Ham Hill Geology

Ideal for higher level geography studies

By Hugh Prudden

1. Uneven bedding

Unlike the evenly bedded Blue Lias of Somerton, Ham Hill Stone (HHS) has very uneven bedding, which indicates <u>deposition</u> by variable fast moving currents on the sea floor. It is mainly broken shell debris. The rock exists because there was a net accumulation of sediment. The geological record only contains that which has survived; we shall never have a complete story. The brown colour is caused by the weathering of iron minerals.

2. Cross-bedding

The sea floor currents moved the shell debris in the form of waves on the sea bed. The remains of these dunes are seen as cross-beds (lower centre); here we see the lower part of some cross-beds, which have been preserved. The sea floor wave was moving from right to left i.e. from the SW. The dark line across the middle of the picture represents a scour, which removed the top part of the cross-beds. The lines represent alternating episodes of deposition/erosion.

3. Large modern working quarry

Modern machinery has enabled large quantities of HHS to be extracted in recent years for new buildings and restoration work. Note the large quantity of waste sand and rock piled up.

4. The overburden

Note the overburden of some 4m of Yeovil Sands and poor stone much of which is piled up temporarily. The valuable stone lies more deeply buried here than at the northern end of the Hill.

5. Ammonite fossil

A beautiful example of an ammonite *Dumortieria moorei*. This pins down the date of the HHS to the Toarcian Stage (Jurassic) of geological time scale. Ammonites do occur in the Basal Conglomerate, as did this specimen, but are rare elsewhere on Ham Hill.

6. Sedimentary layers

Note the contrast between the massive beds below and the thin alternating beds above. The latter consist of alternations of shelly debris and sandy beds. Clearly there was a change in the supply of sediment and the nature of the sea floor currents. The tilestones came from these thinner beds.

7. Fossil wood

A rare find of fossil wood on a bedding plane. It is more common in the Lias clays at Charmouth.

8. Striations

A nice example of a smoothed rock face showing striations. This is an indication that the rocks at Ham Hill have been wrenched, that is, stresses in the Earth's crust have induced horizontal movement of one face against another. The face opposite probably moved to the right; how do we know? Note the patches of calcite crystals, which grew in tension cracks that opened up consequent to the movement.

9. More striations

Another example of a smoothed rock face showing striations. The face opposite probably moved to the right; how do we know? Note the patches of calcite crystals, which grew in the tension cracks that opened up consequent to the movement. Many of these faces are orientated either NNW-SSE or NE-SW.

10. Major joint faces

Shows a series of steeply inclined fractures one of which is seen in No 9. This is a good indication that wrenching of the rock has induced horizontal movement of one face against another.

11. Calcite crystals

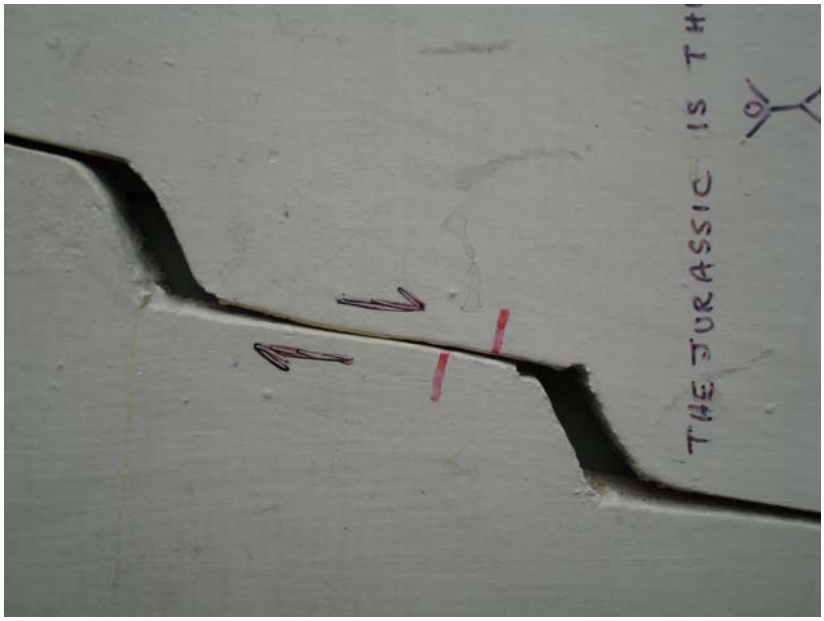
These sharp-edged crystals have grown in a space, which would have allowed them to form this shape. Calcite-rich water must have stood in a fissure. Look carefully at Picture 8 to see a patch just right of centre; the face is one side of a fissure; the opposing side has been quarried out.

12. Zig-zags

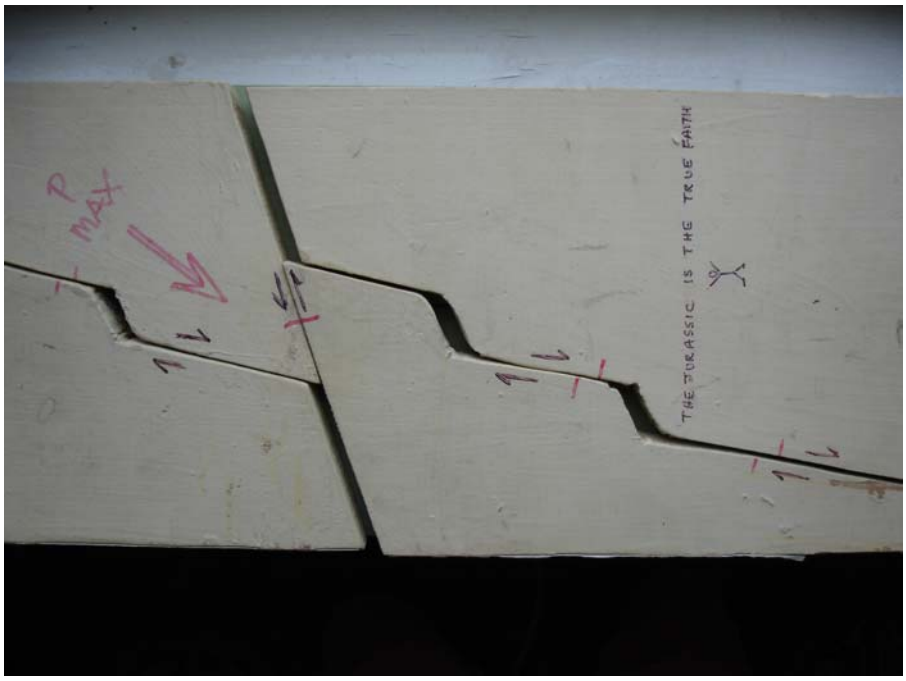
This zig-zag lines, usually near vertical, are best seen in ashlar building stones. They seem to represent fractures where there has been slight movement and separation of the blocks; small calcite crystals can be found on the faces of the slip planes. The lines are marked with iron deposits. These fractures are again the result of horizontal compression of the rocks. Yet another indication that much of Somerset has suffered N-S tectonic compression.

13. Wrenching

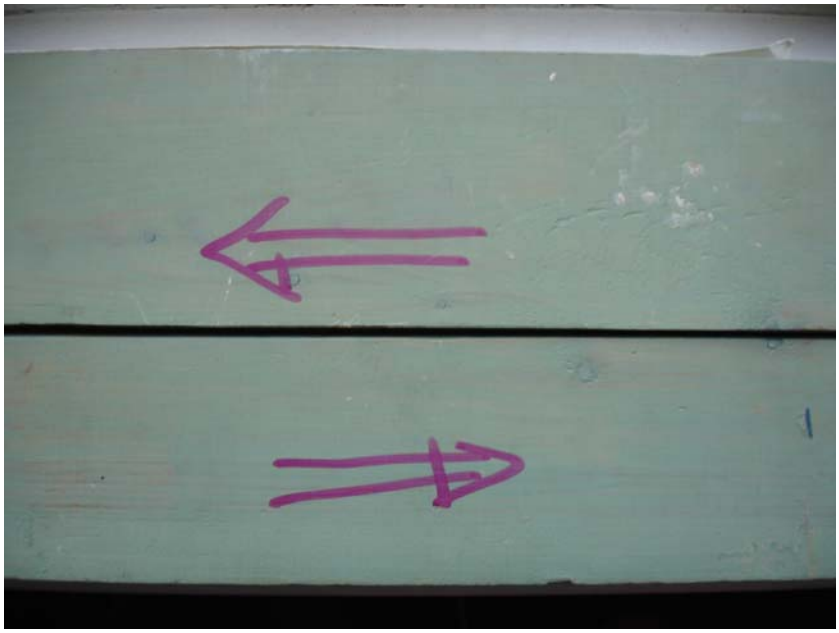
The striations, rock faces with calcite crystals and zig-zags are all part of one process: the rocks have been wrenched as has most of the South West. The wooden model below shows where rock faces have slid by each other, hence the horizontal striations (note the red marker). At the same time gaps have opened up (tension gashes) and this is where the crystals have formed.



The mechanics result in a second set of movements (NE-SW) as shown below. The driving force is horizontal pressure shown by P MAX in red.



Studies of faults in the older rocks of S W England have shown that there are many NNW-SSE strike-slip faults (cp the San Andreas fault in California). A strike-slip fault is where rocks have moved horizontally rather than up or down although there is usually an element of both. The next picture is of the two boards below the top boards shown above; they represent strike-slip movement in the older basement Palaeozoic rocks below the later Jurassic strata. These basement rocks were faulted (and folded) during the *Variscan* mountain building events. They were reactivated during the N-S compression associated with the much more recent *Alpine* mountain building events.



The horizontal compression also resulted in the zig-zag features.

STRIKE SLIP FAULTING IN SOMERSET AND ADJACENT AREAS

H.C. PRUDDEN

Prudden, H.C. 2005. Strike-slip faulting in Somerset and adjacent areas.
Geoscience in south-west England, **11**, 158-161.

The presence of strike-slip faulting in Cornwall, Devon and Dorset is well established. There is now a growing body of evidence that strike-slip faults are to be found throughout Somerset as shown by faults and joint patterns. There were major dextral strike-slip movements during the Variscan Orogeny. Later movements have affected the Jurassic and Cretaceous formations and possibly Palaeogene rocks. Strike-slip faulting has implications for field mapping, the development of landforms and the quarrying industry.

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INTRODUCTION

Strike-slip faults have long been noted throughout SW England cutting the Variscan basement (Devonian and Carboniferous), granite plutons (Permian) and post-Variscan sedimentary successions. Dearman (1963) inferred that NNW-SSE trending dextral strike-slip faults in Devon and Cornwall largely originated as Variscan structures that were reactivated during mid-Tertiary shortening of the Alpine orogenic foreland. The Sticklepath-Lustleigh Fault zone and associated Tertiary pull-apart basins e.g. Bovey Basin (Edwards, 1976); Petrockstow Basin (Bristow *et al.*, 1995) are important examples of these structures. Shearman (1967) reported evidence for NNW-SSE Tertiary fault movements in north-west Exmoor. Likewise similar dextral and associated NE-SW sinistral strike-slip faults have been reported in Dorset. For example, the 20 km-long Poyntington Fault, east of Sherborne, is interpreted to have a post-Jurassic dextral offset of some 3 km. Thickness variations on either side of the fault suggest that it was active during sediment deposition (Bristow *et al.*, 1995, pp. 134-139, figure 56). The purpose of this paper is to elaborate published work and focus on further evidence of strike-slip faulting in inland Somerset (Figure 1).

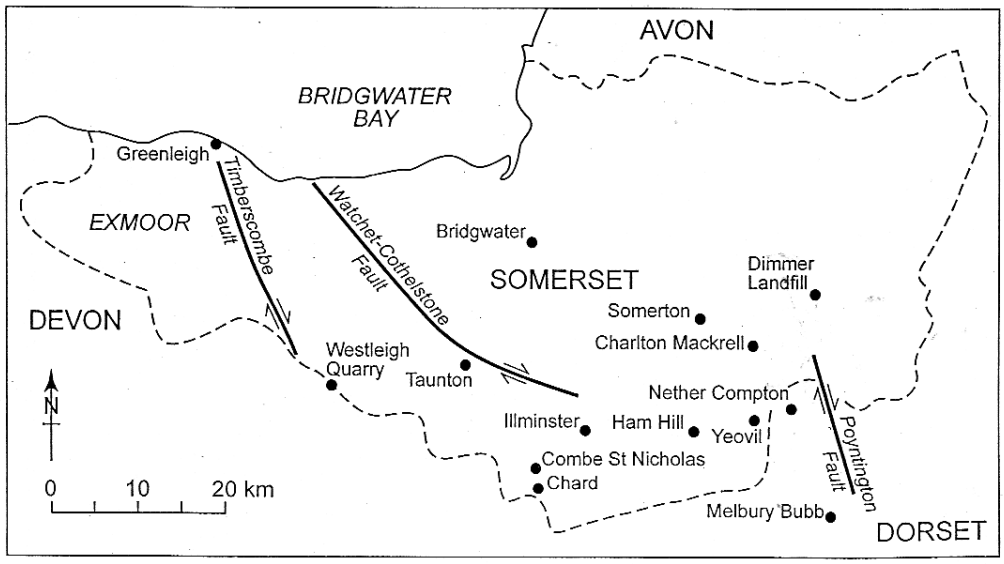


Figure 1. *Map showing the location of places referred to in the text of the paper, along with the major structures in the region.*

14. The Basal Conglomerate

A sawn face of the pebbly bed from the base of the HHS where it lies on the Yeovil Sands now renamed Bridport Sands. The pebbles were formed from a light, coloured fine sand and were rolled around on the sea floor. At sone time they were colonised by trace fossils-the borings are clearly visible. The Basal Conglomerate suggests that the sea floor became shallower or possibly the sea floor currents, or waves (?) became more vigorous. Possibly a cliff formed nearby and the debris became the pebbles. The Basal Conglomerate contains a lot of fossils e.g. ammonites, bivalves, belemnites. The dark brown sediment between the pebbles is HHS.

15. The Basal Conglomerate-close up view

A close-up view. The pebbles are matrix-supported by shelly brash (Ham Hill Stone). Note how the edges of the pebbles are bored. The Basal Conglomerate can be seen on the under surface of one of the pillars in the stone circle at the northern end of the Hill.

16. A trace fossil: Thalassinoides *in situ*

Note the tubular elongate feature lying flat on the bedding plane. It is associated with the Basal Conglomerate (see Nos 13 & 14 above).

Google is a mine of information. Here is a description of a similar specimen from the Upper Cretaceous Bad Heart Formation in Alberta. Photo courtesy Chris Collom (collom@geo.ucalgary.ca).

'A rounded tube-like structure lies on the bedding plane with a diameter of 6cm. These tunnels sometimes form a branching network. *Thalassinoides sp.* burrow is a type of dwelling burrow (domichnia) common in shelf marine environments. This type of burrow is probably produced by a lobster, crayfish, or other type of burrowing crustacean, as indicated by similar modern burrows and occasional preservation of the crustacean within the burrow as a body fossil.'

17. Another example of Thalassinoides

Another example of this trace fossil found in the Basal Conglomerate in the base of the HHS in the wood near Hedgecock Hill. Note the rounded end on the left. The other end is where it broke away from the remainder of the burrow.

18. Tufa

Calcite has been deposited by evaporating water on a fracture in the HHS. Some are similar in shape to small mushrooms and may have an algae association. The calcite must have been dissolved from overlying soil and rock. This is a very recent event in the geological history of Ham Hill.

19. Tilted beds

Beds on the west side of the Hill are tilted at some 14˚ to the west. This is thought to be the result of the collapse of beds at the side of the hill possible as a result of weak beds being squeezed out of the lower hillsides when deep permafrost thawed at the end of a glacial cold period.

20. Tilted beds

Another example of cambering near Monument on western edge of the Hill. Note how the rock has separated into large blocks. This has happened all over the Hill. In some instances blocks have dropped several feet.

21. Stoke Primary School

A nice example of ashlar H H S with HHS stonetiles on the roof although most house in Stoke have slate roofs or Bridgwater tiles.

22. Colonising plants

Various phases of vegetation colonisatiom by pioneering plants can be seen in areas of recent excavation. The more advanced stages with scrub and invasive trees require a lot of labour, much of which is done by volunteers.

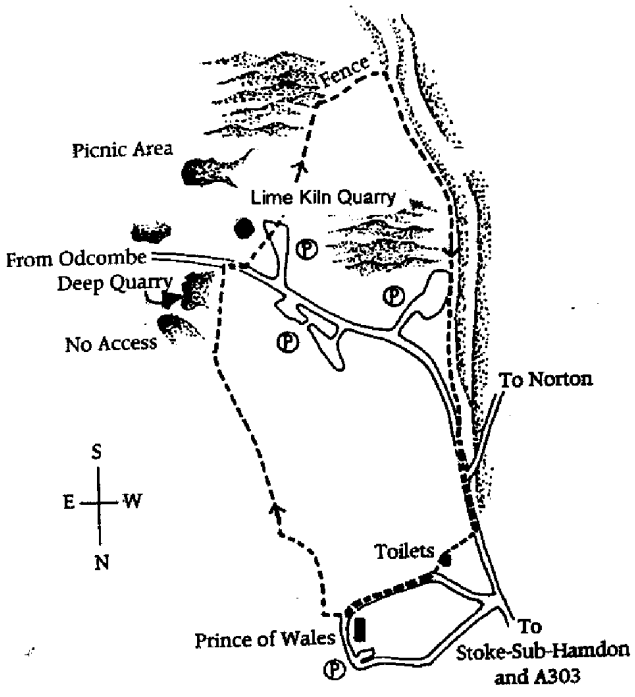
23. Carving in Montacute (Terry Charles)

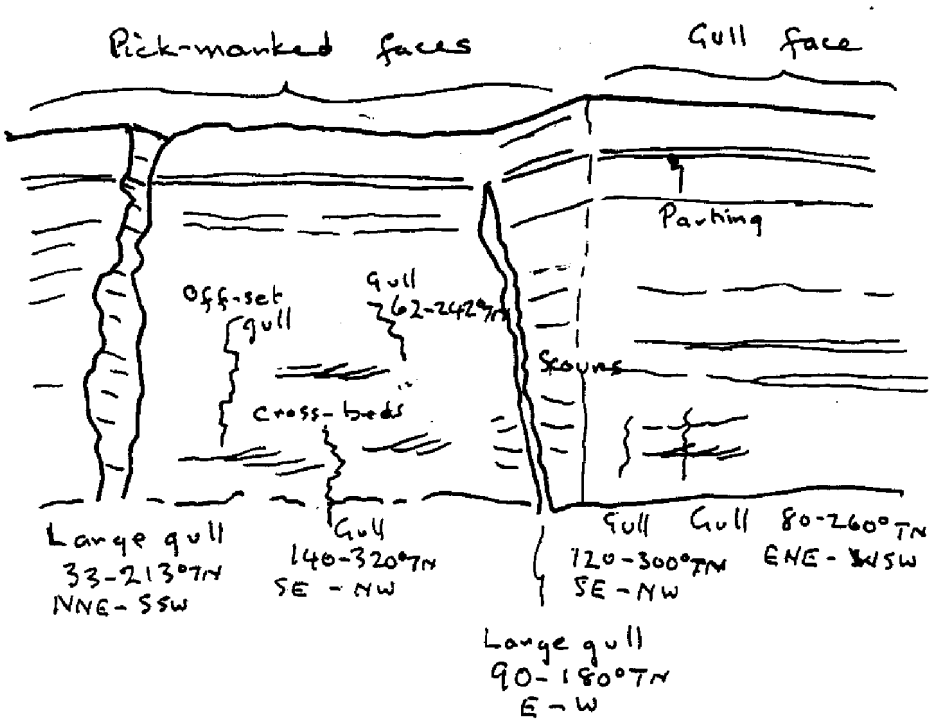
HHS lends itself to quite fine carving and weathers well.

At the rock face

Now is the time to see if you can discover some of these features at the rock face. Three good locations are shown on the following map. The basic method is to first *describe the feature* and second *ask questions* about it. More questions arise when you study a rock face. There are more questions we could ask about the calcite crystals in No 11 above on the N E quarry face.

The map below leads from the Prince of Wales and has south at the top. Visit the Deep Quarry and see what you can make of the small quarry face by the lime kiln.

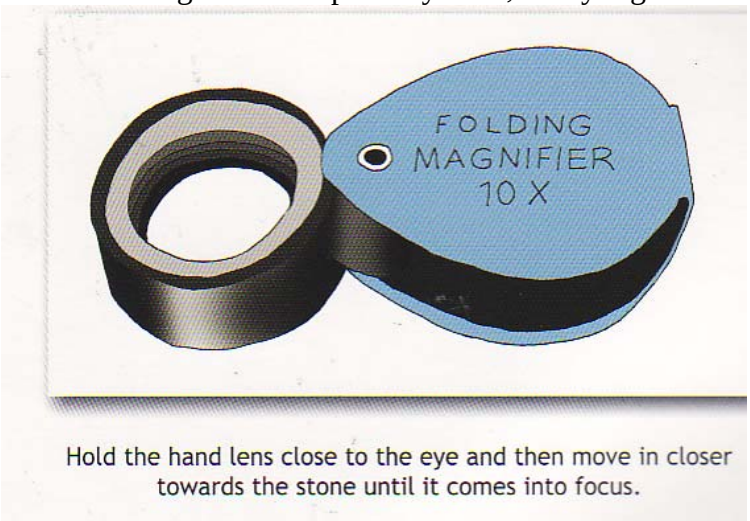




Sketch of the deep quarry face

A hand specimen

A x10 hand lens is indispensable in order to see a piece of rock more clearly. Find a loose piece of Ham Hill Stone and break it in order to obtain a fresh face.
-Describe the shape, size and nature of the components
-Describe the colour and cohesion of the rock
You should have discovered shell fragments and possibly finer, sandy ingredients.



-In which environment on land or in the sea might one find so much shell debris?
-There are very few whole shells; what processes might have created the debris?
-Whence did the creatures derive the calcium carbonate to make their shells?
-The shell debris is clearly stuck together; what substance might have been partially dissolved and then reprecipitated to stick the debris together?

Ham Hill Stone is classified as a bioclastic limestone (bio = clasts). Questions remain:
1. Where were all the bivalves living at the time? Were they swept in and collected from some distant/near source. We shall never know!
2. The Ham Hill Stone forms a N-S outcrop from south of Crewkerne to Stoke sub Hamdon in the north. Why here?

There are three possible processes that may have been responsible:
a. Contemporary vertical movements of the sea floor altering the configuration of the sea bed.
b. Varying marine processes e.g. tides, waves and currents
c. Sedimentation i.e. the build-up of sediments on the sea floor.
Blue Lias is the blue-grey building stone fond in a wide belt from Hatch Beauchamp to Langport, Somerton and Street. Follow the above procedure with a fresh lump if you can find one. What are the differences? Why are the two stone different? Or do the same with apiece of chalk or granite.

It is worth repeating that the geological record is spasmodic; we only have snapshots from the past. Secondly, we find out new facts and develop new theories every day. Geology is exciting!

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www.stoneroof.org.uk/jura.html Stonetiles for roofing

www.jncc.gov.uk/earthheritage/gcrdb/GCR.asp Geological Conservation Review See CGR block-Toarcian (TOH)

http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/hughprudden *Somerset Geology a Good Rock Guide*

Hugh Prudden
December 2007

Ham Hill Country Park Risk Assessment for educational activities

- In order to maximise safety on all visits, all members of staff should be first aid qualified and carry a first aid kit where possible.
- All adults should also carry a mobile phone.
- Anyone planning a visit to Ham Hill should do a full site visit in order to find locations and routes and to identify any other hazards. It is recommended that a visit be carried out the week before the visit, as the landscape or level of vegetation etc. may have altered. If this is not possible, it is recommended that you contact the Ham Hill Ranger team on 01935 823617 as they will be able to inform you of any recent changes to the area you are using.
- Please contact the rangers in advance even if you are not booking a member of staff or the Ham Hill Centre it is good that they know there is a school party on site for health and safety reasons, and also because they will be able to inform you if there will be another school group on site.
- Please read through the risk assessment below thoroughly, making sure you are aware of information you need to give participants before you visit and on the day of the visit before carrying out activities/walks.

Risk	Potential Hazard	Preventative Measures
Participants getting separated from adults	Participants getting lost and/or injured/emotional distress	• Brief participants: Stay with the group, do not go off on your own • Explain that it's a very large park, easy to get lost – if at any point you end up on your own walk back to the Ham Hill Centre
Members of the public	Abduction/abuse	• Adults to supervise participants at all times, and as above
Animal holes, uneven terrain, muddy ground, steep slopes	Slipping/tripping up and falling, potential injuries	• Brief participants: Walk, don't run when going up and down steep, muddy slopes and keep looking down at where you are going, • Activities not to be carried out on muddy/sloping areas unnecessary or where risks are significantly increased by this • Participants to wear suitable shoes (closed shoes)
Quarries: Heavy machinery**,** rocks falling from above, big drops	Serious injury/death	• Instruct participants not to go anywhere near quarry as dangerous • Most steep quarry faces fenced at the top to prevent accidental falls • Where no fence in place, boulders define the top of cliff tip and pictorial 'warning steep quarries' signs are erected at regulation intervals
Thorns and branches	Injuries and cuts	• Brief participants: Watch out for tree branches and brambles in the woods and on path edge

Exposed site, extreme weather conditions	Illness from cold/wet weather e.g. hypothermia or hot/dry weather e.g. heat stroke and sun burn	• Ensure participants are instructed on what to wear and what to bring before going on visit to Ham Hill: wellies/sturdy boots (preferably not trainers, no open toed shoes), jumper, waterproofs, scarf, gloves, hat in colder weather and sun cream and hat in hotter weather. Participants to carry a drink with them • Activities should be cancelled if weather too adverse to go outside
Mountain bikers and horse riders	Injuries from collision/trampling	• Maps in prominent positions show where designated areas are situated, byelaws are posted at the education centre in site publications • Brief participants: Stand to the edge of path if bike or horse is trying to pass by
Health risks	Diseases from animals/faeces, soil, litter Skin reaction from certain plants Snake/insect bites Tick bites	• Check medical records to be aware of any allergies • Brief participants: Do not touch poisonous/irritant plants and fungi (see photo and information about wild parsnip below). There are more details on plants and diseases in full site risk assessment in Ham Hill Centre • Explain there is minor risk of ticks on site and get participants to check themselves for ticks after being out on site, avoid areas where ticks are more likely (i.e. long grass, bracken and dense vegetation) • Ensure participants wash hands thoroughly before eating
Traffic on road	Serious injury/death	• Avoid walking on and crossing the road where possible • Brief participants on road safety: when walking on road use single file, stay close together, don't run, adults must be at the front and back of the group, when crossing everyone must cross together, only when given the ok from an adult • Adults to closely supervise participants on approach to and on road
Dogs	Dog attacks, diseases from dog faeces	• Brief participants: Watch out for dog mess on the paths, and get participants to wash hands thoroughly before eating • Many poop scoop bins available around site and signs informing the public of fixed penalties for dog fouling

Rope during shelter building	Rope burn	• Brief participants: Be careful when using rope and to handle it with care
Participants getting lost during compass trail in Witcombe valley	Emotional distress, injuries	• Brief participants: Must not leave the Witcombe valley boundaries, i.e. this would involve going through a gate • Adults to be stationed so that participants can be seen at all times
Slippery ground/trees, uneven terrain and overhanging branches during blindfolded assault course	Injuries and cuts	• Brief participants: Do not rush, move slowly when carrying out the assault course • Adults to ensure non-blindfolded team members help the blindfolded team member adequately • Assault course not to be carried out if ground and trees are too wet
Willow	Injuries	• Brief participants: Need to be very aware of where both ends of the pieces of willow are at all times, important to be sensible with it as can do serious damage

Wild parsnip
In the summer months a plant called wild parsnip grows on Ham Hill. The plant is tall with yellow upside-down umbrella shaped flowers. Avoid getting the sap from this plant on your skin as it can cause quite a severe red rash, and if this is then exposed to sunlight it can cause blistering. If your skin comes up in a rash or blisters after visiting Ham Hill do not be alarmed - cover up your skin so that it is not exposed to sunlight, and seek medical attention if rash/blisters do not start to reduce within a few days.

Places and Features of Interest at Ham Hill Country Park

From huge disused Victorian quarries, to tiny fossilised ammonites there are masses of places to see and features to find at the Country Park.

Use this map to visit some of those that interest you most.