



# Denbury Hill Fort – A Countryside Walk Looking at Devon Hedges



## Devon Hedge Facts

- A Devon Hedge comprises of an earth bank, usually with a line of shrubs growing on top
- The bank may be faced with either stone or turf
- Devon has around 33,000 miles (53,000 km) of hedges, more than any other county in the UK
- Three quarters of Devon's hedge are thought to be medieval
- Around 20% of the UK's species-rich hedges are in Devon
- Hedges require management, including periodic rejuvenation by laying, to prevent them from disappearing

For more information about Devon Hedges visit <http://www.devon.gov.uk/hedges.htm>

## The Devon Hedge Group

The Devon Hedge Group is a forum of organisations and individuals interested in working together to promote the appreciation and conservation of hedges found across the county. Members of the Group represent the full range of interests associated with hedges in Devon, including agriculture, the conservation of wildlife and landscape, and historical and cultural values. This leaflet has been produced as a part of the Devon Hedge Group's Green Veins and Lanes project.

## Follow the Countryside Code

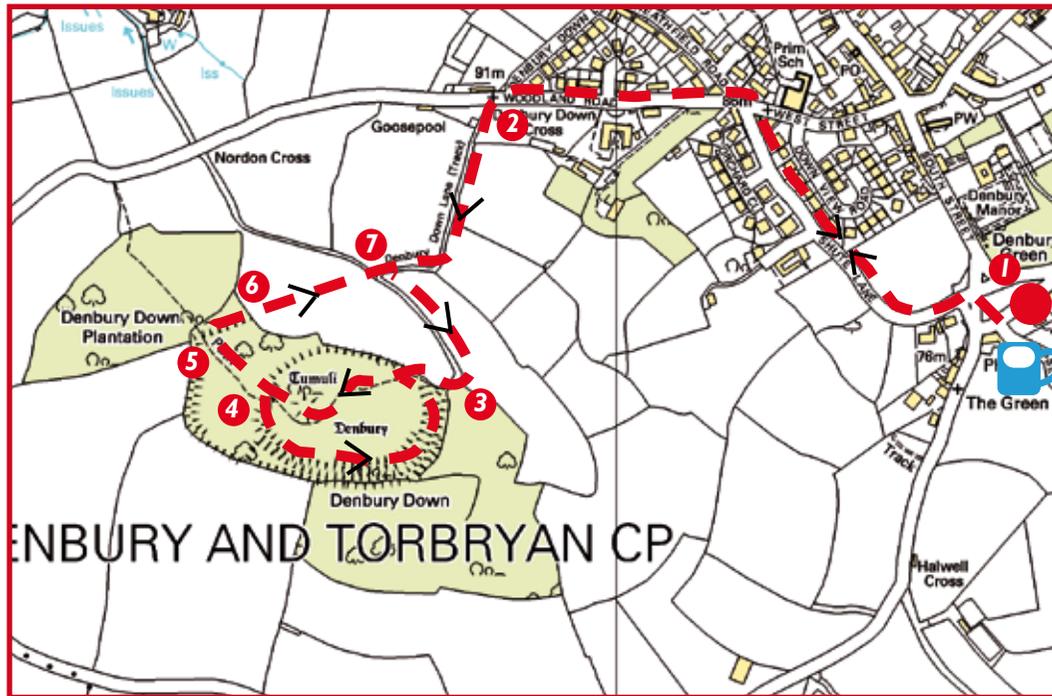


- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people



**T**his walk will take you to the top of Denbury hill fort, passing many ancient hedges along the route. The walk is about 1½ miles long and will take about 1½ hours. The walk starts at Denbury Green, 2½ miles southwest of Newton Abbot, Devon.

When the visibility is good, there will be many beautiful views over the surrounding countryside. When the weather has been wet you will need waterproof footwear.



**1.** The walk starts at Denbury Green opposite the Union Inn (grid reference SX 825 687). With your back to the pub turn left down Shute lane, bordered initially by a stone wall on the left. At the end of Shute lane turn left on to Woodland Road signposted to Broadhempston, Woodland and Ashburton.

**2.** After passing Denbury Down lane on your right immediately turn left along a track at Denbury Down Cross.

This track is an ancient green lane dating back to the Bronze Age, bordered by extremely species rich Devon hedges at least 1200 years old. Devon hedges are characterised by hedgerow trees and shrubs growing on top of an earth bank, faced with stone or turf.

The hedgebank consists of 12 species of trees and shrub including oak, hazel, spindle, dogwood and dog rose. 'Hooper's Rule' states that the approximate age of a hedge in years can be worked out by counting the number of woody plant species in a 30 yard section of hedge and multiplying this by 110. It is estimated that one new species colonises the hedge every 110 years. The lane has been important historically and was recorded as being part of a network of Saxon routes.

The left hand side hedge is managed mechanically by a tractor mounted flail. Beyond the sharp left hand

bend, the right side of the hedge is traditionally laid. Hedgelaying involves cutting the trunks of the trees almost all the way through but leaving a hinge so that the tree lies flat alongside the bank. These then form the pleachers. The stump sends up new shoots the following spring, which, along with shoots coming off the pleachers themselves, form a thick stock proof hedge ideal for nesting birds and providing shelter. Nuts and berries are plentiful after a few years providing food for a wide range of wildlife

Hedges provide an important refuge for a wide range of plants and animals, linking many different habitat units. The wildlife benefits of laid hedges are immense due to the varied structure of the hedge and different heights and stages of hedgelaying are evidenced.. Historically hedges were extremely important in providing food, firewood and medicine for humans. Traditional hedgelaying is very labour intensive hence the majority of hedges are now managed by flailing.

**3.** Follow the track until you reach a gate at the top into the wood where extensive views of Haytor can be seen. Once through the gate follow the main track ahead which takes you to the top of the hill fort.

Two Bronze Age burial mounds, also known as tumuli, are located either side of the path.



**4.** Pass the two large holm oaks on the right and take the next track on the left.

This follows the original upper boundary rampart which is no longer visible. To the right is the fosse – a deep defensive trench circumnavigating the hill fort, surrounded by a single agger – originally a raised causeway which extended widely to include additional land to the west. Expansive countryside views through the trees towards the South Hams can be seen. Hedgerows are a feature of this typical Devon landscape.

Continue round the periphery and re-join the main track dissecting the Bronze Age burial mounds. Pass the track on the left which follows the upper boundary rampart and head downhill passing out of the original fort entrance.

An interpretation board shows an artists impression of this original entrance.

**5.** Follow the track down the hill until you reach a small track on the right. Follow this until you reach the edge of the wood and another interpretation board showing an artist's impression of the layout of the hill fort.

**6.** Climb over the stile into a steep sloping field, appreciating views over the countryside to the north stretching from Buckland Beacon, Rippon Tor, Saddle Tor and Haytor on the horizon to the left. Straight ahead on a clear day Haldon Belvedere is visible with Teignmouth to the far right. Again good views of the field patterns spread out before you, most of them dating back to the medieval period. Devon has more hedges remaining than any other county in the UK including about 20% of the UK total of species rich hedges.

Continue diagonally across the field to a stile by a granite water trough. Climb the stile into another green lane turn right and then immediately left rejoining the main track back down to the village.



**7.** The green lane that you have just crossed is a Saxon track, leading down to Nordon Cross; Norden being a reference to the keeping of sheep on lower pasture around the hill fort. In the spring the hedges are full of wildflowers including primrose, bluebell, ramsons, replaced by red campion, stitchwort and foxglove in the summer.

Denbury was the last stronghold of the Dumnonii, the men of Devon, during the Saxon invasion in 681 AD. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that from this point, the site of a great battle, the Dumnonii were driven to the coast.

Denbury Church has a one handed clock, originally dating from 1730, when some clocks did not have the extra accuracy of a minute hand. Aeldred, a Saxon landowner, owned the Manor of Denbury and was a monk of Tavistock Abbey. Later as Archbishop of York he crowned William the Conqueror and Edward the Confessor.

Retrace your steps back to the village green along Shute lane.

The remains of Aeldred's Cell surrounded by high walls are visible from the pub.