

**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.



Cheddar Gorge

**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 Mendips 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 are a number of show caves found 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, receiving 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.

*(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](http://www.cheddargorge.co.uk)

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cheddar-Gorge](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cheddar-Gorge)

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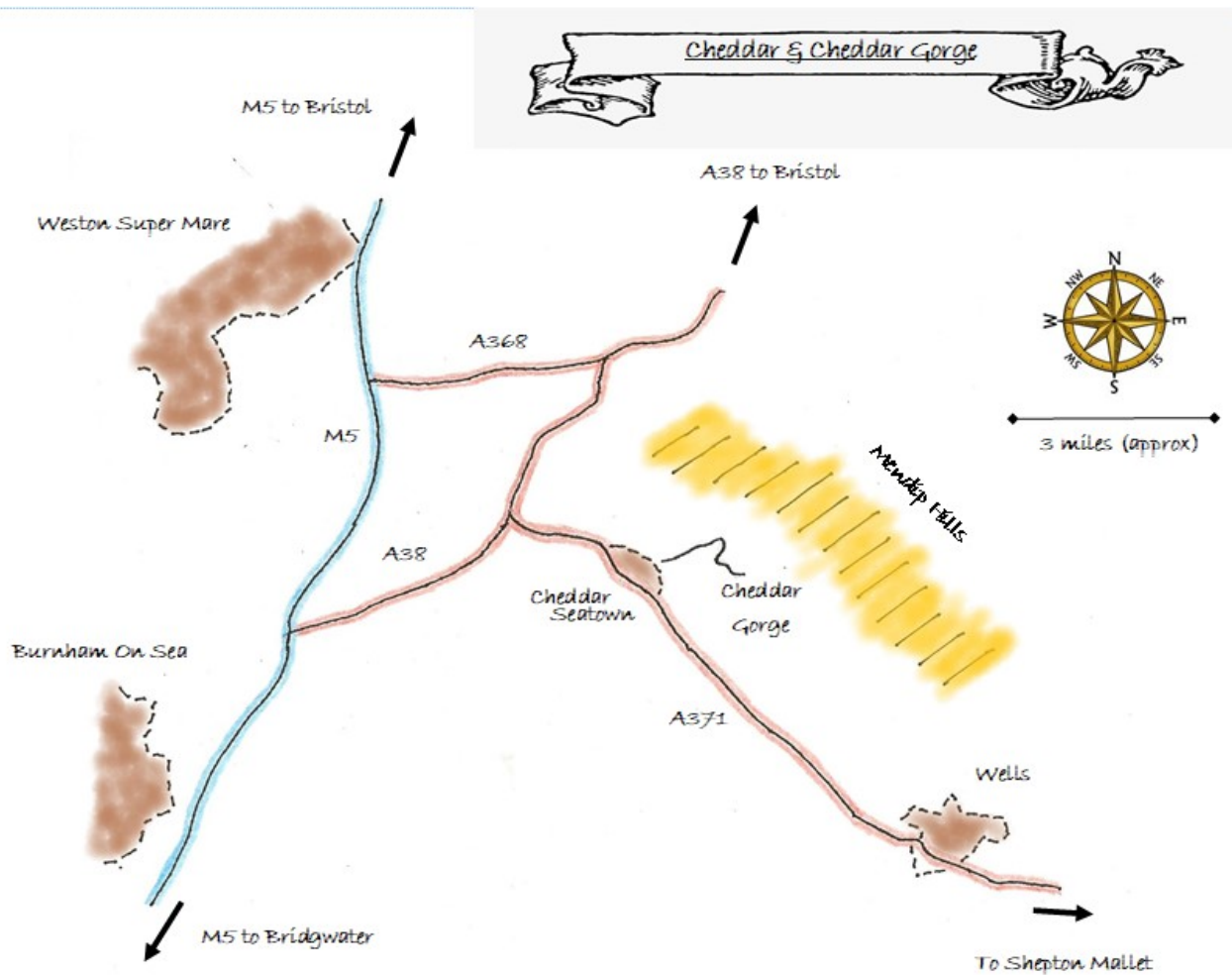
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There is a pleasant circular walk of around 5 miles that takes you along the high cliffs on each side of the gorge. The walk runs through an area designated as an SSSI due to its Karst limestone geology and remnant calcareous grasslands. There is a bit of a steep pull to endure when leaving the village – but the effort is rewarded at the top with views both into the gorge itself, and across to the opposite cliff walls. Many people prefer walking away from the village on the cliff top and then returning along the road through the floor of gorge. There is plenty of traffic to be wary of, but some great views looking up at the sides of the gorge contrast the views from above.

Cheddar Gorge is also a popular location for adventure sports, with caving experiences for all abilities and some serious rock climbing opportunities. There are 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.



**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*