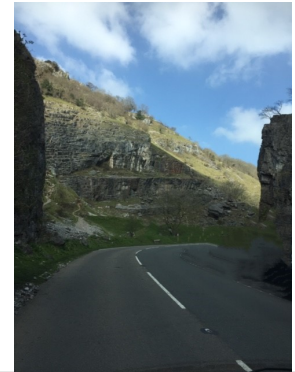


Location & Access:



Cheddar Gorge is located at grid reference ST 471 543 (Sat Nav – BS27 3QF) next to the village of Cheddar (population 5,700). It can be accessed via the A371 from Wells, 7 miles to the south east. There are car parks in the village, and there are two car parks within the gorge itself at ST 474 545 and ST 468 540. First Bus serves Cheddar Gorge from Weston-Super-Mare, Axbridge, Wells and Street.



Key Geography: Limestone gorge, tourist honey pot, caving and other adventure sports.

Description: Cheddar Gorge is the finest example of a limestone gorge in Britain, lying on the southern edge of the Mendip Hills in Somerset. It is almost three miles long, and has a maximum depth of 137 metres. There is a near-vertical cliff-face to the south, and steep, grassy slopes to the north.

Contrary to popular belief, Cheddar Gorge is not a collapsed cavern – but is a gorge cut by a surface river, and since left high and dry as drainage went underground. The gorge was formed by meltwater floods during the many cold periglacial periods over the last 1.2 million years. During these Arctic episodes, the development of permafrost blocked the caves with ice and frozen mud making the limestone rock impermeable. Snowmelt floods during the brief summers were then forced to flow on the surface, carving out the gorge in the process. During the warmer interglacial periods, the water flowed underground again through the permeable limestone – leaving the gorge dry.



There is a pleasant circular walk of around 5 miles that takes you along the high cliffs on each side of the gorge. The walk runs through an area designated as an SSSI due to its Karst limestone geology and remnant calcareous grasslands, and begins at the National Trust Information Centre in the village of Cheddar at grid reference ST 46636 53911. Take the stony track (Cufic Lane) opposite the centre, and follow the finger posts that lead you through woodland for 15 to 20 minutes. This is a steep ascent, but the effort is rewarded when you emerge at the top with views of both the gorge itself and across to the opposite cliff walls. At the top of the climb,

(continued overleaf)

Curiosity Questions:

- # Can you spot the feral goats that roam the sides of the gorge? What is their purpose?
- # What 1960s rock band used the Cheddar Caves as a backdrop for their debut album cover?
- # Batts Combe Quarry to the north of Cheddar Gorge excavates Burlington Oolite, a very pure limestone used for making quicklime. What is it used for?

Further information:

www.cheddargorge.co.uk

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cheddar-Gorge

Reviewer: Paul Berry B Ed (hons) M Sc FRGS

Former Assistant Vice Principal and Head of Geography at South Molton Community College with 35 years of classroom experience.

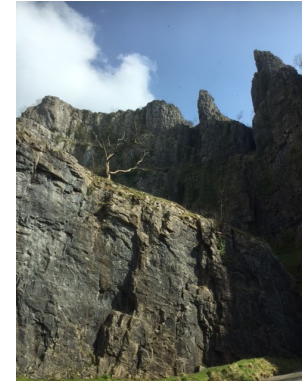
Now an Iceland Field Studies Tutor with Rayburn Tours.

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the route leads through a gate and joins a grassy path. Keeping the stone wall on the right, follow the finger post markers while the path eventually descends a set of steps into a deep valley. Passing through a kissing gate, the route continues through a wooded area, and descends to meet the 'Black Rock' stony path. You then need to turn right through two gates to meet the main gorge road. It is possible to return to the village from here, along the flat gorge road. There is plenty of traffic to be wary of, but some impressive views looking up at the walls of the gorge. Alternatively, you can cross the main road and join the path signposted to Dreycott and the West Mendip

Way that rises to the top of the opposite side of the gorge. After a steep climb to the top, the path levels out. Do not follow the West Mendip Way sign to the left, but keep right through a wooded area, where you are offered glimpses of the other side of the gorge. Numerous spots along the path offer superb views of the lower gorge – but take care here, as there are sheer drops to the rocks below. The path eventually descends through woods towards Pavey's Lookout Tower and the 274 steps of Jacob's Ladder – both open only to Cheddar Gorge and Caves Explorer ticket holders. Before reaching the tower, the path heads left and downhill through a wooded area to join Lynch Lane. Turn right as you join the lane, and at the end, right again into Lipiatt Road. Turn right at the junction with the main gorge road to head back to your start point at the National Trust Information Centre.



If you have time, there are a number of show caves to explore at the lower end of the gorge, created by an underground river that flows through the area. People have used these caves for shelter for 40,000 years, and today they are still accessible to the public, and receive around half a million visitors each year. There are two main caves, each named after their respective discoverers. Gough's Cave is the largest, and contains numerous chambers with interesting rock formations. It is also home to Britain's oldest near complete skeleton known as 'Cheddar Man', which dates back over 10,000 years, and was found buried here in 1903. Cox's Cave is smaller, but contains more intricate formations. It is also home to the 'Dreamhunters' multi-media experience highlighting the adventures of early man. Nearby is the Museum of Prehistory, and also the 'Beyond the View' virtual tour of the local landscape and history played on a 270 degree panoramic screen.

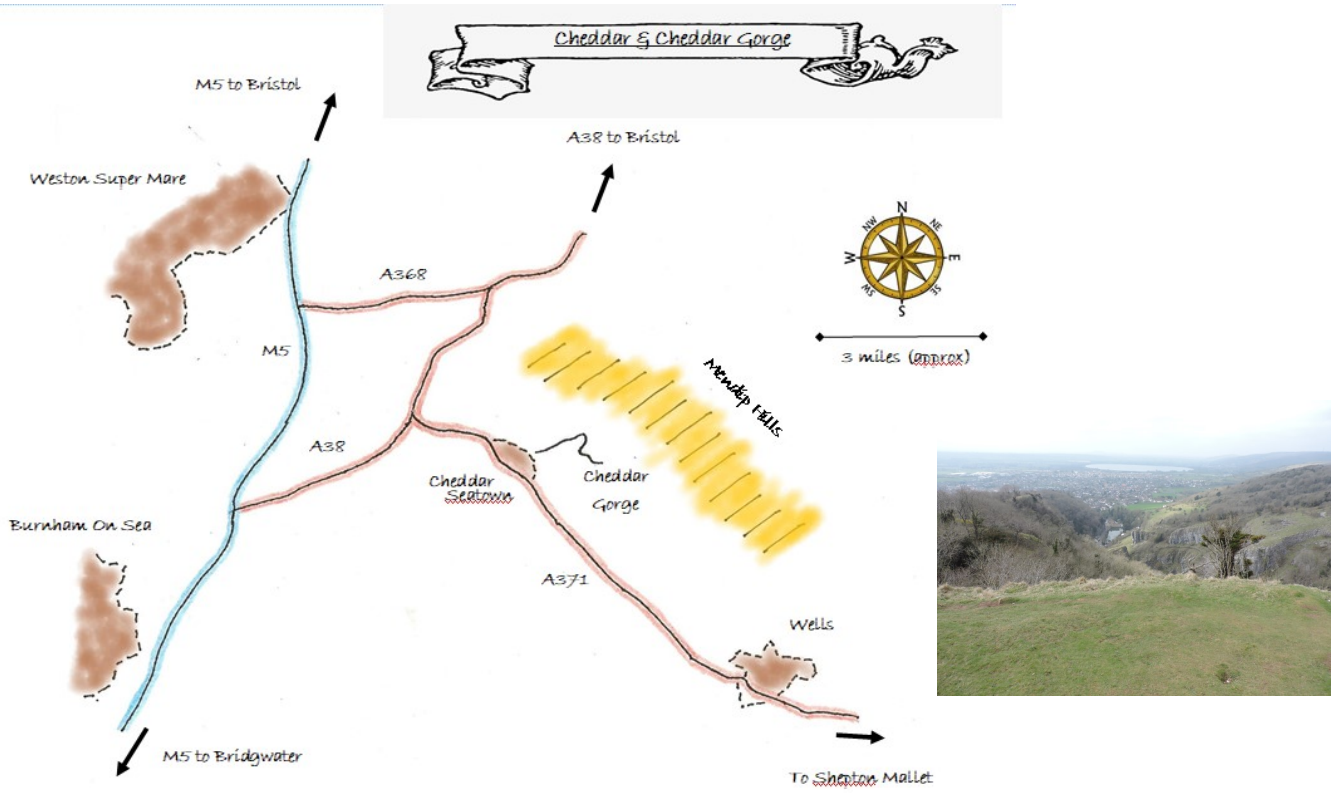
Cheddar Gorge is also a popular location for rock climbing, with nearly 600 graded routes on the south side of the gorge. The nearby village of Cheddar is full of the usual services expected at such a popular tourist honey pot.



Circular Cheddar Gorge walking route

Answers to Curiosity Questions:

- # Can you spot the feral goats that roam the sides of the gorge? What is their purpose? (*To keep scrub vegetation at bay*).
- # What 1960s rock band used the Cheddar Caves as a backdrop for their debut album cover? (*The Troggs*).
- # Batts Combe Quarry to the north of Cheddar Gorge excavates Burlington Oolite, a very pure limestone used for making quicklime. What is it used for? (*Quicklime's main use is in the steel industry*).



Return to village along road or cross over towards West Mendip Way

