

Chew Valley; The Greatest Contrast #mendipchewvalley

In the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) where would you find the greatest contrast to the bleak, windswept plateau that the area is famous for? For me it has to be the Chew Valley; lakes, streams, hedges, rich soils, sheltered from the wind, cosy villages, everything you don't find on the plateau. Even the colour palette of the landscape is very different.

Although we generally refer to the valley from Blagdon through to Bishop Sutton as the Chew Valley it is in fact two valleys. The Yeo Valley at the western end with the River Yeo heading out towards the Bristol Channel while the River Chew at the other end heads north. These valley bottoms with their productive soils have led to the rich farmland we see today. Cows graze the lush grass in the fields with hedgerows creating a field pattern that dates back to the first enclosures in the 1700's.



Curiously the Chew Valley itself was not in the area originally proposed in 1968 for the designated AONB. The Yeo Valley and Blagdon Lake were, however it was only after further consultation that the boundary was redrawn in 1969 and the line swept north to take in Chew Valley Lake. The Mendip Hills was formally designated an AONB in 1972 and the Yeo and Chew Valleys now form an essential part of the jigsaw that make up the area.

Most of the people that live within the boundary of the AONB are in villages along the spring-line of the Chew Valley; Blagdon, Ubley, Compton Martin and the Harptree's. Again this is another contrast to the sparsely populated plateau. You can find vibrant communities with pubs, community shops and cafes. Many of the villages are recorded in the Domesday Book nearly a 1000 years ago.

The valley has a unique character that could be easily eroded though. Air traffic is likely to increase at Bristol Airport, the A368 will need to take more traffic from our growing population and a change in the farm payment system could result in intensification of farming. The local community has worked hard to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, the AONB Partnership comments on planning applications,

and projects are being run by organisations to work with farmers in the area to reduce chemical and silt run-off from fields that affect the water supply. An example of this work is the Mendip Lakes Project, click [here](#) for more details.

We've talked previously about the lakes and the limestone aquifer in our January Blog, and how they form another of the Special Qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB. The lakes, and their internationally important wildlife, add directly to the special quality of the Chew Valley. All 12 of the special qualities link together and the sum of them make this nationally important landscape so special for residents and visitors. But if you want to experience the greatest contrast in landscape character take a walk through the Chew Valley then up onto the plateau.