

**Not for nothing** does the entire west of the county feature within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Walking routes ramble across the hilly hinterland that lies – like a lovely, albeit lumpy, green picnic blanket – behind the pebble beaches and breaking waves of Lyme Bay on the World Heritage-listed Jurassic Coast.

From verdant valley floors to Dorset’s highest points, these trails wend through some of the county’s most incredible countryside, taking in ancient Iron Age remains, medieval-era villages and towns, and eccentric inns and alehouses with weird and wonderful traditions (Stinging Nettle-Eating competition anyone?).

The area is studded with multiple prehistoric hillforts, because it lies on the seam between the traditional turf of two ancient peoples: the Durotriges, who settled east of the River Axe (Dorset), and the Dumnonii, who lived to the west (Devon).

Until the Romans arrived 2000 years ago and became the common foe, these rival Celtic communities vigorously defended their land and resources from one

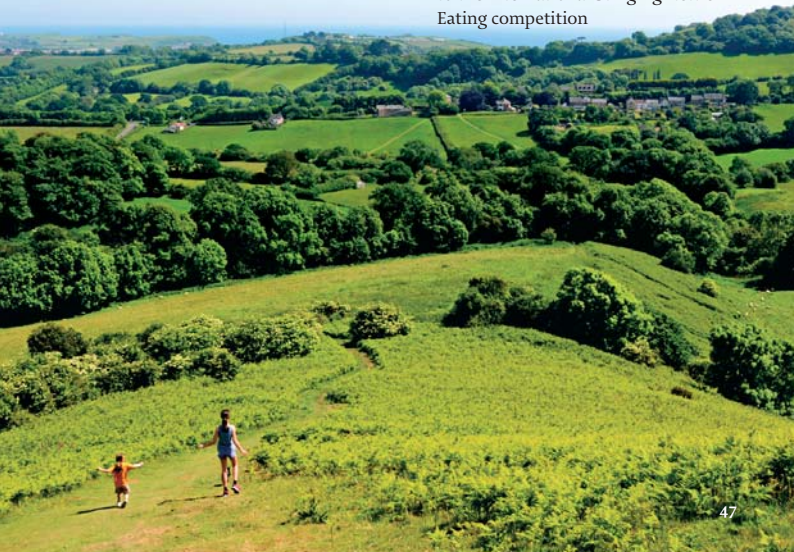
another, as evidenced by the remains of defences and fortified warrens that sit atop the upper greensand grit on the hills.

Inevitably, the Dorset bard Thomas Hardy found inspiration aplenty here, between Bridport (which is Port Bredy in *Fellow Townsmen*) and Beaminster (which is Emminster in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*).

But Hardy wasn’t the only writer to be wooed by England’s wild West Country. At the end of the 18th century, William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy spent two formative years here, regularly wandering lonely as two conjoined clouds through the hills while composing and quoting poetry out loud (a habit that convinced suspicious locals they were casting spells on their livestock).

# West Dorset

- 1 Colmer's Hill** 48  
Amble to the apex of this conical local landmark and take in sea views over Golden Cap and Lyme Bay
- 2 Stoke Abbott and Waddon Hill** 50  
From the traditional village of Stoke Abbott, stroll across the flanks of Waddon Hill, with its Roman remains, and then pick up the Wessex Ridgeway and Jubilee Trail
- 3 Lewesdon Hill** 52  
Scale the highest peak in Dorset and scan the route of King Charles II's death-defying flight from the Roundheads in 1651
- 4 Wordsworth's Pen** 54  
Discover why Wordsworth spent two years padding around Pilsdon Pen – Dorset's second highest hill and home to an Iron Age fort
- 5 Lambert's and Coney's Castles** 56  
Discover two prehistoric hillforts on this walk from the Bottle Inn, home to the international Stinging Nettle-Eating competition



## Colmer's Hill

**Distance** 1.6km **Time** 1 hour  
**Terrain** footpaths, bridleways and village lanes **Map** OS Explorer 116 **Access** buses from Dorchester, Axminster, Exeter and Poole to Sprakes Corner, near Symondsburry; roadside parking in Symondsburry (free)

Colmer's Hill erupts from the Jurassic Coast hinterland like a great green volcanic cone. This little loop ascends its steep sides to quickly deliver one of West Dorset's best vistas, with 360-degree views far into Dorset and Devon.

Drivers on the A35 are often confronted with the sudden sight of conical Colmer's Hill catching the rising or setting sun on the north of the road between Chideock and Bridport, but few know its name or ever stop to stagger up its steep flanks to discover how much better the view is from the summit.

The cheeky peak stands almost 130m above sea level, and you will climb 107m of that during this short, sharp hill shuffle. The eye-popping panorama from the summit, however, is worth every bead of sweat invested in the ascent.

Approaching from the A35, keep left after passing the Ilchester Arms and find a parking spot opposite St John the Baptist Church, amid the abundant apple orchards of the juice- and cider-producing village of Symondsburry.

Stroll up Shute's Lane, keeping the church on your right, and just beyond a bunch of houses on your left the road segues into a rough track. After about 400m of uphill walking, a permissive path to Colmer's Hill is signposted off to the left. Take this and follow the path right through the field, climbing to a huddle of trees in a saddle between two hills.

On the other side of these trees, the path forks, with the right-leading option ascending to Quarry Hill. Leave that for another day and instead go left to climb

