

The Cotswold Way Companion

An Insider Guide

This book is about the Cotswold Way - perhaps the best loved of the UK's sixteen designated national trails. It's just 102 miles (162 kms) long and doesn't rise much above 330 metres. Yet it's full of beauty and interest, following a dramatic limestone escarpment linking the Georgian city of Bath in the south to the medieval market town of Chipping Campden in the north. The countryside it passes through is quintessential English and dotted with small towns, villages and monuments with fascinating histories.

The book will help you to get the most out of walking the Cotswold Way. It's special for two reasons: it focuses on the Cotswold Way's natural environment and its archaeology and history; and it's the work of people with great knowledge and experience of the trail: members of the Cotswold Way Association (CWA), the charity set up in 2016 to promote its conservation and protection, and Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who patrol the trail and lead walks on it.

Proceeds from the Cotswold Companion, which is available as an eBook and paperback, will go towards the trail's upkeep and improvement. Buy both and you will get one year's membership of the CWA to help keep making a difference.

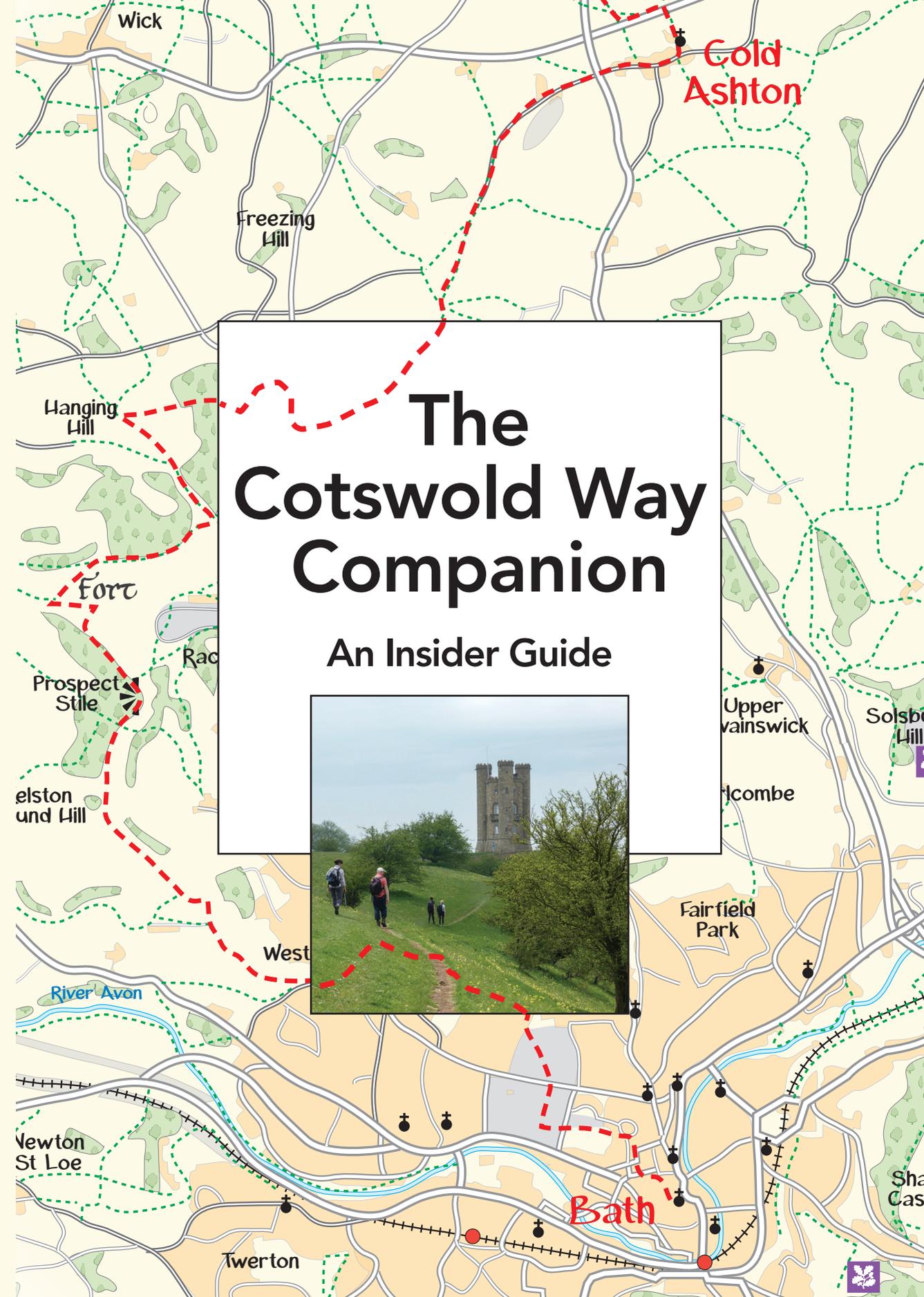
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Edited by Keith Sisson

The Cotswold Way Association

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Acknowledgements

There isn't enough space to name all the people who helped to make this book possible. Some do deserve to be so recognised, though. These include the five people who made up what might be described as the 'editorial team'. John Bartam, Steve Holbrow, Malcolm Higgins, Margaret Reid and Keith Sisson. As well as being Trustees, three of these had roles with the CWA: John was chair, Malcolm Secretary and Keith editor of its *Cotswold WayMarker* newsletter. Margaret and Steve were very active CWA members and 'volunteers', Margaret looking after membership as well as being Head Cotswold Voluntary Warden at the time and Steve helping with social media.

Getting from A to B involved a three-stage process: Keith turning into rough chapter drafts the notes of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who'd led the annual Cotswold Way walks pre-Covid-19; his four colleagues helping to knock the chapters into shape for wider reading and comment; and two further groups of Cotswold Wardens adding corrections and suggestions for improvement, along with any quirky anecdotes and stories that would help to put a smile on people's faces. These were the coordinators of the Wardens who regularly patrol a stretch of the trail and the stage leaders of the relay walk held in September 2021 to celebrate the delayed Cotswold Way 50th anniversary. It's with some justification, therefore, that 'An Insider Guide' is the book's subtitle.

Also to be emphasised is that the book's not just a matter of text. It also has many images, with special thanks due to the following:

- Rob Talbot for the National Tail maps in these preliminaries and chapters 1 and 2
- Bob Child for the specially designed stage maps in chapters 3-12
- Mark Richards for allowing his pen & ink drawings to grace the book throughout
- Mike Cripps, Richard Wilson, Harvey Mattinson, Jean Booth and Rob Talbot for individual photographs in Chapters 3, 4, 9, 10 and 12 respectively.

As far as the editorial team have been able to establish, the other images appearing in the book are in the public domain either on websites or in general publications. Unless posted otherwise at the foot of the image, their source is the CWA itself and/or the Cotswold National Landscape (CNL). As already indicated, in the few cases where this is not the case, every effort has been made to attribute the source properly, bearing in mind all these images are in the public domain. Any mistakes drawn to the CWA's attention will be rectified at the earliest opportunity.

A word about the sources for the text is also appropriate. A starting point for many of the original walk leader notes was **Wikipedia**. As the many references in the text suggest, these were double checked, retained and developed along with links in the eBook. There are very good reasons. Wikipedia is not only a valuable source of information in itself, but also an excellent link to further sources, including coverage of any differences of opinion and interpretation. In a publication like this, referring to Wikipedia also means not having to spell out the article details, book references and page numbers expected in an academic work. It's similarly possible to dispense with footnotes in the interest of text flow and readability. If you want, you can follow up the links in the eBook edition.

The publications of bodies such as the Cotswold National Landscape, English Heritage (for the **Great Witcombe Roman Villa**), Natural England, National Trails and the National Trust (especially for **Crickley Country Park**, **Dyrham Park** and **Haresfield Beacon**) were another valuable source of

information on specific features in both the original notes and the final book. The same is true of the websites of organisations responsible for the **Broadway Tower**, **Cleeve Common**, **Prinknash Abbey**, the **Stanway Estate**, **Stinchcombe Hill** and **Sudeley Castle**.

The Cotswold Way is also blessed because the towns through which it runs have active local history societies and/or heritage centres. As their websites confirm, these proved to be a rich source of detailed historical information used in preparing the final text. Again in alphabetical order, with links to their websites, they are:

Broadway

Chipping Campden

Dursley & Cam

Painswick

Winchcombe

Wotton-under-Edge

In the case of designated and scheduled sites, the book is especially indebted to **Historic England**. Such is the quality of the entries, it rarely made sense to try to offer a summary, explaining why many of its descriptions are quoted in full. Also very helpful, particularly in the case of barrows and hillforts, was Tim Copeland's Archaeological Walking Guide to the Cotswold Way.

As luck would have it, at the beginning of October 2021, just as the manuscript was being finalised, Historic England announced that, for the first time, it was making freely available online the results of over 30 years of aerial photograph mapping projects involving over 500,000 aerial photographs. In the words of Duncan Wilson, Historic England's Chief Executive:

This new aerial archaeology mapping tool lets people fly virtually over England and drink in its many layers of history. It will allow everyone to explore the hidden heritage of their local places and what makes them special. We hope it will give people a springboard to further investigation, whether for research purposes or simply to satisfy curiosity about what archaeological features they may have noticed around their local area

Here are details of those covering the Cotswold Way:

- **An Archaeological Survey in the Severn Vale, Gloucestershire: A Highlight Report for the National Mapping Programme NMP**
- **An Archaeological Aerial Photograph Interpretation in the Cotswold Hills: A Report for the National Mapping Programme**
- **The North Cotswolds: A Highlight Report for the National Mapping Programme**

Last but by no means least, Mark Richard's *The Cotswold Way. The complete walker's guide* deserves a special mention. Not only is it the home of the wonderful original pen and ink drawings that he very generously allowed us to use. The book proved to be a great reference point for double checking to make sure nothing important had been left out!

Foreword by Mark Richards

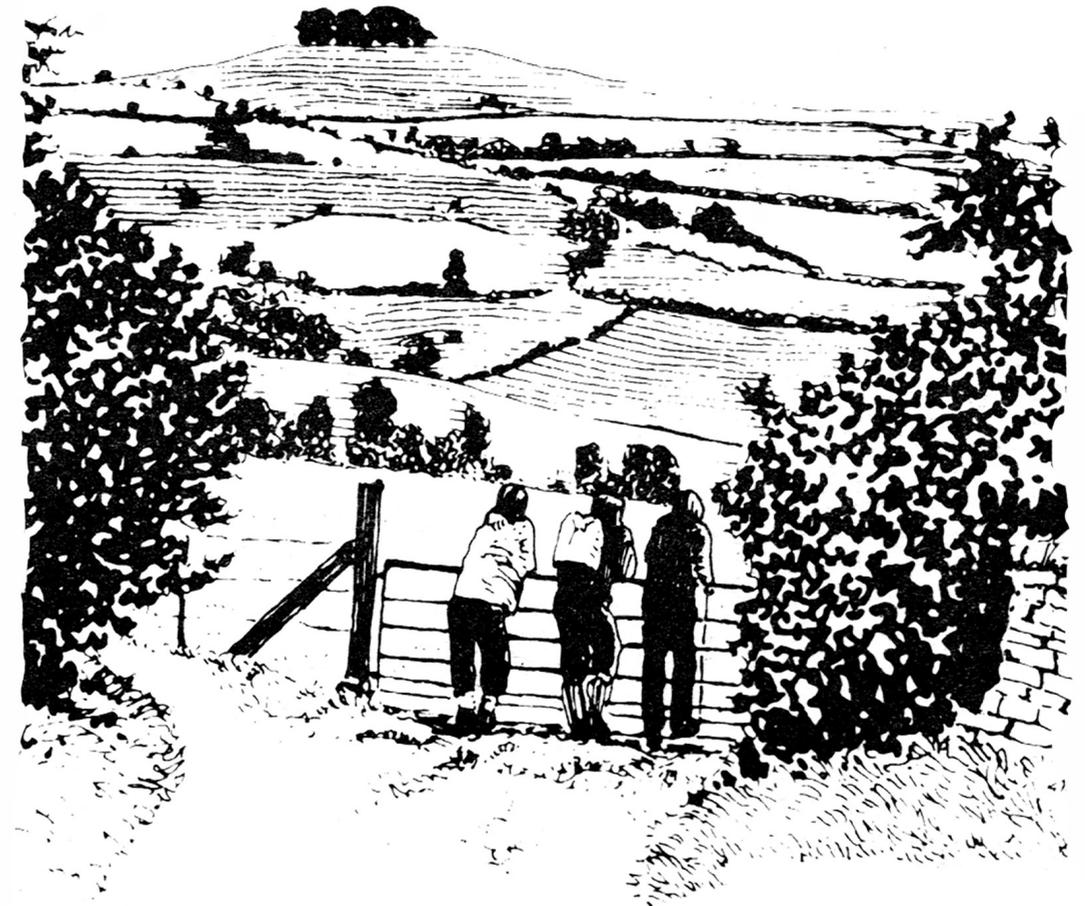
... ever forward with the winding trail

My outward view of the world derives from an upbringing as a Cotswold farmer. The first forty years indeed spent tilling the heavy Lias clay and rearing Hereford cattle in the Evenlode valley. My recreation was always country walking, so in 1969 seeking adventure I moved from Moreton-in-Marsh Young Farmers' Club to Gloucestershire Mountaineering Club, where I met Tony Drake - one of the architects of the Cotswold Way.

My love of pen & ink drawing, nurtured by Alfred Wainwright, prompted Tony to suggest I create the very first guide to The Cotswold Way. The newly launched trail was in need of its own 'Wainwright' guide. Major Clarke had prepared a 10-page A4 stapled description for walkers to find the nascent route and that was my guide too. What fun I had. Quirkily I did not begin at the start, stepping into its midst walking from Duckpool Street in Winchcombe up to Belas Knap via Wadfield to get a feel for the journey. Ironically a section of the original route that recently has been the subject of some controversy. Over the years as an author/artist I have revisited the route creating three distinct walking guides, the original 1973 Thornhill Press booklet, a Penguin Books paperback in 1984 and the Reardon guide published in 1995.

For all that I now live in Cumbria the route remains dear to my heart, so it was wonderful news when it gained National Trail status. The trail has many fans, with volunteers helping to maintain it supported by an enthusiastic Cotswold Way Association. All breathe renewed life into the care of the route and an appreciation of the gorgeous scarp landscape through which it skips. As the seasons unfold you will always find pleasure and invigoration through constantly changing perspectives up and down the wooded escarpment, across fields and commons, most notably north and west across the spreading Evesham and Severn vales. The villages and towns, built with a warm-toned stone, imbue any walk with a lasting glow. Here's to the next fifty years of 'Cotsaller's' delight dawning fresh each new day.

Mark Richards
markrichardswalking.co.uk
October 2021



Pen and ink drawings throughout - by kind permission of Mark Richards

Chapter 1

About this book

This book is about the Cotswold Way. One of the UK's sixteen designated national trails, it's internationally renowned and attracts walkers from all over the world. What it might lack in length or difficulty - it's just 102 miles long (162kms) and doesn't rise much above 330 metres - it more than makes up for in beauty and interest. It follows a dramatic limestone escarpment linking the Georgian city of Bath in the south to the medieval market town of Chipping Campden in the north. In doing so, it passes through quintessential English countryside dotted with small towns, villages and ancient monuments.

The trail is also pretty accessible. Bath is just 18 miles or 29 kms from Bristol international airport and Chipping Campden 35 miles (56 kms) from Birmingham's. London Heathrow is some two hours away.

The main route of the present day Cotswold Way was the brainchild of walkers from the Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire Ramblers groups - notably Tony Drake and Cyril Trenfield respectively. It was first mooted some seventy years ago following the passing of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 providing for the creation of long distance paths. It was only in 1968, however, that things really began to move, with Gloucestershire County Council preparing the route based on existing local public rights of way. The Cotswold Way was formally launched in May 1970 and became a designated National Trail in May 2007. Fittingly, there are memorials to both Tony and Cyril on the trail: Tony's is a special waymark post near Painswick (see Chapter 8) and Cyril's a recently restored and CWA-funded bench near Dyrham Park.



A team effort

Hardly surprisingly, the Cotswold Way has spawned lots of books, with the internet bringing a proliferation of walkers' blogs more recently. This is because, as Chapter 2 explains in greater detail, its 102 miles offer something for every grade of walker, with a unique landscape, marvellous views of the surrounding countryside, glimpses of wonderful wildlife and passage through small towns and villages steeped in history.

This book is nonetheless very distinctive. As in the case of the Cotswolds Way's route, its outstanding feature is that it builds on the contributions of a great many people with very special knowledge and experience of walking the trail. Especially notable are the contributions of three groups of Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, helping to explain why 'an insider guide' is the sub-title.

One group comprises those who have led stretches of the Cotswold Way guided walks the Wardens offer. It's their pre-Covid-19 notes, last used in 2019, that form the basis of Chapters 3 to 12 of the book.



The involvement of the second and third groups is more recent. The second comprises the Cotswold Way Wardens who are responsible for regularly patrolling a stretch of the trail and the third those who led stages of the relay walk held to celebrate the (covid-postponed) 50th anniversary of the Cotswold Way in 2021. At the time of the relay, in September 2021, both groups not only generously read and commented on draft chapters, but also added suggestions for improvement, along with quirky anecdotes and stories that would help to put a smile on people's faces. The final outcome, therefore, is the product of the knowledge and experience of a great many people who know and love the Cotswold Way.

The book's aims

This book also has very distinctive aims. Yes, it has maps to help you put things into perspective. But, no, they're not designed to give you step by step directions - follow the many well-positioned waymarks to follow the route and take an Ordnance Survey map as you would for any serious walking in the UK. In a nutshell, as well as extolling the unique virtues of the trail and explaining why it's a 'must do' walk, the main aim is to help you get the very most out of the walk - to give you an idea of

the main points of interest to look out for, where to get the best views and take photographs, and so on. If you hadn't thought about stepping out on the Cotswold Way, hopefully you will after reading it. If you've decided to walk the trail, or just a section or sections - perhaps one of its Circular Walks - it will add considerably to your anticipation and enjoyment. If you've already walked on the trail, it will help you to remember the good times you had and, perhaps, whet your appetite to come back to see what you missed.

A second aim, let's not beat around the bush, is to raise money towards the upkeep and improvement of the trail. You might wonder why money is a problem given that the Cotswold Way is a national trail. The simple answer, put bluntly, is that austerity and budget cuts mean that the grant provided by the national government through Natural England is insufficient. A 'Trail Partnership' embracing local authorities is responsible for the path on the ground and keeping it up to the high standards set for National Trails. Trouble is local authorities don't have the wherewithal to make up the difference.

It was in the expectation that things were unlikely to change that, in 2016, a small group of Cotswolds Wardens and Ramblers agreed to take action in their personal capacities. Briefly put, they decided to follow the example of the Friends of the Ridgeway and South West Coast Path Association and set up the Cotswold Way Association (CWA). As already indicated, the CWA is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with the UK Charity Commission: an 'open' membership charity, which anyone can join and contribute to.

Because the challenge of conserving this much loved trail for future generations to enjoy is pretty immense. The restoration and renewal that the CWA funds is more or less a continuous process involving very practical projects such as:

- better waymarking
- supplying information boards
- installing benches (only where appropriate)
- creating steps and installing handrails on steep slopes
- replacing stiles with gates
- installing boardwalks
- tackling erosion

You'll find recent examples of improvement in the illustrations at the end of the chapter.

If you're wondering why erosion is such a problem, remember that the Cotswold Way's popularity attracts some 200,000 walkers a year, causing significant damage to the trail's surface. This is especially true at pinch-points such as stiles and kissing gates. Also, it isn't enough just to put down hardcore or a bundle of stones if you are trying to look after a fantastic National Trail in a lovely national landscape with complicated geology. For a significant part of the route, the subsoil below the spring line is soft clays. These 'puddle' wonderfully under walkers' feet, forming a soft, deep, watertight soup into which any amount of stone seems to disappear in a matter of months - it really is a case of pouring money down the drain!

As the illustrations at the Chapter's end show, Cotswold Warden experiments have suggested the best solution is to install a layer of geotext material to help prevent the base being washed away,

along with honeycomb ecogrid to hold the stone, followed by a topping. Digging a 'french' drain also helps.

It goes without saying that considerable and ongoing resources are required to look after a national treasure like the Cotswold Way. The material costs of restoring ten metres of trail from erosion add up to £300. Those of a three metre boardwalk are around £200 and a kissing gate about £400 plus £75 in materials to make good the area around it - and the Cotswold Way has a couple of hundred or so. If commercial contractors are used on these jobs instead of volunteers, these costs can be more than doubled.

Some projects can run into thousands of pounds. As you'll see from the photographs at the end of Chapter 9, one such is on Leckhampton Hill above Cheltenham. The project, which was completed in September 2021 with the generous support of the HF Holidays Pathways Fund, now allows ALL users to have access to the hill's escarpment. Practically, it involved re-ramping, smoothing and grading a 2-3 metre wide path on both sides of a gate virtually impassable by a wheelchair or pushchair. Logistically, it meant having to deliver to the site some 150 tonnes of limestone dust and Cotswold stone.

There is a third reason for publishing the book. It is to encourage you, if you can, to become involved in activities supporting the Cotswold Way and other footpaths in the Cotswolds. You could become a member or volunteer or Trustee with the CWA. You could become a Cotswold Warden, patrolling parish footpaths or leading walks or joining one of their regular work parties - an outdoor gym with all-round advantages over the indoor variety even if it will sometimes feel as if you're digging holes just to fill them in!

You can also make a donation, organise a fundraising event on behalf of the CWA or sponsor someone taking part in such an event. You'll find further details of how to do these if you go to the Cotswold Way Association website.

Several options

When thinking about walking the Cotswold Way, people are often given the impression they have just two options: you walk north-south or south-north. Both directions have their supporters. Advocates of south-north reckon it gets better and more exciting the further north you go. Those who say north-south disagree and point to the benefit of walking into rather than out of the Georgian city of Bath.

There's never likely to be a consensus about the direction to walk the Cotswold Way. It's a magnificent walk whether you walk N-S from Chipping Campden to Bath or S-N the other way. And if it's something that bugs you, why not do it both ways for different experiences?

Either way, you don't have to walk the trail from end to end in one go. You can sign up for an organised walk along it with the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens in ten monthly day walks. You can leave your car at Winchcombe or Cold Ashton near Bath and then a bus will take you to the start of each stage of the walk and return you back at the end of the day. The Cotswold Way Association website has the details.

You can also consider walking the trail in bite sized segments independently. One of the CWA Trustees, Harvey Mattinson, breaks it down into sixteen 6-7 mile sections based on available parking.

Again, you'll find details of his Cotswold Way in Stages on the CWA website.

If your main interest is to make the most of what it has to offer rather than being fussed about 'doing' the Cotswold Way, there's a serious alternative to an 'end-to-end' approach. It is to follow in the footsteps of what more and more walkers are taking: it is to target the impressive network of Cotswold Way Circular Walks along the 102 mile route. As you will see from the map below, there are no fewer than twelve such walks, plus two friendship trails, all hugely popular. Putting your energies into these walks means you will be able to focus on the very best that the trail has to offer. You can download maps of all the Cotswold Way Circular Walks from the National Trails website. There are also brief details of the walks at the end of the relevant stage chapters in this book.

The National Trail website also has a few suggested itineraries for those who do not have the time to walk the whole trail. Some of these are organised by walking companies. Cotswold Walks and Hike & Bikes, who are business members of the CWA, can be recommended.

You might also like to know that the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens run a regular programme of shorter guided walks across the Cotswolds, many of which will involve sections of the national trail. Typically, they are between four and ten miles and will introduce you to the very best the Cotswolds have to offer. You'll find details in the *Cotswold Lion* free magazine published twice a year and available in TICs, libraries, hotels, shops and many other outlets. Alternatively, visit the Cotswold National Landscape website for it.

Practical information

The National Trail Website is the best place to start for practical information. It has an interactive map covering the trail, including a distance measurer, points of interest, accommodation and services. Answers are given to various questions and a GPX file of the trail can be downloaded. The Cotswold National Landscape website provides loads of information on the Cotswolds and how to explore this valuable protected landscape. If you would like to whet your appetite for walking the trail or need to check on a few locations, then why not try the Cotswold National Trail on Google Street View to be found there. It's a bit clunky but is worth a look.

If you are looking for a traditional directions-giving guide, the following are currently available from either the National Trails Shop or other retailers:

- **Cotswold Way** by Anthony Burton. This is the official national trail guidebook and provides route details and general information on points of interest. It's written from north to south.
- **Walking the Cotswold Way** by Kev Reynolds. This is a Cicerone guide and also covers the route and general information. It's written in both directions. Latest edition (2021) has up-to-date information on accommodation.
- **Cotswold Way Trailblazer Guide** by Tricia & Bob Hayne and Henry Stedman. In addition to detailed route information this also provides reasonably up to date information on services as well as accommodation. It's written from north to south.

Also valuable are:

- **Archaeological Walking Guide to the Cotswold Way** by Tim Copeland. This is a specialist guidebook which focuses on the trail's historical features.
- **Slow Travel - The Cotswolds** by Caroline Mills. This is an excellent general guide to the Cotswolds with lots of suggestions for places to visit off the normal tourist routes.

As for maps, the Cotswold Way is marked on the 1:50,000 Landranger OS maps (sheet numbers N-S -151, 163, 162 and 172) and the 1:25,000 Explorer OS maps (sheet numbers from N to S - 205, OL45, 179, 168, 167 and 155). The Cotswold Way Harvey Map is particularly useful as it is a strip map on one sheet covering the whole trail and the Cotswold Way. A-Z Adventure Atlas also has the whole trail at 1:25,000 in book format. Both are available from the National Trails Shop.

If you're opting for the end-to-end approach, your No 1 priority is to book your accommodation in advance as places to stay are limited on some sections. *Walking the Cotswold Way* and the *Cotswold Way Trailblazer Guide* are your best sources of information. In addition to detailed route information, they offer a wealth of reasonably up to date information on accommodation and where to eat and drink along the trail, including local public transport arrangements. You can also check on their website for any significant changes. If you are looking for a place to stay which is an easy day's walk



from Bath, Hill Farm, a business member of the CWA in Cold Ashton, is to be recommended.

The good news is that you don't have to carry a heavy pack to walk the Cotswold Way. Luggage transfer is available through several companies listed on the National Trails website. One of them is Cotswold Walkers Transport Services, which is a business member of the CWA. They will also handle taxi transfers along the trail. You'll find direct links to the most important sources of information about the practicalities in the e-book version.

For those thinking of any of the 'Cotswold Way in Stages' approaches, your priority is to plan your parking. This is something the traditional guides very rarely mention. In this case, you'll find suggestions at the end of each of the ten stage chapters. You're strongly recommended to have a couple in mind, just in case you pick the wrong day for your first choice!

One final thing. The Cotswold Way is a proper walk. Please treat it with the respect it deserves. Don't see it as just a challenge to be walked in quick time. Wear proper footwear and clothing. Take a walking pole for balance - the trail can get slippery when it's been raining - and a phone in case of emergencies. Carry plenty of liquid, especially in hot summer, to keep you hydrated.

The rest of the book

At the end of this chapter, you'll find illustrations of the types of improvement being funded by the CWA including gates, seats, notice boards, handrails and steps, along with an impression of what's involved in tackling erosion. The next chapter gives you background information on the Cotswolds that are the setting for the Cotswold Way - in particular, their geology, grasslands and woodland, settlement pattern, distinctive architecture and footpath network. There follow ten chapters each dealing with one of the typically ten mile or so stages that feature on the Cotswold Way walks led by Cotswold Wardens every year. Most walkers should find the ten miles or so achievable in a day. The sequence, South-North, is in line with Mark Richards' original *The Cotswold Way* and the editor's own experience of walking the trail. The parking information will also enable you to adjust the stages to suit - for example, if you want to spend more time in places like Winchcombe or Broadway.

You'll see that each of the stage chapters highlights a major theme, as well as drawing attention to the main points of interest, of attraction and of beauty, and of views. You will also find anecdotes, quirky stories and points of detail that will help you to gain a deeper appreciation than is normally possible (e.g. how the man responsible for building Dyrham House came up with the wherewithal, why J.K. Rowling so named the Dursley family in her Harry Potter books, how it is that a 'Cromwell's Stone' turns up in the middle of nowhere above Painswick, and why the Stanway Estate has strong connections with characters as different as Thomas á Becket and Peter Pan).

To enable you to put the trail into perspective and highlight the features close to it, each stage chapter includes a map drawn by Bob Child, a graphic designer whose Pear Tree Studios are based in the Cotswolds. Included, too, are copies of some of Mark Richard's wonderful original pen and ink drawings that first appeared in his *The Cotswold Way. The complete walker's guide* nearly forty years ago. As well as being gems in their own right, they help to remind us of that great tradition of walk books that Alfred Wainwright began with his famous introductions to the Lake District's fells.



A wooden kissing gate at Stumps Cross near Stanway



A restored seat near Dyrham originally installed in 1977



An information board on Selsley Common



A handrail and steep steps near Haresfield Beacon



A 45 metre long handrail on a slippery path near Weston



Tackling erosion - start with a 'french' drain



Install geotext and ecogrid



Make ready for topping