



Dorset

Golden Cap



Basic Hike: For those convalescing, there is the basic level walk, which simply follows the contour around the top of Langdon Hill, but for hale and hearty folk the additional climb to Golden Cap is a must.

Recommended Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 116 Lyme Regis & Bridport.

Distance and going: two miles, well laid tracks, pretty level all the way.

A friend of mine had a bit of a heart attack recently and has been warned not to push things too much during his convalescence. Needless to say, the poor chap gets bored being stuck at home, so the other day he asked if he could join me on one of my walks.

One of these days we'll feature a round up of suitable Westcountry walks for those who are convalescing, but in the meantime allow me to sing the praises of Golden Cap.

This might seem surprising as Golden Cap is the highest point along the entire English south coast. Climbing its 191-metre summit from sea-level would be out of the question for all but the most fit – however, the great hill that looms between Lyme Regis and Bridport is attached to a flattish plateau that offers a fantastic level walk with heavenly views.

It is also, by the way, one of the most highly protected places in the region being a key point of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, and being owned by the National Trust as part of its wonderful Golden Cap estate.

To find the altitudinous demesne you must reach a hilltop village called Morcombelake on the A35 between Charmouth

and Chideock. Just past the garage, over the hilltop heading east, watch out for a tiny lane on the right. Then, once you've negotiated your way onto it (and be careful, if you're heading east you must cross a nasty bit of road), follow the turn left marked Langdon Hill car park. You'll find the National Trust parking place in the woods and from here you have a choice of numerous walking routes.

After a quick read of the Trust's interpretation board, which told us about the rare snakes, lizards, butterflies and birds that haunt the area, we set off due south down the big forest ride.

Views. That's what this place is all about. Huge views from the moment you begin your walk - out over the charming village of Chideock, far, far below, and into deepest Dorset with its knobbly hills and green Hobbit-like vales.

At just over 600 feet the car park is at much the same altitude as the top of Golden Cap itself, so when at last you come to the edge of the trees you are delighted to discover that only a small dip separates you from the great and famous hill.

From this particular angle Golden Cap looks like an Alp - perfectly conical so you think the top must be crowned by a small peak. It's not, because the peak stretches in a tiny escarpment toward the sea, but you only find that out once you've descended a little way down into the dip, crossed a field or two, and then climbed the steep footpath to the top.

To be honest, this climb was a little too much for my friend, who sensibly waited in the sunshine at the base while I hauled my way to the top - but he was still able to enjoy stunning views up and down the coast from his vantage point.

This first portion of peak allows for breathtaking views of the coast to the east. There is Seatown deep in its gully a long way below, then there are the rolling ridges leading up to Thorncombe Beacon past Doghouse Hill. You cannot see Eype Mouth which is hidden beyond all this, but further still there's a glimpse of the quay at West Bay.

I once walked to Lower Eype from here, and returned via inland paths over Frogmore Hill and up through Chideock and Quarry Hill, but it requires a day's hard hiking.

On top of the Golden Cap plateau it's only a few hundred yards past the Bronze Age burial mounds before you reach the other end, but at the edge of the cliff you are treated to yet another stupendous view.

This time it's west, down across the gargantuan landslides that mark this coast - past a million dinosaur fossils to Charmouth, and on again along more of the region's Jurassic Park as the coast rises, reluctantly, at The Spittles - the jumble of cliffs that so haphazardly lead the roving eye around to Lyme Regis.

From Golden Cap Lyme looks like it's meant to look: i.e. all French-Lieutenant's-Womanish and romantic - the sort of place you imagine Jane Austen going for her holidays.

I could see ruined St Gabriel's Chapel in a corner of the fields beneath my lofty viewpoint, and recalled the fine little hike that heads down to this old ruin, then inland through St

Gabriel's Wood and up to Filcombe Farm. You can then walk the little lane back around to the car park at Langdon Hill.

I also recalled taking the long descent to Seatown, followed by an equally long ascent back my car up Langdon's Lane. But that is a cardiovascular Olympic job and I had to return to my pal, who I found sitting happy as Larry in dip. We then returned to the car by taking the western loop around the woods that crown Langdon Hill.

By the time we finished, we'd strolled just under two humble miles (which in truth was a mile further than my friend's cardiac nurse had advised) but the walk was almost entirely level and the patient was beaming with delight. He said the activity and the fabulous views had combined to make him feel better than he had been in ages.