostly apparition of the car still appears on the road from time to time.

Landscape

Blackdown Rings was originally an Iron Age hillfort, probably built sometime after 400 BC. It was defended by a massive earth and stone rampart topped with a timber palisade, and a deep outer ditch. Large wooden gates would have guarded the entrance to the fort. Inside, people lived in small thatched roundhouses.



Over a thousand years later, the site attracted new residents. Following their triumph at the battle of Hastings, the Norman invaders moved in during their conquest of the South West in 1068. They built a 'motte and bailey' castle inside the old earthworks – a fortified tower on a raised mound within its own rampart and ditch.

The site later became forgotten and deeply overgrown, but in 1988 was given to the Arundel Trust – a local charity originally founded back in 1591. The Trust has restored the site so that it can be enjoyed by the public.

Wildlife

The banks of the Avon around Gara Bridge are known for the Wild Daffodils that bloom in the spring.

A little later in the same season, many stretches of the Avon valley here are swathed in Bluebells and Ramsons. The clusters of brilliant white star-shaped flowers of the ramsons make a dazzling display on the woodland floor. The plant is also



known as Wild Garlic and the leaves can be added to salads, sandwiches and cooking for their flavour (the taste is milder than the pungent smell).

Brown Trout swim in the river, feeding on insects and crustaceans. Their silvery brown bodies are dappled with ringed reddish, brown or black spots.

The long sinuous forms of an Eel can occasionally be seen in the water. Varying in size, eels will even emerge from the river if necessary, wriggling along the bank to avoid obstacles.

Amazingly, eels begin their lives thousands of miles away in the Sargasso Sea. They swim across the ocean as tiny elvers and live out their lives in rivers and streams. Years later, they make the return journey back to their roots across the seas, where they spawn and die.



A small bird with a long tail which it flicks and bobs as it potters about busily along the water's edge is likely to be a Grey Wagtail. Its name is a little misleading as the grey wagtail also shows a good deal of yellow around its breast and tail.

The Dipper can be seen flying low over the surface of the river, or standing on a stone in midstream. It has rich brown plumage with a white bib and feeds on larvae and other small creatures found in the river.

Another river feeder is the Kingfisher, which perches on branches overhanging the water. It dives from here for small fish. This tiny, spectacular bird has bright blue and orange plumage, and is most often seen as a brilliant flash whirring by.

Mild summer evenings will bring bats to the river, hawking over the water for insects. The most common, the Pipistrelle, is also the smallest – like a tiny mouse with wings. The larger Daubenton's Bat feeds exclusively near water and often flies very low above the river as it hunts.

