

PWS2: Velvet Bottom, Charterhouse

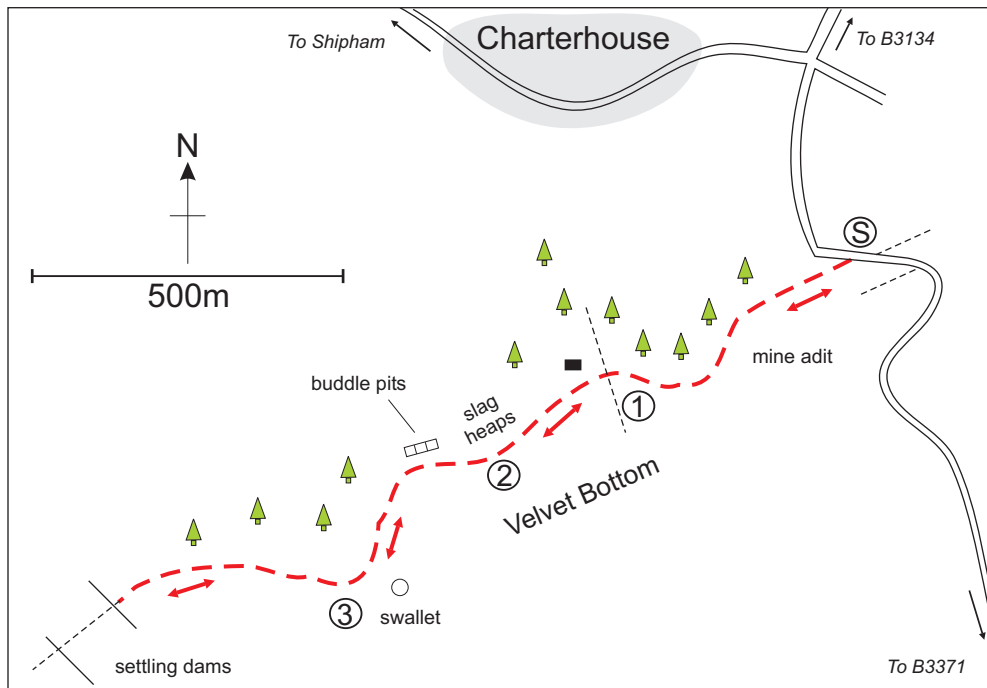


Outline Information

Distance: 1.5 miles (2 km)
Time: 1 hour
Grade: Easy
Map: OS Explorer OL131
Grid Ref: 502554

Velvet Bottom is a picturesque valley deep in the Mendip Hills near Charterhouse. Once the heart of a thriving lead mining area, the land is now re-vegetated and designated a nature reserve due to the number of plant adapted for the high levels of lead in the ground. The reserve forms part of the Cheddar Gorge SSSI.

The path through the valley is good and this is a pleasant there-and-back walk with plenty of opportunity for picnics. Due to lead levels, keep children away from any water as it will be contaminated. As it is a nature reserve, cycling is not permitted and do not disturb the plants and animals.



Getting there

From the B3371 turn down the minor road signposted to Charterhouse. Park in the lay-by in the valley bottom just after a sharp right hand bend.

S. From the lay-by, turn left down a track towards a large gate and information board. Go through the gate and continue along the track down the valley. *The tunnel under the road was built after a large flood here in the 1960s washed the road away and churned up the valley bottom.*

Walk along the valley bottom past sycamore and elder trees. *Look out for mining adits in the valley sides.*

1. Continue along the track and pass a building on your right. *If you look at the track, you'll see it's made of dark grey glassy gravel. This gravel is actually glassy slag from the lead smelting operations in the valley. The slag has very sharp edges so keep an eye on children picking it up!*

2. As you head round the bend, you'll see the remains of the slag heaps. Once past the slag heaps the path narrows to an earth track. *To the right of the path are a series of square holes. These are buddle pits and date from Victorian times. Buddles were stone-lined pits to clean and concentrate the lead ore prior to smelting, and further down the valley are a series of dams and settling beds.*

Keep following the path, bumpy, until the valley opens out. On your left here is a large depression in the valley bottom. *This is a swallet hole where water from the surface percolates through the limestone bedrock down into the large cave systems which underlie the Mendip Hills.*

3. This is the last feature on our walk, so pause to have a play and a picnic before returning the way you came. *You can continue to the Victorian dams, but we don't advise going beyond the second dam as it is a very awkward descent down a collapsed wall.*

Enjoyed this walk? Then why not try **PWS3 Hope Cove** or **PWS4 Ubley Warren**?