

# BAT TRAIL-4

## Braunton Countryside Centre



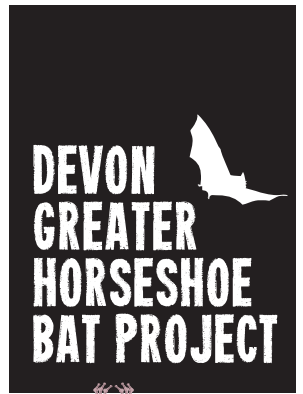
Photo: View from West Hill

Welcome to Braunton, gateway to the North Devon Coast AONB and Biosphere Reserve, noted for its special landscapes, in the form of Braunton Burrows, Braunton Great Field and Braunton Marshes. What is less well known however is that it is also home to a very special animal, so special that a Site of Special Scientific Interest has been designated around it.

In early 2000 Braunton was reputed to have the second largest population of Greater Horseshoe Bats in the United Kingdom and the bats are still here today.

Bats are insect feeding creatures and Britain's only flying mammal and there are known to be 18 species of Bat in this country. The greater horseshoe bat is one of our larger and one of our rarer species. This walk will introduce you to these fascinating mammals and in particular the greater horseshoe bat.

The surrounding countryside around Braunton is particularly suitable for supporting this important species and this walk explores parts of Braunton, known to be used by these little known creatures.



### ROUTE INFO

<b>Start:</b>	Braunton Countryside Centre, Caen Street Car Park
<b>Distance and timings:</b>	Short route 1.3 km Long route 2.4 Km
<b>Circular Walk:</b>	Yes
<b>Terrain:</b>	Largely surfaced, but unsurfaced footpaths on Braunton Beacon (West Hill)
<b>Obstacles and Gradients:</b>	Level on short route. 1 flight of steps and two steep ascents on the route to Braunton Beacon
<b>Public Transport:</b>	Bus Service 21 and 21 A Barnstaple to Ilfracombe
<b>Toilets:</b>	Caen Street Car Park
<b>Refreshment Facilities:</b>	Braunton Village
<b>OS Map:</b>	Explorer Map 139 (Bideford, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple)
<b>Grid Reference and postcode:</b>	SS486 365



Photo: River Caen near Church



Photo: Phil Richardson



Photo: Frank Greenaway



Photo: Main flight route to West Hill



Photo: Braunton Churchyard

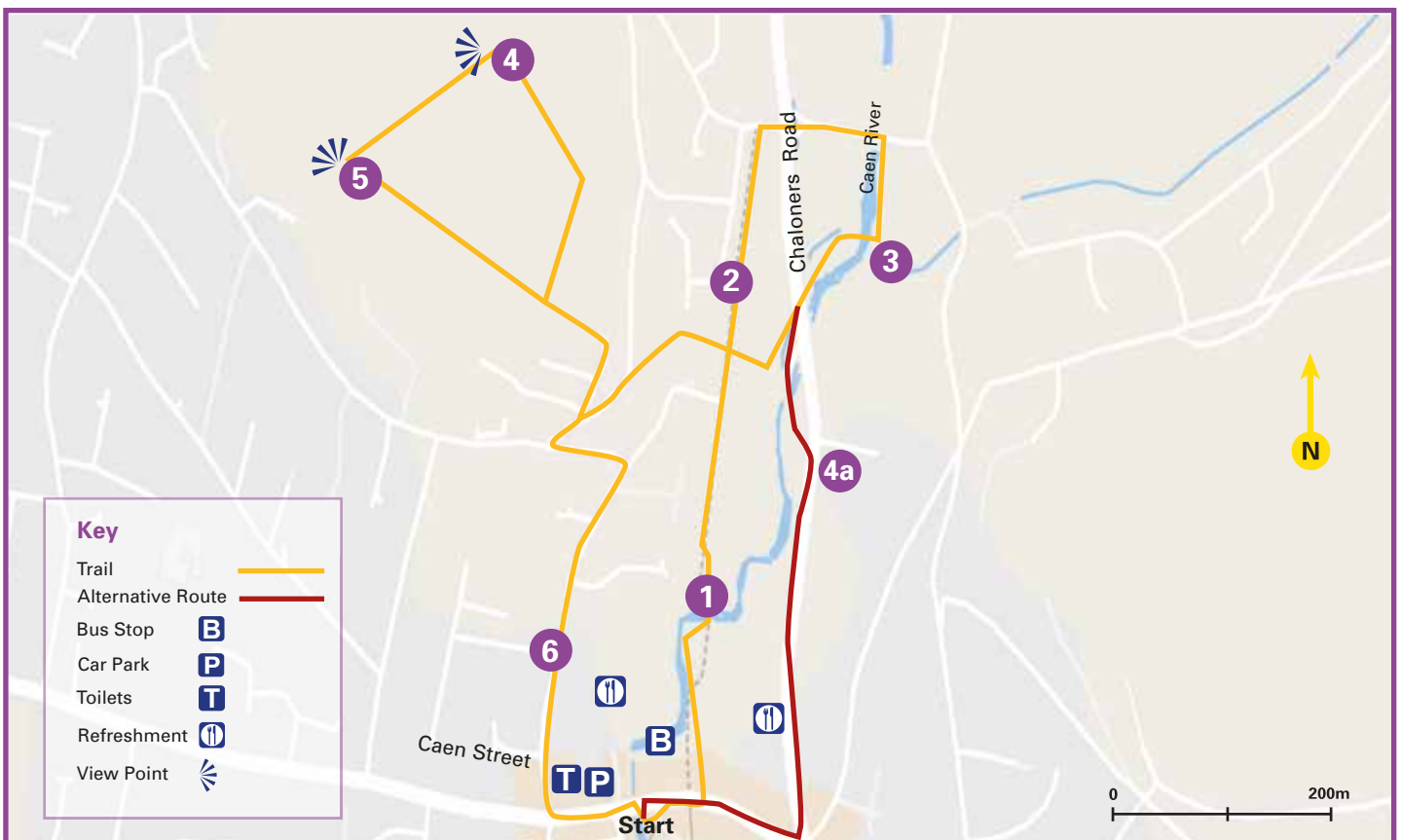


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## DIRECTIONS

Please follow the white bat trail markers and the map above to follow this route. Start by crossing Caen Street and picking up the cycleway leading behind the school.

**1** In 2002 a study took place tracking bats from their home roost to the north of Branton - bats were found as far away as Branton Burrows, Croyde and even around Fremington. Female greater horseshoe bats typically use a 4km zone around their roost to hunt in, although they will travel much further than this. To reach the south, particularly Branton Marshes, the bats have to go around or through Branton. Horseshoes are nocturnal and emerge about 30 minutes after dusk navigating and catching their prey in the dark using echolocation - this is where the bat calls at a very high frequency and listens for the return call as it bounces off an object. This helps them to create a map of their surroundings. Branton's 'green corridors', along the river and cycleway, provide travelling routes through the village.

**2** Stop and look around you; the valley on either side is covered in trees. Bats like woodland as the edges, paths and hedges provide good feeding grounds for them. Insects gather in sheltered areas to create a bat buffet!

**3** Roosting greater horseshoe bats wrap their wings around themselves and hang by their feet, living in groups or colonies. Summer roosts are found in attics and roofs of old buildings which are easily accessible, draught-free, dark and warm for the females to have their young. Winter roosts are found in caves, cellars and older buildings - cooler temperatures are required for hibernation from October onwards. There are few caves in Branton but old mine workings and buildings make ideal roosts.

**4a** Spot bats here on summer evenings as they fly along the River Caen. Other bat species can also be found here, including Daubenton's and Natterer's bats.

**4** From this dedicated viewpoint you can watch bats flying at dusk along the woodland edge. Greater horseshoes catch their prey in a number of ways; taking prey in mid-air or by hanging upside down in trees and then swooping on larger victims.

**5** From here look down on the vast expanse of Branton Burrows, the open strip field of Branton Great Field and Branton Marshes. A favourite meal for them is large insects such as cockchafer and large moths - three-quarters of their diet is moths and beetles. A particular favourite is the dung beetle, associated with cattle pastures, and the Marshes, where cattle graze, are particularly important for these.

**6** We can help bats to thrive by planting flowers and wildflower grasslands (good for insects), providing roosting sites such as bat boxes, leaving small holes in trees and buildings and reducing artificial lighting (which confuses and disturbs bats).

As you cross the River Caen look out for Daubenton's bats, which roost under the bridge and feed on insects flying just above the water.