

Brent Knoll Butterflies

A Local Walk



Brent Knoll is an outcrop of limestone, mudstone and clays formed in the Jurassic period that resisted erosion when sea levels were much higher than they were now. Despite the proximity to the Mendips Brent Knoll is much younger, probably 150 to 200 million years, and the nearest equivalent geological feature is, in fact, Glastonbury Tor. The land rises steeply above the church to a plateau and the Knoll itself rises steeply to a summit, on which there was an Iron Age fort. Later this was used by the Romans, who named it Mons Renarum (Hill of Frogs), presumably a reference to the frogs that must have thrived in the marshy ground at the bottom.

The ground flora is not as rich as the nearby Mendip Hills, and, as a consequence, the butterfly population is not as diverse. Nevertheless, the species present represent a good spread of common countryside butterflies. The most notable area for butterflies is at the top of the Knoll owned by the National Trust.

The walk starts at St Michael's Church entrance and passes through the church yard to the right of the church and then turns left onto the path that goes up to the Knoll. There is a buddleia next to the entrance to the church that attracts **red admirals**, **painted ladies**, **peacocks** and **commas** in midsummer. Above the church is a shaded section of path where you will often see **speckled woods**. Turn right through a gate and climb steeply up to the plateau watching out for **ringlets** as you go. On your left

there is an unimproved meadow on which you may see **common blues and marbled whites**. Pass through a gate at the top of the steep section and along the footpath with a hedge on your right. After a hundred yards the path bends right and then left before you climb steeply up the Knoll. The brambles on this section of the hedge provide a rich source of nectar for **meadow browns** and **gatekeepers** in July. You may also see **small heath** in the field to your left.

Pass through the gate at the top of the path and climb up the steps to the path around the Knoll. Walk along this path to the right past the Jubilee stone to the National Trust cairn and then return along the same path carrying on clockwise around the Knoll until you see the footpath down to East Brent. The reason for doing this is to concentrate on the south facing slopes above the scrub line where most butterflies are seen. **Small tortoiseshell, red admiral, painted lady and common blue** are present, and there is also a small colony of **wall**. These are usually seen around the Jubilee stone. Take care on the slope down to East Brent in wet weather because it can be very slippery. As you pass through the gate watch out for **ringlets** in late June.

Walk towards East Brent for a hundred yards and turn left skirting the field towards a metal gate at the bottom. Walk along a hedge row past the gate and you pass a damp rushy area on the right. **Large skippers** are often seen in this section of the path. Turn right through a metal gate and cross a field to a point where the path meets Hill Lane. Go straight across the road through a metal gate into Ralph's Wood, a young plantation, with a permissive footpath skirting the edge. Turn left along this path until you reach an overgrown hedge just past a pit containing water in wet weather. In this section of the walk **common blue and small copper** may be seen nectaring on common fleabane in late summer. Turn right and go into the wood with a ditch/hedge on your left for fifty yards. Then turn left through a gap in the hedge by a large fallen tree, where you may see **red admiral** basking in the sun. Walk back down the other side of the ditch/hedge back towards the road. Turn right and you will reach a stile that takes you onto Hill Lane. **Gatekeepers** are common in late July on this section.

The walk continues along Hill Lane back towards Brent Knoll. In the open section with hedges on either side you will often see large numbers of **meadow browns** that love the flowering privet and brambles in late June / early July. As you walk down the hill in the shade of beech and ash trees you may see **speckled woods** that are attracted to this shady part of the lane well into early autumn.

As Church Lane opens up watch out for **brimstone** in early spring followed by **orange tips** and other species of **white butterfly (large, small and green-veined)** in April and May.

Return to St Michael's Church along Hill Lane turning left at the junction with Church Lane. **Holly blues** are not common locally but can be seen in Church Lane as you approach the church.

