

Clapton Circuit guide

A new circular walk approximately 4.5 km or 3 miles in length has been created in the Gordano Valley linking Avon Wildlife Trust's Clapton Moor Nature Reserve with the village of Clapton-in-Gordano. New dedicated rights of way have been created around the nature reserve and across neighbouring farmland, and new kissing gates, stiles and footbridges have been installed to create this new publicly accessible route. The project was initiated and overseen by the Avon Wildlife Trust and project managed by the rights-of-way section at North Somerset Council. The project was made possible through generous funding from Yansec.

Starting at the Black Horse pub in Clapton in Gordano (1) the circuit is best enjoyed by walking in a clockwise direction first walking up Wood Lane towards the motorway bridge.

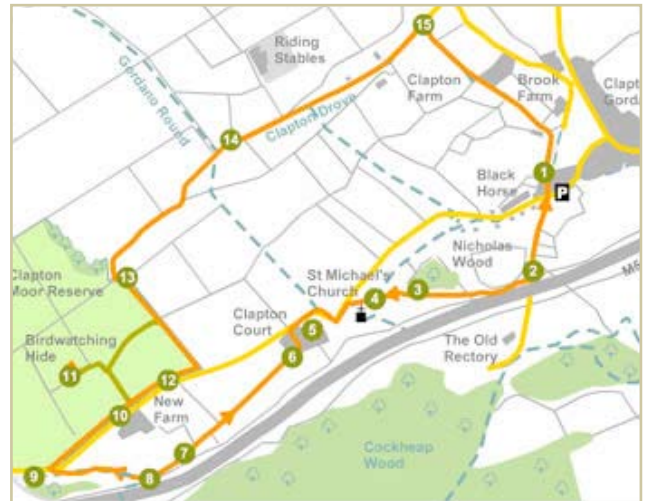
The village is mentioned in the ***Domesday Book*** which records that the manor of "Clotune" was held by Algar before the Norman conquest and then by Herluin, a subtenant of the Bishop of Coutances. The village is split between the Church and Clapton Court in the west and the village settlement with Black Horse pub in the east. Eve Wigan in her admirable "Tales of Gordano" book discusses whether this was due to the 1349 Black Death or to coal mining.

Clapton may be derived from "clop tun" meaning a settlement by the hill.

Just before the bridge turn right by an old cottage with the dates 1766 and 1770 on the wall (2). Keep to the left close under the M5 motorway across the first two stiles. The first part of the walk is dominated by the noise and sights of the motorway but after passing Nicholas Wood on the right the route bears away from the motorway towards the brow of the hill.

Close to this point in 1922 28 Roman coins were unearthed in a field above Nicholas Wood. Two years later a local archaeologist Mr R E Godwin from Portishead carried out an extensive search and finally unearthed a cache of 3400 coins. The coins had been wrapped in skin and placed a wooden vessel hooped with iron. He also discovered the remains of a Roman floor and evidence of iron smelting. The coins date from around 280 AD so it can be surmised that the Romans were active in this area at this time and were extracting both coal and iron ore in the vicinity.

59 of the coins were sent to Taunton Museum and a few of these can now be seen at North Somerset Museum in Weston-super-Mare. The vast majority ended up in a biscuit tin in a London saleroom in 1949 where they were purchased for £50 by the Nicholson Museum of the University of Sydney in Australia where they now reside.



Aerial view of Clapton Circuit showing the start of the Circuit at the Back Horse Inn (Google maps UK)



90 Roman coins were discovered in nearby Glenny Wood in 2003.

At the brow of the hill a magnificent view of the Gordano Valley reaching out towards Clevedon comes into sight. The route then descends the hill towards Clapton Church past Nicholas Wood on the right. Half way down the slope (3) the entire panorama of the valley is laid out before you from the cranes and industry of Royal Portbury Dock, past the growing town of Portishead and sweeping south westwards past the villages of Weston- and Walton-in-Gordano to the outskirts of Clevedon.

From this point the variety of the valley's geography is clearly displayed. Across the valley, woodlands, including the Trust's reserve of Weston Big Wood, cloak the northern ridge, which is mainly limestone in character. These woodlands are mirrored on the southern ridge. The valley floor below this point sits on a bed of marl that was deposited about 2000 years ago when the sea level rose and flooded this eastern end. It is a few feet higher and therefore drier than the western end and is made up from small, hedge lined, fields. By contrast the valley floor at the western end of the valley is composed of peat laid down over the last 11,000 years in a shallow inland lake protected from the sea by a sand bar across the valley at Weston-in-Gordano. There are fewer hedges and the fields are divided by rhynes (ditches).



Clapton Court - 5

The route carries on down the hill and joins the church path at a metal gate (4). Through the gate the walk descends the road from the Church onto Clevedon Lane and around Clapton Court (5).

St Michael's is a Norman (Grade 1 listed) rose coloured sandstone church standing on its own knoll and was once in the centre of the village. The village appears to have moved eastward as coal mining developed. At Clapton Court a glance through the 17th century archway reveals the magnificent 15th century embattled tower that is all that remains of Clapton Manor which dates back to 1325. It was once the most important house in Gordano.

After passing the farm the footpath turns left and passes between the cowsheds and a large silo. Go through the gate at the end (6), turn right, head up hill, cross two stiles and then head for the top of the slope under the motorway (7). New Farm is directly below with the Trust's Clapton Moor reserve beyond. To the right of New Farm is the site of a coal shaft, part of the 19th century coal mining activity.

A coal mining revival took place between the years 1860-1870 and it is likely James Davis who farmed at Clapton Court was the lead figure. Activity took place at the lower level with new shafts adjacent to Church Path and at New Farm. In order that these shafts did not flood it was necessary to sink a well close to the 18c drainage tunnel (see below) and install a steam engine to pump water up into the tunnel. There must have been early success as a Public Company was formed however it went into receivership. Village folklore is that the water beat them. The pumphouse was sited just to the north of the Church below the church path.

Cross two more stiles and head downhill away from the motorway. At the top of the slope an alternative footpath (8) leads to a footbridge over the motorway and up to Cadbury Camp. As you walk downhill the valley is once more spread out before you. Walk to the bottom of the hill with the woodland on your left, cross a stile into a narrow field under the wood, and immediately go through a kissing gate onto Clevedon Lane. Straight across the road is a narrow gap in the hedge and steps leading down to a kissing gate and in to Clapton Moor Nature Reserve (9). This is the start of the newly dedicated right of way that leads around the reserve and across adjoining fields to meet the existing rights of way network at Clapton Drove. The route around the reserve runs through 10-metre wide borders to the upper fields, which have been fenced and are managed to provide feeding habitat for owls and other birds of prey.

Clapton Moor Nature Reserve was purchased by the Trust in 1997 and measures nearly 40 ha or 98 acres in area. At that time the land was rough grazing attached to New Farm. It had been managed unintensively for many years and represented some of the best, unspoiled, wetland areas in the valley. The reserve cost £190,000 to purchase and a further £100,000 was set aside for restoration and management. 75% of these costs were provided by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The other funders for the project included Yansec and the Countryside Commission.

On entry to the reserve turn right and head towards Portishead and the mouth of the valley. On the left the reserve drops away to the low-lying wet meadows which are actively managed to encourage waders including redshank, lapwing, and snipe to breed. The fields immediately below the path are managed as hay meadows and contain a diverse range of meadow flowers. Notice the difference between the small hedge-lined upper

fields and the expansive, lower, wetland area divided by rhynes.

The path doglegs into the next field and reaches the main entrance to the reserve (10) from where a permissive path leads down to a bird watching hide (11). Binoculars and telescopes are useful aids when using the hide in order to get close up views of birds in the lower wetland fields. Continuing along the top boundary of the reserve the route passes a pole-mounted barn owl nest box (12). Barn owls have successfully bred on the reserve. The route continues round the northeastern boundary of the reserve dropping down towards the bottom of the valley floor where a footbridge (13) leads out of the reserve onto neighbouring farmland. Another new length of right-of-way leads from this point bearing to the right and following the rhyne across the next two fields to meet the existing right of way network at Clapton Drove (14).



view from panorama - 7

At this point the circuit continues along Clapton Drove but walkers can also turn left and follow the footpath across the valley floor past How Harm Farm to the quarry cottages at North Weston from where a footpath leads under Weston Big Wood and eventually back into Portishead.

The route follows Clapton Drove for about 700m. On the right through breaks in the hedgerow the motorway can be seen and Nicholas Wood, Clapton Court, and Clapton Church stand out clearly on the opposite side of the valley.

Close by in a field on the right of the drove is the end of the drainage tunnel that was dug to drain the 18c coal workings in Glenny Wood. Shafts were sunk up to 44 fathoms deep and drained by gravity through this tunnel down into the valley. Water still springs from this point. The coal was 'very quick of kindling and abounds in sulphur'. Around 240 bushels (10 tons) a day was produced, "the best is at 31/2d per bushel, and the small is shipped at Portishead point for Wales where it is used for burning lime"

According to an 1825 text the coal seam could not be worked any deeper because of the activities of the miller at the tide mill in Portishead: " [The miller] has a privilege of letting in the salt water to a given point which he usually exceeds and thereby retards the two running streams (one each side of the moor) thereby making it dangerous to ride over it. If the impediment of the mill was done away with the coal work level could be sunk 3 feet deeper and preserve the underbed of coal at present totally lost."

Just past the riding stables a new kissing gate leads onto a footpath across the valley to the outskirts of the village. **Do not** take this path but keep on the Drove for a further 400m until a new kissing gate appears on the right. The route passes through this gate and across the next three fields.

One of the fields on the left just before the pub shows signs of 16th and 17th century coal mining activity in the form of irregular mounds known as 'gruffy ground' resulting from shallow hand dug bell-pits.

Passing through a narrow field the route arrives back at the village of Clapton-in-Gordano.

Rose Cottage on the left just before the pub was called Cockfighting Cottage until 1849 when the name was discretely changed after cockfighting was outlawed. Prior to this cockfighting, despite the efforts of the clergy and other authorities, remained a favourite pastime of the English royalty and gentry from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Old maps appear to show a pit or pond next to the cottage.

Finally pass through some stabling and through a gate into the yard of the Black Horse Pub.

The grade 2 listed Black Horse Inn is thought to be 14c; it has a classic North Somerset farm house centre passage way and was probably thatched. The village was much smaller (123 persons in 1801) and the landlord would have had another job. For example at one time he was also the village blacksmith. It was very much the village centre and in 1837 we know that a meeting to agree the Tithe map was held in the pub. To this day Parish Council meetings are held here. A reminder of the past remains in the form of the exterior window bars in the lounge bar which was used as the village lock-up in the past.

Hopefully the pub will be open and well-earned refreshments can be taken!

(Last updated 17/1/2008)