

Maiden Newton to Dorchester



This could be the ideal undemanding ride. It is fairly flat, the railway stations at either end are one stop apart, and much of it is not on the road. It also has the advantage of taking you through some of Dorset's beautiful countryside and delightful villages to its historic county town.

The Route

National Route: 26

Distance: 8 miles

Terrain: fairly level with two short climbs at the end, a mix of traffic-free routes, shared footways, bridleways and quiet roads

Public transport: railway stations at Maiden Newton and Dorchester

Bike hire: Dorchester cycles - 01305 268787

Maps: Cycling in West Dorset – leaflet available from Dorchester TIC, who will post it on request

OS maps: Explorer 117, Landranger 194

Tourist information: Dorchester TIC – 01305 267992

Places to search for on Sustrans website mapping: Maiden Newton, Dorchester

Maiden Newton is an old market town. The Saxon doorway (now blocked) of its parish church is reputed to be the oldest in England, and its market cross dates back to the 15th century. The White Horse, its old coaching inn (rebuilt in 1912), features in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where Maiden Newton is thinly disguised as Chalknewton.

From the station you ride into Maiden Newton, joining National Route 26 for a short section of the A356, then you are on the back roads through the hamlets of Frome Vauchurch and Cruxton, joining a bridleway alongside the river Frome. The next on-road section passes within a quarter of a mile of Frampton, where the village green alone is well worth the short detour, and one of the bridges over was designed by Sir Christopher Wren.

Make sure you turn right coming out of Southover. This will bring you onto the next section of bridleway which is rough for about half a mile, and is most suitable for mountain

bikes or robust tourers, then a tarmac-surfaced bridleway will take you into Muckleford. Please take care at the crossroads, then follow the lane to Bradford Peverell, birthplace of John Hutchins, Dorset's most famous historian. Turn left on leaving the village, and continue to the busy A37. Cross with care, then join the shared foot/cycleway. After about half a mile, take the signed left turn through the village of Charminster. Once you are through the village, you turn right onto the cycle track along the Dorchester to Sherborne road. At the bottom of the hill by the pub, a new traffic-free route takes you over the water meadows, and onto Glyde Path Road (note Hangman's Cottage on the right, which really was!). Take a sharp left up the short hill, and at the end of the road you are on Dorchester High Street.

The old streets of this compact county town (Thomas Hardy's Casterbridge) merit further exploration. Hardy fans may wish to visit Max Gate, the house he built on the south-eastern edge of the town: check www.nationaltrust.org.uk for opening times. You can return to Maiden Newton by train from Dorchester West station.

Rangers on a section of route created by a Sustrans workcamp

