

## Walking the Cotswold Way with Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

Included in the many guided walks provided by the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens are two along the 102 mile Cotswold Way. Both of these annual walks are in monthly stages commencing in May and running through to February. These walks include transport to and from the start point. The northbound walk from Bath to Chipping Campden is held on the first Wednesday of each month and southbound walk from Chipping Campden to Bath is on the first Saturday of each month. For further details please see:

<http://www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk/walking/guided-walks/>



*Courtesy of National Trails*

Recently I completed the southbound walk with around twenty other walkers that made up the 2016-17 group. Although as a Cotswold Voluntary Warden I was familiar with the southern section of the route I was keen to complete the whole of the Cotswold Way and explore, with our knowledgeable wardens, unfamiliar sections of the Cotswold Way.

Set out below are some of my memories from our journey south from Chipping Campden.

### Stage 1 – Chipping Campden to Stanton in Gloucestershire. (10 miles)



A lovely warm May day, which was ideal for walking and a chance to meet our new companions for the next ten monthly meetings. Leaving the lovely market town of Chipping Campden it is a steady climb to Dovers Hill and then onto Broadway Tower, both locations provide the first of many views we will see across the Severn Vale. Broadway is just one of the picturesque villages that we saw on our journey. The route to Stanton includes some lovely woodland areas filled with bluebells. The village of Stanton provides a fitting end to

stage one and whilst waiting for our transport, an opportunity to enjoy a few overs of village cricket.

### Stage 2 – Stanton to Cleeve Common (12.5 miles)

A cool hazy start to this June day but it gradually warmed up. Despite the threat of thunder showers the walk remained dry. Each long climb was rewarded with some beautiful views. The morning route passes Stanway House and the ruins of Hailes Abbey, before a lunch stop in the ancient Saxon town of Winchcombe. The afternoon has a long steady climb to Belas Knap long barrow. The stage is completed with a final climb up onto Cleeve Common above Cheltenham.



*The gatehouse at Stanway House*

### **Stage 3 – Cleeve Common to Seven Springs (8.5 miles)**

Having been away on holiday I completed this stage on my own a few days after the main group. I was pleased with the good July weather if a little breezy on the top of Cleeve Hill the highest point on the Cotswold Way. I could even make out the Black Mountains, including the Sugar Loaf.

The descent through Dowdeswell Wood to the A40 gives a clue to the climb on the other side of the valley. As you leave the plantation on Wistley Hill you are treated to a lovely view back over most of today's route.

After several hours of peaceful walking the stage ends at the busy road junction at Seven Springs.



*Cleeve Hill*

### **Stage 4 – Severn Springs to Fiddlers Elbow (11 miles)**

A beautiful August summers day provided plenty of superb clear views from the escarpment towards the Black Mountains and the Malvern Hills. A leisurely lunch stop at Crickley Hill gave us an opportunity to enjoy the panorama of the Severn Vale.

The afternoon was spent primarily in woodland and this provided us with welcome shade from the hot sun.

Shortly prior to completing the walk we had time to enjoy the view from Cooper's Hill, famous for its cheese rolling event. I did not appreciate how steep this hill is, which explains the injuries sustained by some of the competitors!



*Barrow Wake towards Coopers Hill*

### **Stage 5 – Fiddlers Elbow to Cripplegate near Haresfield Beacon (9.5 miles)**

The weather forecast was not good, wet and windy would sum it up on that day back in September. Making the most of the dry start we set out at a good pace up through the woods and onto the golf course at Painswick Beacon. The restricted views were a clue to the weather to come. By the time we reached Painswick it was time to put on our wet weather gear. Painswick is a town worth spending more time in to enjoy its beautiful buildings but that is for another day. By the time we reached the Tony Drake MBE memorial the rain had turned heavy. Tony was one of the creators of the Cotswold Way. We then climbed up to the Edgemoor Inn taking the opportunity to have a short sandwich break under the shelter of the trees at Rudge Hill Nature Reserve on Edge Common.



*Memorial to Tony Drake MBE*

This stage has some interesting features including Cliff Well and Cromwell's Stone. With a lot of the route in woodland we were sheltered from the strong south-westerly wind that only became evident on Haresfield Beacon.

### **Stage 6 – Cripplegate to Cam Long Down (10.5 miles)**

I love beech woods and the Cotswolds AONB has some wonderful examples, many of which are along the Cotswold Way. The weather forecast on this October day was not good but we set out in hope of it being wrong.

With heavy rain falling Standish Woods provided good cover and the beech trees provided an atmospheric mood. There is plenty of evidence of early Britain on this route as well as glimpses of the Severn and across to the Forest of Dean. By the time we reach the Stroudwater Canal the weather had improved. At this point there is a choice of routes and with the weather forecast in the back of our minds we chose the route via Kings Stanley rather than the longer one along the canal and over the exposed Selsley Common.

Buckholt Wood provided a sheltered place for a picnic lunch as the thunder past by in the distance. The final stretch of this stage has a descent from the escarpment then a steep climb up onto Cam Long Down where we were rewarded with some wonderful views across the Severn.



### **Stage 7 – Cam Long Down to Wotton under Edge (9 miles)**

It was a good day for walking on this cold dry November Day. Having descended into Dursley there is a steep climb back up the escarpment to Dursley Golf Course. However, there are some wonderful views, firstly back past Coaley Peak towards the Malvern Hills and then later on views to the south, down the Severn Valley, towards the two bridges.

Like a lot of the Cotswold Way this section has a good mixture of views, woods and valleys. The beech woods provided a fantastic autumn colour show.

After a lunch stop at North Nibley another steep climb to the Tynedale Monument erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in remembrance of the remarkable William Tyndale the 16<sup>th</sup> Century translator of the English Bible. I was aware of the excellent work being carried out by South District Wardens on behalf of Historic England at Brackenbury Ditches, an Iron Age Hill Fort, it was great to be able to see this work at first hand. Whilst we, in Avon Valley District, are doing similar work for Historic England at Little Sodbury Hill Fort, South District has a lot more large trees to tackle than we have!

Before the stage ends with the descent into Wotton under Edge we have some more wonderful views from Wotton Hill including a look at the route of Stage 8 next month.



*Brackenbury Ditches*

### **Stage 8 – Wotton under Edge to Little Sodbury (10.5 miles)**

The weather on this December day was dry and cold and made for good walking conditions. The landscape starts to change with fewer views to the west from the escarpment and more to the east of the AONB. The Cotswold Way passes through a mixture of woodland and open farmland both pasture and arable. Passing the village of Alderley and on towards Hawkesbury Upton and the Somerset Monument a reminder of childhood picnics. Passing the National Trust property at Horton Court the Cotswold Way skirts the Iron Age hillfort at Horton Camp before our day ended at Little Sodbury Church.



*By-Way near Alderley*

### **Stage 9 – Little Sodbury to Cold Ashton (11 miles)**

This January day commenced with thick fog restricting the views on this part of the route. Shortly after setting out we cross Sodbury Hill Fort which looked magical in the fog; a place we have done a lot of work clearing scrub trees for Historic England in order to return the area to limestone grassland. The noise of the M4 motorway cannot be ignored but by the time we reach Dyrham Church it is just a distance memory. This section has five churches all with an interesting tale to tell. The heavy ground conditions were some of the most challenging we had at any stage of the whole walk but still an enjoyable day's walking.



*Sodbury Hill Fort*

### **Stage 10 – Cold Ashton to Bath (9.5 miles)**

The final stage to the City of Bath; it was a cold February day but with the sky clearing we are quickly in lovely sunshine. The previous day's heavy rain had resulted in some slippery conditions requiring care on one or two slopes. This section drops quickly into the upper part of the Swainswick Valley with its lovely view to the south. Climbing the other side of the valley we reach the Civil War battle site at Lansdown, you realise how the troops who climbed the hill must have felt back on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1643. As we skirt Bath Racecourse we arrive at Prospect Stile which, following work by Cotswold Wardens has once again views across the Avon Valley to the Mendips.



*Kelston Round Hill from Prospect Stile*

The route from now on is down to Weston Village and on into Bath. On this cold winters day there were lots of tourists enjoying this wonderful Georgian city. We draw a few sideways glances as our group with walking poles and muddy boots arrived at Bath Abbey Churchyard.



*The Royal Crescent in Winter sunshine*

102 miles completed, in good company, very enjoyable walking and great satisfaction. We then returned by the transport to our cars and onto a local pub for a celebratory late lunch.

A big thank you to all my fellow Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who guide each stage of the walk, in particular John Bartram who organises the southbound walk and John Walker who organises the leaders for each stage. Both of whom have guided various stages of the walk.



*Bath Abbey and journeys end!*

Mike Cripps  
Cotswold Voluntary Warden