

**TOURIST'S GUIDE
TO SOMERSETSHIRE:
RAIL AND ROAD**

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Tourist's Guide to Somersetshire: Rail and Road by R. N. Worth

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PREFACE.

THIS Guide embraces within its scope the whole of the County of Somerset, with the city of Bristol, which, although territorially independent of either of the counties on whose borders it lies, must find a place in any complete Tourist's Handbook for either Somerset or Gloucester. The arrangement of the routes has entailed some little difficulty ; but it has been thought that the convenience of the visitor will best be served by making them, so far as possible, topographically consecutive. Beginning, therefore, with Bath, the different sections have been so planned as to form a complete circuit of the county ; and to fit in at Bath and Templecombe respectively with the Great Western and South Western routes from London.

As in his other 'Guides,' it has been the aim of the writer to seek in the first place practical utility ; and although the multiplicity of points and objects of interest which "pleasant Somerset" possesses, have compelled conciseness, it is hoped that no feature of importance has been overlooked ; and that the 'Tourist's Guide to Somerset' may be found worthy of the same kind praise as the 'Tourist's Guides to Devon.' In a work of such a character imperfections are inevitable ; and any hints for their correction will always be gratefully received.

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INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

TOPOGRAPHY.

SOMERSET has an area of 1,049,815 acres, (Pop. 469,010) widely diversified, its physical features comprising "bold hills and picturesque valleys, grand cliffs, ravines, and flat moorlands"—using the latter term in its stricter meaning of wide alluvial tracts. Indeed, Mr. Hughes says it "includes a diversity of surface which is hardly surpassed by any other portion of S. Britain, and from the circumstances of its position and aspects and its physical geography possesses a completeness and unity of character such as belongs to hardly any other part of the British Islands." These latter conditions are however observed far more closely in the adjoining counties of Devon and Cornwall.

The *hills* of Somerset are less remarkable for their height than for the manner in which they range across the county towards the "Severn Sea," and divide much of its area into a series of wide valley districts—a configuration which has had an important influence upon its history, as well as on the conditions of its people. The highest region of Somerset is *Exmoor*, which belongs geographically to Devon, and which reaches, at *Dunkery Beacon*, to 1668 feet. To the E. of Exmoor lie the *Quantocks*; and then, traversing the body of the county in rudely parallel lines running S.E. and N.W., we have the *Blackdowns*, the *Polden Hills*, and the *Mendips*. The extreme S.E. angle (like the extreme S.W., but on a very much

smaller scale) is occupied by an elevated, broken tract, most of which once formed part of the ancient forest of Selwood. The highest point of the Quantocks, Wills Neck Hill, is 1270 feet in height; that of the Blackdowns about 750. The Poldens do not rise above 360; but the Mendips are much more important, attaining at Blackdown 1067 feet. Glastonbury Tor, between the Mendips and the Poldens, derives much of its importance from its position in an alluvial district, for it rises only 500 feet. More prominent, but still chiefly from its position, is Dundry Hill, between the Mendips and Bristol, which reaches 768. Other important heights, for the county, are Lanedown near Bath, 813 feet; Masbury Castle, 979; Long Knoll near Maiden Bradley, 948; Symonds Hall Down, 802; Uley Bury, 823; Long Cross, 786; Stinchcombe Hill, 725; Brent Knoll, 617.

The mere enumeration of particular heights fails, however, to give an adequate idea of the surface contour of the county, which contains, apart from Exmoor, several elevated tracts of considerable extent, at times like that wild waste approaching to the dignity of valley-cleft table-land.

The *rivers* of Somerset are numerous, but not as a rule important, and with the exception of a very small portion of the area in the S.E. corner, and a part of Exmoor, the whole of the drainage finds its way into the Bristol Channel or Severn Sea, through the medium chiefly of the only two rivers of note or commercial value the county owns, the Avon and the Parrett.

Of these the *Avon* is the more important, and forms for many miles the boundary of the county. At Bristol it has been converted to the purposes of that ancient and distinguished port, whilst more inland it forms the basis of a canal system. The Avon rises near Badminton, and flows through Wiltshire into Somerset, near Bath, where for a short distance both banks are within the latter county. The chief tributaries on the Somersetshire side are the Frome, which falls into it near Freshford, the Midford brook, which joins it near Monkton Combe, and the Chew. The Avon has a course of 62 miles.

Next in importance is the *Parrett*, which rises near South Perrott in Dorset, and is the trunk of the drainage of the county S. of the Mendips. It has a course of 36 miles, and receives several tributaries—chief the Yeo or Ivel and the Cary on the right bank, and the Isle and Tone on the

left. Of these the Tone has a course of 33 miles. The Parrett falls into the Channel near Burnham, in Bridgewater Bay, after passing through Bridgewater. The tide in the Parrett rises to a great height, and its channel for a considerable distance is embanked for the protection of the lowlands.

The only other rivers in this direction which call for notice are the *Aze* and *Brue*, the former of which rises in the cavern at Wookey Hole, and after a course of 21 miles flows into the Channel at Uphill; while the latter rises near South Brewham, and discharges at Burnham, close to the mouth of the Parrett. The *Yeo* is the leading stream N. of the Mendips.

The drainage of Exmoor is carried chiefly by the *Eze* into the English Channel at Exmouth; a considerable portion, however, discharging through the *E. Lyn* at Lynmouth into the Severn Sea just beyond the boundary of the county.

Somerset has another *Aze* in its S.E. corner, a lovely stream which rises in Dorset and flows for some distance along the edge of Somerset, dividing the counties, but having the most beautiful part of its course within the Devon boundary. There is good fishing here, and in the upper waters of many other Somersetshire streams.

Such in somewhat formal detail are the chief physical characteristics which decide the scenic attractions of what has been well called the "pleasant" county of Somerset. No term so accurately expresses its leading features. It has little that is grand, but much that is beautiful, though grandeur is not wanting on the stern flanks of Exmoor, or among the cliffs of Cheddar and Clifton. It has wide tracts of Dutch-like marsh lands, with long lines of sluggish drain-cuts and stunted pollard willows, and dreary alternations of turbary and rush-bed, hardly relieved by rich meadows where the cattle graze knee-deep in grass, and which in spite of their sturdy dikes have frequently been converted into wide-spreading winter lakes. It has wide vales, so productive that their fertility has passed into a proverb, like that of Taunton Deane; barren, rolling hills on Exmoor; wide table-lands, crested with the richest foliage, broken by valleys in which comfortable farm-houses nestle snugly amid orchards which in spring burst into veritable seas of blossom. For scenes of pastoral loveliness Somerset may challenge any county in England;