








Walk 10: Semley to the Donheads

Length of Walk
5.5 miles (8.8km)

Ordnance Survey map: Explorer 118
Walk Start: ST 94554 29381

Key

-  Walk route with waypoint
-  Parking
-  Pub
-  Place to eat
-  Historic Site
-  Nature Reserve
-  Point of Interest

Distance: 5.5 miles (8.8km)
Time: Allow 3 hrs
Terrain: Field path, tracks and quiet lanes with a number of steep gradients, could be wet in places. 1 stile.

Start: The car-park of The Benett Arms, Semley near Shaftesbury SP7 9AS. Walking groups; please notify pub well in advance
Start Grid Reference:
X : 394554
Y : 129381
Latitude : 51.063738
Longitude : -2.0790941
ST 94554 29381

OS Explorer Map (1:25 000)
Shaftesbury & Cranborne Chase No. 118

Notes & Refreshments:
The Benett Arms, Semley Village Stores & Café in Semley, and The Forester in Donhead St. Andrew

The intriguing name of 'Donhead' is believed to derive from the Saxon word meaning 'Head of the Downs'. From the peaceful village of Semley, explore the picturesque landscape of the pretty thatched villages of Donhead St Andrew and Donhead St Mary, both nestled between a maze of quiet meandering lanes, steep hills, ancient woodland and enchanting views. Discover which village has a fascinating connection with the United States of America.

1. From the car-park of the Benett Arms pub in Semley, follow the footpath straight ahead across Village Green and past the pond on L. Turn R along road passing St Leonards Church on the L and Semley Village Stores on your R. Continue along this road leading out of the village and passing the first road turning on R.
2. Further on, take first turning on L along road marked Wiltshire Cycleway and follow the road uphill past Oysters Coppice Nature Reserve on your L.
3. Continue straight on through the sleepy village of Gutch Common. Go past the red post box in the wall of Fairview Cottage on the L into Britmore Lane.
4. Go past Clift Farm on the L, and Donhead Clift, an important woodland for bats on the R, into the village of Donhead St Mary.
5. Opposite Spring Cottage, there is a village well. Turn L by the well past the Village Hall.
6. Further on is St Mary's Church which dates back to the 12th Century and well worth a visit.
7. From the church, turn L along Berry Wood Lane where most of the cottages date back to the 17th and 18th Century, and then bear R following the way-marker sign leading to the pretty village of Donhead St Andrew past newly planted orchard fields. At the end of the track past the planted orchards, follow the path through two kissing gates down a field beside the wood on your L. The next field slopes down to the River Nadder, head towards St Andrews Church and the bottom L corner of the field, then L across the wooden footbridge over the River Nadder and onto St Bartholomew's Street.
8. Turn R up the road and then L at the end onto Lower Street to find The Forester, an award winning pub on the R for refreshments. On leaving the pub, turn R along Lower Street and continue ahead.
9. Take first L turn into Mill Lane past Mereworth House B+B on L and continue along Mill Lane until you reach the entrance of Kelloways Mill, one of a number of former mills through the Donheads standing along the River Nadder. Milling ceased between 1900 and 1923. Turn L marked public footpath to the church.



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10. A little further on, if you wish, you can carry straight on through a gate to take a short detour down to the Church of St Andrew dating back to the 12th Century. Otherwise, turn R into the next field and bear L over two stiles in a north-westerly direction to the top of the field, through the gate into another field and head towards the bottom R hand corner over a stile.

11. After climbing the stile, turn R along St Bartholomew's Street past a row of pretty thatched cottages and past Beauchamp House, a former Rectory House. Keep straight on past Pig Trough Lane on the R, where it was said the Abbess of Shaftesbury once kept her pigs! Continue straight on through the tiny village of St Bartholomew's to where the road joins Berry Wood Lane.

12. Here you will see a road sign pointing towards the village of Semley. Follow this straight ahead up steep track through Barkers Hill Woodland. This is a beautiful broadleaved woodland of beech and birch privately owned but with public access. There are two tracks leading through this woodland you can take but this is the main one. Make sure you head in a westerly direction. There's a short very steep scramble down the bank when you leave the wood (take care in wet weather). Turn R onto the road.

13. Continue along the road into village of Gutch Common and bear R along the road leading to entrance to Oyster's Coppice. Turn L at the side of Woodside Bungalow into the woodland past Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's interpretation board. Turn R near the entrance and follow the path downhill through the woodland. Halfway down is a bench where you can rest awhile, relax and enjoy the stunning countryside views.

14. At the bottom of the woodland, exit the reserve and turn L onto the public footpath and head across fields in a northerly direction back towards the village of Semley through a series of metal gates following the footpath and to the Semley Village Stores and Café or to The Bennett Arms for refreshments.

Countryside Code

- **Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs**
- **Leave gates and property as you find them.**
- **Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.**
- **Keep dogs under close control**
- **Consider other people**



Points of Interest

A Semley Plague Stone. This can still be seen at the edge of the wood just past Calais Cottage (now renamed Caleston) shown on the map. It commemorates the plague of 1665 utilising the base of a former Medieval cross. Sustenance was left presumably by the residents of Semley for the benefit of the parishioners of Donhead St Mary who had apparently been stricken by an outbreak of the plague.

B Oysters Coppice. This is a beautiful ancient woodland and nature reserve managed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The name Oyster's Coppice actually has nothing to do with seafood! Its name is derived from the old English name Ecowestre which means sheepfold. The wood is managed to encourage a variety of wildflowers such as wild daffodil, wild garlic, bluebell and yellow archangel.

C Gutch Common SSSI. The area around the village is a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and of national importance for wildlife, due to its valuable mosaic of oak, ash, hazel woodland, wet flushes, bracken, and large grassland meadow. Look out for great spotted woodpecker, bullfinch and tree-creeper.

D Donhead St. Mary & Donhead St. Andrew. The Estate of Donhead was formed in the Middle Ages from the parishes of Donhead St. Mary and St. Andrew. Both belonged to Shaftesbury Abbey in 1066. The name 'Donhead' is the Saxon name for 'Head of the Downs'. Donhead St. Andrew was once the home of Ann Arundell who with her husband, the 2nd Lord Baltimore, founded the American colony of Maryland in 1633. They both lived at Hook Manor.

E St. Mary's Church. Built on the site of a 2nd Century Roman settlement in Donhead St. Mary. Bats roost in the building and the grounds are designated a Wildlife Conservation Area.

F Church of St. Andrew. Amongst the memorials is that of Captain John Cooke RN who was killed commanding HMS Bellerophon at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.