

# The Cotswold Way (Notes) 1

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**Ted Thornton's notes below may be useful in planning photo-outings for our project.**

These notes apply to the specific part of the Cotswold Way with which I am familiar from leading walks and on work parties with the Cotswold Wardens, namely that in South District from Ryeford, near Stonehouse to Horton, near Hawkesbury Upton. I hope this will prove useful in coordinating the project and in establishing points of interest, and possible places of access for the less active, but I would strongly recommend the active to set-off and explore. I will try and indicate, as well as interest points directly on the Cotswold Way in South District, places I know of special interest a short distance off the Cotswold Scarp, even if this means a steep descent to the west and a return climb, for instance, Frocester Tithe Barn and Hawkesbury Church. Starting from the north:

## Ryeford

Looking north is Doverow Hill, overlooking Stonehouse, an example of an enormous landslip. At Ryeford is the large Stanley Mill, the River Frome and the Stroudwater Canal where the Cotswold Way immediately branches. One branch goes south past King's Stanley (King's Head pub) and climbs steeply through Middleyard and Penn Wood to the Cotswold Scarp, with both villages providing plenty of examples of typical hillside architecture of the Stroud area, and including chapels and the fine church at nearby Leonard Stanley. The footpath above Middleyard provides examples of Warden's work in the form of steep stepped and revetted footpaths defining the long distance trail. The other branch of the Cotswold Way proceeds eastwards along the Frome valley, with access (when restored) to the canal and to Ebley Mill and almost to Dudbridge where a track climbs south across the fields to Selsley.

## Selsley

The church, All Saints, 1862 by G.F. Bodley was built for Mill Owner Sir S.S. Marling, who lived next door at Stanley Park, and is well known for its saddleback tower and famous for the stained glass windows of William Morris, Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti, Burne-Jones. The views across the Severn Vale are good here and get better on the steep ascent of Selsley Common, culminating at The Toots, a Neolithic Long Barrow. Doverow Hill and the Cotswold Scarp towards Painswick are visible on a clear day, and in the Vale, the Arlingham Peninsular, Sharpness and Berkeley, while on the horizon May Hill, the Malverns, the Forest of Dean, and possibly the Black Mountains, Hay Bluff and the Sugarloaf at Abergavenny. The villages previously mentioned nestle in the foreground.

There are several disused quarries on the common, one of which has been partly cleared to expose the underlying rock strata of the Inferior Oolite, while another appears to be used by young folk to write and draw on the ground in small stones. The common is grazed, important for this area of unimproved limestone grassland, and the wardens clear scrub on the lower slopes, and the reward comes in the spring when parts are covered with early purple orchids. Later, in June in some places appear common spotted, fragrant and pyramid orchids while in secret spots may be found the shy twayblade and bee orchid, a flower photographers paradise to be searched for (parking on the Common).

The two footpath routes meet in Penn Wood, and the Cotswold Way can then be followed for 2 miles to Nymphsfield Long Barrow. A large section here has been revetted by the wardens, raising the long distance path, some wardens would say, 'to easy walking motorway standard'!

This section is well wooded, with open sections and views of the Vale, and sometimes gliders from the nearby club are seen. There is another Neolithic long barrow at Buckholt Wood just before Nympsfield. Our ancient ancestors must also have found it scenic. The car park at Nympsfield is often busy, and as well as a scenic viewpoint has a Nature Reserve which includes old quarry rock faces.

Only a short distance away is access (with some walking) to Woodchester Park and famous Mansion, probably well known to the club, but less well known is that the National Trust, with a lot of help from the wardens is clearing extensive areas of planted forest to recreate the distant vistas, including the artificial lakes of the original park. Nearby Nympsfield village is a pretty spot with pub.

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Continuing south for 1 mile to Uley Bury, still in woodland yet another Neolithic long barrow is passed, the well known Hetty Pegler's Tump and at the Bury is another car park giving access to the well known Iron Age Hill Fort. This is a fine specimen with a well defined ditch and rampart with superb views across the Severn Vale into Wales, and, deep in the beautiful valley to the scenic Cotswold village of Uley and nearby Owlpen Manor. Uley Bury has recently had the ramparts cleared of scrub, with help from the wardens and by arrangement with the landowners and Cotswold Conservation Board's Grassland Officer to reduce erosion and the land within has been returned to grazing to restore the limestone grassland. Uley is well worth the effort to visit, in spite of the steep descent, as it has remains of its water mills and cloth weaving past and the present Uley Brewery.

From the Bury is a steep descent and then climb to Cam Long Down, a long scenic ridge which can also be accessed from a car park to the west. To the south Downham Hill with its fine rim of mature trees has recently had public access negotiated. From the Long Down is a descent to Dursley, another interesting small Cotswold Town, long connected with Listers diesel engines, followed by the ascent of Stinchcombe Hill. The edge of the hill is extensively wooded, but the top is maintained as a conservation area and golf course. There is access and a public car park in the centre, not to be confused with that of the golf course, and the Cotswold Way follows the whole rim, about 2 miles. The local Conservators, sometimes helped by the Wardens clear the edges of scrub, maintaining a spectacular habitat of grassland and wild flowers including wild orchids. On the western rim is the spectacular viewpoint of Drakestone Point again looking across the Severn Vale, but now taking in Berkeley and Oldbury Power Stations, and , to the south, both Bridges.

From Stinchcombe there is a sculpture trail, before making the steep descent into the Vale, past Stancombe Park, and an ascent to North Nibley, from which there is a very steep further ascent to the Tyndale Monument, which opens up a more southerly view across the Vale. The field behind the Monument is good for Early Purple Orchids in the late spring, and the nearby quarry for orchids in June. Below, to the north is the attractive valley of Waterley Bottom, worth a visit in it's own right. Continuing south on the Cotswold Way, past Nibley Knoll is Westridge Wood, an area of dense woodland for about a mile, in which is hidden Brackenbury Ditches, another Iron Age Hill Fort, the trees in whose ditch and ramparts are being cleared by the Wardens, to open them up for future study.

At the end of the woods is a small car park and access point which route to the south soon drops down to Wotton Hill and the well known viewpoint from it's circle of trees. From here the route descends steeply along a stepped and revetted path into Wotton-under-Edge, yet another photogenic town. From Wotton there are footpaths above the town with spectacular views of the town and its well known Strip Lynchets, and, if you know where to find them fine Pyramid Orchids. Leaving the town the Cotswold Way follows the stream up Tyley Bottom, through the picturesque hamlets of Holywell and Coombe, and then ascending Blackquarries Hill to the Cotswold Scarp.

Here a diversion to the National Trust Property of Newark Park is essential, and its snowdrop display, together with Ozleworth Park and it's garden, with early daffodils and rare six-sided Norman Church overlooking the beautiful valley of Ozleworth Bottom. Returning to the Cotswold Way, there is another Neolithic Long Barrow at Blackquarries, and in a few hundred yards, with an extensive view to the south the path turns sharply left and contours along a

horseshoe-shaped ridge before descending through woodland to Wortley. The Ozleworth Stream is crossed, where interesting diversions in both directions lead to picturesque old water mills and a mill pond. Alderley has some interesting architecture and a folly high on the hillside. The Ozleworth Valley (Bottom) is referred to by the Cotswold Author J.R. Lewis as one of the most delightful of Cotswold's frayed edges.

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The route from Alderley now follows a long, narrow, steep sided, beautiful, secret and floodable valley to Lower Kilcote, containing a number of old watermills. The largest of these, Newmills, can be seen from above on the Cotswold Way, or can be accessed by footpath. Leaving Alderley, look on the left for the modest memorial to Brian Barry, a former Cotswold Warden from nearby Hillesley. The valley runs for almost 2 miles, the second half having an access road following, and sometimes flooded by, the stream. Half way along is a particularly beautiful, but often muddy side valley, climbing steeply to the north-east to the pretty village of Tresham, perched precariously on the edge of the scarp. This is also the route of the Monarch's Way long distance path which here joins the Cotswold Way for about 6 miles, as far as Little Sodbury. Tresham can be accessed by road from Alderley and the A46. At Lower Kilcote the Cotswold Way turns south-west and slowly climbs Long Coombe, a mixture of wood and open, which can yield both autumn colours and sunset, before arriving at the Somerset Monument and the Beaufort Arms at Hawkesbury Upton.

A diversion down the scarp to the tiny hamlet of Hawkesbury is worth while for the fine, large church, and diversions north of Hawkesbury Upton down the steep sided valley to Upton Coombe, Hannel Bottom and Small Coombe yield wild flowers. South from the pond the Cotswold Way runs along the open scarp with views to the west and south and the bridges become clear, but in addition the Great Ridgeway to the east becomes visible, notably the 3 clumps of trees on Hackpen Hill. This appears to be a unique place in that turning on the spot gives views from deep into Wales to the Wessex Downland. (Does anyone know another such spot?) A mile down the path is the ancient and historical National Trust House of Horton Court, which takes the route out of South District.