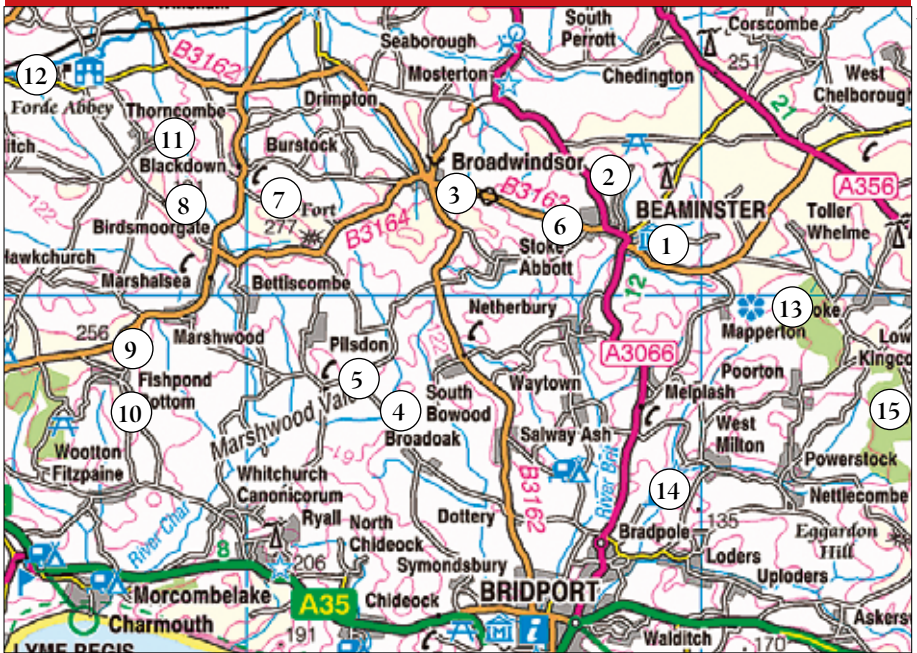


ITINERARY #2 - BEAMINSTER & MARSHWOOD VALE



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MARSHWOOD VALE (OE *mersc wudu*, marshy wood) is a large oval valley, surrounded by higher ground, except to

the southeast. It is formed of Lower Lias clay which is relatively impermeable, hence the marshy ground. The source of the River Char is in the north of the Vale.

highest in Dorset, closely followed by Pilsdon Pen (277m) and Lambert's Castle (256m). All three have large, multivalate hillforts and afford spectacular panoramic views across the valley.

BEAMINSTER & MARSHWOOD VALE

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The area has escaped much of the march of modern intensive farming and retains its ancient pattern of irregular small fields. It is traversed by many narrow, sinuous, hedge-lined lanes and age-old footpaths. The low-lying valley was originally forested, and several small stands of ancient woodland remain in places. The area is especially mysterious on misty, frosty winter mornings.

Hillforts Marshwood Vale is ringed by Iron Age hillforts, many of which were in use since Neolithic times or earlier. Lewesdon Hill (272m) is the

Beaminster lies to the north-east of the Vale in its own small bowl-shaped valley. Far from main roads and the railway this attractive little settlement has preserved its attractive local limestone centre and escaped the near ubiquitous chain store conformity of so many.

The town was prosperous during the 18th and 19th centuries, producing linen and wool. It is said that there were once 17 inns here. The oldest still standing is the Bridge House Hotel, which originally dates from the 13th century.

ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:50,000 & 1:25,000 MAPS

OS Landranger Map 193
OS Explorer Map 116

Taunton & Lyme Regis
Lyme Regis & Bridport

BEAMINSTER & MARSHWOOD VALE

1. Beaminster (page 140, popn. 2011, 3,136) is 5mi (8km) north of Bridport on the A3066 at the head of the Brit Valley. An attractive little town rebuilt in yellow limestone; it was burnt by the Royalists in 1644, as well as by accident in 1684 and 1781, then finally rebuilt in local stone. With over 200 listed buildings, a wide selection of local shops and accommodation, it makes a good base.

2. Horn Hill Tunnel (page 140), on the A3066 1.5mi (2km) north of Beaminster. was opened in 1832 to bypass the very steep Horn Hill. The 105m-long tunnel is still in use.

3. Broadwindsor (page 141) is 2mi (3km) west of Beaminster. The Craft and Design Centre is based in renovated old farm buildings and is home to artists' and crafts studios, shops selling food, drink, toys and all manner of gifts as well as a restaurant.

4. Marshwood Vale (page 140) is sparsely populated farmland, due to being composed of impermeable Lower Lias clay. It is criss-crossed by many narrow, hedge-lined lanes which are interesting to explore on foot or by bicycle. Some small areas of ancient woodland harbour rare plants.

5. Shave Cross Inn (OE *sceaga*, copse or grove, SY415980) is an excellent and deservedly popular pub, centrally placed for food and refreshments.

6. Waddon Hill (page 141, 207m, ST448015) has a Roman fort which was occupied during 50-60AD. Artefacts may be seen in Bridport Museum.

Lewesdon Hill (page 141, 279m) is the highest point in Dorset. Like Pilsdon Pen it is formed from erosion resistant Upper Greensand and has a hillfort, now hidden by woodland.

7. Pilsdon Pen (page 140, 277m, ST413011) is the largest of several hillforts which surround Marshwood Vale. There are spectacular panoramic vistas in all directions from here.

8. Birdsmoorsgate (page 333) is on a high ridge at the crossroads of the B3165 and B3164. There are fine views over Pilsdon Pen and Marshwood Vale.

9. Lambert's Castle (page 140) is about 2mi (3km) southwest of The Birdsmoorgate crossroads. This extensive hillfort is covered with mature trees, many mysteriously shaped, and offers expansive views over Marshwood Vale.

10. Coney's Castle (page 140) is on Long Lane 1mi (1.5km) north of Wootton Fitzpaine. This small Iron Age hillfort is famous for its drifts of Bluebells in spring and autumn colours later in the year.

11. Thorncombe (page 141, ST375033) is a small village near Forde Abbey. The present church was opened in 1867, but includes artefacts from the previous medieval building, including a large memorial brass to Sir Thomas and Lady Brooke, who died in 1417 and 1437. He was much in favour with Henry IV and a Member of the Commons.

12. Forde Abbey (page 141, ST362052) stands in a prominent position on the south side of the River Axe. It was founded in the 1130s as a Cistercian Abbey, taking its name from a nearby ford across the river and eventually its estate extended to over 12,000ha. Parts of the abbey church and building were demolished after 1539, but much remains, creating an interesting grand house. The gardens cover 12ha and include several water features. They are open all year along with the tearoom and plant nursery. In spring huge drifts of Daffodils, followed by Bluebells, are spectacular. The gardens are also famous for their autumn colours.

13. Mapperton House & Gardens (page 141, SY503997) is about 2mi (3km) east of Beaminster off the B3163. The enchanting 17th century sandstone manor house and outbuildings may be visited in the summer. The gardens are in a sheltered valley and are open from March to October. The house is said to be one of the best of its kind in England.

14. Mangerton Mill (page 145, SY490058) is a partially restored watermill and museum off the A3066 about 2mi (3km) north of Bridport. There is an excellent tearoom as well as art and craft studios and a small lake. Open from April to October.

15. Powerstock Common (page 152, SY547974) between Bridport and Maiden Newton is one of the best nature reserves in Dorset. It includes a stretch of abandoned railway line as well as woodland, wetland and grassland. It is at its best in early summer for various species of orchids, butterflies, dragonflies and breeding birds. In spring the woodland floors are a mass of Bluebells. Parking is next to an old railway bridge on Barrowland Lane.