

Coastal walk...3 miles

Brean Down, Somerset Coast

THE NATIONAL TRUST

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Discover one of the great landmarks of the Somerset coastline on this scenic coastal walk across Brean Down. Standing over 300 feet high and extending one and a half miles into the Bristol Channel, the Down is steeped in intriguing stories, from prehistoric worship to WWII weapon testing. It's also renowned for its wildlife; so keep a look out for a great variety of birds, plants and butterflies whilst en route!

Start: Cove Café – grid ref: ST 296588 – maps: OS Landranger 182, Explorer 153

Getting there & local facilities

By foot: a short walk along Berrow beach (not NT)

By bus: First (Avon) Service 102 and 112, Burnham – Brean – Weston-super-Mare

By train: Highbridge  is 8 ½ miles away. From here, get on the 112 bus

By road: signposted from A370 from Weston-super-Mare to Highbridge, follow the Burnham and Berrow coast road

Car park, toilets and a small information centre at Brean Down's Cove Café (not NT). Contact us on 01934 844518 or breandown@nationaltrust.org.uk for more info.

Things to look out for...

Geology

This large whaleback headland is an extension of the limestone rocks of the Mendip Hills. The vegetation on its steep, rocky southern slopes and cliffs contrasts with that on the gentler slopes of the north side where the soil is deeper. The rare white rock rose, which flowers in early summer, grows in abundance in the thin limestone soils.

Wildlife

Wildlife thrives on Brean Down due to its rocky limestone grassland and warm south facing cliffs. Listen out for the loud, sharp call of the stonechat. You may also be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of skylark, meadow pipit, linnet, raven and peregrine falcon.

Brean Down Fort

In 1862 four acres were requisitioned at the tip of Brean Down to build up fortifications to protect access to Bristol and Cardiff in fear of the growing strength of France under Napoleon III. No shots were ever fired in action, but regular drill and gunnery practice was part of the routine. The fort was re-armed at the start of World War II.



To preserve the rich variety of vegetation on the Down, grass and scrub need to be cut back otherwise they can overwhelm more delicate plants. Cattle and rabbits help to 'mow' the turf. Feral goats do a good job at trimming it back too!

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This rugged headland is the site of archaeological remains from the Iron Age. A hill-fort was first built here in about 300BC to defend the entrance to the River Axe, which was an important trade route for lead coming out of the Mendips.

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Many butterflies love the limestone cliffs and do very well on Brean Down. The common blue (pictured here), chalkhill blue and marbled white can often be spotted during the summer months.

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"Has to be experienced to be fully appreciated... not only does it offer spectacular views, but the history of the Down unravels before you as you walk."

Martha Perrian, National Trust Volunteer

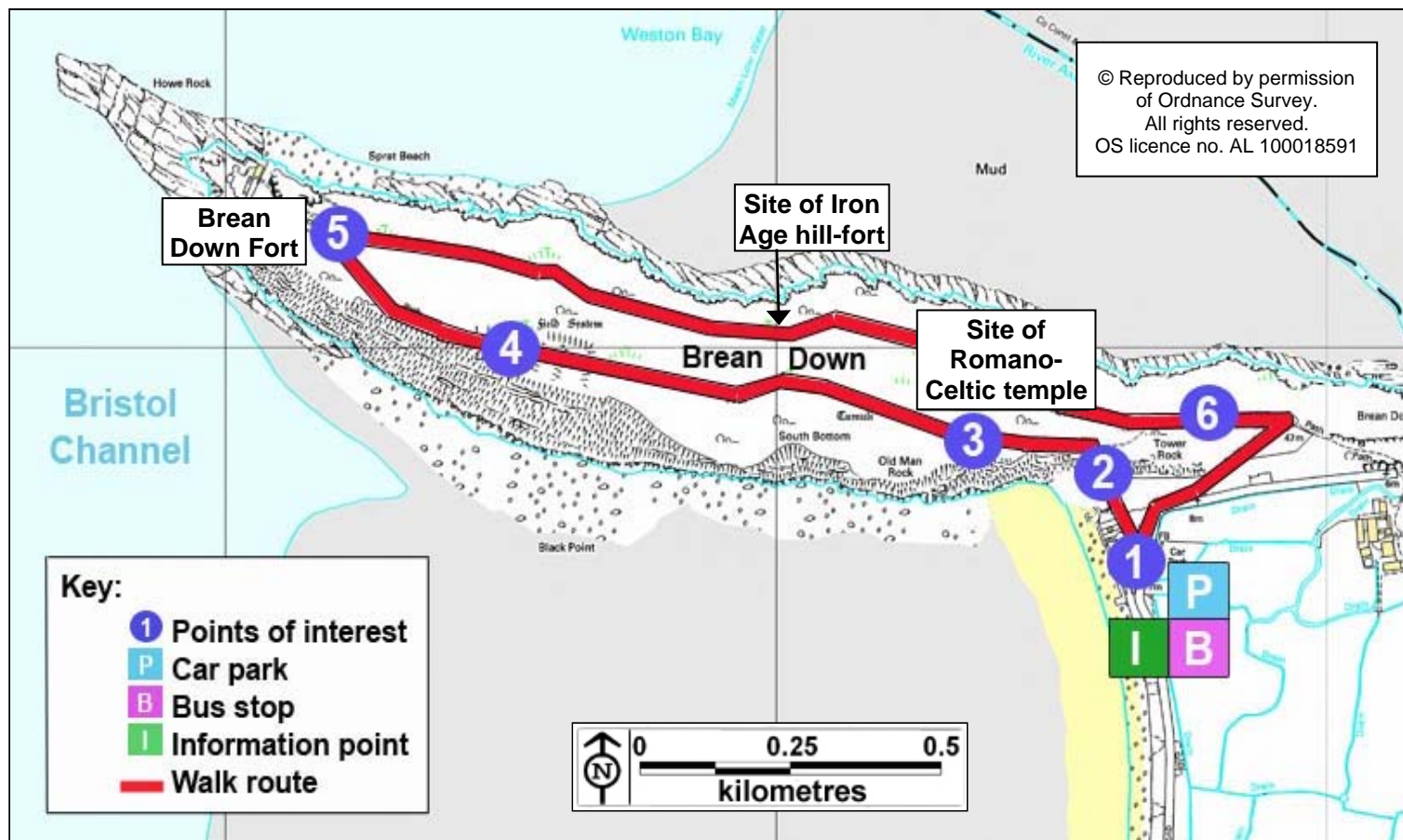
Directions

1. Follow the road from the café towards the headland until you reach some fairly steep steps. These will lead you up onto the Down.
2. Once on the Down, take the path to the left, along the southern slopes. In early summer look out for the white flowers of the white rock rose.
3. Continue along the path until you come to the site of a Romano-Celtic temple. It was built in about AD 340, close to a Bronze Age burial mound. Rock from a quarry on the Down provided some of the stone for the building.
4. Further along the path you will come across the remains of a Celtic field system, a series of small rectangular fields.
5. Continue up towards the fort, which is located on a small hill. Here you can take a closer look at the remains of the fortifications and enjoy spectacular views across the Bristol Channel.
6. From the fort make your way back along the other side of the Down to the site of the Iron Age hill-fort. Take a closer look at the banks and ditches before continuing along the path. Follow it round to the right. This will take you back to the steps and down to the café.

Terrain and accessibility

This is a moderate 3 mile (5km) walk. Steep at first, some steps. Paths are grassy and rocky in places. Good footwear is advised. Height gain of 97 metres over the walk. If on Brean beach (not NT) be aware of deep mud at low tide.

Cliffs are dangerous (children should be supervised). Keep an eye out for changes in the weather as there is little shelter on top of the Down. Dogs should be kept under close control at all times.



National Trust places to visit nearby... Brent Knoll, Crooks Peak and Cheddar and Clevedon Court

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