

# enjoy & explore dorset

area of outstanding natural beauty



a guide on where to go, what to see and do in the Dorset AONB



**Dorset**  
AREA OF OUTSTANDING  
NATURAL BEAUTY  
PARTNERSHIP

# a nationally important landscape... but what makes it special to you?

The Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a collection of stunning landscapes, each with different histories, ways of working and stories to tell. Whether you like the openness of the downs or the intimacy of the vales, the buzz of the market towns or the freedom of the coast, there's a place for you somewhere, just waiting to be found.

We hope this guide will encourage you to explore Dorset's finest countryside and find that part which is special to you.

## good views:

**There are some cracking viewpoints where you can sample the very different landscapes that make the area outstanding. Enjoy the walk, take a picnic, fly a kite, soak up the view. Try them all year round and notice what a difference the seasons can make.**

### **Golden Cap**

Highest point on the south coast with dramatic views of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

### **Pilsdon Pen**

Highest hill in Dorset – only 30 metres short of a mountain! - with sweeping views across the hedged landscape of the Marshwood Vale.

### **Eggardon Hill**

Views of seven other hill forts on a clear day, as well as the Powerstock Hills and Marshwood Vale.

### **Hardys Monument**

Set within the ancient South Dorset Ridgeway landscape, panoramic views of the unique Fleet and Chesil Beach and the rolling Dorset Downs.

### **Hambledon, Bulbarrow and**

### **Hod Hills**

This trio of hill forts all give you views over Blackmore Vale and the chalk ridges of Cranborne Chase.

### **Ballard Down**

Fantastic views of the Dorset heaths, Poole Harbour and Old Harry's Rocks.



## go wild in dorset

Wherever you are in Dorset, you won't be far from some special wildlife. With everything from bluebells to barn owls, otters to orchids and deer to dolphins, it's no surprise that Dorset is often considered the wildlife capital of the UK.

While some wildlife is easy to see, you may need to be patient to spot some of the rarer or more shy species. Nature reserves can be great places to start your search and guided walks and events run throughout the year to help.

“Dorset's heathlands support all Britain's six species of reptiles”



## look out for:

### spring

Birds like the puffin return to Dorset to breed. In the fields, hares have boxing matches as females fend off over-friendly males!

Woodlands come alive with bird song, bluebells and other spring flowers. Try Langdon Woods, Bracketts Coppice, or Bonsley Wood.

### summer

Downland and meadows burst into flower, attracting rare and beautiful butterflies. Try Stonehill Down, Kingcombe Meadows and Hambledon Hill.

Dorset heaths, home of all 6 British reptiles, become a riot of purple as heather blooms. Try Stoborough and Studland Heaths. A trip to the coast offers the perfect chance for a rockpool ramble – Kimmeridge is a great spot.

### autumn

Deer are particularly active at this time of year and can be easy to spot. Fruits and berries abound, providing important food supplies for dormice, squirrels and birds. Woodlands become a mass of colour as leaves turn red and golden yellow and fungi spring up on the woodland floor. Try Powerstock Common, Melbury Park and Turnworth Common.

### winter

For some wildlife this is a quiet time of hibernation, sleeping through the worst of the weather. But head to the coast and you'll be amazed at the huge flocks of wildfowl and wading birds massing together. Arne and the Fleet are good sites.



For more information, including details of wildlife walks and events, visit [www.dorsetaonb.org.uk](http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk)



## dorset tastes different!

The Dorset AONB coast and countryside is rich, varied and produces plentiful food and drink. Picture sheep grazing on windswept hills, cows on fertile green meadows, fishing boats in harbours and it's easy to see how local food and this outstanding landscape are intricately linked.

But there are surprises too – the AONB supports lots of small scale producers - you may come across locally produced chilli peppers and crisps, beer and biscuits while you are here too!

Buying local food & drink can be a pleasure in itself. Our market and coastal towns still have vibrant weekly markets, which overflow with local food on farmers market days. Shopping on market days, in local stores and in farm shops can be a treat for you and a real support to the local economy.



## tasty treats:

- Go to town on **market days** to pick up something fresh, local and a little bit different. Bridport, Blandford, Dorchester, Swanage and Wareham all have weekly market days and monthly farmers markets.
- While out and about, look out for **farm shops** and doorstep tables for fresh, home grown fruit and vegetables and homemade chutney, jam and cakes.
- **Cooked with care**, local food can taste distinctly different and you will find it celebrated on menus all over the AONB – cafes, restaurants and country pubs.
- Join a **cookery workshop** to get even closer to the authentic Dorset taste - try making bread, cheese, cider, sausages or chutney using the freshest local ingredients.
- Look out for the **Direct from Dorset** label in shops, eateries and places to stay. Products with this label are from Dorset and produced in ways that care for the environment.
- In October you can join in double **celebrations of local food**. Try Dorset Food Week with cookery workshops, walks, talks and plenty of tastings, or Apple Day to sample Dorset Apple Cake, cider and lots of local varieties.

Visit [www.dorsetaonb.org.uk](http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk) for more local food information





# dorset area of outstanding natural beauty

## finding out more....

.... about local walks, rides, bike hire and much more contact local Information Centres in and around the AONB:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Blandford TIC</b><br>01258 454770             | <b>Kimmeridge – Fine Foundation</b>             |
| <b>Bridport TIC</b><br>01308 424901              | <b>Marine Centre</b><br>01929 481044            |
| <b>Charmouth Heritage Centre</b><br>01297 560772 | <b>Lulworth Heritage Centre</b><br>01929 400587 |
| <b>Chesil Beach Centre</b><br>01305 760579       | <b>Lyme Regis TIC</b><br>01297 442138           |
| <b>Dorchester TIC</b><br>01305 267992            | <b>Studland Beach Centre</b><br>01929 450259    |
| <b>Durlston Country Park</b><br>01929 424443     | <b>Swanage TIC</b><br>01929 421427              |
|  | <b>Wareham TIC</b><br>01929 552740              |

## .... about wildlife sites and country parks:

-  **Dorset Wildlife Trust:**  
[www.dorsetwildlife.co.uk](http://www.dorsetwildlife.co.uk)
-  **Dorset Countryside:**  
[www.dorsetforyou.com/countryside](http://www.dorsetforyou.com/countryside)
-  **Forestry Commission:**  
[www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)
-  **Natural England:**  
[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)
-  **RSPB:**  
[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)
-  **National Trust:**  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

## getting about ....

When exploring the area you can help keep it special by following some simple steps from the new Countryside Code:

- Leave gates as you find them and when in fields with crops, follow paths wherever possible.
- Protect plants and animals – take only your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control so that they don't scare farm animals or wildlife
- Be safe by planning ahead and following signs
- Consider other people – busy traffic on small country roads can be unpleasant and dangerous, slow down and where possible leave your car at home.

For local transport options, contact Traveline on [www.travelinesw.com](http://www.travelinesw.com) or **0871 200 2233** for impartial information on planning your journey by bus, coach or train

Look out for the free Dorset Coast & Countryside newsletter and events guide at these Centres.

Lots more information about places to explore and enjoy in the Dorset AONB on [www.dorsetaonb.org.uk](http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk)

relaxing,  
refreshing,  
**inspiring,**  
**exploring...**

Spending time outdoors in the natural environment is great for your health. With rolling downland, secluded woodlands, wide open heaths and a dramatic coastline, the AONB is the perfect place to stretch your legs and get some fresh air.



## try these:

- Walk the edge between land and sea on the **South West Coast Path National Trail**, with 71 miles of glorious views of the Jurassic Coast from Studland to Lyme Regis. Try combining a walk with a ride on the X53 Jurassic Coast bus to help you explore more.
- Stick to the high ground on the **Wessex Ridgeway**, an ancient track taking in hillforts and historic villages like Cerne Abbas along the way.
- Boat across Poole Harbour to explore **Brownsea Island**, follow the trails to discover its rare red squirrels and amazing birdlife.
- Take in heathland, downland and dramatic coastal scenery on the **Purbeck Way**, passing Corfe Castle, Chapmans Pool and along to Swanage.
- Cycle in style with the **West Dorset Pedal**, a collection of beautiful routes with artists' studios and local eateries where you can stop for food and inspiration! Purbeck also provides good on and off road cycling through woodland, heath and downs.
- Leave the car at home with **Trains to Trails**, which offers four fantastic walks weaving together landscape, history and culture with a train ride on the Heart of Wessex Line.





## a time and a place

The AONB offers some amazing glimpses back in time – real hands on history not dusty text book style.

The rocks that make up the AONB's beautiful landscape tell a fascinating story - of life on earth. The story is most easily read along the coast, which forms part of England's first natural World Heritage Site – the Jurassic Coast.

While geology has been shaping this landscape for millions of years, for the last few thousand, people have been making their mark on it too. The stories of Dorset as a working and living landscape are all around you ....



## try these:

- **The Jurassic Coast** story starts with the ancient red deserts that are now East Devon and travels 185 million years over 95 miles to the tropical seas, fossil forests and dinosaur infested swamps which we now call Purbeck!
- **Stone circles** and round barrows were popular 3–4000 years ago. The circle at Kingston Russell sits on the South Dorset Ridgeway, an area with over 500 of these prehistoric monuments!
- **Iron Age hill forts** have a 2500 year old story to tell if you have the time to listen! We have over 20 in the AONB and boast Maiden Castle as the biggest in Europe.
- **Chalk figures** also come big in Dorset. The Cerne Abbas Giant and Osmington White Horse are among the biggest in the country cut into hillsides.
- **Parklands and formal gardens** often reflect the wealth, plants and the landscape fashion of their times. Compare Milton Abbey with Forde Abbey, Lulworth Castle with Durlston Castle...
- **Rural industries** as diverse as farming, fishing, forestry, quarrying, rope making, milling and rush working can be seen in the very fabric of local towns and villages.



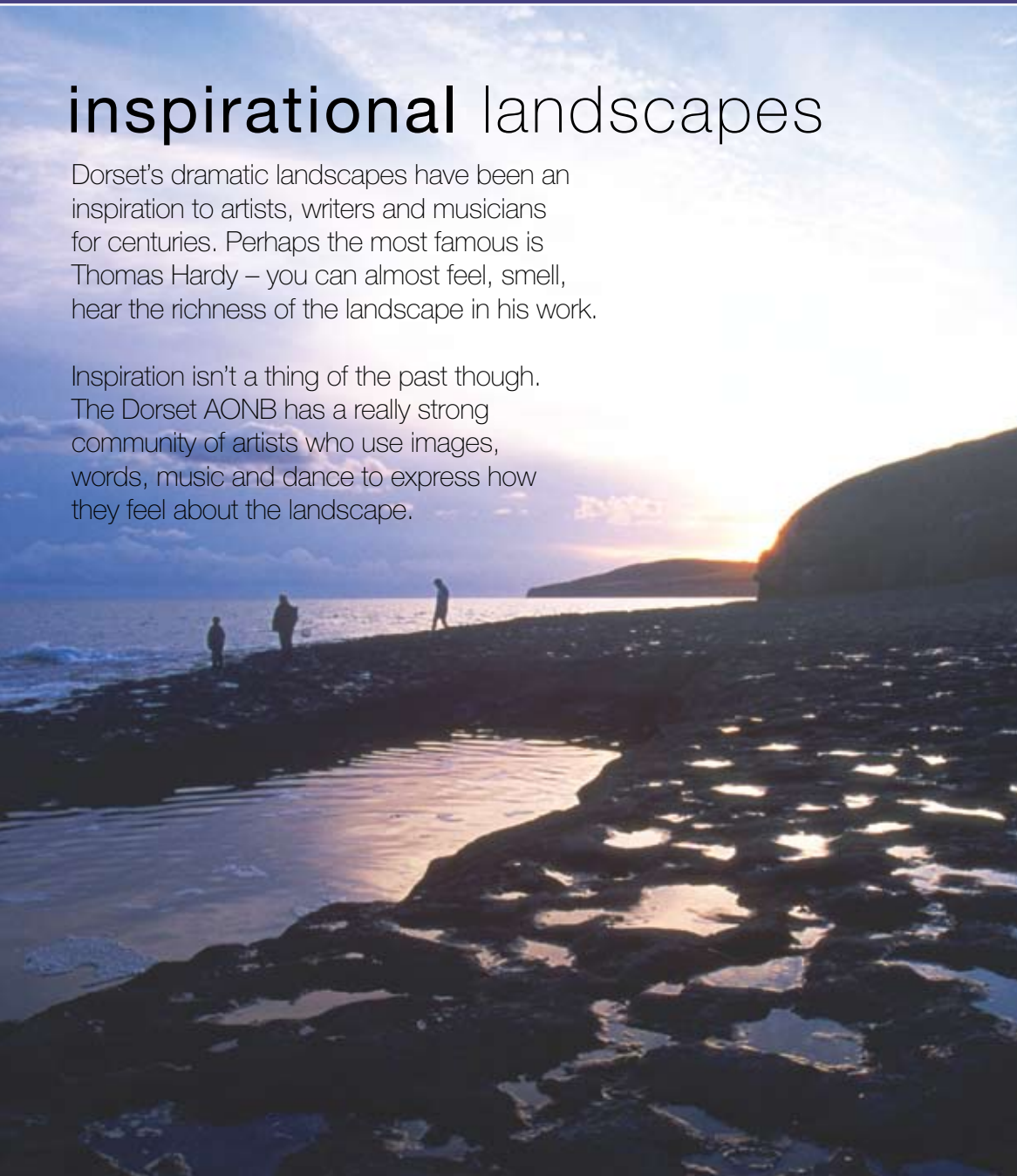
For lots more information & inspiration visit [www.jurassiccoast.com](http://www.jurassiccoast.com) and [www.dorsetaonb.org.uk](http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk)



# inspirational landscapes

Dorset's dramatic landscapes have been an inspiration to artists, writers and musicians for centuries. Perhaps the most famous is Thomas Hardy – you can almost feel, smell, hear the richness of the landscape in his work.

Inspiration isn't a thing of the past though. The Dorset AONB has a really strong community of artists who use images, words, music and dance to express how they feel about the landscape.



## try these:

- Famous artists like William Turner, Paul Nash, John Constable and Fra Newberry all painted the Dorset landscape. You can see how the landscape has inspired artists of today by visiting their studios - either during Open Studio Weeks or by appointment.
- Visit the Dorset Heaths to get a feel for the landscape that Thomas Hardy knew and loved. Reading the work of other Dorset inspired authors like Daniel Defoe, William Barnes, Enid Blyton and Minette Walters will give you very different insights into Dorset life and landscape.
- Stunning landscape backdrops can really bring performances to life. Look out for outdoor events at Abbotsbury, Kingston Maurward and in villages, where you may also come across mummings plays, morris dancers, may day celebrations, beating the bounds.....
- The landscape has provided materials for artists and crafts people to work with for centuries - stone even travelled from Dorset to London to build St Pauls Cathedral. Rural crafts are still very much alive in the AONB - you can try stone carving, basket making, pottery and rush working to get 'hands on' inspiration from the landscape.
- Dorset has a wealth of small, often lesser-known attractions including vibrant festivals, artists and craft workers. The Hidden Dorset website contains a treasure trove of information on the small, the beautiful and the downright quirky.
- Parish Maps have been a beautiful and creative way for local people to show what they love about their parish – look out for these in village halls and notice boards as they are a good way of getting to the heart of place quickly.



Visit [www.dorsetanb.org.uk](http://www.dorsetanb.org.uk) for details of where you can see the work of inspired artists, old and new.



# and finally...

The Dorset AONB Partnership brings together a range of organisations to care for the area and keep it in good shape for future generations.

The Dorset AONB is one of a family of 52 protected landscapes in England and Wales, set up to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape.

For more information about the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the work of the Dorset AONB Partnership:

[www.dorsetaonb@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:www.dorsetaonb@dorsetcc.gov.uk)

01305 756782

The Barracks, Bridport Road, Dorchester, DT1 1RN

All leaflets can be made available in audio tape, large print and Braille or alternative languages on request.

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