

BAT TRAIL-5

Braunton-walk 2



Photo: Braunton Marshes: North Devon Coast AONB

Welcome to Braunton, gateway to the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and North Devon Biosphere Reserve, known for its special landscapes, in the form of Braunton Burrows, Braunton Great Field and Braunton Marshes. What is less well known is that it is home to a very special animal, with a Site of Special Scientific Interest designated around it.

In early 2000 Braunton was thought to have the second largest population of greater horseshoe bats in the United Kingdom and they are still here today. The surrounding landscape with its old

meadows, hedges, woodland, cattle, old mines, old buildings and barns is perfect for bats. During your walk, you will find out why these areas are so important.

Bats eat insects and are Britain's only flying mammal. Of the 18 species of bat in this country, the greater horseshoe bat is one of the larger and rarer species.

Why not pop into Braunton Countryside Centre and borrow an audio pen to take part in the audio trail?

DEVON GREATER HORSESHOE BAT PROJECT



ROUTE INFO

Start:	Caen Street car park
Distance and timings:	2.5 miles Easy Access Trail (1.5 miles)
Circular Walk:	Yes
Terrain & Description of paths:	Level footpaths
Obstacles and Gradients:	One stile (optional) One flight of steps at Velator Weir. Two road crossings (one light controlled)
Public Transport:	Bus Service 21 and 21 A Barnstaple to Ilfracombe
Toilets:	Toilets in Caen Street Car Park
Refreshment Facilities:	Braunton Village has a variety of pubs, cafes and restaurants.
OS Map:	Explorer Map 139 (Bideford, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple)
Grid Reference and postcode:	SS 487, 365 Braunton Centre EX33 1AA



Photo: Score bridge



Photo: Braunton Great field



Photo: Phil Richardson



Photo: Frank Greenaway



Photo: Linhay Braunton marsh

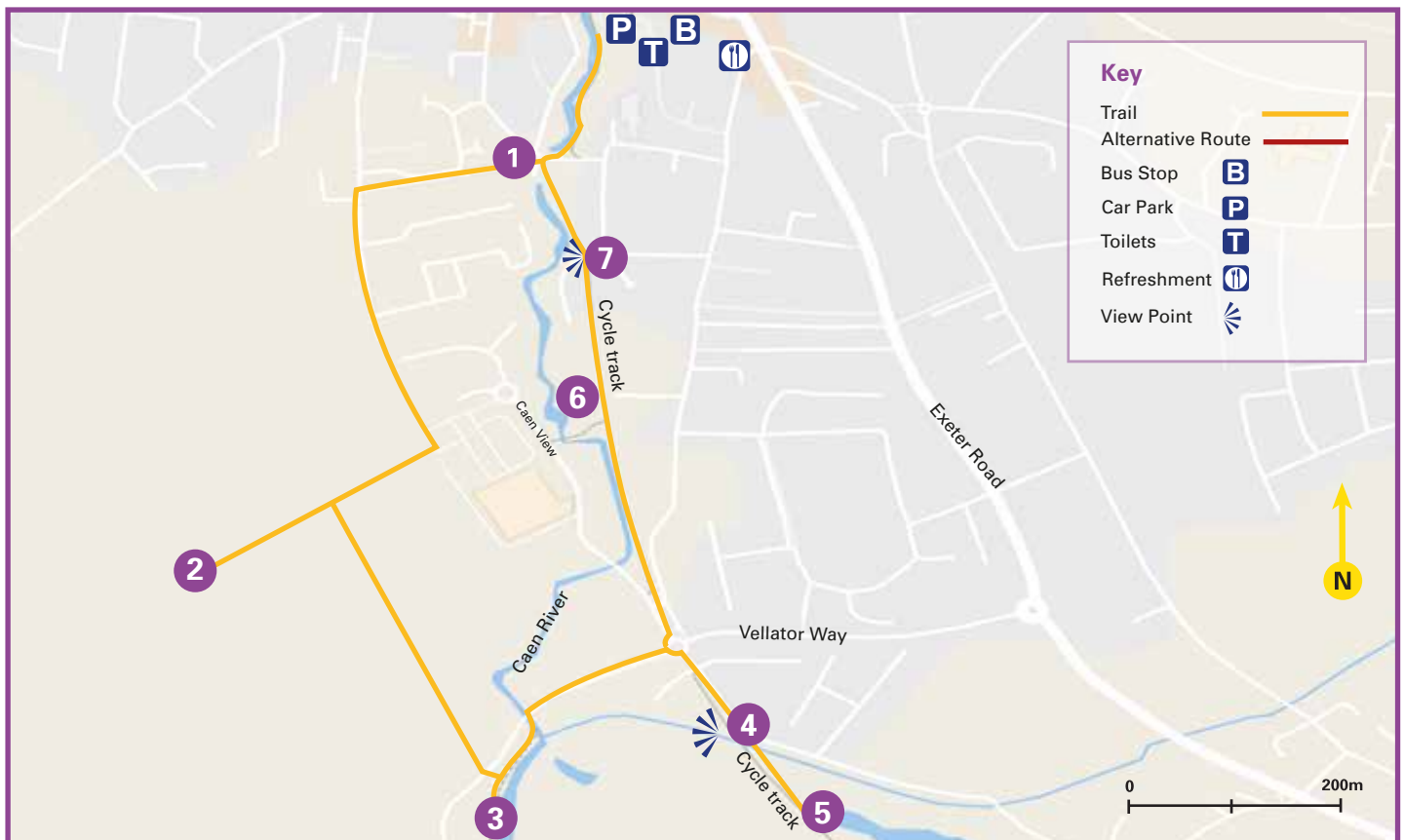


Devon
Wildlife Trust



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DIRECTIONS

You can follow this route using the map above along with the white bat trail markers.

To start, head south following the path to the back of the Countryside Centre. Turn left along the river through Caen Street Car Park.

1 Looking around, it's not obvious why this built up stretch of land is so important to the greater horseshoe bat. The main roost colony is north of Branton, but there is evidence they fly considerable distances in search of roosts and food. Female greater horseshoe bats typically use a 4km zone around their roost to hunt in, although they will travel much further than this. Dark and undisturbed 'green corridors' like the river and old railway line are important bat 'flyways'.

Horseshoes are nocturnal and emerge about 30 minutes after dusk to hunt their prey, navigating in the dark using echolocation - 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.

2 This is Branton Great Field, archaeologically very important as it is one of only two surviving open strip field systems in the country. The field was originally managed in individual strips of 22 yards (1 chain) by 220 yards (a furlong) making one acre. Even today the field is managed as one big, open area. Although this area is not great for horseshoes as it is very open with no hedges for them to follow, the patchwork of fields and woodland you can see on the hills beyond are much better for bats.

3 Here we reach another bat 'highway', standing adjacent to the River Caen, whose banks spill out into important grazing marshes such as Branton, Horsey and Chivenor. Bats eat insects and horseshoes love to eat moths, beetles and crane flies. A particular favourite, especially in young bats, are dung beetles, so cattle grazed pastures are essential for their cow pats!

4 Another great place to stop and look for bats. Many of the bats follow the course of the river - with good vegetation each side of the river it's used not only for navigation but as a good source of food.

5 On a fine summer's evening this is a great spot to look for bats. Just look at the number of different habitats you can see, from open water to woodland.

6 This new development gives off a lot of light. Whilst some bats, like Pipistrelles, may use this to their advantage (lights attract insects), many bat species are disturbed by light emission. Wherever possible we should avoid outside lighting in areas used by horseshoe bats.

7 This is another great place to observe bats, in particular pipistrelle bats which love to fly along this stretch of river in search of insects. The river is a good navigational route but there are no roosts here for greater horseshoes. They prefer to roost in old buildings, mines and caves, with the type of roost dependant on the time of year, whether they are pregnant or have young, and the weather.