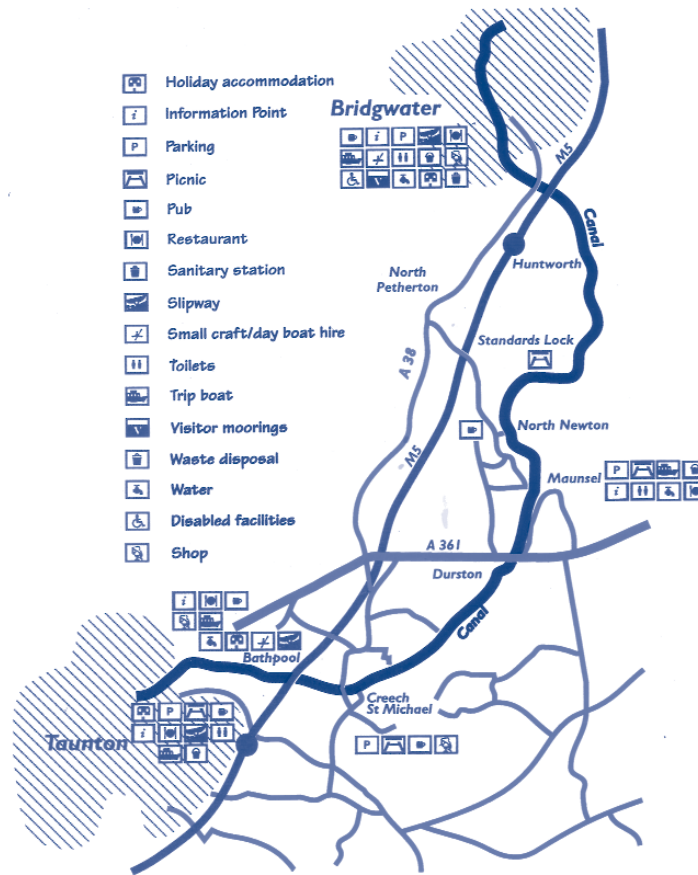


FACILITIES ALONG THE  
BRIDGWATER AND TAUNTON CANAL

*Circular Walks from the  
Car Park*

From the car park here at Creech St Michael four short circular walks begin by using the canal towpath, selected local footpaths and quiet country lanes. The walks go through local villages, hamlets, alongside the River Tone, and across varying countryside, from the quiet areas of the Somerset Levels and Moors, to the built up areas of Hankridge and Bathpool.



*Bridgwater & Taunton  
Canal  
Circular Walks  
Creech St Michael*



This leaflet was produced by the Countryside Services Group,  
Somerset County Council

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## *Creech St Michael*

The name of the village is derived from the British word 'cruc' meaning 'a hill' and 'cruktan' meaning 'the hill on the River Tone'. However, it was not until after 1750 A.D. that it became known as Creech St Michael.

The 13th Century Church has a fine wagon roof and inside can be seen some intricate carved woodwork - including medieval choir seats and bench ends and a reading desk dated 1634. Outside, under a yew tree reputed to be 1000 years old, the parish stocks still stand.

The old Creech Mill, which lies between the River Tone and the canal, was once famous for its making of fine paper, including writing paper, envelopes, tobacco, art, chrome and enamelled papers. It eventually closed in 1983 and has now been converted into small industrial units.

## *A History of the Canal*

The Bridgwater and Taunton Canal was part of an ambitious 19th century scheme to create a route between Exeter and Bristol, which would avoid the treacherous sea route around Lands End. Sadly the great link never materialized though the Bridgwater and Taunton canal opened in 1827, joining the new docks at Bridgwater in 1841 & making its total length 15 miles.



The canal was used mainly for the transportation of coal, timber and limestone that was brought into Bridgwater dock and then transferred to barges and small tub-boats. The commercial success of the canal ended when the Bristol and Exeter railway opened - commercial traffic ceased in 1907.

## *Restoration*

The West Country branch of the Inland Waterways Association lobbied for many years for the canal to be restored. This led to Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council working jointly with British Waterways to bring about the restoration of the canal for amenity purposes between the years 1980 and 1995. The replacement of 14 low bridges was the main part of the restoration programme (the original swing bridges were removed in wartime to create a line of defence). Seven of the bridges were replaced by swing bridges and seven by raised bridges, and this, along with the restoration of six locks, brought the canal back to life - it was reopened to navigation in June 1994.

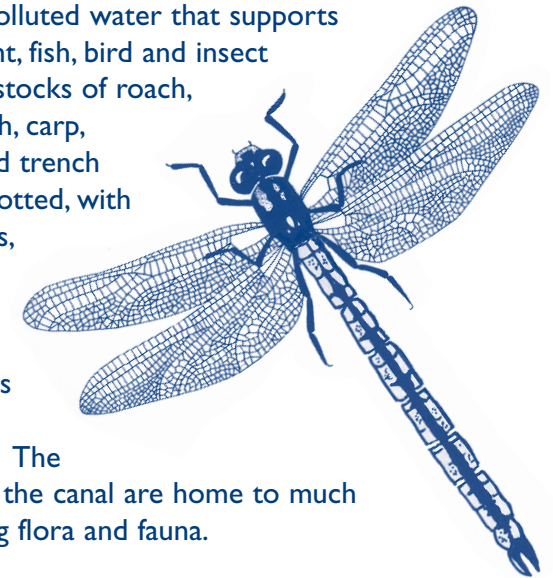
## *The Canal Today*

Nowadays the canal is used as an important recreational resource. Informal activities like fishing and cycling take place - Sustrans use the towpath as part of their National Cycle Route that runs from Padstow to Bath/Bristol. Sections of the towpath are also used as part of the River Parrett Trail that runs from Chedington in South Dorset through to Bridgwater and beyond.

Environmentally, the canal is used as a water supply for Durleigh reservoir - it acts as a drainage system to take surface water run off from agricultural land and storm water in urban areas. The canal is also a link that joins the River Tone in Taunton and the River Parrett in Bridgwater.

## *Conservation and Wildlife*

The canal is an important ecosystem for wildlife because it represents a thin ribbon of land and water in an environment that is used intensively for agriculture outside the urban areas. It is an excellent example of a wetland habitat, with clear unpolluted water that supports much plant, fish, bird and insect life. Vast stocks of roach, pike, perch, carp, bream and trench can be spotted, with kingfishers, herons, dragonflies and damselflies flying overhead. The fringes of the canal are home to much interesting flora and fauna.



## Walk No. 1

Creech St Michael - Bathpool - Hankridge - Ruishton - Creech St Michael

An easy level 4.5miles/7.2km walk

From the car park turn left onto the towpath and walk along the canal for approximately 1.5miles/2.5km until reaching the swing bridge at Bathpool. Turn left and follow the lane to the main road (A38) and then right along the pavement. Once just past the railway bridge, cross the road and follow the footpath signposted 'town centre'. Follow footpath around edge of lake and alongside River Tone (ignoring second town centre sign) for approximately 1mile/1.5km, passing under the motorway and along a well-worn path until reaching Ruishton. The path then leaves the river and continues along a lane to the right of the church to join the road next to the Ruishton Inn. Turn left and then take the first lane on the left, beside some cottages, (signed public footpath) just before Barton Lane. The route then follows the river once more passing beneath the old railway and then over the old aqueduct until eventually reaching the road and Creech St Michael (remains can be seen of the Five Arches Bridge, which was the course of the Taunton to Yeovil Railway). Turn left & once over both bridges follow the signs to the Canalside car park.

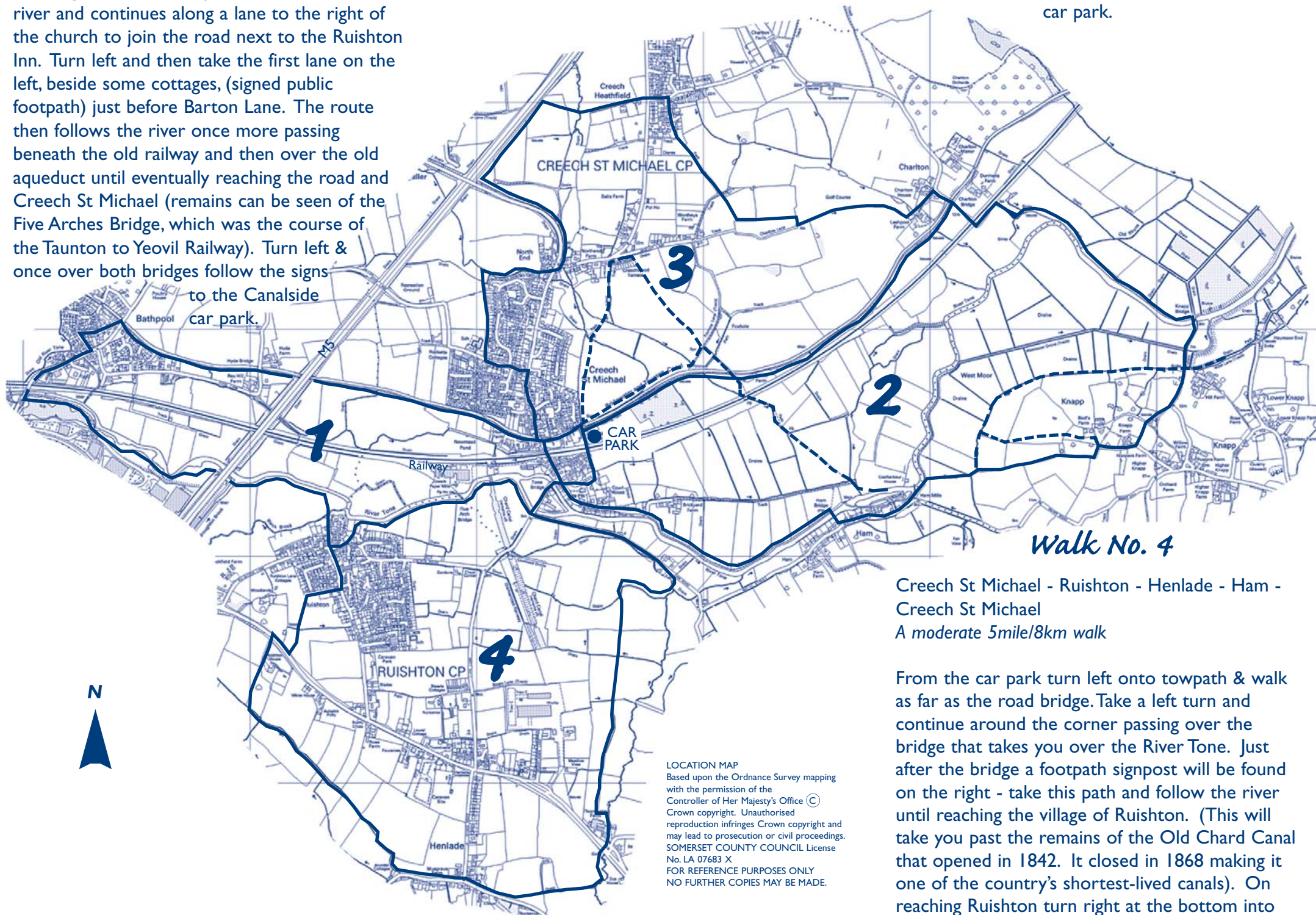
## Walk 2

Creech St Michael - Charlton - Knapp - Ham - Creech St Michael

A scenic 4.5mile/7.2km walk

From the car park turn right onto the towpath and walk along the canal past the derelict Engine House and Pillbox. You will soon arrive at another Pillbox and a crossroads at Charlton. Turn right and walk over the railway bridge following the lane round to the gate at the bottom. Once through the gate turn immediate right and follow the bank along the River Tone until reaching Knapp Bridge. Turn right over bridge and follow lane up the hill to a corner until reaching a 'hidden' footpath on your right. Follow this footpath (great views of Hay Moor)

across several fields until reaching another lane where you go straight across. Cross the field (it usually has horses in it) to the top right hand corner. Turn right following the lane until reaching a footpath signpost and an orchard. Walk through the orchard and down to the left hand corner (here you can sit and enjoy the marvellous views). Continue down the hill through several fields to the road at Ham (just past the suspension bridge - known as Bailey Bridge). Turn right and walk through the hamlet until reaching a footpath signpost on the right. Cross the footbridge over the River Tone and turn left. This path takes you back into the village of Creech St Michael. On passing St Michaels, a delightful 13th century church, take a right turn into Vicarage Lane to reach the Canalside car park.



## Walk No. 3

Creech St Michael - North End - Creech Heathfield - Charlton - Creech St Michael

An easy 4mile/6.5km walk

From car park turn left onto towpath and walk as far as the road bridge. Turn right over bridge and follow St. Michael Road, past the Bell Inn, turning left into Hyde Lane. Walk as far as the footpath signpost on the right (before School) and follow path around the edge of the estate (the eastern foot of the Quantocks and the tower of West Monkton Church can be seen in the distance). Walk across the field to a stile and continue to lower right hand corner of next field. Keep to the right of next field until reaching a gap between houses (at North End). Cross over main road and turn left heading out of village. Walk along the pavement until

footpath signpost on right (just before motorway bridge). Take steps down the bank, turn left, take the stile on the right then follow the hedges bordering the motorway. Cross over several fields until reaching a partly enclosed lane that leads to Creech Heathfield. Cross over road and walk along Charlton Road until reaching a footpath signpost on right. This takes you down a lane, Meads Droveaway, to fields, then along a trackway until reaching a T-junction and two houses. Take the footpath straight across the track and head straight across field. On reaching stile turn left and continue across field towards the golf course. Follow direction signs that lead across the golf course and out through a lane. Turn right towards the canal and take a right turn after crossing Charlton Bridge. The canal path takes you back to the Canalside car park.

## Walk No. 4

Creech St Michael - Ruishton - Henlade - Ham - Creech St Michael

A moderate 5mile/8km walk

From the car park turn left onto towpath & walk as far as the road bridge. Take a left turn and continue around the corner passing over the bridge that takes you over the River Tone. Just after the bridge a footpath signpost will be found on the right - take this path and follow the river until reaching the village of Ruishton. (This will take you past the remains of the Old Chard Canal that opened in 1842. It closed in 1868 making it one of the country's shortest-lived canals). On reaching Ruishton turn right at the bottom into Cheats Road. Follow the road, past the Ruishton Pub, into Bushy Cross Lane. Walk along here until reaching a footpath signpost on the right (next to Rose Cottage). Walk into field & bear left. Follow footpath signs over fields to the A358 and Ruishton Court. Walk up the drive of Ruishton Court to a footpath signpost on right - this takes you down through fields to a small stream. Cross over the stream using the footbridge (behind a large conker tree). Turn left following the footpath signposts through several fields (Stoke Hill can be seen to your right) all the way to Henlade corner. Turn left along the road, past the drive of Mount Somerset (on your right), until reaching a gate and footpath signpost on the left. Follow the track diagonally across the fields, crossing the A358 to Thornwater Farm, and then through more fields - they will bring you out on Ham Road. Turn left here and follow the road back into Creech St. Michael. On reaching the main road to Creech take a right turn over the bridge towards Vicarage Lane that returns you to the Canalside car park.