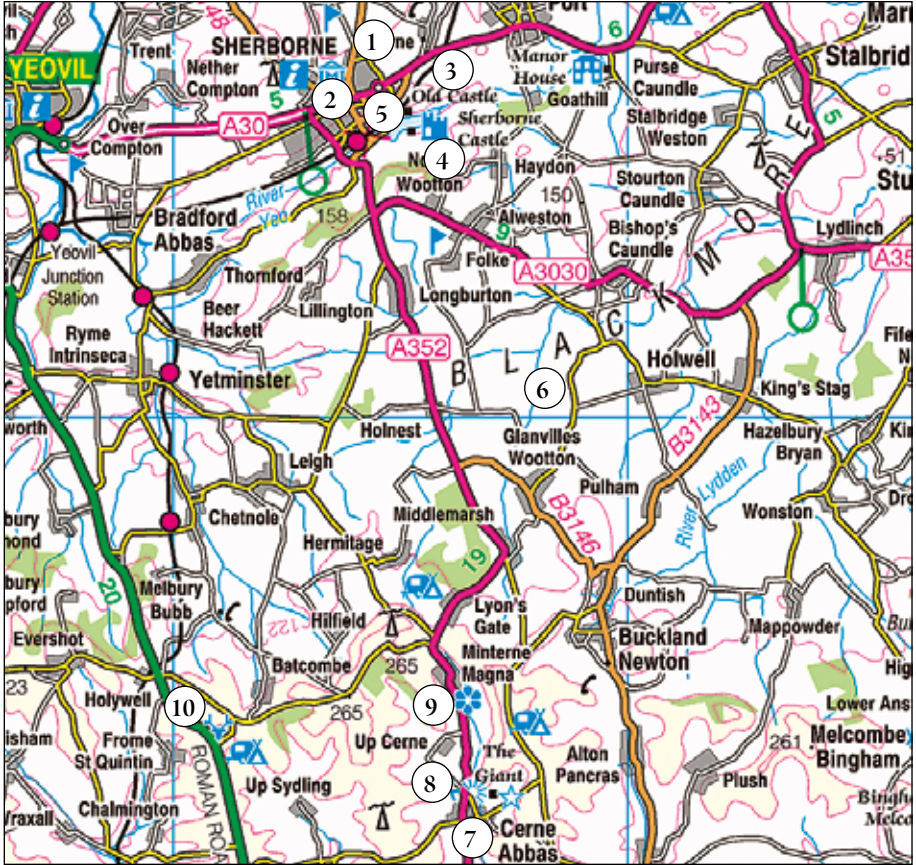


ITINERARY #4 - SHERBORNE & AROUND

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SHERBORNE & AROUND

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SHERBORNE lies in a part of West Dorset which extends northwards to the River Yeo in the west to Poynton Hill about 5mi (8km) to the east. Although there are no significant archaeological sites to visit in the vicinity, there is evidence of much activity in the area during the Iron Age and Roman times. The dairy at Sherborne Castle, somewhat bizarrely, has a resited Roman mosaic floor.

Its beautiful situation has inspired many famous people, including the Saxon kings who made it the capital of the Kingdom of Wessex. They established Sherborne Abbey, as well as the original school.

Later, the Normans built Sherborne Old Castle on a prime site. This was ruinous when Sir Walter Raleigh first saw it on his way from London to Plymouth. His heart became set on building a country lodge here for his wife, Elizabeth and himself.

Sherborne Museum has an excellent small collection of local artefacts dating from the Palaeolithic Age to recent times. One of the highlights of the museum is an electronic version of the 15th century Sherborne Missal. This was produced by the Benedictine Monastery in the international gothic style and is an exquisite example of this style of book illustration.

ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:50,000 & 1:25,000 MAPS

OS Landranger Map 183, Dorchester & Weymouth; Map 194, Yeovil & Frome
OS Explorer Map 129, Yeovil & Sherborne; Map 117, Cerne Abbas & Bere Regis

SHERBORNE & AROUND

1. Sherborne (page 156, popn. 2011, 9,523) occupies a fine south-facing slope on a tributary of the River Yeo and has been claimed to be “*the most attractive town in the county.*” It has a long history going back to Saxon times and is largely built of local ochre-coloured Ham Stone. The town centre has a wide range of independent shops, art and antique dealers, as well as a good selection of restaurants and pubs. There is a large network of quiet lanes, tracks and footpaths to explore roundabout.

2. Sherborne Abbey, or St Mary’s Church, (page 158) was founded in AD705 and is one of the most outstanding churches in Dorset. The building only survived due to the determination of the people of the town after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539. Today it is an essential visit, especially to see the exquisite 15th century fan-vaulted roof of the nave. The building includes Saxon, Norman and Medieval features, all of which combine to make a very fine church.

St John’s Almshouse (page 159) is across the green from the church and dates from the 15th century. The chapel is original with a fine stained glass window and a triptych which may have come from Cologne. **The Close** gives fine views of the abbey, while **the Conduit** on Cheap Street is now a market house, having been the *lavatorium* of the monastery. **3. Sherborne Old Castle** (page 156) occupies a fine site to the east of the town overlooking Sherborne Lake. It was built by the Norman, Roger de Caen in the early 12th century as a fortified bishop’s palace. Most of the ruins date from this time apart from work carried out by Walter Raleigh in the 1590s after being given the Sherborne Estate by Elizabeth I. The Castle was twice besieged by the Parliamentarians during the Civil War. The second was led by Cromwell himself, who called it “*A malicious mischievous Castle*”, before having it slighted. The site is maintained by English Heritage.

4. Sherborne (New) Castle (page 156) is off New Road, southeast of the town. It was originally built by Sir Walter Raleigh in the 1590s as Sherborne Lodge. The central block and polygonal corner towers date from his time. With Raleigh locked up

in the Tower of London, James I sold the estate to the Digby family, who still own it. Further wings were added over the years to create a romantic stately home, filled with works of art, fine furniture and porcelain collections. The extensive gardens, park and lake were laid out by “Capability” Brown in the 1750s. Open from April to October; the Castle hosts several special events during the year.

5. Sherborne Steam and Waterwheel Centre (page 157) at Castleton was set up to preserve a large waterwheel which supplied water to the town from 1869 to 1959. Steam engines and other water supply artefacts make this unusual museum an interesting visit. Open on Sundays and occasional other days May to October.

6. Blackmore Vale (page 240) is a wide valley stretching across northern Dorset between the Dorset Downs in the south and the River Stour watershed to the north. This green landscape still has many small farms, pretty little villages and winding lanes. The varied geology of limestone and clay add variety to this low-lying fertile area.

7. Cerne Abbas (page 154) is situated on the A352 about midway between Sherborne and Dorchester. The village has fascinating old buildings, including a 14th century doorway, a 13th century church and remains of the abbey. The “Royal Oak” claims to be the oldest pub in England.

8. The Cerne Giant (page 154) is on the southwest corner of Giant Hill, just north of the village. Although it can be seen from the official parking place, there is a much better view from Weam Common Hill, reached by a path just opposite.

9. Minterne Gardens (page 155) is 2mi (3km) north of Cerne Abbas. The gardens are in a small valley below the house, with ponds, waterfalls and streams. They are open from mid-February until early November. There is a successive profusion of colour from early spring onwards.

10. Roman Road (page 162) The A37 from Dorchester to Ilchester follows the line of a Roman road for most of the way. At Dorchester the Roman road runs close to the Roman aqueduct before crossing the river, west of Stratton.