



The Quantocks

Will's Neck Circular

Will's Neck is the highest point on the Quantock Hills and you are guaranteed magnificent vistas just about any way you look.

Indeed, the steep descent from the lofty summit to the hamlet of Triscombe is the nearest Westcountry walking gets to flying. You feel that at any moment you could soar away across the vast West Somerset vale that lies far below. On the way down you can peer over at distant Dartmoor, take a discerning peek at the Blackdowns, examine Exmoor and eyeball the Brendons.

Of course, being able to enjoy all this altitudinous sightseeing does come at a cost. As is the case with most high-points, the price of the panorama is the climb up.

To find all this scenic glory you only need drive 15 minutes out of Taunton on the Minehead road. After about seven miles turn right and follow the signposts to Triscombe, and within a mile you will be in one of the loveliest hamlets in Somerset – tucked, as it is, under the central massif of the Quantock ridge. Tucked, also, under one of the county's biggest quarries.

Its red aggregate was used in all manner of famous places - I seem to remember writing that the rock of the Quantocks was the first thing most visitors see when they come to Britain, because it was used for the runways at Heathrow. I was also once told that the regal red road outside Buckingham Palace was made of the stuff.

Thankfully, the quarry is quiet nowadays, and there's not much at Triscombe save for a handful of pretty cottages and a rather good pub. Park where you can and find the footpath which you will see leaving the lane which runs north west along the hills to Crowcombe. The path passes one or two cottages before climbing the flank of the hill a little way, then runs parallel with the lane below in a north-westerly direction.

The right-of-way passes through woods that divide the lower skirts of the moor and the high fields – and they are an ideal place for spotting wild red deer.

After about a mile and a quarter the path passes Little Quantock Farm and introduces the walker to Little Quantock Combe. This is where the hard work comes in. The half mile to the top of the ridge is steep, to say the least.

But the effort is worthwhile, because the main ridge of the Quantocks offers spectacular views in all directions. On a clear



Basic hike: from Triscombe (seven miles northwest of Taunton) along the side of the Quantocks to Little Quantock Farm, up onto the ridge and then south east to Will's Neck before returning to Triscombe down a very steep track.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 140 - Quantock Hills. Distance and going: four miles very steep in places.

day you will see the whole of North Somerset, including the vast expanse of The Levels. You can see the new Severn Bridge spanning the upper limits of the Bristol Channel.

It's now a two-mile jaunt past Great Hill on the ancient drovers' road which is a wonderful feature of the Quantock ridge, no matter where you meet it. There's something antediluvian about walking on this unmade track. If you've seen Lord of The Rings movies and you want to feel what it might be like to be in such a world – try taking a turn along this prehistoric trail. Ancient gnarled beeches are a feature of the wide rutted road and somehow it's easy to imagine Somerset's answer to Gandalf marching along here.

The old name for this section of the track vouches for its antiquity – a 13th century document calls it “Alferode” and it's pretty certain that King Alfred marched along here with his men on his way from Devon.

Just after you pass the two-and-a-half-foot high menhir called Triscombe Stone (sit on it if you will – some people say the monolith will grant you a wish) and passed the unpaved road which plummets down to Triscombe, a path ascends gently uphill to the right. This is the way up to Will's Neck – the highest point on the Quantocks.

The summit is 1,260 feet above sea-level and the strange name comes from “Ridge of the Wealas” - which refers to a local tribe that, according to tradition, fought with the Romans up here.

After admiring the extraordinary views from the cairns at the top, turn west and walk down over the ridge. This, as I said, is where it gets particularly altitudinous, in a vertigo-inspiring sort of way. In fact, so steep does this path become, I wouldn't recommend it to anyone who's out of shape or suffering dodgy knees.

Eventually you enter the woods and after a bit more slipping and sliding you will find yourself back in Triscombe.