

Route 1 Great Wood Volcano Walk

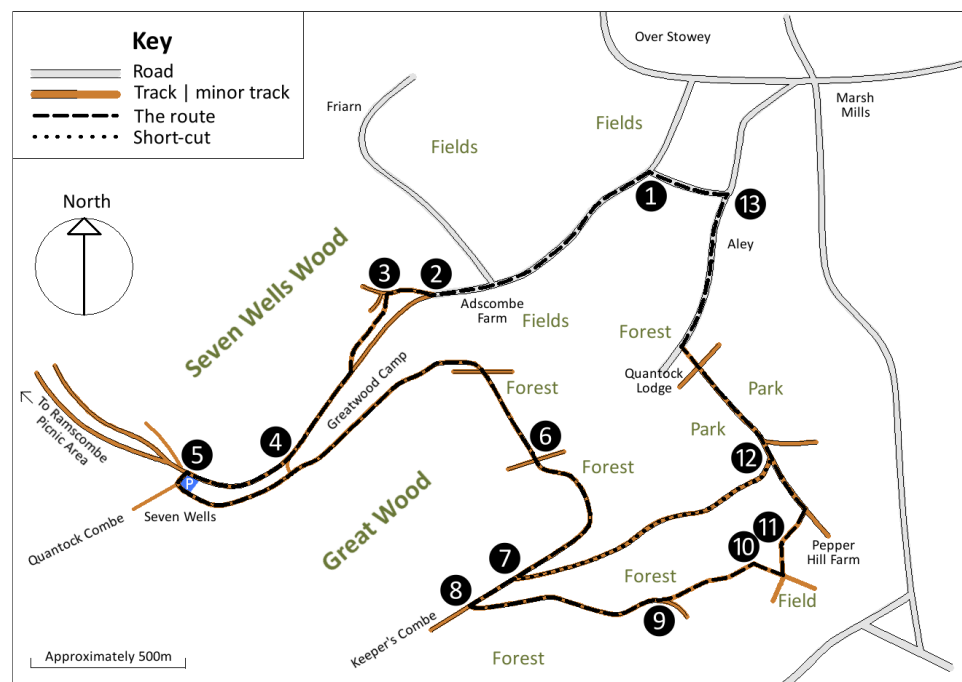
Distance: 3.5 miles (5.5 km) **Height gain:** 680 feet (207 m) **Time:** 1.5 to 2 hours

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 140 *Quantock Hills & Bridgwater*.

Parking: Seven Wells car park (ST173373), marked ⑤ on the sketch below.

Start and finish: The Campbell Room or Seven Wells car park.

This easy circular walk in the Quantock Hills follows tracks and bridleways through Great Wood forest, fields and open parkland, as well as taking you over rock from the Quantock's very own extinct volcano. The sections on local roads are generally quiet but care is required. A short-cut is also suggested, cutting the distance by half a mile.



Parking

Unless you are staying at the Campbell Room, start this walk from the Seven Wells car park ⑤, on the way to the Ramscombe Picnic Area. Then begin the walk with section B, *Seven Wells Car Park to the volcanic track*. Section A will be the last part of your circuit.

A) Campbell Room to Seven Wells car park

From the Campbell Room ①, turn left and walk along the road towards Great Wood forest. The stream on your right, raised above road level, is actually a leet built to supply water to the former flour and silk mills at Marsh Mills. After Adcombe Farm the road rises, becoming a forest track at the cattle grid ②. You could continue directly ahead along the track, but take the right hand track up hill instead. Just after the car barrier, turn left off the track ③ and take the narrow bridleway between the trees. This brings you back to the main track to Seven Wells just before the entrance to Greatwood Camp.

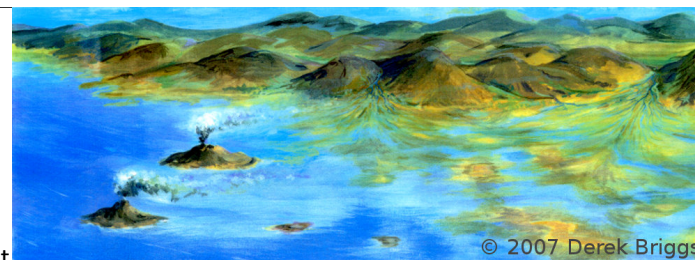
Continue along the track for just over half a mile to reach the Seven Wells car park or — if you started from the Campbell Room — you could save half a mile by cutting down the small path a few hundred metres on the left after Greatwood Camp ④, crossing the stream and turning left onto the track on the other side of the valley floor.

B) Seven Wells Car Park to the volcanic track

Seven Wells — named after the seven springs in the area — is at the junction of Adcombe, Ramscombe and Quantock Combe ⑤. From the Seven Wells car park entrance, turn immediately sharp left and follow the track along the bottom of the valley towards Greatwood Camp. As you walk, take a close look at the stone that forms the track and its banks. It should feel sandy — it is a sandstone and sometimes contains seashell fossils. After curving around the hillside keep going directly ahead up the hill at the 4-way track junction. As you continue you see a field through the trees to your left.

At the top of the rise there is a fenced enclosure on the left containing some low buildings ⑥. This is the Friarn Tank, the reservoir that supplies water to the local area. From the tank, continue ahead as the track turns down the hill into Keeper's Combe. As you reach a low point in the track there is a junction ⑦. Have you noticed any different stones underfoot yet?

The sands which form the local sandstones, including one called *Hangman Grit*, were laid down around 490 million years ago in shallow water close to the shore of an ancient



ocean. The sand was brought down by rivers from the hills of a semi-desert landscape away to the North! From time to time volcanoes erupted in the sea and the ash from one of these forms the greenish *Cockercombe Tuff* found near stops ⑦ and ⑧.

The Quantock Hills were pushed up about 100 million years later. They were probably once much higher than they are now.

Keep going straight on as the track starts to climb again and look down as you walk. Sections of the track are formed from larger greenish-grey stones – this is the volcanic *Cockercombe Tuff*, formed when ash blown out of a nearby volcano settled on the sea floor, was buried and squashed under more sand to make an 18m thick layer of rock.

C) Short-cut

If you're continuing on the main route, skip to the next section. If you want to take the short-cut then retrace your steps back to the track junction ⑦. Bear right following the track down the valley. Shortly you will go past a house on your right hand side, then come to another cottage with stables and a gate across the track. Although this looks like the entrance to a private garden it is actually a public bridleway, so go through the gate, past the cottage and through the following gate. Both houses are built using Cockercombe Tuff.

Continue along the track into the parkland until the track rises up to a track junction ⑫. From here you rejoin the main route, following the description in section E — *Quantock Lodge to the Campbell Room*.

D) Volcanic track to Quantock Lodge

Unless you plan to take the short-cut, walk up the track a little further, turning left at the first track junction ⑧. If you've been studying the stone check that you've not already walked too far! Shortly after the track flattens out there is a plantation of young oak trees on your right hand side. You can see the path that you just walked along through the trees to your left.

As you continue, look out for pine cones from the Douglas Fir and the Sitka Spruce. The Sitka Spruce cones are sausage shaped, with many thin, crinkly-edged scales. The cones of the Douglas Fir are more oval, with fewer, thicker, harder scales, and with paper-thin forked tongue-like bracts sticking out from under them.

The track bends very gently right for a while, then more sharply left and becomes straight. Then, as the track starts to swing round the hill to the right, a narrower bridleway drops downhill to the left ⑨. Turn down the bridleway, which becomes relatively steep. As it flattens out you can see a field ahead and to your right, and a little further on you come to a gate ⑩. Go through the gate into the field.



Directly across the field you can see another gate ⑪. While you will be going through this shortly, the right of way makes a loop, so follow the direction indicated by the bridleway sign, heading towards the right hand side of the roof of Pepper Hill farm, which you can see in the valley. Half way across the field turn left and head towards the gate you saw earlier ⑪. Go through the gate and the short section of wood beyond, then turn left onto the track. Continue along the track, which follows the fence as it drops downhill, through a gate and into the park. As you start going uphill you come to a track junction where the short-cut rejoins the main route ⑫.

E) Quantock Lodge to the Campbell Room

From the track junction in the park, walk up the hill towards Quantock Lodge. As you go, look back and to your right to see the gate house at the edge of the park. Quantock Lodge was designed in the nineteenth century by Henry Clutton as a home for the MP Henry Labouchère, 1st Baron Taunton and the park used to form the grounds of his mansion. You should be able to identify the stone used in its construction.

Go through the gate, along the side of Quantock Lodge and through a second gate. After 20 metres you come to a junction, with a car park to the left, a gate to the right and a bridleway heading downhill directly ahead. Take the bridleway and after a short distance you reach a road. Turn right and follow the road downhill in the direction of Aley. After going through the stone entrance keep going through the hamlet of Aley. From the proportion of houses with former stables you can tell that the horse used to be an important form of transport locally. Soon you arrive at a junction with a post box and bus stop ⑬. Turn left and continue along the road until you reach the road junction and the Campbell Room ①.

If you parked at Seven Wells, then from the Campbell Room continue in a straight line following the route described in section A — *Campbell Room to Seven Wells car park*, but ignoring the first instruction to turn left.

Users of this route do so entirely at their own risk. Please take care and follow the Countryside Code.

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