

Historical footsteps... 1 ½ miles

Corfe Common & Corfe Castle

 THE NATIONAL TRUST

This gentle short walk explores Corfe Common, a sandstone ridge south of the picturesque village of Corfe Castle. Look out for signs of the human activity that shaped this interesting archaeological landscape over thousands of years and enjoy the wide range of wildlife which now makes its home here.

Start: Corfe Castle ticket office – OS Explorer OL15 map – grid ref. SW961821

How to get there & local facilities

By foot: Purbeck Way runs from Wareham to Corfe Castle

By bike: Purbeck Cycleway passes through Corfe - starts and finishes in Wareham

By bus: Wilts & Dorset 142 or 143, Poole-Swanage

By train: Corfe Castle  on the Norden to Swanage Steam railway

By car: A351 from Wareham to Swanage runs through Corfe Castle village

Accessible WCs at our ticket office and Castle View Visitor Centre (five minutes from the start of this walk). Parking at Visitor Centre. National Trust tea room and gift shop in the village.

Contact us on 01929 480609 or corfecastle@nationaltrust.org.uk

Points of interest...

-  In 1086, William the Conqueror exchanged the mound at Corfe and land around it for the church of Gillingham in North Dorset.
-  The village of Corfe Castle probably started out as a work camp for King John's building programme. Cob or wattle and daub houses would have surrounded the square creating a bustling hub for workshops and a weekly market. King John decreed that all fish caught locally had to be offered for sale in the Corfe Castle market first before being sold elsewhere.
-  In the 18th century, smugglers carried contraband such as fine French brandy and ladies' silk gloves across the common on their way from the Purbeck coast to London.
-  Some villagers still have 'Common Rights' and graze their cows or horses on the common for an annual fee. Each year a Hayward (someone who, in the Middle Ages, oversaw the harvesting of crops) is appointed to collect the fee and to make sure the animals are well cared for.



There are spectacular views on this walk as the imposing keep of Corfe Castle rises dramatically over the village. William the Conqueror began building the Castle in 1086. It was destroyed in 1646 by Parliamentarian forces during the Civil War.

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Corfe Common is Dorset's largest area of common land. It is an important place for acid-loving flowers and grasses – the best spot in England to find the rare wild chamomile. The bright yellow blossom of gorse can be seen from May to October. Have a sniff and you'll notice its strong coconut aroma. Gorse was once used as a fuel for bread ovens.

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Look out for 'hollow ways' as you walk across the common. They are all that remain of old tracks which led from the quarries to Corfe Castle. Over time, carts laden with limestone wore away the track and it became a deep muddy gully. When it became impassable they just moved to the side and started a new track.

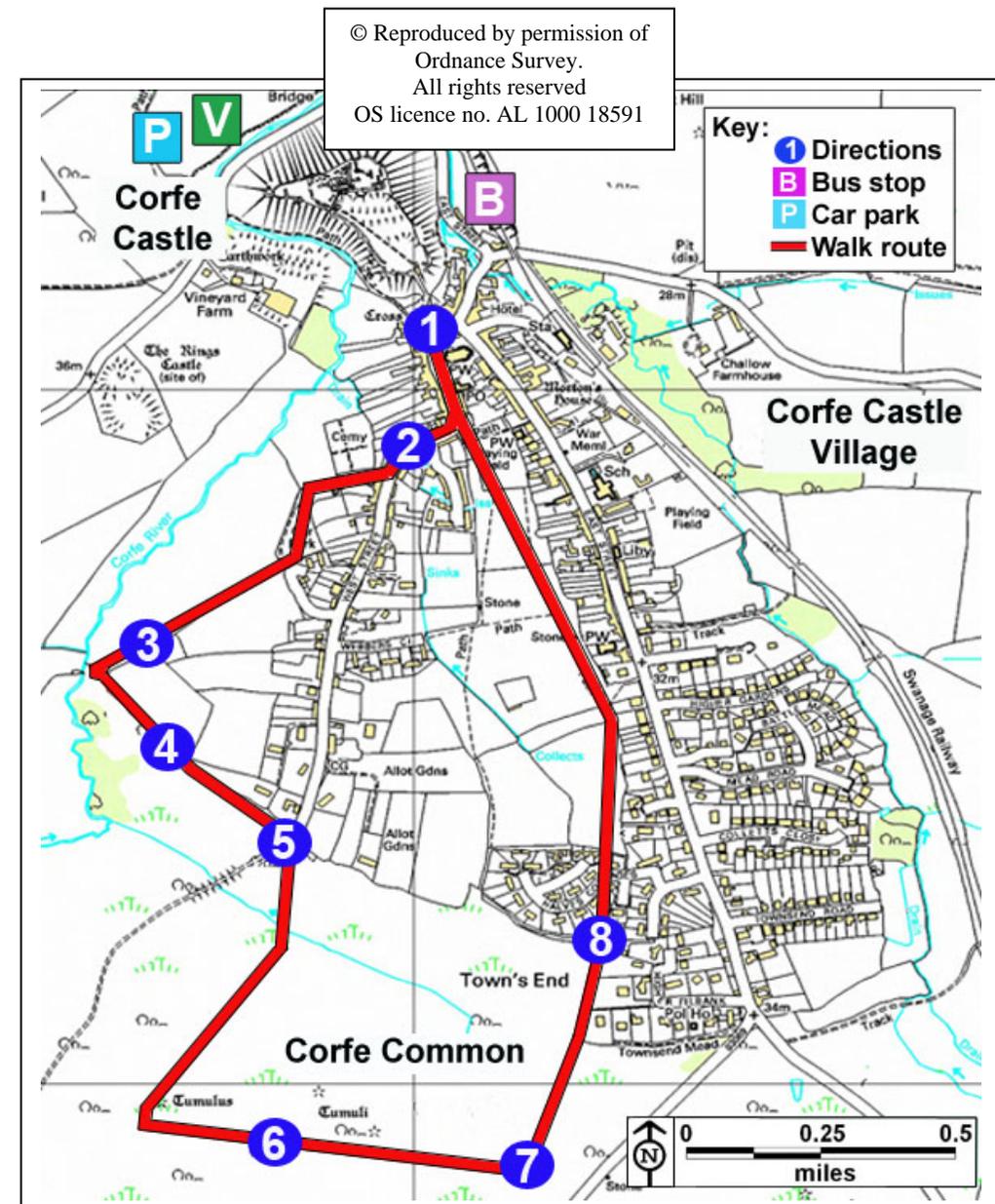
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Terrain and accessibility

1½ mile (2.4km) route, mostly on the level. There are a few slopes, gates and boardwalks. Some areas can be muddy after wet weather so sensible footwear is advised. Please keep to footpaths to avoid eroding this beautiful landscape.

Directions

1. From the Corfe Castle ticket office, walk along West Street once the main road through the village. It was known as 'Duck Street' due to the number of animals driven along it on to the common and the mess they left behind!
2. Turn right towards West Street car park. At the end of the car park turn right again, through a 'kissing gate' and follow a path along the edge of the field. This is the 'Halves' or 'Haws', communal land, once used for strip and furrow farming. Families would each have had a strip on which to grow their own food, much like allotments.
3. Go through the stone 'kissing gate' and stop at Copper Bridge. Built in the 1800s, this small humped back bridge used to be on the main road to Church Knowle. Animals would have walked through the ford at the side of the bridge.
4. Turn left up the slope (almost going back on your self) and follow the hedge. When you get to the top of the slope bear right to join the road.
5. Walk down the dip and up the other side. At the top, leave the road and follow the path left to the top of the ridge.
6. Along the ridge you will find a series of low 'humps'. These are the remains of 4,000 year old Bronze Age burial mounds. From here you can enjoy views of the Castle to the north and the village of Kingston to the south.
7. Turn left at the large, low burial mound at the end of the ridge and make your way to the bottom of the slope walking down the 'hollow ways' towards the lower common.
8. Follow the path towards the gate at the top corner of the common, along the path between the houses and onto Middle Halves. Signposts then mark the way back to Corfe Castle.



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