



MELLS

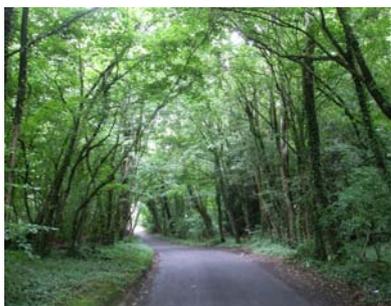
This route was kindly donated by Nigel Vile.
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He put in his thumb by Nigel Vile:

Mells, tucked away along a maze of country lanes in the countryside between Frome and Radstock, is a delightful place. Back in the 1940s, one guidebook writer was fulsome in his praise of the place. "Lovely it was to find that the ages have not spoiled it" wrote Arthur Mee. "If our England is a garden, as Mr Kipling says, Mells is as rare a fruit as hangs on an English tree; it is a piece of pure delight". From the ages old bridge over the Mells Stream to the Talbot Inn, from the grand church alongside the manor to a tale of intrigue relating to one of its former Lords, there is something of interest at every turn in this most handsome of villages.



Our exploration of the place must wait, however, as the walk initially follows quiet lanes and a centuries old bridleway out of the village to Buckland Down. Good views open up across this corner of Somerset and, despite the absence of any notable landmarks, it is as pleasant a swathe of countryside as could be hoped for. Woodland and arable fields, grazing cattle and sheep pasture – this is no twee picture postcard scene, rather it is a workaday landscape of farming and forestry. The forestry angle hits home up on Buckland Down, where the right of way quite literally passes through a timber yard, replete with stacks of tree trunks and mounds of sawdust!



From the timber yard, a quiet lane is followed through woodland bordering the Ammerdown Estate down to the site of the former Mells Road Station. Here the walk joins a section of National Cycle Route 24, named Colliers Way after the many coal trains that passed this way in the heyday of the Somerset Coalfield. Recently opened as a cycle route, the path runs parallel to the trackbed of the long-disused North Somerset Railway running between Radstock and Frome. Along the way lie an intriguing collection of stones bearing the names of varieties of apples – as well as recently planted apple trees. In days gone by, rail travellers discarded apple cores from the carriages that self-seeded. The idea is to create a new linear orchard that will hopefully provide refreshment for passing travellers in years to come.



Lanes and fieldpaths lead back into Mells where the first port of call is St Andrew's Church. Built of limestone oolite, this is a perfect example of the Somerset Perpendicular. Pevsner hesitates as to its age, with the scales falling in favour of the 15th or early 16th-century. Certainly, he was impressed by the construction of the tower whose 'arrangement of buttresses and pinnacles is as ingenious as any in Somerset'. The churchyard is an intriguing place, too. In a quiet corner are a number of graves that read like a page out of 'Who's Who', with Ronald Knox – the Roman Catholic Priest and Scholar, Siegfried Sassoon and Lady Violet Bonham-Carter all finding their earthly resting place hereabouts. What brought them to this part of Somerset was their friendship with the Horners in the nearby manor house ... and herein lies another tale of intrigue!



Local tradition maintains that the manor of Mells is none other than 'the plum' in the 'Little Jack Horner' nursery rhyme. The tale holds that Jack Horner was steward to Abbott Richard Whiting at the time of the Dissolution. Jack Horner was despatched to London with the deeds to a number of manors that were part of the rich demesne of Glastonbury Abbey, all in an

attempt to placate Henry VIII. Jack Horner held back one of the deeds for himself, which turned out to be none other than Mells Manor! What did that rhyme say? He put in his thumb and pulled out a plum – Mells Manor is certainly a plum, one of the finest houses in all of Somerset.

Talking of houses ... and public houses! The Talbot Inn in Mells does appear to feature in just about every 'Good Pub Guide' or any other publication that recommends places to eat and drink and be merry. The Independent newspaper waxed eloquent 'stunningly venerable ... the quintessence of England' whilst the inn's own website described a visit to the Talbot as 'an occasion to be cherished, offering an award-winning a la carte menu of traditional English food with a delicate French influence, sourced from the best local ingredients'. And with this being the festive season, it is probably best to book ahead!

Fact File:

Distance	5 miles ½ miles.
Time	2 or 3 hours.
Start Point	Village Shop in Mells (GR 730490).
Map Reference	OS Landranger 183 or OS Explorer 142.
Terrain	Gently undulating; nothing too strenuous.
Contact via	vilewalks@yahoo.co.uk

Directions

Getting there Leave the A363 Frome to Radstock road one mile northwest of Frome, and follow a signposted turning into Mells. Park in the side road opposite the village shop, just by a bridge over the Mells Stream.

1. Facing the village shop, turn right along the main road in Mells and, in a few paces, take the first turning on the left. Follow a lane that climbs gently uphill from Mells, bearing left in 600 yards and then right in 350 yards before continuing for 600 yards to a railway bridge. Cross the railway bridge, walk ahead for 20 yards and turn left onto a track – restricted byway. Follow this track for $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to a mature beech tree, and keep on the track as it bears right to continue climbing gently uphill. In another $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, keep on the track as it bears left and follow to track for $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to a timber yard. Follow the path to the left of the timber yard and along to a wooden barrier and a lane.
2. Turn left, and follow this lane for just over $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to a lane on the left waymarked as National Cyclepath 24, immediately before a railway bridge. In 250 yards, turn right to join a dedicated cyclepath that follows the line of the North Somerset Railway. Follow the cyclepath to the left for 1-mile before veering right up to a lane just before reaching Conduit Bridge. Follow the lane to the right for 600 yards and, where the lane bears left, keep ahead into the corner of a field. Follow the right edge of the field ahead down to its bottom corner before turning left to follow the bottom field boundary across to its far corner.
3. In the corner, turn right into the adjoining field and head across to a stile in the hedgerow opposite. In one final field, drop down to the line of yew trees in Mells churchyard. Pass through the churchyard and around the church before walking down New Street to the main road in Mells. Turn right, pass the Talbot Arms and take the first turning on the left by the entrance gates to Mells Manor. Follow this back road down to a lock-up and a property called Little Thatch on the left. Ahead is a fork – veer left down a side turning and drop down to a junction in a valley. Turn left, walk through this valley and, at the next junction, turn left up to the village shop.

The Route:

