

Chepstow Community Orchards Trail:

Full Trail Directions and What to Look Out for

Here are detailed walking directions for both the shorter and extended versions of the trail, together with information about some of the wildlife and interesting specimen trees you may see along the way. We recommend that you also use the **Trail Leaflet** which includes a map.

The shorter version is about 3 miles. It is nearly all hard surfaces except at Penterry Park where stout footwear is recommended in wet or muddy conditions. **The extended version** is almost 6 miles. Allow about 4 hours, including a break. Again, it is mostly hard surfaces except for the Wales Coast Path where stout footwear is recommended all year.

1. Castle Dell Orchard

The trail starts at Castle Dell, which is also the start of the Wye Valley Walk. The orchard is located through the Castle car park, beside the footpath that leads to the left of the Castle, up into the Dell. Castle Dell Orchard was the first of our Community Orchard sites. There is a mix of eating apples, such as Ashmead's Kernel, cider apples such as Kingston Black, and plums. In January each year at the Wassail these trees are celebrated and "toasted" – literally! Pieces of toast are hung on branches in the hope of good blossom and fruit, and to feed the birds. The Castle Dell Park is a haven for wildlife and boasts some very interesting specimen trees. There are wildflowers on the castle slopes and in the summer swifts can be heard screaming overhead.

Continue along the path up into the Dell. Just past the orchard there is an old **Mulberry tree** on the left close to the path. There are a number of species of mulberries, coming from the Middle East and Asia. The leaves of one kind, the White Mulberry, are the food of the larvae of the silk moth, known as silk worms. For millennia these larvae were artificially raised in China to produce silk, a very valuable commodity. In the 17th Century King James I wanted a British silk industry and ordered that mulberries should be planted, however, the wrong kind of mulberry was imported and propagated! We now have the so-called black mulberry which produces edible fruits, but its leaves are not suitable as food for silk worms.

A little further along on the right is a group of **Small Leaved Lime Trees** and as you go uphill there are **Edible Cherry Trees** overhanging the path. *Just before the gate at the top of the park* look to your right where, on the other side of the grassy area, there are some interesting mature specimen trees including a **London Plane**. This is a hybrid made in the 17th Century between two species of wild plane trees, one from America and the other from Greece. It can grow over 100ft and is only found in cultivation. The hybrid was first recognised and planted in London streets where it is said to account for about half of the city's street trees. Its bark peels away over time to reveal fresh bark underneath - this has made it resistant to the bad smog and air pollution which has killed many other types of tree in London. Nearby is a **Tree of Heaven**, a tall deciduous tree from China where it has been planted for over two thousand years. Valued for its medicinal properties, it will grow in difficult conditions and can be planted in towns. Introduced to Britain in the 18th Century as an ornamental, in Europe and North America it has proved to be extremely invasive and difficult to control. It is now banned in some countries and has even been called the "tree of hell" by some. *Walk through the park gate.*

Planting for pollinators in the town

You can take a short (5 minute) detour here to look at the flowerbed just outside the Dell School gate by turning right after the park gates. This flower bed has been planted by volunteers with easy to grow pollinator-friendly garden flowers. Throughout the town there are other beds and planters demonstrating how even small spaces can be planted to benefit insect pollinators, including the Library garden, the Methodist Church and the oblong planters managed by Transition Chepstow near the High Street and the Castle. Return to the park gates.

2. Kingsmark Avenue fruit trees

Cross over Welsh St to the bottom of Kingsmark Avenue where there is a small group of fruit trees in front of the fencing to the left. The fruit trees here are now maturing well, although one or two have been getting a little shaded by vigorous nearby vegetation – most fruit trees need plenty of sun.

Return to Welsh Street and turn right towards the town centre. Walk up the elevated road/footpath in front of the cottages, immediately after number 9 turn right into a lane that leads past Huntfield Cottages, then becomes a footpath. Follow this footpath uphill between the houses, emerging at the top of the steps into a turning circle in Deans Hill. Walk up the hill.

3. Deans Hill Orchard

The Deans Hill fruit trees are planted in two areas of the open spaces on the left as you walk up the road. Many local families turned out to help on planting day! The fruit trees on the higher area are doing less well because the soil is thinner and rockier there. Then follow the road downhill around to right. Take the first left into Meadow Walk and walk up the hill to the end of the road. Follow the footpath through the trees into the bottom end of Penterry Meadow.

4. Penterry Park SINC

This area is designated as a Site of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) and is particularly important for its wildflowers and grasses and the creatures that use them. In the shady areas in Spring look out for **Early Purple Orchids**. This is one of our earliest flowering orchids, appearing from April to June. It is often found in habitats with non-acidic soils such as hedgerows, banks, ancient woodland and open grassland. The pinkish-purple flowers appear on a spike of medium height with up to 50 dark purple flowers arranged in a dense, cone-shaped cluster on each spike. The lower lip of each flower has three lobes and the upper petals form a hood. The leaves are glossy and dark green with dark spots, and form a rosette on the ground; these appear from January onwards.

Continue straight ahead under the trees until you see the gateway to the main road (A466). Just before the gateway turn sharp left uphill, walking on the grass and following the edge of the open meadow on your left, with the tall roadside hedge on your right. When you reach the shorter grass near the top of the meadow turn left to view the open area of the meadow. In Spring you may well see **Cowslips** in flower in this area. The rosettes of green, crinkly, tongue-like leaves are low to the ground and the tube-like, egg-yolk yellow flowers are clustered together on tall, green stems. A cousin of the Primrose, the Cowslip was once common in traditional meadows, woodlands and hedgerows and was very widely used for celebrations, including garlands for May Day and strewn on church paths for weddings. The loss of these habitats to the advancement of agriculture has caused a serious decline in Cowslip populations.

Continue along the shorter grass, walking parallel with the houses at the top until you reach Penterry Park road. Follow the road straight through the small roundabout into Tempest Drive, which leads into the Community Hospital car park. Carry on through the car park, past the bus shelter, until you reach the main zebra crossing leading to/from the hospital entrance across the car park. Turn left (to face away from the hospital building) following the crossing and take the steps leading down out of the car park into Mounton Road. Turn left, then cross over and turn right into Mounton Drive. There is a **Monkey Puzzle Tree** on the corner. Introduced to Britain as an ornamental tree in the 1850s, this tree originates from South America and can live over 1,000 years. It is the National Tree of Chile, where the edible seeds are called piñones, but is now endangered in the wild because of very extensive logging and burning. While it was still rare in Britain, one garden owner was recorded as saying "it would puzzle a monkey to climb that," hence its common name.

Continue straight on along Mounton Drive until you see a hedged footpath going straight ahead between numbers 38 and 39, where the road bends sharp left. Take the footpath which brings you out onto the main road (A48), beside the Two Rivers Hotel. Turn right and then cross the road using the pedestrian crossing by the petrol station. Turn right on the far side of the road. Just past the petrol station and by the bus stop there is a footpath with a few steps on the left. Follow this path between houses into Beech Grove and turn right. Shortly you reach a "T" junction with High Beech Lane. Cross the road and turn right. Shortly you reach another "T" junction with Fair View. Turn left.

5. Fair View Orchard

The orchard is at the far end of the open space on the opposite side of the road. Fair View is our largest Community Orchard. It was started with over twenty apple trees in 2011, with a mix of cider and eating apples including Pitmaston Pine, which has russet fruit, sweet tasting with a hint of pineapple. The fruit trees have done well here. This is a good location for learning pruning and other orchard care skills as the ground is level and there is a variety of trees to learn about. There are also two **Walnut Trees**, planted in recent years and situated in the same open space, before you reach the main orchard. These were raised locally on the Transition Chepstow community food-growing plot at Hanley Landshare. Chepstow once had many walnut trees, used in shipbuilding and other industries, and you will still find some scattered around the town.

Continue along Fair View until you reach the junction with Mathern Road and turn left.

At this point you can extend your walk to include the Bulwark and Thornwell orchards and a section of the Wales Coast Path. Please see details towards the end of this document.

For the shorter walk, continue along Mathern Road, passing the cemetery, where there are some interesting wildflowers. At the junction with Bulwark Road turn left. Continue until you reach St George Road on the right. Turn right there and a short distance down this road on the left there is a footpath leading down into the park, known locally as Piggies Hill.

12. Piggies Hill Park

Follow the pathway down through the park, passing the skateboard area on your left. Towards the bottom of the park, looking back up from this path you can get the best view of the escarpment which has the remnants of **limestone grassland**, traditionally very wildflower-rich. The escarpment is now being managed by volunteers to restore it. The volunteers have grown wildflower seeds of local provenance and planted plugs of a late flowering variety of knapweed, some birds foot trefoil and other plants beneficial to pollinators. A revised mowing regime by the County Council is helping the wildflowers to flourish and set seed before the grass is cut each autumn. At the bottom of the park community **Cherry Trees** have been planted by volunteers. The steps at the bottom of the park lead you to Rockwood Road. Turn left. At the junction with Hardwick Avenue turn right.

At this point the extended trail rejoins the route.

13. Garden City Orchard

Walk down the hill into Garden City open space and sports field and you will find the orchard on the far side of the sports field. The 1917 housing development for shipyard workers known as Chepstow's Garden City features larger than average private gardens for residents to grow their own food. There is a large area of community open space here and plenty of community activity. The first fruit trees were planted in 2011, including the variety "Machen", believed to be named after the village near Caerphilly. At dusk in the warmer months **Hedgehogs** have often been seen in this area. They are declining rapidly, especially in the open countryside, but they can still be found in some areas of Chepstow, including Garden City. Suburban hedgehogs need to move between gardens to forage for food and to find a mate, so if gardeners grow hedges as boundaries there are natural gaps for them, or if boundaries are fenced, small holes can be made to let hedgehogs through. You won't normally see hedgehogs in the daytime though, as they are nocturnal.

Return via Hardwick Avenue, following the road as it bends to the right into Garden City Way at the top of the hill. You will pass the remnants of the old Portwall on your right. When you reach the junction with the busy A48, cross over the main road here, where there is a refuge in the centre of the road.

14. Palmer Centre fruit trees

There is a small group of fruit trees at the rear of the Palmer Centre on your right as you reach the town centre side of the A48. Follow the path past the Palmer Centre and through Cormeilles Square to the High Street, turn right and walk down the hill. At the bottom of the High Street use the pedestrian crossing and continue downhill in St Mary Street. Turn right into Upper Church Street. At the end of the road cross over and take the footpath with railings called "Church Walk" on the left side of St Mary's Church. At the bottom of the footpath continue downhill in Lower Church Street. The road bends to the left at the bottom of the hill, just before this bend cross over in front of the Pottery into "The Back" which leads to the riverside. Turn left along the riverside walk following the path until you reach the standing stones and signage for the Wales Coast Path and enter the Bandstand Park.

15. Riverside /Bandstand Park fruit trees

There is wildlife to be seen in all seasons from the riverbank. Gulls call all year round and in summer you can hear the **Swifts screaming** overhead. These summer visitors nest in small holes in buildings so will usually be seen or heard in towns and villages rather than the open countryside. They return to the same nesting site each year so it is important to protect traditional nesting areas such as we have in Chepstow.

Looking at the cliffs at the far side of the river in summer you may be lucky enough to see young **Peregrine Falcons** being fed by the parent birds. Most years there is a nest in this area.

To the rear of the bandstand you will find fruit trees planted in the mixed shrubbery border. There are other interesting and beautiful trees nearby, including an **Almond Tree**. Almonds probably originated in Western Asia and have naturalised around the Mediterranean. The fruit is valued for making marzipan but in Britain it rarely ripens fully because the summers tend to be too cold. There is a **Foxglove Tree**, the erect purple flowers of which are shaped like foxgloves. The flowers open in May before the leaves appear. The tree has large leaves and its flower buds stay on the tree throughout winter. Originally from China, this tree was thought to have magical powers to preserve beauty and health - an infusion from leaves and fruit was made to prevent skin wrinkling and hair from turning grey! There are also a number of **Willow Trees** in the park. Originally cultivated in China millennia ago, willows were traded through the Middle East via the Silk Road and introduced to Britain in the 18th Century. Modern weeping willows in Britain tend to be hybrids, bred to be more suitable to the British climate. The weeping willow was named *Salix babylonica* by Linnaeus on the mistaken assumption that this was the tree mentioned in Psalm 137, where the Israelites hung their harps on willow trees by the rivers of Babylon. In fact, that would have been a local species of poplar that grows in the Middle East.

16. Hollins Garden fruit trees

Follow the path at the rear of the Bandstand Park onto St Annes Street. Cross over and turn right, then left when you reach the corner of Bridge Street. Pass Chepstow Museum on your left and just past Cromwell House turn sharp left under a stone archway leading to Hollins Garden. This is another peaceful little haven with several fruit trees. This is where the Orchards Trail ends, very close to its start. We hope you have enjoyed it!

The Extended Trail

The extended trail starts after Fair View Orchard

6 & 7. Bulwark fruit trees

From Fair View Orchard, continue along Fair View until you reach the junction with Mathern Road and turn left. Immediately, cross over Mathern Road and turn right into Channel View. Walk down Channel View as far as an open space on the left and turn into Striguil Road. At the end turn left into Pembroke Road, following the road until you come to a roundabout at the junction with Bulwark Road. On the far side of the roundabout beside Bulwark Road you will see a triangular shaped open space where two rare **Welsh Bardsey** apple trees have been planted.

Continue along Bulwark Road and at the next roundabout turn right into Burnt Barn Road. On reaching the junction with Western Avenue on your left there are fruit trees. Walk along Western Avenue until it joins Somerset Way at a "T" junction. Turn left into Somerset Way, walk down a short hill, then turn right into a short road that leads to Lord Eldon Drive. Turn left, then right at Thornwell Road, passing through the roundabout. Cross Thornwell Road shortly before you reach another, larger roundabout, then take the first turn left into Caernarfon Way.

8, 9 & 10. Thornwell Orchards

At Caernarfon way there is a row of fruit trees in the wide open verge on the right hand side of the road, planted parallel with the road and in front of the tall hedgerow. These trees are not doing well as they are overshadowed by the hedgerow.

Return to the large roundabout and take the next left into Denbigh Drive, to the left of the shops. Follow Denbigh Drive up a slope: there is a fruit tree planted on the right. Turn left along Fountain Way and then right into Lewis Way. You will find the small orchard in an open grassy area where there is also a fine veteran oak tree. There is a mix of apples, plum and pear in these areas. Now retrace your steps to Denbigh Drive, turn left and continue uphill. A short distance along on the right turn into Tenby Lane where there are fruit trees planted beside the car park for the Thornwell Playing fields.

11. The Wales Coast Path

Continue a short distance along Tenby Lane until you reach the Wales Coast Path, which is waymarked with a blue sign. Turn left and follow the gravel path to the left of the football pitch. This is a long path that leads back towards Chepstow town centre, a distance of about a mile and a half, passing through Park Redding and Warren Slade Woods. The river views along this path are spectacular. In Winter when foliage is much reduced there are many viewing opportunities and in Summer the woods provide welcome shade, wildflowers and birdsong. There is a wealth of information about the whole of the Wales Coast Path on their website.

<http://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk/>

When you reach Raglan Way the path follows the roads for a short way. The route is waymarked here with blue signs. Turn right into Raglan Way, then left at the top into Victoria Road, then right back onto the footpath.

Follow the path, again for a long stretch, passing the Bulwarks Iron Age Fort, the rear of the industrial estate on your left and a disused quarry on your right. Follow the path down through the woods until eventually, you reach Wye Crescent. Continue along Wye Crescent until you reach Hardwick Avenue and turn right.

At this point the extended trail rejoins the shorter route as you walk down the hill into Garden City open space and sports field.

If you would like to know more about the Chepstow Community Orchards please contact Transition Chepstow, a group of volunteers who manage the orchards and who have produced this document. We also welcome your feedback about the Trail and/or the information we have provided. orchards@transitionchepstow.org.uk