

## Partly real, partly dream

A self guided walk in Thomas Hardy's Dorset



Follow in the footsteps of one of Britain's greatest writers  
Explore the natural landscapes that inspired him  
Discover how they have changed over the last 150 years  
Find out how this rural area is adapting to modern times

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the stories of our landscapes  
discovered through walks





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

## Contents

Introduction	3
Practical information	4
Route maps	6
Directions	9
Further information	15
Credits	15

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# Partly real, partly dream

## Explore the landscapes of Thomas Hardy's Dorset

It is hard to think about Dorset without picturing the evocative landscapes created by one of Britain's greatest writers, Thomas Hardy.

In his novels and poems Hardy created a "partly real, partly dream" county that he named 'Wessex'.

Hardy's Wessex was based on the places he grew up in and his writings captured a time when Britain's countryside was at the point of rapid change.



Bridge over the River Frome  
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

This walk takes you through places at the heart of Hardy's Wessex including picturesque hamlets and working farms, humble cottages and grand manor houses, water meadows and heathlands, fertile fields and whispering woods.



Springtime  
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Discover how these natural and built landscapes inspired Hardy's fiction. Find out how they have and haven't changed since Hardy's time. See how this area of rural Dorset is adapting to changing times.

This walk was created by Dick Bateman, a retired geography teacher and author and Alistair Chisholm, Dorchester's prize-winning Town Crier and Blue Badge Guide.

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## Practical information

### Location

West Dorset, Southwest England

### Start & Finish point

Thorncombe Wood car park, Higher Bockhampton, DT2 8QJ

### Getting there

Higher Bockhampton is three miles northeast of Dorchester just off the A35.

**Car** - If travelling along the A35 from the northeast (Blandford Forum / Poole and Bournemouth) towards Dorchester, take the exit signed for Lower and Higher Bockhampton. Follow the country lane for about ½ mile then turn left down a lane signposted Higher Bockhampton and Hardy's Cottage. Follow the lane round to the right which leads to the car park in Thorncombe Wood.

If travelling along the A35 from the southwest, exit at the roundabout signposted for Stinsford, Kingston Maurward, Bockhampton and Tincleton. Follow the road for about a mile then turn left at a crossroads signposted Higher Bockhampton and Hardy's Cottage. After ¾ mile turn right down a lane signposted Higher Bockhampton and Hardy's Cottage. Follow the lane round to the right which leads to the car park in Thorncombe Wood.

Parking is free but donations are welcome.

**Train** - The nearest stations are Dorchester South and Dorchester West (both 4 miles away).

Dorchester South is served by trains running half-hourly between London Waterloo and Weymouth via Poole, Southampton and Bournemouth.

Dorchester West is served by trains running hourly to Bristol via Yeovil and Bath.

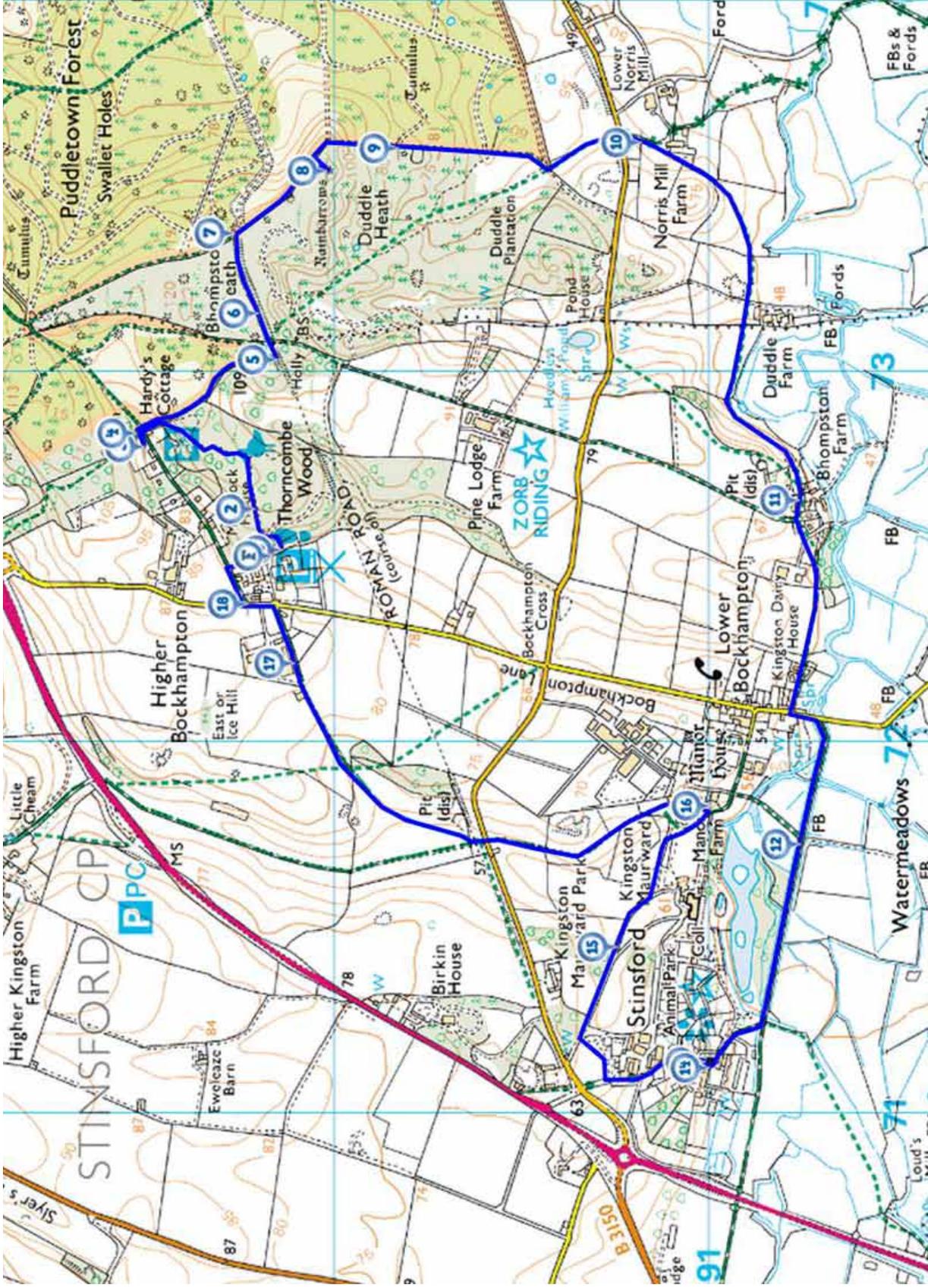
**Bus** - Local buses stop on the A35 at Kingston Pond (1 mile) and at Kingston Maurward College (1 mile).

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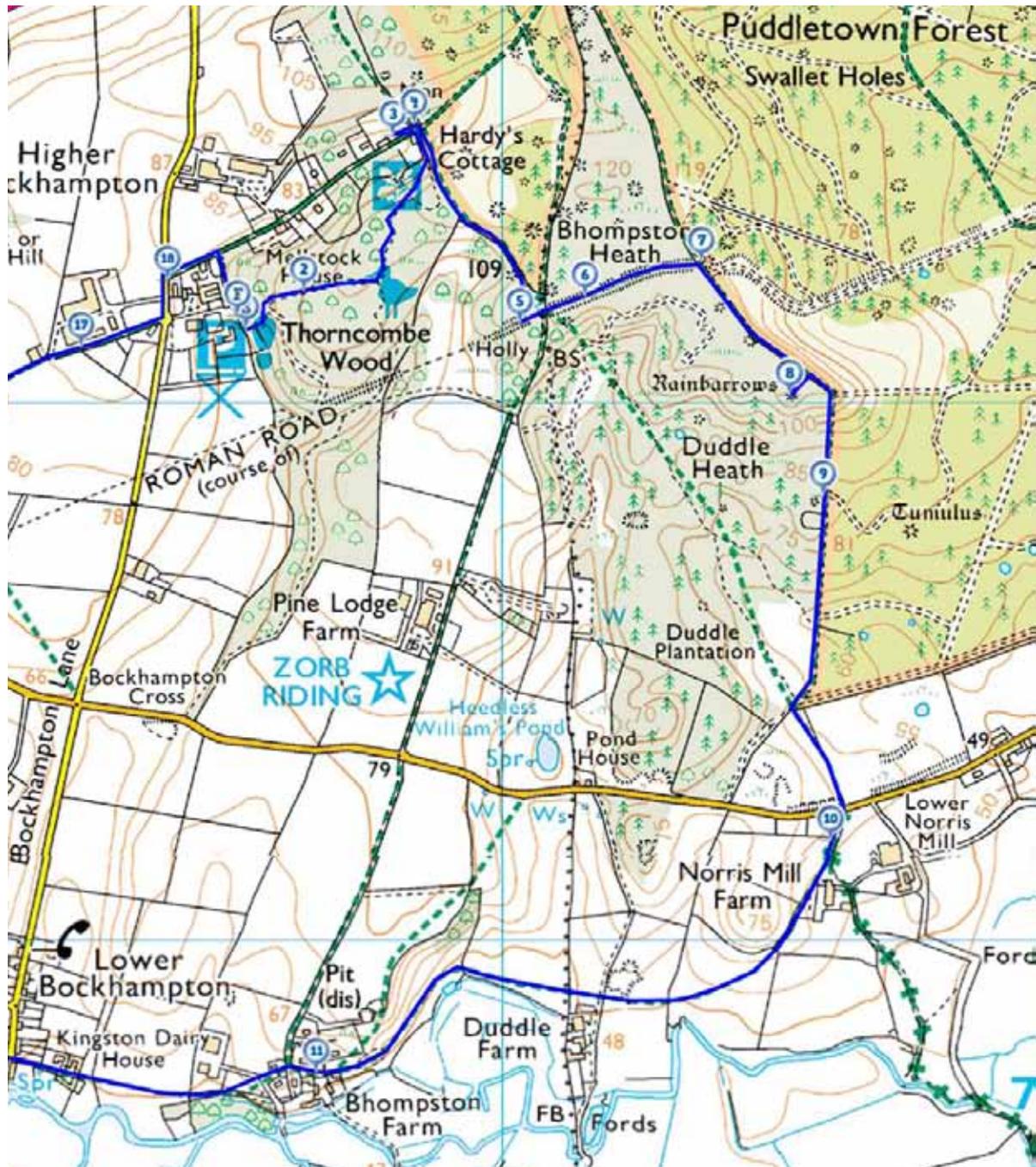
<b>Distance</b>	5 ¼ miles
<b>Level</b>	Moderate
<b>Terrain</b>	A mixture of woodland footpaths, heath tracks, field paths and rural lanes. Some ascents and descents plus gates and stiles to cross.
<b>Conditions</b>	Like most rural walks the ground can get very muddy in places after wet weather so wear suitable footwear.
<b>Suitable for</b>	<b>Dogs</b> - Must be kept on a lead on farmland and not allowed in Hardy's Cottage
<b>Refreshments</b>	There are very few places to buy food on route so we suggest taking a picnic.  There is a cafe at Kingston Maurward College (Stop 15) which is open to the public. However if you do visit the cafe please do not go into the College itself.
<b>Facilities</b>	The only toilets en route are at Kingston Maurward College in the café.
<b>Other info</b>	<b>Hardy's Cottage</b> is open Wednesday to Saturday from 11am to 5pm between March and October. The site is managed by the National Trust. Entry free to members; non members £4.75 (adults), £2.20 (children).  <b>Max Gate</b> , Hardy's later home, is nearby on the A352 from Dorchester. It is also managed by the National Trust. For opening times and more information telephone 01297 489481 before visiting.
<b>Tourist information</b>	<b>Dorchester Tourist Information Centre</b> , 11 Antelope Walk, Dorchester DT1 1BE. Tel: 01305 267992

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# Route map



## First and last part of route

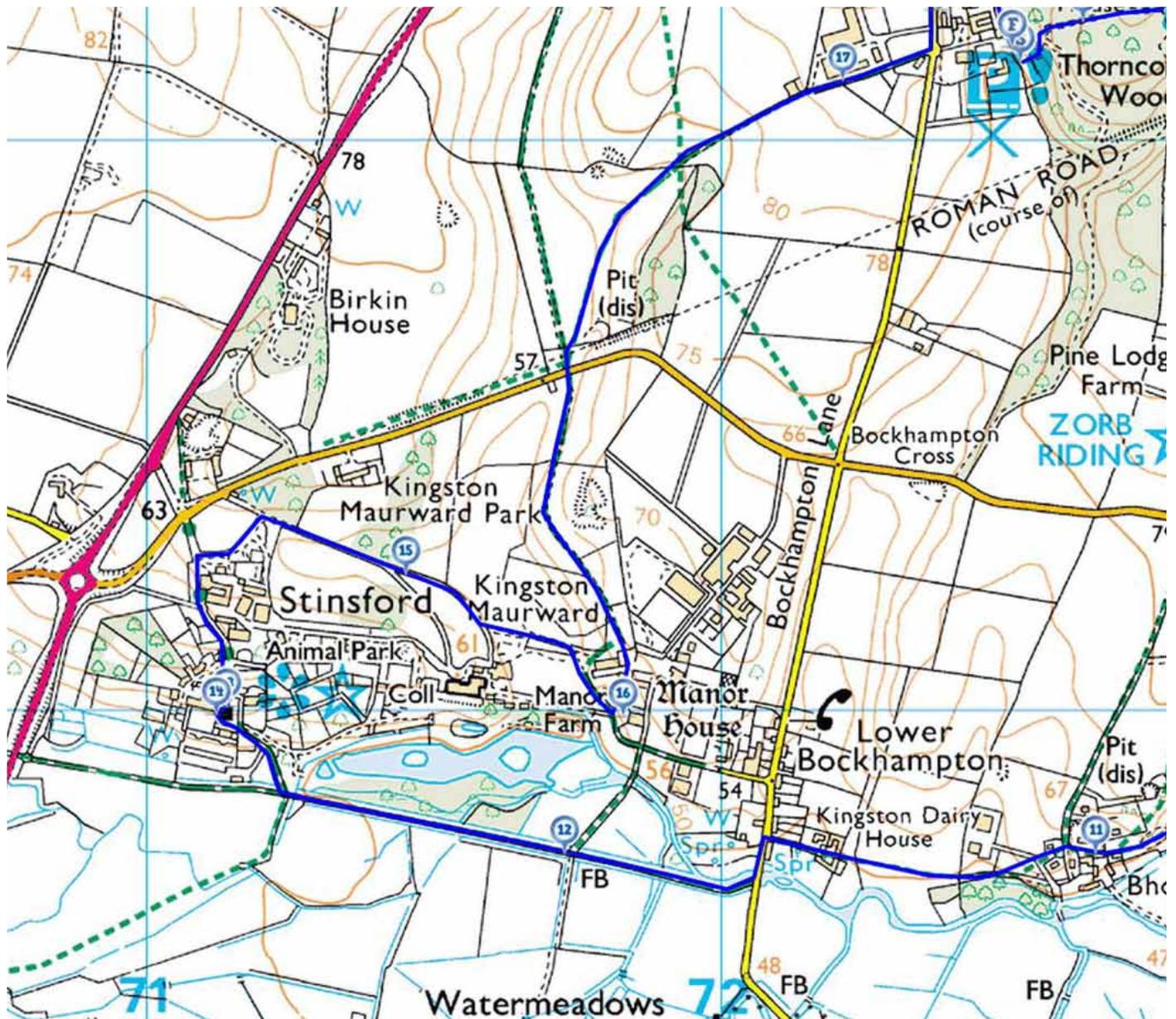


### Stopping points

1. Thorncombe Wood car park
2. Thorncombe Wood
3. Hardy's Cottage
4. The American Hardy Society Monument
5. Roman Road signpost near Rushy Pond
6. Bhompton Heath
7. Swallet hole, Puddletown Forest
8. Rainbarrows
9. Duddle Heath
10. Norris Mill Farm
- 17. Hampton Farm Business Park
18. Chalk and flint houses, Higher Bockhampton
19. Thorncombe Wood car park

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## Middle part of route



### Stopping points

- 11.** Bhomepston Farm
- 12.** Floodplain beside the River Frome
- 13.** Hardy's grave, St Michael's churchyard
- 14.** Inside St Michael's Church
- 15.** Kingston Maurward College
- 16.** The Old Manor House

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## Directions

These directions are for use with the audio commentary. Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

### 1. Welcome to Hardy's Dorset Thorncombe Wood car park

#### Directions 1

From the information boards in the car park follow the footpath up into the woods signposted 'Hardy's Cottage via woodland'. Follow the main path upwards. Stop where the path levels off and listen to Track 2.

### 2. The whispering woods Thorncombe Wood

#### Directions 2

Take the path to the left signposted 'Hardy's Cottage' and follow it through the woods. At a junction of paths, turn left downhill with a fence on your left. Hardy's Cottage is at the bottom. Turn left around the corner towards the entrance. Stop outside the gate into the garden and listen to Track 3.

You may wish to go inside the garden and cottage. It is owned by the National Trust and there is an entrance charge for non-members. Opening times vary throughout the year.

### 3. A humble cottage Hardy's Cottage

#### Directions 3

From the cottage gate, return to the crossroads of tracks. Stop by the stone obelisk and listen to Track 4.

### 4. Life loyalties The American Hardy Society Monument

#### Directions 4

Retrace your steps uphill with Hardy's Cottage on your right. At the top turn left along the footpath signposted 'Rushy Pond'. Follow the path through the woods with a fence on your right. At the next signpost go through the gate. Walk round Rushy Pond keeping the water on your right. Look for a wooden entrance/stile to your left in the bushes bearing the words 'Roman Road'. Stop beside this track and listen to Track 5.

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## 5. Roman motorway

### Roman Road signpost near Rushy Pond

#### Directions 5

Turn left and go through the tunnel of bushes and out onto a broad, straight path signposted 'Roman Road Permissive Path'. This path passes through a mix of heathland and forest plantation. Stop in a convenient place to admire the open heathland and listen to Track 6.

## 6. Manmade landscape

### Bhompston Heath

#### Directions 6

Continue along the Roman Road for about 300 metres until it kinks to the right. Take the right fork in the track and pass through the kissing gate. Stop by the deep hole on the opposite side of the track and listen to Track 7.

## 7. A sinking feeling

### Swallet hole by the Roman Road

#### Directions 7

Turn right along the track keeping the fence on your right. After about 250 metres where the path starts to go downhill, look for a gate in the fence on the right. Go through the gate and follow the path for about 30 metres to a rounded mound. Stop on top of the mound to take in the view. When you are ready listen to Track 8.

## 8. Rounds and hollows

### Rainbarrows

#### Directions 8

Retrace your steps to the gate and turn right. Follow the path downhill, keep the fence on your right. Where the path forks, keep right and follow it through the trees. After the steep descent the path levels off. There is a track to the left. Stop at this junction for Track 9.

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## 9. Hardy's heath

### Duddle Heath

#### Directions 9

Continue down the track ignoring the track off to the left. At the next junction (where another track goes to the left) carry straight on over another rise. At the next corner the main track goes to the left and there is a stile to the right. Do not take either but go straight on through the bushes on a waymarked path.

After a very short distance cross a stile into an open field and walk to the left, keeping to the fence. Cross the stile onto the lane and go straight across to the farm track. On the brick building is a sign 'Public footpath to Bockhampton and Dorchester'. Stop after the farmhouse looking out over the fields and listen to Track 10.

## 10. Land of milk and butter

### Norris Mill Farm

#### Directions 10

From Norris Mill Farm continue straight along the farm track which is signposted as a public footpath. Go over the rise in the track and under telegraph wires into a field. Walk diagonally right across the field heading directly towards Duddle Farm, an imposing brick building with white windows.

Cross a stile through the hedgerow and head across the next field heading for the right hand end of the farm's barn. Cross another stile onto a track and straight across over another stile which leads 30 metres to a pair of stiles (one with a 'your dog can scare or harm farm animals' sign). The path leads downhill with telegraph wires running in parallel on the left.

At the bottom of the slope go over the stile by the gate and follow the footpath to the left. After wet weather it may be very muddy here so you can walk parallel to the path higher up the valley side. After about 250 metres follow the path round the right hand side of the first building. Stop by the stile and listen to Track 11.

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## 11. Return of the native?

### Bhompston Farm

#### Directions 11

Make your way up the track between the cottages of Bhompston Farm. Where the track bends round to the right signposted 'Thorncombe Wood' go straight on between the farmhouse on the left and some stables on the right. After about 20 metres go through the gate signposted 'Lwr Bock'ton'.

Follow the path across the field, over a stile and through a gate. There may be cattle grazing in the next field so take care and keep dogs on a lead. Cross the field to the next farm buildings and go through three gates which take you through the outbuildings of Kingston Dairy Farm and onto a lane.

At the T-junction turn left down the hill, past a lovely thatched cottage and over a bridge (Don't damage it, you could get "Transportation For Life"). Turn immediately right along the footpath at the side of the stream. Continue along the footpath with the stream on your right until a farm track crosses at right angles, with two metal gates. Stop here and admire the view across the fields on your left and right. Listen to Track 12.

## 12. Riverside ramble

### Floodplain beside the River Frome

#### Directions 12

Continue straight ahead through a tunnel of trees with drainage streams on both side of the path. Shortly after crossing a low brick bridge over a wider stream, take the footpath on the right signposted 'Stinsford'. Go through the gate into the churchyard, walk past the church and stop by Hardy's gravestone which is near the top gate. Listen to Track 13.

## 13. "I left my heart..."

### Hardy's grave, St Michael's churchyard

#### Directions 13

Walk back down the path to the church and enter through the main door. Listen inside to Track 14.

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## 14. Mellstock Church

### Inside St Michael's Church

#### Directions 14

Leave the churchyard by the upper gate and walk up the road with cottages on the left and farm buildings on the right. Follow the road over a rise then take the first road off to the right. Pass three entranceways on the right including Stinsford Farmhouse and the entrance to a farmyard and the end of a tarmac road.

Take the next right turn which is the main driveway of Kingston Maurward College. There is no footpath and it can be busy with vehicles so please take care. Continue ahead, passing a road on the right marked no entry which leads up to the main house. Find somewhere safe to stop on the next stretch of the driveway looking towards the main house then listen to Track 15.

## 15. Farming today

### Kingston Maurward College

#### Directions 15

The walk route continues straight along the road and through the car park following signs for the Old Manor. However, you may wish to bear right into the courtyard to the left of the main house where there is a café and some toilets. Please do not walk elsewhere in the college other than on public rights of way.

If you do not wish to go to the café, continue straight along the road through the car park. Follow it as it bears round to the right. Stop in front of the Old Manor House.

If you do go into the café, leave the courtyard and go down the steps into the car park. Follow the gravel path which leads across grass then turn right onto the road. Stop in front of the Old Manor House and listen to Track 16.

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## 16. Imaginary county

### The Old Manor House

#### Directions 16

In front of the Old Manor House turn left between college buildings. Where the road bends up to the right go straight on signposted 'Higher Bockhampton and Waterstone Ridge'. Go through the gate, cross the track and through another gate onto a path between grazing paddocks.

When you reach a road, go straight across. After passing through two gates take the footpath which goes diagonally right up the field signposted 'Higher Bockhampton'. At the crest of the hill follow the fence, through a gate and up the left hand side of the next field. At the next gate turn right along the track. Stop at a side gate on the left hand side looking into new barn-like buildings and listen to Track 17.

## 17. A new lease of life

### Hampton Farm Business Park

#### Directions 17

Continue along the track and turn left when you reach the road. Stop outside the two flint houses on the right hand side and listen to Track 18.

## 18. Chalk and flint

### Chalk houses, Higher Bockhampton

#### Directions 18

After the second flint house turn right down the lane signposted 'Higher Bockhampton and Hardy's Cottage'. At the bottom of the slope turn right along the lane to Thorncombe Wood car park where we started. Stop in the car park and listen to Track 19.

## 19. Hardy Country

### Thorncombe Wood car park

#### Directions 19

You are now back at the start of the route - we hope you have enjoyed the walk!

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## Further information

### **The Thomas Hardy Association**

[www.thethomashardyassociation.org](http://www.thethomashardyassociation.org)

### **The Thomas Hardy Society**

[www.hardysociety.org](http://www.hardysociety.org)

### **Kingston Maurward College**

[www.kmc.ac.uk](http://www.kmc.ac.uk)

### **The National Trust - Hardy's Cottage**

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hardys-cottage](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hardys-cottage)

### **The Nature of Dorset - Puddletown Forest**

[www.natureofdorset.co.uk/sites/puddletown-forest](http://www.natureofdorset.co.uk/sites/puddletown-forest)

### **The Nature of Dorset - Thorncombe Wood and Duddle Heath**

[www.natureofdorset.co.uk/sites/thorncombe-wood-and-duddle-heath](http://www.natureofdorset.co.uk/sites/thorncombe-wood-and-duddle-heath)

### **St Michael's Church, Stinsford**

[www.achurchnearyou.com/st-michaels-stinsford](http://www.achurchnearyou.com/st-michaels-stinsford)

### **Visit Dorset**

[www.visit-dorset.com](http://www.visit-dorset.com)

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## Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **Dick Bateman** and **Alistair Chisholm** for creating the walk and providing the commentary
  - **Caroline Millar** for editing the walk materials and the audio files
  - **Jenny Lunn** for editing the walk materials and providing photographs
  - **Rory Walsh** for producing the walk resources and providing photographs
  - **Chris McKenna** and **Roger Templeman** for further photographs
  - **Elaine and Howard Lunn** for testing the walk and providing useful feedback
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