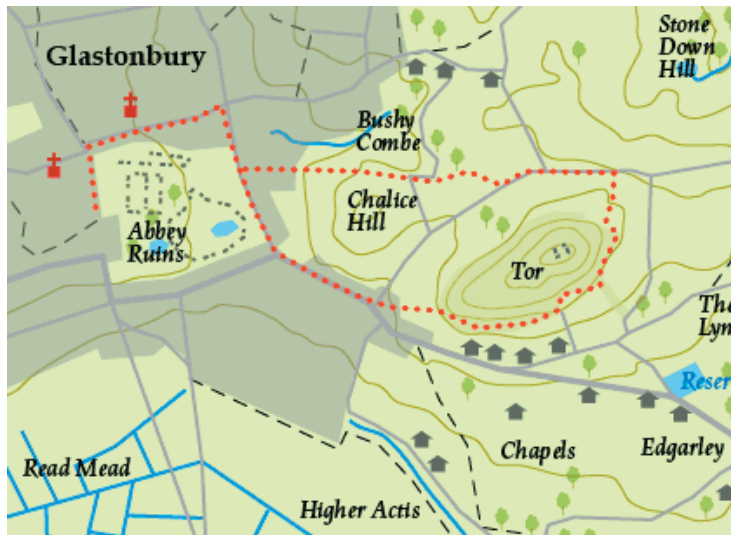




Somerset

Glastonbury Tor



The Somerset Levels are magnificent sight from the 518-foot summit of Glastonbury Tor, which is a sort of island set in the middle of the great swathe.

There's an official town trail and you can buy a leaflet describing it from the Tourist Information Centre. The leaflet is crammed with information dealing with the long and interesting history of places you'll see in town, but it doesn't take you up to the Tor - so I've adapted the walk to allow you to make that grand ascent.

Moreover, the official route takes all sorts of detours so that, for instance, you can - if you really want - take a peek at the 19th century police station. You can also go down Grope Lane if you have the desire or inclination.

We're off to the High Street though, which you'll see swinging right up the hill just a hundred yards away by Market Place.

This is one of the Westcountry's great main streets - and certainly one of its most eccentric, if the names of the shops are anything to go by. The Psychic Piglet Incorporating the Golden Bough sounded good. Crystal This, Mystic That, New Age Everything Your Karma Can Imagine. You name it, Glastonbury's got it with bells on. Or bongos. Or didgeridoos. At the top of the High Street, Bove Town continues on up the hill and this road you must ascend until it renames itself Wick Hollow.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 141.

Distance and going: Three-and-a-half miles, steep section up the Tor itself. This walk begins outside the Abbey Gatehouse in Glastonbury's Magdelene Street. It's an easy enough place to find and you can visit the famous abbey if you've the time. We're off to the High Street though, which you'll see swinging right up the hill just a hundred yards away by Market Place.

Pick up a copy of the Glastonbury Town Trail leaflet (30 pence) from the TIC at The Tribunal, 9 High Street, Glastonbury. Tel: 01458 832945.

And hollow it is. Here the lane climbs through a small ravine that looks as if it's either been an ancient quarry, or otherwise has been worn down by the feet of pilgrims who have been coming to town for centuries. At the top turn into Bulwarks Lane and proceed south to Lypyatt Lane before turning sharp left into Wellhouse Lane.

Now we're out of the confines of the town and on the northern flanks of the Tor itself. After a few hundred yards Wellhouse widens to allow visitors to park their cars and a stile on the right introduces one and all to one of the National Trust's most celebrated mounds.

It's a steep five or ten minute climb to the top of the Tor. A concrete path has been laid all the way to the summit in an attempt to stop erosion, so best keep to it and on the way you can mull over some of the many fanciful theories that seem to attach themselves to this magnificent hillock.

Here's a couple I heard in town: «When finally you have made it to the top, the magnetic energies open your crown chakra,» said one leaflet. «Then slowly filter down through the rest of your chakra system. You feel empowered. The energies of King Arthur come to you. He brings you the Holy Grail!»

«Situated on a major acupuncture point of the Earth body, Glastonbury is one of the most powerful energy centres on the planet,» claimed another. «Prophecies have foreseen it playing an important role in the New Age. The entire area around this small town in Somerset has a very holy vibration.»

At the summit there is, of course, the hollow 15th-century tower that is visible from more than half of Somerset. It is all that remains of the church (or churches, there were two) of St Michael.

Somehow the Tor does manage to drip with mystery and legend. It is supposed to be home of Gwyn ap Nudd, Lord of the Underworld, and a place where fairies live.

After taking in the view, it's simply a matter of descending back to Wellhouse Lane and continuing down it to Chilkwell Street, which will lead you back to the town centre.