

Maiden Newton Circular (via Cerne Abbas)			Maiden Newton to Dorchester (via Cerne Abbas)		
1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check	1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check
11 <sup>th</sup> /18 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2022			22 <sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2022		
Current status	Document last updated Tuesday, 02 <sup>nd</sup> January 2024				
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## Maiden Newton Circular or to Dorchester (via Cerne Abbas)

**Start:** Maiden Newton station

**Finish:** Maiden Newton or Dorchester stations

Maiden Newton Station, map reference SY 599 979, is 189 km south west of Charing Cross and 106m above sea level. Dorchester South station, map reference SY 692 900 and Dorchester West station, map reference SY 688 902, are 12 km south east of Maiden Newton and 72m above sea level. All are in **Dorset**.

**Length:** 28.3 km (17.6 mi).

**Cumulative ascent/descent:** 694m.

For a longer or shorter walk and an Alternative Ending, see below **Walk Options**.

**Toughness:** 8 out of 10

**Time:** 6 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> hours walking time.

For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 13 hours.

**Transport:** Maiden Newton and Dorchester West are stops on the Heart of Wessex line from Bristol to Weymouth. From London, a connection is needed at either Westbury or Castle Cary (served by trains from Paddington) or in Dorchester (5 minute-walk from Dorchester South to West). Dorchester South is a stop on the London Waterloo to Weymouth Main Line. Journey time to Maiden Newton is from 149 minutes.

**Saturday Walkers' Club:** Maiden Newton Station is outside the Network Southeast Railcard zone. Off-Peak returns can be prohibitively expensive. Advance tickets are usually the better option. Dorchester (South) Station is within the Network Railcard Zone. Take a train no later than 9.00 hours.

**OS Landranger Map:** 194 (Dorchester & Weymouth)

**OS Explorer Map:** 117 (Cerne Abbas & Bere Regis)

### Walk Notes:

This is a route entirely in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, leading through three roughly parallel valleys cut into the dip slope of the chalk hills of the Dorset Downs, the most westerly part of the large chalk formation running through southern England, and a couple of steep combs within those valleys. Consequently, there are six ascents spread out through the walk, but the views from the steep slopes of the dry hanging valleys (including two of the three parts of Hog Cliff NNR), the rounded hills and broad ridges are just rewards for the effort. Four chalk streams and rivers are crossed and plenty of picturesque villages, hamlets and historic churches passed. The author Thomas Hardy based many of his locales on this area.

Cerne Abbas is the jewel in the crown amongst the villages, with almost every building being historic, special and beautiful. It also has some sizeable remains of the 10<sup>th</sup> century Cerne Abbey, a holy well, an imposing tithe barn, three pubs, a tea room and a tap room as well as Britain's largest hill figure, The Cerne Giant. This is likely of early Anglo-Saxon origin and depicting a pagan god, stark naked.

Note: The chalk figure is fenced off at a wide margin to prevent erosion and views of The Cerne Giant are only possible during the approach to the village, but not once in the village!

### Walk Options:

**A Shortcut** right at the start cuts the initial loop through Maiden Newton and down the Frome Valley. Cut 2.6 km and 24m ascent.

**Another Shortcut** early on cuts the scenic coombes of the Hog Cliff National Nature Reserve, and reverse-walks part of the finish of the walk to Sydling St. Nicolas. Cut 1.5 km and 82m ascent. **Taking both Shortcuts reduces the rating to 7/10.**

**An Extension in Cerne Abbas onto Giant Hill** leads to a couple of fine viewpoints up and down the Cerne Valley and through the many pre-historic earth works on Giant Hill. **Note:** you get no views of any part of The Giant from this extension, but will add 2.0 km and 100m ascent!

**An Alternative Ending in Dorchester** follows the Cerne Valley downstream with only two modest climbs (resulting in fine views) and routes through the historic centre of Dorchester to link directly to the more frequent and direct train line back to London. Cut 140m ascent but add 1.3 km distance (also **8/10**).

**Bus line 5** (Yeovil – Sherborne – Dorchester, with 6 buses per day Mon-Fri only) links Cerne Abbas and the villages in the Cerne Valley south of Cerne Abbas to train stations in Dorchester (on the Weymouth – Waterloo line) and Sherborne (on the Exeter St. David’s – Waterloo line). See the route map for the location of relevant bus stops.

### Lunch (details last updated 28/10/2022)

**The Greyhound Inn** 26 High Street, Sydling St. Nicholas, Dorset, DT2 9PD (01300 341 303, <https://dorsetgreyhound.co.uk/>). The Greyhound is located a couple of hundred metres off route, after 9.0 km/5.6 mi. Open 11.30-15.00 and 17.30-22.00 Mon-Fri, 11.30-23.00 Sat and 11.30-20.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.00 and 18.00-20.00 Mon-Fri, 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-20.30 Sat and 12.00-17.00 Sun.

**Plus, all located within 80m (!) of each other**, after 14.9 km/9.3 mi of the walk:

**The Royal Oak** 23 Long Street, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, DT2 7JG (01300 341 797, <https://theroyaloakcerneabbas.co.uk/>). Open all day Wed-Sun. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-20.30 (not Sun evening).

**The Giant Inn (aka The Red Lion)** 24 Long Street, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, DT2 7JF (01300 341 441, <https://www.thegiantcerneabbas.co.uk/>). Open all day Tue-Sun. Food served all day (not Sun evening).

**The New Inn** 14 Long Street, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, DT2 7JF (01300 341 274, <https://www.thenewinncerneabbas.co.uk/index>). Open 12.00-late Mon-Wed and Fri-Sat, 15.00-late Thu and 12.00-16.00 Sun. Lunch served Fri-Wed 12.00-14.30, dinner served Mon-Sat 18.00-20.30.

**Abbots Tearoom** 7 Long Street, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, DT2 7JF (01300 341 349, <https://www.abbotsbedandbreakfast.co.uk/>). Open 10.00-16.00 Tue-Sun.

### Tea (details last updated 28/10/2022)

**The Cerne Abbas Brewery** Chescombe Barn, Barton Meadows Farm, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, DT2 7JS (01300 341 999, <https://www.cerneabbasbrewery.com/>). The Brewery is located 15.8 km/9.8 mi into the walk. Brewery Tap open 12.00-18.00 Thu-Sat.

### Tea – Maiden Newton Ending (details last updated 14/11/2022)

**The Greyhound Inn** Details as above. The Greyhound is located a couple of hundred metres off route and 4.0 km/2.5 mi and 117/121m ascent/descent, i.e.: approximately **one hour of walking**, from the end of the walk. Open 11.30-15.00 and 17.30-22.00 Mon-Fri, 11.30-23.00 Sat and 11.30-20.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.00 and 18.00-20.00 Mon-Fri, 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-20.30 Sat and 12.00-17.00 Sun.

**The Chalk and Cheese** 53 Dorchester Road, Maiden Newton, Dorset, DT2 0BD (01300 320 929, <https://www.chalkandcheesepub.co.uk/>). The Chalk and Cheese is located 450m beyond the station in the village centre. **Under new management!** Currently opening all-day every day, for drinks only.

### Tea - Dorchester Ending (details last updated 31/10/2022)

**The Sun Inn** Lower Burton, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 7RZ (01305 250 445, <https://www.sun-inn-dorchester.co.uk/>). The Sun is located 2.1 km from Dorchester South station. Open all day every day. Food served every day 12.00-20.30.

**Plenty of options in Dorchester’s Centre**, on and off route.

**Plus these near Dorchester South Station: Vivo Lounge, Luciano’s, The Brewhouse and Kitchen, Pizza Express, Nando’s, Zizzi, Wagamama, Côte Brasserie, Hub Box, Morrish & Banham Wine Merchant Tasting Room, Costa Coffee, Yalbury Café.**

## Notes:

### Maiden Newton

Maiden Newton is sited on Upper Greensand at the confluence of the River Frome with its tributary of equivalent size, the Hooke. Both these rivers have cut valleys into the surrounding chalk hills of the Dorset Downs. It was the basis for the village of Chalk-Newton in many of the works of Thomas Hardy.

### Wessex Ridgeway

The Wessex Ridgeway is a waymarked linear 220 km (137 mi) long-distance footpath, part of The Great Ridgeway, a prehistoric trade route which once stretched right across England linking the Norfolk coast to the Devon coast. It basically extends the Ridgeway National Trail to the south-west, crosses the glorious downlands of Wiltshire and Dorset and links the ancient stone circle at Avebury to the sea, following as near as possible the line of the ancient route. Passed on the way are the stone circles at Avebury, the Vale of Pewsey, the northern edge of Salisbury Plain, the Wylde Valley and Win Greene Hill in Wiltshire and Cranborne Chase, Cerne Abbas and Pilsden Pen in Dorset.

### Macmillan Way

The Macmillan Way is a 470 km (290 mi) waymarked long-distance footpath that links Boston, Lincolnshire to Abbotsbury, Dorset. It is promoted to raise money for the Macmillan Cancer Relief.

### (Dorset) River Frome/Frome Valley

The River Frome is a 48 km (30 mi) river in Dorset from Evershot to Poole Harbour and the major chalk stream in southwest England. Its catchment area is approximately a sixth of the county.

The river is navigable upstream from Poole Harbour as far as the town of Wareham.

Historically, the floodplain east of Dorchester was marshland and gave name to the local the Brittonic Celtic tribe: the Durotriges or *water dwellers*.

Prior to the end of the last ice age, the Purbeck Hills were continuous with the Isle of Wight, and the Frome would have continued eastwards, before emptying into the Channel near Selsey Bill.

### Frome Valley Trail

The Frome Valley Trail is a linear 25 km (16 mi) waymarked footpath broadly along the River Frome, currently from Evershot to Dorchester but, when complete, extend to Poole Harbour and The Purbeck Way and be 70km (43 mi) long. The waymark is an arrowhead, reflecting the Bronze Age finds from the valley.

### Sydling St. Nicholas/Sydling Water/Sydling Valley

Sydling (derived from the Old English for 'broad ridge') St. Nicholas is a very picturesque linear village nestled in the chalk hills of the Dorset Downs, alongside Sydling Water (chalk stream), a tributary of the River Frome, with tiny connecting bridges to the ancient thatched cottages lining the stream.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century church of St. Nicholas was rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has a fireplace inside the porch where villagers once sat to hold parish meetings. The clock – faceless but striking the hours – is one of the oldest in England, dating from 1593. The nearby tithe barn is from 1590.

Thomas Hardy names the village as Sidlinch or Broad Sidlinch in his story 'The Grave by the Handpost' (1897) and the church was used as a location in the 1967 film adaptation of *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

### River Cerne/Cerne Valley/Cerne Abbey/Cerne Abbas

The River Cerne is a 16 kilometres long river, rising in the chalk hills of the Dorset Downs at Minterne Magna, in the bowl between High Stoy and Dogbury Hill and flows down south through Cerne Abbas, Godmanstone and Charminster, and into the Frome just outside Dorchester. It is largely groundwater fed with some upstream catchment, running primarily over chalk and upper greensand and is a haven for brown trout. In the past, the river has over spilled into Cerne Abbas, but no river-related flooding has occurred since a relief scheme and a reservoir capable of holding 44,000 m<sup>3</sup> were commissioned in 1986. The Cerne Valley is characterised by sweeping steep 'U' shaped valleys with flat bottoms, rounded hollows, and incised coombes leading up towards the surrounding rounded, open chalk uplands.

The area has been settled for thousands of years, evidenced by plentiful pre-historic finds and earth works. Giant Hill above Cerne Abbas has a high concentration of them, from enclosures and house platforms to barrows. The hill was later used by the pagan Anglo-Saxons for what is now Britain's largest known chalk hill figure, The Cerne Giant. A Benedictine Abbey was founded in the village in AD 987, presumably to counter the pagan cult around the depicted Heathen God. Still visible earth works and the surviving Abbey Guesthouse and parts of the Abbot's House, as well as the Tithe Barn, show how powerful the abbey was. Cerne Abbas was named for the abbey and has been voted Britain's Most Desirable Village at one point, on account of its surrounding bucolic countryside, the hill figure, the chalk river, the Abbey remains, plentiful historic stone houses, three pubs (used to be 14), a fine tearoom and a lovely village store.

### The Cerne Giant

The Cerne Giant is Britain's largest known hill figure, with its height generally given as 55m (but 60m according to the National Trust who own the site). And it is one of only two in the country depicting a major human figure (the Long Man of Wilmington being the other one). It depicts an upright naked man with a club in one hand (37 metres long) and the other arm stretched out horizontally (possibly originally holding a

cloak or hide) and another prominent body part fully erect (to 11 metres). A line across the mid-body is interpreted as a belt. All in, it shows similarities to the Roman god Hercules, and may be a depiction of an Anglo-Saxon god known as 'Helith', 'Heil' or 'Helio'.

The figure is placed on a steep west-facing slope of Trendle Hill (now: Giant Hill) facing the River Cerne and a hill on the other side of the river (Weam Common Hill).

Its age and origins were unclear until recently. But although the current outline may have had details added or removed over time (as above), it is believed that the figure has fundamentally been as it is from the start. That was assumed to have been the late Medieval period, as the first written account of it is from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and it was thought that Cerne Abbey would not have tolerated a pagan fertility symbol as prominent as this one in its vicinity.

A soil-sample analysis published in 2021 though narrows its creation date to the period between AD700 and AD1100. And as Hercules was well known in the Middle Ages and there was a particular spike of interest in him during the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, at a time when the area was under attack by Vikings, it is now reasoned that the image was carved to mark a muster station for West Saxon armies to fight the invaders.

The founding of the abbey in AD987 may have then been a reaction to the figure, in that the abbey was founded to counter the pagan cult. The figure was not mentioned in any medieval scripts or surveys until 1697 though, but this could be explained by the abbey letting the figure become overgrown during its reign, only for it to be revealed again sometime after the dissolution of the monasteries.

Although the best view of the figure is from the air or from Weam Common Hill (private ground), the best view for walkers and tourists is from The Viewpoint car park off the A352.

The chalk trenches are mostly 30cm deep, run for a total of 460 metres and are fully re-chalked about every 10 years, needing 17 tonnes of chalk each time.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cerne-giant>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerne\\_Abbas\\_Giant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerne_Abbas_Giant)

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/cerne-abbas-giant-anglo-saxon-b1845636.html>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-67717015>

### **Cerne Valley Trail**

The Cerne Valley Trail is a circular 39 km (24 mi) waymarked footpath broadly along the Cerne Valley. It starts in Dorchester and a westerly route goes up along the ridge separating the Cerne and Sydling valleys to the highest ground of the Dorset Downs at Gore Hill and easterly from there along the northern scarp and down through the landscaped Minterne Valley, home to the Churchill family, to turn south along a ridge into Cerne Abbas and then through all other villages and hamlets in the Cerne Valley to the confluence with the Frome near Charminster and back into Dorchester. The waymark is a white disc with a buzzard.

### **Dorchester**

Dorchester is the county town of Dorset. It is situated between the towns of Poole and Bridport on the A35 trunk route. A historic market town, Dorchester lies on the banks of the River Frome, just south of the Dorset Downs and north of the South Dorset Ridgeway that separates the area from Weymouth. The earliest settlements were about 3 km southwest of the modern town in the vicinity of Maiden Castle, a large Iron Age hill fort that was one of the most powerful settlements in pre-Roman Britain. Different tribes lived there from 4,000 BC. The Durotriges were likely to have been there when the Romans arrived in 43 AD. The Romans defeated the local tribes by 70 AD and established a garrison nearby, which was subsequently converted to a town named Durnovaria, a Brythonic name incorporating *durn*, "fist", loosely interpreted as 'place with fist-sized pebbles'. Durnovaria became a market centre for the surrounding countryside, an important road junction and staging post, and subsequently one of the twin capitals of the Durotriges tribe. The remains of the Roman walls that surrounded the town can still be seen today. Near the town centre is Maumbury Rings, an ancient British henge earthwork converted by the Romans for use as an amphitheatre, and to the north west of the town is Poundbury Hill, another pre-Roman fortification.

By 864, the area around Durnovaria was dominated by the Saxons who referred to themselves as *Dorsaetas*, 'People of the Dor'.

Poundbury is the modern western extension of the town, constructed started in 1993 according to urban village principles on Duchy of Cornwall land owned by the then Prince Charles. Being developed in four phases, on completion (estimated to be in 2025) it will have 2,500 dwellings and a population of about 6,000. Prince Charles was involved with the development's design.

Dorchester was the home and inspiration of the author Thomas Hardy, whose novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was based on the town.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

Leave **Maiden Newton** station down some steps to the right of the station building onto **Station Road** and *bear right* down the road or along a tarmac path to the left of it, in 10m ignoring a broad right turning gravel path along the line. In 80m a car wide tarmac track joins from the right behind from a railway bridge. This is the return route.

**Here you have a choice:**

**For Shortcut I**, *turn hard right* along the track and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Shortcut I**.

**For the Main Walk**, continue downhill into the village, now on the **Wessex Ridgeway**. In 100m, at the bottom of Station Road, by a **Millennium Stone** on the left, *turn second right*, along **Cattistock Road**, signed 'Cattistock, Wraxhall, Rampisham' on the left. In 70m *turn left* through metal bollards and along a tarmac path between houses which in 40m emerges into a residential cul-de-sac and in another 30m *turn left* along **Church Road**, (the **Macmillan Way** has joined through a gap by a metal field gate ahead). In 40m you pass the lychgate to **St. Mary's, Maiden Newton** with its square tower and shaft of a Medieval cross in the churchyard (usually open and worth a visit).

You pass **Manor House**, **Manor Farm House** and **Maiden Newton House** and in 80m *turn right* down into the village. In 90m you reach a junction with the **A356 Dorchester Road** by the **Village Store** on the right (open 08.00-19.00 Mon-Sat and 09.00-18.00 Sun) and **The Chalk & Cheese** pub 50m away to the left, and a **Village Cross** on the left-hand side of the road (15<sup>th</sup> C, Grade II\* listed). *Turn right* along the road and pass another store and newsagent (with the **Café 64** at the back, open Mon-Sat 07.30-14.00). In 60m cross the **River Frome** over a footbridge to the right of the road. In 25m pass an ex-chapel on the right and in 25m cross a spring-fed tributary to the Frome on a bridge into **Higher Frome Vauchurch**. *Turn left* across the road and cross a footbridge over the **River Hooke** on a metal two-railed footbridge just before its confluence with the Frome.

Ignore a left turning path along the river and continue in the same direction, with the **Frome Valley Trail**. In 100m cross a grassy channel cut into the meadow (part of some elaborate flood mitigation measures) and *bear left* along it. In 50m *turn right* with the path to continue with the river on your left and in 40m go through a wooden gate. In 10m pass a yellow marker on a fence post and continue along the bottom of a sloping meadow. In 100m *turn left* through a metal field gate onto a tarmac lane at a bend and *turn right* along it, still with the Frome on your left. In 170m pass **Frome Vauchurch House** on the right. On the left you can see some **Strip Lynchets** (ancient agricultural terracing) on the slopes of **Fore Hill**, with **Langcombe Bottom** to the right. The route will ascend Fore Hill along a track to the right of Langcombe Bottom.

In 70m continue in the same direction along a minor lane between hedges, where the road turns to the right, and in 30m you pass **St. Francis of Assisi, Frome Vauchurch** on the left (12<sup>th</sup> C, rebuilt 17<sup>th</sup> C, Grade II\* listed). In 90m *turn left* with the lane and in 40m *turn right* with it through the hamlet of **Lower Frome Vauchurch**. In 100m at the end of the lane, go through a wooden gate to the left of a metal field gate into a river meadow pasture and continue in the same direction initially to the left of a couple of trees in 30m. *Bear right* after the trees to in 30m go through a boundary gap and *veer left* (165°) in the next field towards a gap in the boundary growth 80m away. In the next field *veer left* again (150°) to a raised two-railed footbridge over the **Frome** 120m away, with a metal gate on this side and cross the bridge. [**Note:** this river crossing is further south than where the OS map shows the green line crossing the river.] In 15m cross a weir over another arm of the river to a marked footpath junction.

*Turn left* and in 10m go through a wooden barrier (the bar can be lifted) into a meadow. You have the river on the left but in 50m it bends away to the left as you enter a large river meadow. **The right-of-way** now follows the right-hand side of a field for 75m to then *turn left* inside the field, parallel to the A road beyond the hedge. **There is though** a clearly walked-by-locals diagonal path *bearing left* through the meadow. Take either route and at the far-left end of this field go through the boundary into the next meadow (that is 200m away if taking the diagonal path). In another 100m, *turn right* out of the meadow through a wooden gate in the boundary hedge with a yellow marker on a fence post and cross the **A356** to go up a tarmac drive, a signposted bridleway.

In 110m you go under a railway bridge and ignore a left turn. In 50m by the **Maiden Newton Water Recycling Centre**, *turn uphill to the right* with the now gravel track and in 60m ignore a left turn into a pasture but then follow it through a steep left turn and further up in a north easterly direction along the drop into **Langcombe Bottom**. The scenic combe is mostly hidden from view by a dense hedge, with only two small gaps enabling some vistas. The track curves to the left along the top of the combe, soon on the level, now in a broadly northerly direction. After about 400m, you pass a metal field gate on the left and start to ascend further, towards the top of **Fore Hill**. You have the open hillside to the left and the **Frome Valley** below, and get views on the right into **Hog Cliff NNR**, through which the Main Walk route will lead. Shortcut I joins from the left along a public footpath through a boundary gap out of an arable field.

\*) At the top of the rise you get to a track junction, with large arable fields spreading out in all directions.

### **Here you have a choice:**

**For Shortcut II**, you *bear left* with a grass track along a hedge (300°), ignoring an unmarked public footpath across the field to the right, and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Shortcut II**.

**For the Main Walk**, you *turn hard right* back on yourself along an unmarked public footpath across the large arable field on the right. Aim for the left-hand corner of **Maiden Newton Coppice** (125°) at the far end of the field, 330m away and at the fenced wood, *turn right* with the public footpath. [**Note:** the footpaths here and along the next coppice can be wildly overgrown as can be the field's fringe. In that case, follow the field margin this side of the overgrown fringe and use a hedge gap to get into the next field.] In 120m go over a stile and continue in the same direction along **Parson's Coppice** and in another 250m in the far-left field corner, go through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a metal field gate into the Access Land of the **Hog Cliff National Nature Reserve**. *Bear left* down to the bottom of the grassy combe, aiming for the middle of a line of trees (100°). In 400m go through a metal field gate with a yellow marker and *bear right* to go over a stile 60m away, leading onto a gravel car wide track by a two-way bridleway signpost.

*Turn left* along the track. In 20m *turn right* with the track between fences and in 40m go through a metal field gate (ignore metal-gates-within-metal-field gates on either side), pass an info panel and a map about the NNR and start the ascent out of the valley. In 120m the gradient increases and the track continues on concrete. At the top of the rise, you **leave the Access Land** of the reserve through a double metal field gate by **Hog Cliff Farm** on the right and continue to the **A37** (on the course of a Roman Road). *Turn left* along a wide grassy margin to the left of the A road which broadly runs along the top of a broad ridge. In 220m *turn right* to cross the A road carefully and continue along a car wide gravel track opposite (a signposted public bridleway), through a wooden gate to the right of a metal field gate, gently uphill.

In 100m you go over the brow and in a further 70m get first views of a second part of the NNR on the left, the horseshoe-shaped **Fisher's Bottom**, squeezed in between **Combe Hill** and **South Field Hill**, as well as of parts of **Sydling St. Nicholas** village. You ignore a metal field gate on the left and *turn right* with the track and in 100m pass a disused (or never finished, it is hard to tell) barn. In 30m go through a double metal field gate and in 30m through another one (with a bridleway marker) and in 20m, by the corner of **Park Coppice**, *turn left* through a wooden gate (with a bridleway marker) to the left of a metal field gate into **Access Land**. This is rough grass initially and in 20m you *bear left* with a faint path to follow the fence along the upper end of the combe, always in earshot of the A37.

In 530m go through a metal gate in a treeline with a blue marker and *bear right* through a grassy strip between the fenced boundary and a wooded area. Curve to the left with the upper boundary of the fenced area and in 250m **leave the Access Land** through a metal field gate into a pasture. You continue along the left-hand upper boundary of the pasture and in 120m ignore a metal field gate on the left, with the top of **Break Heart Hill** on the left (the name likely a reference to the unproductive soil). Skirt to the right of a large depression (an unexplained 'historical earth work' according to the OS map) to a rusty metal gate in the boundary fence. You get views here of the neighbouring combe and of **Church Bottom**. The return route leads up the far end of it back to Maiden Newton.

**You have a choice here**, as the route descends into the valley to the right and the neighbouring combe is again **Access Land**:

- **either** *turn right* this side of the boundary growth with **views to the right**
- **or** go through the metal gate and *turn right* with **views to the left**.

**In both cases**, in 150m you pass a (locked) metal field gate in the boundary and in another 190m go through a metal field gate into the lower part of **Combe Hill** and *veer left* along the fenced hanging wood on the left (**Half Moon Coppice**). In 310m go through a metal field gate (or a metal gate a little further along at a right angle) and follow a car wide track downhill along the wood. In 350m you reach a gravel track from the left by a metal field gate into a field on the right. *Turn left* along the track. In 30m ignore a gravel car wide track turning right through a metal field gate and continue in the same direction. In 200m you go through a rusty metal field gate and pass a large open barn and at the far end of it *turn left* along a farm track, to the left of an **Elizabethan Tithe Barn** (16<sup>th</sup> C, Grade II\* listed). At the far corner of the barn, *turn right* over a stile into the churchyard of **St. Nicholas, Sydling St. Nicholas**.

**\*\*)** Pass the church to the right and in 70m in the far end of the churchyard, *turn right* down a walled car wide track. In 70m go through a white wooden kissing gate to the left of a white car gate onto **Church Lane** at a bend. *Turn right* downhill into the village towards the valley road and in 100m *turn left* with a two-way **Wessex Ridgeway** signpost ('Hog Hill 1  $\frac{3}{4}$ ') past a redundant bus shelter and the octagonal stump of the 15<sup>th</sup> C **Village Cross**. The early lunch stop, **The Greyhound Inn**, is 200m further along High Street. *Turn right* across the road to continue down **East Street**, with an arm of **Sydling Water** to the left (initially) and the village hall on the right. In 100m where another arm of the stream joins from the left, *turn left* along a drive, with the stream on the right. In 75m *turn right* over a two-railed footbridge across the stream and **[!]** *turn hard right* along a shingle path, ignoring the left turn further upstream.

The path curves to the left immediately and continues between houses. In 75m *turn left* along the tarmac **Back Lane**. In 75m *turn right* through the second of two adjacent metal field gates (a broken footpath sign is screwed onto the gate post) and walk up a sloping pasture along its right-hand boundary. In the top-right field corner continue along a late-seen narrow path through the growth and enter the next field through a

metal gate. This is the **Access Land of Cowdown Hill** and you ascend the grassy slope broadly in the same direction. Aim for a metal field gate at the top of the visible ascent with a bench-with-views this side of it away to the right and go through a metal gate to the left of it into the higher part of the hillside. On the right on a bearing of 190°, you can make out the **Hardy Monument**, 12 km away **on Black Down** (SWC Walk 275 Dorchester Circular or to Portesham). The small combe on the right below is **Hand's Hole**. You pass another bench-with-views halfway up the remaining ascent, away on your left and aim for a fence corner higher up.

**Leave the Access Land** through a metal gate in that fence corner and continue in the same direction up an arable field's grassy margin along the fence on your left. In 110m *bear right* with the boundary and in 10m *turn left* through a boundary gap and in 20m continue along a car wide chalky farm track bridleway joining from the right behind. In 220m you pass through a ring of trees with a small farm yard in the middle of it on the top plateau of **Cowdown Hill**. In another 250m walk through a double metal field gate and reach a track junction between some large barns at **Higher City Farm**. *Turn left* along a track, now with the **Upper Cerne Valley** on the right. In 50m ignore a signposted right turning public footpath and in 130m go through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate and cross the Maiden Newton – Cerne Abbas road.

Continue through a gap (a missing gate) to the right of a metal field gate and along a gently rising fenced path with a hedge on the right and fine views into the combe on the left, between the flanks of **Cowdown Hill** (Crown Point) on the left and **Hog Hill** on the right, leading into the **Upper Sydling Valley** with its scenic patchwork of fields and hedges. Initially you can see a transmission mast ahead, then it is out of view for a while. The track levels out and turns right then left (ignore a signposted footpath from the right here) to commence in the previous direction, and eventually you pass the fenced transmission mast and **[!]** *turn right* at the far end of the fence with a three-way signpost along a public footpath ('Cerne Abbas 1').

In 30m continue in the same direction across an arable field along a usually well-cleared path towards a wooded area. This whole area was part of **Cerne Park**, a Medieval deer park: the former **Park Pale** is visible along the left-hand boundary of the wood ahead. In 180m, at the wood, *turn right* with a two-way footpath signpost, ignoring the track ahead along the wood ('Private Land – No Public Right of Way'). In 50m *turn left* with a signpost into **West Hanging** (bluebells in season) and descend a rough path through it. In 200m you get glimpses of some houses in the valley, part of **Cerne Abbas** village. In 130m leave the wood over a low stile to the right of a metal field gate and descend through a dry U-shaped valley, broadly along the left-hand boundary. **The Cerne Giant** is briefly part-visible beyond the nose of **Weam Common Hill** dead ahead.

The exit from the pasture is over a stile with a footpath signpost to the left of a rusty metal field gate about 30m to the left of the more obvious metal field gate in the bottom corner (with a 'No Public Access or Right of Way'-sign). You follow a grassy track along the bottom of the field and in 110m go over a stile to the left of a metal field gate into the fenced base of **Weam Common Hill**. The top of this would be the best spot for looking down at The Cerne Giant, but a large sign correctly advises that it is **not Access Land** and there is **no Right of Way to the top**. So, as advised, follow the public footpath along the base of the hill, with a hedge and a fence on the right.

In 150m *curve to the left* with the boundary. In another 20m you get the **first full view of The Giant**. In 320m go over a set of stiles to the left of a metal field gate either side of a farm track (there are the same warning signs about there being no access to the top) and continue along a path between a hedge and a wooded area and in 10m ignore a public footpath turning right. In 125m continue in the same direction at a bend of a farm track between trees (there is no sign here of the right bearing footpath shown on

the OS map). In 160m go through a wooden gate to the right of a metal field gate and in 70m you reach the **A352** at a T-junction.

Cross the road and go through a wooden field gate with a **Permissive Path** marker and *turn right* along a fenced path in a pasture. You have fine continuous views of the chalk figure from this path. In 140m a wooden gate on the right leads into the car park at **The Giant Viewpoint** with a couple of **very good info panels**. Continue along the fenced path and in another 200m you reach another car park and go through it onto **Kettlebridge Lane** by some more info panels. *Turn left* along the gravel lane and in 45m you reach **Kettle Bridge** over the **River Cerne**, by a two-way signpost on the right and a flood protections scheme's weir on the left, where a footpath turns right to the village centre.

### **Here you have a choice:**

**For an Extension onto Giant Hill** (no views of any part of The Giant), cross the bridge over the Cerne and pick up the directions below under **Extension onto Giant Hill**.

**For the Main Walk**, *turn right* (signed 'Village Centre' and 'Public Toilets') and follow a tarmac path to the right of the river. In 140m ignore a right turning public footpath and in 65m by **Mill Cottage** on the right, you *turn left* across the Cerne with a signposted footpath over a two-railed wooden bridge between a fence and a wall. In 50m you emerge on **Abbey Street**. The village centre is away to the right, but you *turn left* for **an out-and-back to St. Augustine's Well and the abbey ruins**. You pass a pond and *bear to the right* of **Abbey House** along a path and in 30m go through the right of two metal gates into the cemetery. *Fork right* by a two-way signpost.

\*\*\*) In 60m *fork down to the right* and the well is another 25m away. Return to the two-way signpost and leave the cemetery through the metal gate onto a path leading down to Abbey Street. There is another metal gate immediately on the right, leading to **the remaining abbey ruins. These are on private grounds**. As per the note displayed, if there is an 'Open'-sign visible, you are at leisure to explore the **Abbey Guest House** (the most substantial remaining part of the abbey) and the **Abbot's Porch**, one of the finest pieces of architecture in Cerne Abbas (being the remainder of the Abbot's Hall). A **contribution of £2,50** per person is requested!

Else, walk down to Abbey Street past the Abbey Gate House and *turn left* along it. You pass a pond (fed by the spring) and a long row of early 16<sup>th</sup> C cottages on the right, opposite the **village stocks** and **St. Mary's Church, Cerne Abbas** (late 13<sup>th</sup> C, usually closed) on the left and eventually reach **Long Street** at a T-junction by **The Royal Oak** on the left. *Turn right* down the road, passing a toilet block on the right, opposite **The Giant Inn** (the ex-Red Lion) and then **The New Inn** on the left, opposite the **Cerne Abbas Stores** and the **Abbotts Tearoom**. The road continues as **The Folly** and in another 20m you pass a **bus stop for services to Dorchester** on the left, opposite the one for **services to Sherborne**. In 50m *veer left* along **Back Lane** with a **Cerne Valley Trail** marker on the street name sign. In 30m *turn right* along a tarmac footpath to in 20m cross the Cerne on a footbridge and continue along a gravel drive.

Where this meets the road, *turn left* through a wooden gate to the left of a wooden car gate along a signposted footpath ('Barton Meadow') down the drive and **[!]** immediately *bear left* along the marked footpath across grass and then along a garden fence, i.e.: **do not walk down the car wide gravel drive!** In 50m you have the river on the left below and in 40m go through a wooden kissing gate into a pasture to follow the signed and marked public footpath bearing right along a clear grass path to, and then along, a fence along the right-hand field boundary. To the right you have the large Grade I listed **Tithe Barn** (late 14<sup>th</sup> C, with late 18<sup>th</sup> C conversion to a house and a 19<sup>th</sup> C restoration).

The hill on the right is **Dickley Hill** and the one on the left is **Black Hill**, and the onwards route will follow it along its base. In 100m, by a bench on the left and where the fence bears to the right, you *turn right* with a marker post along a grass path through trees and in 20m go over a set of three stiles a few metres apart into a pasture. *Bear left* to follow its left-hand boundary along an unmarked permissive path, ignoring the marked public footpath across the field. In 150m go through a wooden gate with a permissive path note and continue between fences along the river. In 100m *turn left* at a T-junction with a car wide gravel lane (a public bridleway) and cross the river on it. In 70m you pass **The Cerne Abbas Brewery's** tap room on the left at **Barton Meadows Farm** and continue in the same direction through a metal field gate.

Walk up a grass track and in 150m go through a wooden gate to the right of a double wooden field gate into **Access Land** and *turn right* along a public footpath joining from the village away to the left. This is a broad track at the bottom of **Black Hill**, mainly through trees, but occasionally with views either into fields on the right or up the steep slope on the left. In 550m, about 20m before the path starts to descend, you *turn right* with a signpost ('Nether Cerne 1 ¼') on the right along a narrow path into the trees and *turn left* along a fence. In 40m *turn right* over a stile **out of the Access Land** into a pasture, with a two-way signpost 5m away ('Pound Farm 2/3'). Cross the field in a southerly direction to a metal field gate 250m away. In the next large narrowing field, you have the descending ridge of **Green Hill** on the left and **Smacam Down** on the right across the valley, wedged between Ridge Hill and Large Bar Hill.

In 550m there is a short stretch of concrete track where you go through a metal field gate and continue towards **Pound Farm**. At the farm, an unmarked public footpath joins from the left down a farm track and you continue in the same direction through the busy yard of this dairy farm and leave it through a metal field gate. **[!]** *Bear right* along a track, ignoring a metal field gate dead ahead into another pasture and in 100m enter another pasture through a metal field gate by a signpost ('Nether Cerne 1/3'). In 90m stay to the left of a clump of ash trees, now with some **watercress beds** on the right and in 170m pass a large stump of an old tree. In 60m continue past the corner of a fenced-in wood and in another 70m *veer right* towards a wooden gate 20m away and leave the field into the wood. In 100m leave the trees and in 50m go through an often-open metal field gate and continue in the same direction along a tarmac lane at a bend.

This is **Nether Cerne** hamlet and you pass some large barns on the left. In 40m ignore a left fork uphill, a marked bridleway, and continue in the same direction along another bridleway, signed 'Church'. In 60m, at the end of a stables block, ignore a grass path to the right and in 25m *turn right* by a Church Conservation Trust sign through a wooden field gate, **for a very short out-and-back** to the redundant **All Saints' Church, Nether Cerne** (late 13<sup>th</sup> C, tower added 15<sup>th</sup> C, Grade I listed) with **Nether Cerne House** next to it. Return through the wooden field gate to the path and continue in the previous direction. In 40m you enter a large arable field and follow its right-hand grassy boundary, signed for **Godmanstone**. In 180m you have the Cerne on the right (ignore a private plank bridge) and in another 180m reach a two-way signpost by a two-railed footbridge across the river.

### **Here you have a choice:**

**For the Alternative Ending in Dorchester**, continue in the same direction along the river and pick up the directions under **Alternative Ending at Dorchester Stations**. **For the Main Walk**, *turn right* across the bridge ('The Turning Point 1') and in 20m cross another two-railed bridge and in 100m carefully cross the A352 Dorchester Road (with bends on both side) and continue in the same direction with a bridleway signpost through a wooden field gate in 20m and uphill along the grassy boundaries of three large arable fields for a total of 1.3 kilometres. **In more detail:** in the first field you

have fine views back to Nether Cerne and its church and halfway up you pass **Glebe Barn** (on the OS map) on your left. In the top field corner walk through a boundary gap into the second field and go up its boundary, now with views higher up the Cerne Valley. Go through another boundary gap into the third field and follow its margin.

At the top of the ascent, follow a wide grass path through a wooded belt. In 20m *turn left* and in 10m go through a wooden gate into a large pasture on top of a ridge. Follow the left-hand field boundary past a **fenced-in memorial tree and a cairn and tombstone** on the right. In 70m pass a two-way signpost ('The Turning Point ¼' onwards) and *veer left* with the fence. The **Hardy Monument** is now visible on 205°. In 130m go through a metal field gate or a wooden gate to the left of it and continue in the same direction with a bridleway marker. In 80m you pass a stile on the left out of a wooded strip and in another 25m reach a five-way signpost inscribed '**The Turning Point**'. You have splendid views from here along the ridge, onwards to the south along **Crete Hill** and backwards to the north to **Ridge Hill**, with a green valley below and another ridge opposite, which separates this side valley from the Sydling Valley.

[!] *Turn hard right* back on yourself ('Pond Bottom ½') towards the bottom-right corner of the fenced-in grassy area this side of a hanging wood (initially out of sight), on a bearing of 320° and in 200m (ignore a stile on the left en route) go through some bushes and *bear left* through a metal field gate with a bridleway marker along a bumpy grass path downhill to the right of that hanging wood. In 120m go through a metal field gate **into Access Land** and continue downhill to the left of a row of intermittent trees. In 200m at the bottom of the drop with a large arable field ahead beyond a fence, *turn right* along a grass track with **Reynard's Copse** up ahead on the right.

In 160m go through a rusty metal field gate in a fence corner into **Pond Bottom** and *bear left* to in 100m pass a grey corrugated iron shed to the left. In 200m a clear track joins from the right behind and above (also a bridleway). The grassy area narrows between the fence and some gorse bushes on the right and in 320m at a fence corner on the left and at the end of a right curve, you *turn up to the left* along the fence with a bridleway marker (this is further along than the OS map suggests). In 160m go through a metal field gate **out of the Access Land** and continue in the same direction between fences further uphill. In 350m the terrain levels out and in 50m you continue in the same direction along concrete at a marked four-way bridleway junction on the very shallow saddle between **Shearplace Hill** on the left and **Eastfield Hill** on the right.

You now descend into the **Sydling Valley**. At the bottom of the drop *curve to the right* with the concrete track past the **Huish Lambing Yard** on the right. The now gravel track passes **The Trout House** in 200m and in 50m you *veer left* through the farmyard of **Huish Farm**. In 80m *bear left* along the tarmac drive and in 25m cross the main arm of **Sydling Water** on the drive. In 40m *turn left* at a T-junction past **Huish Forges Cottage** on the left and in 30m cross another arm of the stream and *turn right* along the valley road. You have an arm of **Sydling Water** on the right and in 50m ignore a signposted left turning bridleway up a car wide gravel track. In 65m you pass the first houses of **Sydling St. Nicholas** village and in 250m ignore a signposted footpath turning to the right, where there is a **mini-waterfall** on the right. In 100m you reach the centre of the village by a staggered four-way road junction. The morning route crossed here. Continue ahead along **High Street**. In 90m, at the far corner of **East House Cottage**, an **easy-to-miss, unmarked footpath** turns left between houses.

The recommended early tea stop, **The Greyhound Inn**, is 150m ahead. [!] *Turn left* along the footpath and in 15m where it narrows, you pass a footpath signpost. Follow it left then right and after 130m emerge on a car wide track with a high brick wall ahead. *Turn right* along the track (a public bridleway and the **Wessex Ridgeway**) and in 30m *turn left* with the car wide bridleway at a three-way signpost, ignoring a public footpath

ahead. You continue between trees, soon gently ascending, and in 350m *bear right* downhill with the track at a three-way bridleway junction, with the slope of **Sherrin's Hill** on the right behind trees. You descend gently and in 200m *bear left* with the track and go through the bottom of the drop. In 200m ignore a bridleway turning right at a three-way signpost and start to re-ascend. In 170 enter a large pasture (**Access Land**) through a metal field gate and walk up its left-hand boundary.

Halfway up a public footpath joins from the left over a stile out of **Church Bottom** and in the top-left field corner you go through a metal field gate **out of the Access Land** and continue in the same direction up a smaller pasture. In 120m *turn left* through a wooden gate to the right of a metal field gate and *turn right* through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate. The top of **Break Heart Hill** is on your left. Pass a two-way signpost ('Maiden Newton 1  $\frac{3}{4}$ ' onwards, 'Sydling St Nicholas 1  $\frac{1}{4}$ ' back) and cross the busy **A37** (on the course of a Roman Road) and continue a little to the right along a car wide farm track, a public bridleway. **Plain Bottom** is visible on the left below through occasional breaks in the hedge. In 420m you pass the first buildings of **New Barn Farm** on the right and in 50m continue in the same direction by a two-way signpost. In 60m *bear left* with the track by a two-way bridleway signpost.

In 25m by a three-way marker post, go through a metal field gate or a wooden gate to the left of it and *turn right* (235°) along a gravel car wide track (a public footpath). You are on the broad top plateau of **Fore Hill**, with fine views into and beyond the **Frome Valley** and down into **Combe Bottom** on the right. In 750m *turn right* at a T-junction with another car wide track and descend along it from **Fore Hill**, initially on coarse gravel then on deteriorating tarmac. Ignore all ways and paths off and in 650m go under an arched railway bridge and pass the first houses of **Maiden Newton**. In 60m pass a bridleway marker post and in 40m an ascending tarmac lane turns hard left up to the **railway station 100m away**. [**For The Chalk & Cheese pub**, continue downhill along **Station Road** and at the bottom of the road at a four-way junction, *turn left* downhill into the village and at the junction with the **A356**, the pub is 50m away to the left. A **service station with a store** is a little bit further in that direction.]

Dorchester bound trains leave from the far platform, over a footbridge.

Castle Cary and Westbury bound trains leave from the near platform.

### **Shortcut I (cut 2.6 km and 24m ascent/descent)**

You are on the **Wessex Ridgeway** and in 40m pass a bridleway marker post. In 60m go under the railway bridge and continue along gravel. In 100m ignore a first metal field gate on the right, leading into a fenced yard, but *turn right* immediately after that through a second (rusty) metal field gate (often open) into a large arable field. Follow an unmarked public footpath along the right-hand hedge and in 110m at the hedge corner *veer left* across the field towards the lower boundary of a wood (130°). In 170m enter the wood over a stile and follow a clear path uphill through it. In 50m go over a stile and in another 20m you emerge onto a steep grassy hillside (**Access Land**).

Follow a grass path a little to the right to the right of some trees and in 80m *bear right* with the path, aiming for the top corner of the grassy area. In 60m you follow the path through an overgrown area in the field corner and in 15m go over a stile into a wooded belt. *Turn left* with the path and emerge through a gap in a very large arable field, ascending the slope of **Fore Hill**. Walk uphill along the left-hand grassy field boundary, with some fine views to the right down the sloping field and into **Langcombe Bottom**. In 400m you go through a boundary gap onto a car wide farm track at a T-junction.

The Main Walk comes up from the right. *Turn left* further uphill with the track and pick up the directions in the main text at the asterisk \*).

### Shortcut II (cut 1.5 km and 82m ascent/descent)

In 120m, by a marker post at the corner of the hedge on the right, you *turn right* through the boundary gap into a large arable field and follow its grassy right-hand field boundary with some fine views to the left down the sloping field into **Combe Bottom**. In 450m go through a wooden gate and through a pasture in the same direction. In 250m, where a car wide gravel track joins from the left, you go through a wooden gate to the right of a metal field gate by a three-way bridleway/footpath signpost. In 25m *bear right* with the track by a two-way bridleway signpost to pass some buildings of **New Barn Farm**. In 50m continue ahead by another signpost. **Plain Bottom** is visible on the right below through occasional breaks in the hedge. In 450m cross the busy **A37** (on the course of a Roman Road) a little to the right and pass a two-way signpost ('Maiden Newton 1  $\frac{3}{4}$ ' back, 'Sydling St Nicholas 1  $\frac{1}{4}$ ' onwards).

The top of **Break Heart Hill** is on your right (the name likely a reference to the unproductive soil) and **Church Bottom** and the **Sydling Valley** ahead. *Turn left* through a wooden gate to the left of a metal field gate and *turn right* downhill in the neighbouring pasture with the boundary hedge on your right. In 120m go through a metal field gate into the **Access Land** of the next pasture and *veer left* a little with its right-hand boundary. Halfway down the field, ignore a footpath turning right over a stile, and in the bottom-right field corner go through a metal field gate and along a wide track, further downhill between trees, **now out of Access Land**. In 170m another bridleway joins from the left at a three-way signpost and you go through the bottom of the drop. You start a gentle re-ascent and in 200m *bear to the right* with the track, now with the flank of **Sherrin's Hill** on the left. In 200m another bridleway joins from the right and [!] you *turn right* along it. You have **Church Bottom** on the right and in 150m *turn left* with the track at a hedge corner. In 350m, by an **Elizabethan Tithe Barn**, *turn left* over a stile into the churchyard of **St. Nicholas, Sydling St. Nicholas**.

Pick up the directions in the main text at the double asterisk \*\*).

### Extension onto Giant Hill (add 2.0 km and 100m ascent/descent)

In 50m by a house ahead, *turn left* with a footpath marker on a wide post and in 50m *turn right* along a signposted footpath between trees. In 10m *bear right* with a marker post and in 100m start to ascend. In 40m go through a wooden kissing gate in a fence **into Access Land** (another footpath joins from the right over a stile from the village) and proceed to a four-way signpost 10m away at the bottom of some railed steps up the slope of Giant Hill. Go up the steps and continue on a level chalk path in the same direction, ignoring a right fork steeply uphill to and along the fence around the hill figure. In 30m you pass the corner of that fence to the left (by a 'The National Trust – Cerne Giant' sign) and continue along the fence.

In 100m you pass the far corner of the fence and continue in the same direction along a chalk path. In 300m *veer up to the right* with the path, ignoring a rough path down through a hedge. In 110m the gradient increases and in 40m you stay to the left of an area of brambles. You have a drop on the left and get some **fine views up the Cerne Valley** to the northern scarp of the Dorset Downs. In 300m you reach a notable **perpendicular earth bank**, with a stile and a two-way footpath signpost 40m ahead in

the upper fence. This is the first of **plentiful earth works** that are remnants of an **Iron Age settlement** (on the OS map). [!] *Turn hard right* back on yourself, in a broadly southerly direction and in 110m go through a boundary (on the OS map). **Cerne Park** and the transmission mast passed earlier are visible to the right across the valley.

In 40m you have a **circular earth work** away to the left (an **enclosure**) and follow the broad ridge of Giant Hill in the previous direction, with fine views **down the Cerne Valley**. In 160m *bear right* (215°) along a wide grass track from the left behind out of a field, now also with **views into Yelcombe Bottom on the left and to Cerne Abbas**. In 110m you go through a noticeable **crescent-shaped linear earth work**, followed by an overgrown **bowl barrow** on the right and in a further 130m pass the fenced area around the giant to its left-hand side. There is another **rectangular earthwork** inside the fenced area, an **Iron Age enclosure** (The Trendle). You continue steeply downhill and in 100m *veer right* further downhill along a chalk path, ignoring a sharp right turn uphill along the fence. Cerne's church is visible dead ahead. In 100m enter a wooded area and then meet a path near the bottom of the fenced Access Land at a T-junction.

*Turn right* for 30m and *turn down to the left* for 20m to a stile in the fence to the right of a metal field gate. Go over the stile and *turn left* along the fence with a yellow marker. In 45m a public footpath joins from the left through a metal gate. *Turn right* back on yourself (250°) with the footpath, this side of the gate (towards the village), going through a pasture with plenty of disturbed ground to the left. This is part of the former site of **the 10<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine Abbey that gives Cerne Abbas its name**. In 100m walk through a line of mature trees on raised ground: further ancient **earth works**, and *veer left* towards a wall corner, with a cemetery to the left beyond the wall and the ruins of the surviving abbey buildings visible ahead. In 90m *turn left* into the cemetery through a metal gate, ignoring a wooden gate into the abbey grounds ahead. Follow a gravel path through the bottom of the cemetery and in 40m you reach a two-way signpost by the exit gate. **St. Augustine's Well** is up on your left.

The Main Walk joins through the gate. *Turn hard left* back on yourself towards the well and pick up the directions in the main walk text at the triple asterisk \*\*\*).

### **Alternative Ending at Dorchester Stations (cut 140m ascent but add 1.3 km)**

In 150m ignore a left turning signposted footpath and *bear right* with the field boundary and the river ('Godmanstone ¼'). In 360m, at a signposted three-way footpath junction, **turn right through a wooden gate for a short out-and-back to Godmanstone's Holy Trinity Church** (Grade I listed, part 11<sup>th</sup> C, usually open) **and England's Smallest Pub** (now closed): in 60m *turn left* through a wooden gate and cross a railed slab bridge over the river and in 20m *turn right* along the mill house to cross the millstream to a road. The former **Smith's Arms** is 40m away to the right. Cross the valley road to the right and go up the gravel **Church Lane** to in 100m go through a metal gate into the churchyard. **Return to the fieldside path** and *turn right* along it ('Forston'). In 150m go through a metal field gate and follow a field boundary with paddocks beyond a wooden fence on the left, and with the river on the right. In 170m go through a metal field gate and pass some stables and in 40m go over a stile to the right of a metal field gate and continue in the same direction ('Forston').

In 40m *turn left* between fences up a wide grass path between paddocks. In 90m go through a wooden kissing gate with a yellow marker into the **Access Land** of the steep slope of **Cowden Hill**. Follow a clear path uphill for 50m and *turn right* at a T-junction along a car wide grass path further ascending the slope. As you ascend, you have fine views emerging up the valley to your rear. In 150m go through a wooden field gate **out**

**of the Access Land** near the top of the rise and *turn right* to a wooden field gate 25m away. Enter a sloping pasture and follow a clear grass path towards the corner of a fenced wood 90m away and then continue downhill along the fence. In 270m in the bottom field corner, go through a metal field gate and continue in the same direction either side of a boundary hedgerow, which discontinues in 160m. In 120m beyond the hedge, at a right turn of the river, you *bear right* towards a wooden field gate 60m away, and continue along the gravel drive of **Forston Farm** to the valley road, passing some weirs on the river and a raised granary away on the left.

Cross the **A352** and go through a wooden gate and uphill along a public bridleway, a grass track between fences. In 400m at the top of the fenced track, with **Watcombe Bottom** to the right, go through a metal field gate into **Access Land** and *bear left* up a low bank to a memorial bench-with-views. *Turn left* along the fence and hedge but *at the higher level* of the memorial bench for fine **views into the Cerne Valley**, with the impressive **Forston House** prominent behind a high hedge along the A road (formerly **Forston Asylum**). In 180m in the field corner, **leave the Access Land** through a metal field gate with a blue marker and follow a clear path to the right of the hedge, in 50m with a large arable field on the right. In 350m you pass a barn up on the right and continue with **Hill Coppice** on the left and some trees on the right. In 50m you have the arable field on the right again, now with the covered **Charminster Reservoir** up on the right ahead at the top of the field. In 150m ignore an unmarked left turning public bridleway along a field boundary and continue in the same direction gently uphill.

In 300m in the far field corner, you go through a metal field gate with two bridleway markers onto **Charminster Down**, indicating an upcoming fork in 30m at a set of bridleway and footpath marker posts. *Fork left* in a south easterly direction along a car wide grass track, broadly parallel to the left-hand boundary of the down and with **Charminster** visible ahead in the valley. In 180m you pass some slightly higher ground on the right and in 190m a marker post somewhat to the right near **Cherry Close Coppice** on the right. In 60m pass a clump of trees on the left with a disused pit in front of it (on the OS map) and continue in the same direction. In 230m you can see what looks like a church tower on high ground on the half right about 4 km away, on a bearing of 170°. That is located in the centre of **Poundbury**, Dorchester's controversial suburb. A little to the right of it, through a gap between some woods, you can see the top plateau of **Maiden Castle**, Britain's largest Iron Age hillfort (SWC Walk 275 Dorchester Circular or to Portesham). In 160m go through a metal field gate to **leave Charminster Down** and continue along a fenced car wide track, soon between hedges.

In 500m ignore a footpath turning right through a metal gate ('Stratton 1') and continue with the **Frome Valley** on the right below and the noise from the **A37** getting more prominent. In 200m you pass **Park Farm** on the right and in 90m go through a wooden field gate and continue along tarmac. Continue in the same direction along a road at a bend and immediately ignore a left turn. This is **Wanchard Lane** and you follow it for 900m into **Charminster** to a T-junction with the **A352** coming down the Cerne Valley. A **bus stop** is away to the right and **The Gamekeeper** pub away to the left. Cross the road and continue through a wooden gate to the right of a wooden field gate along a signposted public footpath ('Mill Lane'), in 20m going through a wooden gate to the left of a metal field gate and through a pasture, with **St. Mary the Virgin, Charminster** church ahead to the right. In 120m go through a wooden gate left of a metal field gate and **[!]** *turn right* along the **Cerne River**, ignoring a bridge ahead.

In 20m enter the churchyard and follow a gravel path to a road. *Turn left* along **West Hill** to cross the Cerne one last time on the road bridge and continue up **East Hill**. In 75m, just as the road starts to ascend more steeply, you *turn right* along a signposted footpath with a Cerne Valley Trail marker ('Wolfeton Lane ¼', 'Lower Burton 1'). In 20m go through a metal kissing gate and in 70m through another one. You follow a fenced-in

path between pastures and in 130m cross **Wolfeton Lane** (private) with signposts on either side. *Bear left* ('Lower Burton  $\frac{3}{4}$ ') and in 150m go through a wooden gate into a large pasture and *turn right* along an avenue of trees. Some of the higher buildings in **Dorchester** are visible dead ahead, and **Poundbury** is up away to the right. In 360m leave the field into a neighbouring field through a set of wooden gates and cross it in the same direction. In 440m leave the field by a signpost into the yard of the large **Lower Burton Farm** and proceed to a road. *Turn right* along the pavement, in 30m cross over to the other side at a set of lights and pass **The Sun Inn** to continue in 60m along a shared cycle and footpath to the left of the road, shielded a little by some trees.

In 120m cross **an arm of the Frome River** on a two-railed wooden bridge and in 120m cross a tarmac lane. In 150m cross a two-railed footbridge over **the main arm of the Frome**. In 75m, just before the road crosses a **third arm of the Frome**, you *bear left* with the cycle and footpath, signed 'Dorchester'. In 200m cross a two-railed footbridge over a linking channel between millstream and river, and *turn right* at a T-junction of tarmac paths, with a **Frome Valley Trail** signpost. In 100m, by a pond on the left, ignore a left turn of path and stream and continue in the same direction across a bridge into town ('Top O' Town', 'Roman Town House'). Cross a road and go through bike barriers and up a stepped tarmac path, entering the Roman Precinct of **Dorchester**. At the top of the steps continue along the pavement up **Glyde Path Road**. You follow this up into town, passing Dorset County Hall away to the right and eventually continue along a pedestrianised stretch of the road to emerge on **High West Street**.

**The Royal Oak** (Wetherspoon) is opposite and you *turn left* along the road. The **Courthouse Museum/Shire Hall** is on the left (spot the wall inscription: 'Hyde Park Corner 120'). In 30m you pass **The Old Ship Inn** on the right and **Trinity Church** on the left, then the **Dorset Museum** and **St. Peter's Church**. At the next street corner, with the **Corn Exchange/Town Hall** and **The Kings Arms** ahead on the left, you *turn right* across High Street and along a pedestrianised shopping street, **South Street**. In about 400m, at a multi-directional road junction, **leave the Roman Precinct** and cross **South Walks Road** a little to the left at a set of lights and *turn right* across **Prince of Wales Road** at another set of lights and continue along **Weymouth Avenue**.

Where the road turns left, by **The Junction** pub across to the right, **Dorchester West station** (for services back to Maiden Newton or on to Weymouth), lies 350m ahead along the road past The Junction: **Great Western Road**.

For **Dorchester South station** (for services to London or Weymouth), *turn left* with Weymouth Avenue. In 110m, by an info panel on the redevelopment of **Eldridge Pope & Co's** brewery, and with **Vivo Lounge** and the (chain) microbrewery **Brewhouse and Kitchen** ahead, you *turn left* along **Eldridge Street** into **Brewery Square**. Further refreshment options in the buildings on the right include: **Luciano's**, **Pizza Express**, **Nando's**, **Zizzi**, **Wagamama** and **Côte Brasserie**. Down Eldridge Street on the left you find **Hub Box**, by a fountain on the right. From here it is another 100m to the station, en route passing the **Morrish & Banham Wine Merchant Tasting Room** (open to 20.00 Fri-Sat), with a **small shop** away to the right at the station forecourt.

London bound trains depart from the near platform.  
Weymouth bound trains depart from the far platform.