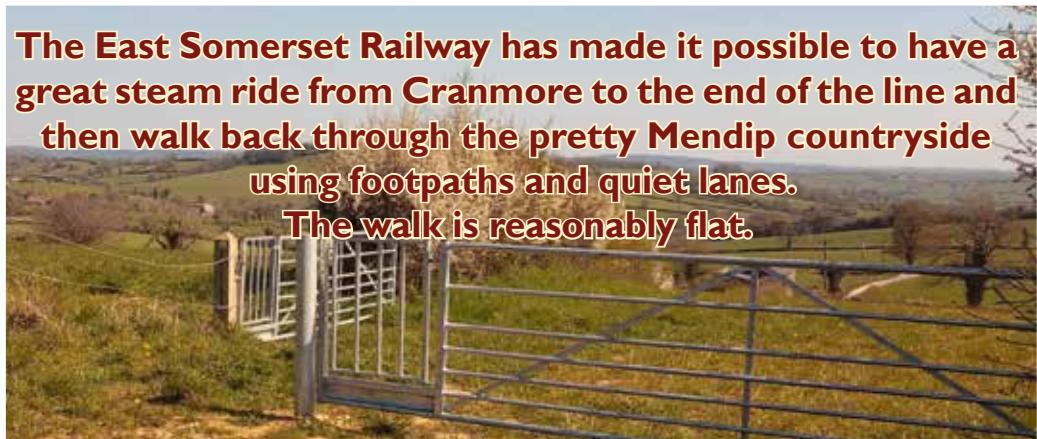




RIDE & RAMBLE

A walk from the East Somerset Railway

The East Somerset Railway has made it possible to have a great steam ride from Cranmore to the end of the line and then walk back through the pretty Mendip countryside using footpaths and quiet lanes. The walk is reasonably flat.



There are good views across the Somerset countryside. Dogs can ride on the train free of charge and will enjoy the ramble back but please follow the Countryside Code. As with all country walks you may encounter areas of mud and in high summer sections of paths, including the railway path (which is only open officially when trains are running) may be overgrown. You will see lots of wild flowers and you may see deer and plenty of birds.

The walk starts at Mendip Vale, the last halt on the train ride from Cranmore. Climb the bank and steps mid-way along the platform and go left by the fence at the top, along the permissive path. There are badger & rabbit holes, so please be careful! The path drops down alongside the railway, then below it, alongside a small ditch, before climbing past the (yellow) Distant signal ahead. It continues above the cutting towards the road bridge.

At the end of the path, you reach Maesdown Road, with the railway bridge to the left (1) and your route along that road to the right (2). Beware of traffic!



There is a good view of the railway cutting from the bridge and you should be able to see the TV transmitter mast at Pen Hill on the Mendips.



The original East Somerset Railway ran its last passenger train on 7 September 1963. The track remained in place here until the early 1970s, when it was removed almost to the top of the cutting. Between about 1981 and 1985, it was re-laid by our P-Way Gang, with passenger trains over this section restarting on 23 June 1985.



Go south along the road to the fork for Peacehaven (3). Go 20-30 metres to the right for a distant view of Mendip Vale station (4).



Unfortunately, our line can only go to Mendip Vale as the track-bed into Shepton Mallet was sold off. The old station site a mile further on has been redeveloped but we could go half-way to the edge of the town. However, this would require a lot of help from the current landowners and pots of money!



Return to the junction and go on, south along the road to where the side-road joins from

the left (5). Just beyond this on the right-hand side (RHS) is a footpath sign (6).

Climb over the slab and then go over the stile into the field. Go up the left-hand side (LHS) and over the next stile.



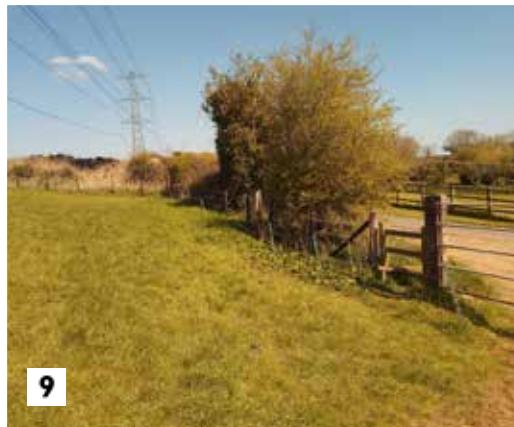
Continue up the edge of this field to where the hedge bends to the right. You will see a double stile (7) in the hedge to your left. Cross this

and go into the field beyond, then go right, (8) up the hedge and down the opposite side of that field.



Views will open out in front and you will see a line of pylons across the bottom. On reaching these, go left along the bottom of the field to a gate and stile (9) two thirds of the way along. Go over the latter onto the metalled track.

Follow this track past Farncombe Farm to the T-junction, check for traffic, turn right for a few metres and take the footpath into the field opposite, under the power line.



Go to the right of the pylon and aim for the gap in the hedge on the skyline, which is in the top corner of the field (10). Go through the first Bristol gate, then left, through the second. Go down the side of the hedge (11) on your right to the bottom of this field

and through another Bristol gate.



Turning left, you go onto an old grassy and dirt farm lane. This is Holcombe Lane (12) and you need to walk along this pretty lane (13) for over a kilometre until you reach a crossroads at the end.



You will see a sign for a low bridge straight ahead (14) - the railway bridge you crossed by train just before Merryfield Lane halt. The other sign refers to flooding and yes, it most certainly does, as water flows in from the surrounding fields after prolonged rainfall and a stretch of 50 metres becomes far too deep to drive through.



Turn right, ignore a right turn after 200 or 300 metres and continue along the lane for a further 800 metres until you reach a junction. Turn left, north, towards Cranmore. Walk along this lane for 500 metres and you will come to a right-hand bend (15) with a wide verge and views towards the railway, to Cranmore church tower and to Cranmore Tower on the hill behind.

Cranmore Tower is 45 metres tall and a 19th century folly. It sits 280 metres above sea level, and is the highest point on the Mendip Way. There are footpaths to it from our car park. You can climb the tower and refreshments are available when it is open. Phone 01749 880742 or 07931136091 to check opening times.

Go along the lane for about another 150 metres and pass the pillars to the entrance to Home Farm on your left. Just after that is a metal farm gate and beyond that a wooden (16) one to your footpath north, alongside the house. Go along the left edge of the field beyond this house and down the track (17) by the wood at the end.



At the bottom right is a stile. Cross this and soon, cross a metalled road (marked 'Private' to your right) and over another stile (18) opposite. The official footpath takes you across the field on the diagonal to a gate (19) in the hedge.



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Then you continue diagonally through a second field, down to the lowest point of the hedge opposite, close to the railway (at 23). This is likely to involve walking through growing crops.

If nobody else has made a track there, you may opt to walk on the unploughed edges around the right side (20) of the field (parallel to the private drive) and down the far side 100m to the gate in the hedge (21).

Then go through and along the hedge on the left (22) for 150-200m. Go left, into the corner of the field behind the hedge and go down to the railway on the unploughed edge of that field (23).



Turn right and walk along the edge of that field (24) towards a lane beyond. Follow the railway hedge and soon you approach the farm gate and stile on the left.



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On the hill ahead you will see the pillars at the entrance to Southill House (25) which was important in World War Two. Resistance units were set up in countries in mainland Europe after invasion had taken place. Here in the UK, groups were being considered even before invasion became a serious threat.

The stables at Southill House formed the headquarters for the organisation of the second biggest resistance group in the country. Auxiliary Units sprung up using 50 secret bases around Mendip, with that in nearby Beacon Hill being the nearest. Men were trained to kill and sabotage and were expected to operate from these tunnelled-out bases, separated from their families and given a life-expectancy of only ten to fourteen days. (See 'Somerset v Hitler' by Donald Brown for full details).

Looking across the lane you can see the ESR going east (26) towards the main line at Witham Friary, over 8 km away.

Just out of sight is the entrance to Merehead, a massive limestone quarry from which trains convey the stone out daily over the main rail network. We hope to operate trains as far as the junction with that quarry eventually but operating trains to Witham itself is a distant dream, the quarry being licensed for further extraction until at least 2045 or 2050!



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Looking out for traffic, step onto the lane, turn left, north and walk up (27) to the railway bridge. There is a fine view of Cranmore Station (28) and it is a vantage point when the engine has uncoupled and has drawn forward to take water or to run around to the other end of the train. Walk down the other side and our car park is on the left.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk through some of our beautiful countryside.

If you are lucky, the cafe and shop will still be open for refreshments and other purchases!



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*This walk was devised by Sue Gearing in association with The Mendip Times in about 2008.
Updated by Nick Waton, ESR, in April 2021*

