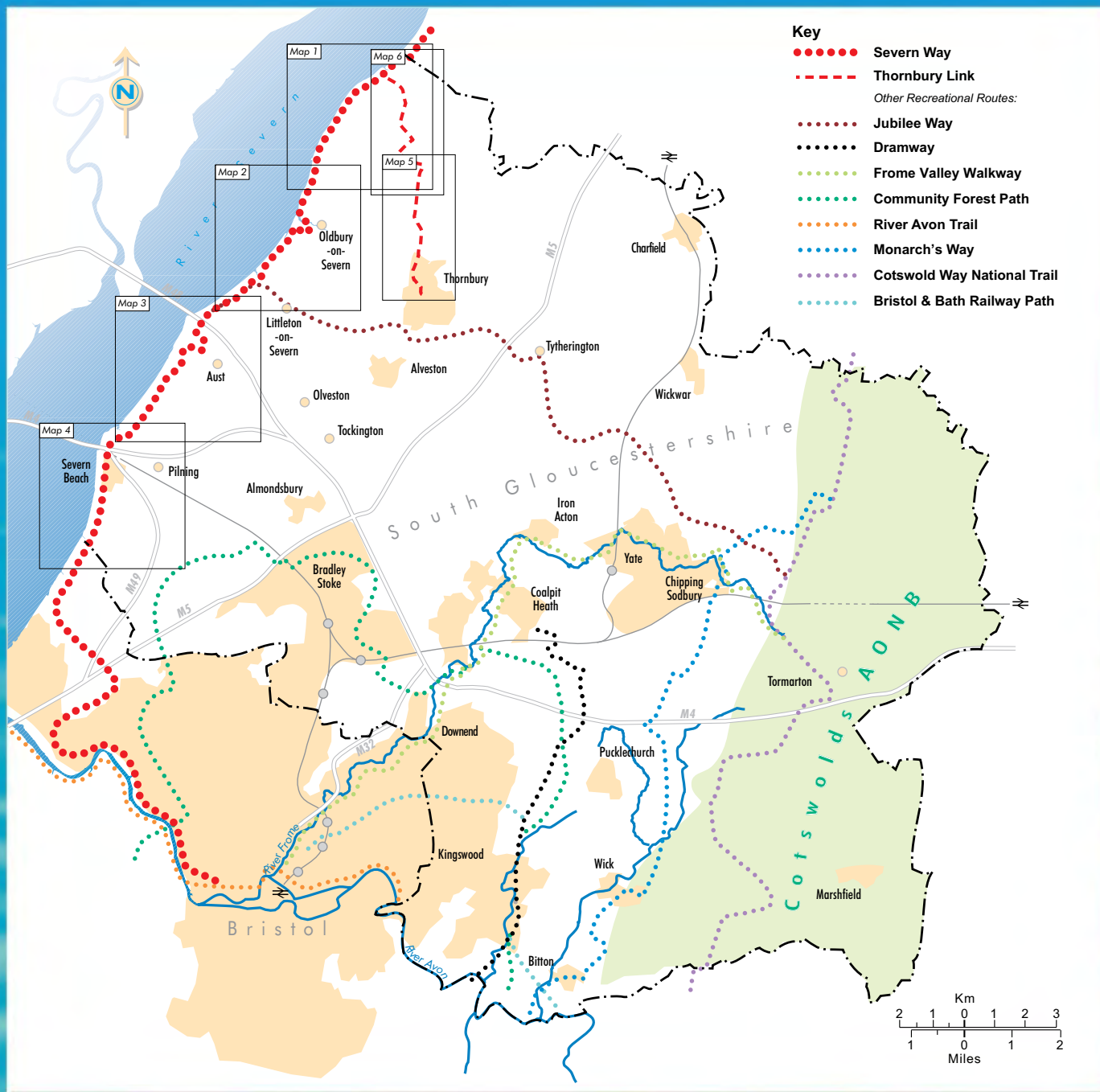


*An atmospheric  
walk with  
vast, open  
skies and the  
smell of the sea*



# Severn Way





## Bus Services

### Rail and Bus Services serving the South Gloucestershire Section of the Severn Way

Rail or Bus Stops near the Severn Way	Service
Aust Motorway Roundabout	X11 Bristol - Chepstow X14 Bristol - Newport
Thornbury Health Centre	309 Bristol - Thornbury 310 Bristol - Dursley
Thornbury Health Centre, Lower Morton, Rockhampton, Nupdown, Oldbury, Shepperdine	613 Oldbury - Thornbury
Thornbury Health Centre, Aust Motorway Roundabout, Aust Village, Northwick, Severn Beach Station	614 Severn Beach - Thornbury
Thornbury Health Centre, Castle School	615 Thornbury Town Service
Thornbury Health Centre	622 Cribbs Causeway - Thornbury Chipping Sodbury
Redwick, Severn Beach Station	625 UWE - Bristol Parkway - Severn Beach
Thornbury Health Centre	201 Thornbury - Wotton-under-Edge - Gloucester
Thornbury Fire Station	207 Thornbury - Berkley - Gloucester
Severn Beach Station	Train Bristol Temple Meads - Severn Beach



For details on service frequency and days of operation phone Traveline on **0871 200 22 33**. (calls cost 10p per minute from a landline) or plan your journey at [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)

Services are subject to change so you should always check with Traveline before setting off.

Certain services are provided with financial support from South Gloucestershire Council.

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## *Key for Route Maps*

	Route
	Motorway
	A Road
	B Road
	Minor Road
	Lane
	Track
	Railway
	Footpath
	Field Boundaries
	Public House
	Church, Chapel
	Telephone
	Buildings
	Ponds, Streams, Rivers
	Built-up Areas
	Woodland
	Local Nature Reserve Sites (LNR)
	Trees
	Viewpoint
	Station
	Golf Course
	Museum
	Information Centre
	Bus Stops

# Introduction

**T**he **Severn Walk** is a long distance walk of around 337km (210 miles) that follows the river from its source at Plynlimon in the Welsh mountains to its mouth in the Severn

Estuary. This booklet describes the 21km (12.5 mile) section of the Severn Way which lies in South Gloucestershire, exploring the estuary and lower reaches of the River Severn from Severn Beach to Hill, just north of Oldbury Power Station.



The Thornbury Link is a route joining the Severn Way with the market town of Thornbury, and is included in this booklet. Other footpaths that join the Severn Way are also shown on the maps, to help you plan circular walks if required.



*Tidal salt marsh and mud flats at Northwick Warth  
© Sharper Image Photography*



# The Severn Walk

## What kind of walking to expect

This is comfortable walking, along the lower reaches of the River Severn and its estuary. There are no steep inclines and much of the route is on top of the river bank, with wonderful wide open views over the river to the Forest of Dean and up the Severn Vale towards the Cotswold Hills. However, the route can be chilly as it is open to the winds that often blow up the Bristol Channel from the Atlantic Ocean, so make sure that you have enough warm clothes!

The river is tidal in this section, and can be liable to flooding at high tides and after heavy rain. Keep to the way-marked route and avoid walking out onto any of the mud and sand banks, especially at low tide, as they can conceal hidden gulleys and quicksand.

## Public transport, inns and cafés

This section of the Severn Way is well served by public transport. There is a regular train service to Severn Beach from Bristol Temple Meads ([www.severnbeachline.org](http://www.severnbeachline.org)) and a network of bus services serve the towns and villages along the Severn Vale. More details of public transport services are given on the inside back cover of this booklet. There are various inns and cafés and these are all marked on the route maps enclosed.

## Sharing the Severn estuary – its wildlife and you

The Severn Estuary has over 50,000 winter visitors from all over the world – they are all birds! Disturbance from some land and water based recreation can affect over wintering birds. They are particularly vulnerable when the weather is cold. Disturbing them means they have difficulty feeding at a time when they most need to.



You can help protect our winter visitors and encourage them to return by:

- Keeping to public footpaths.
- Keeping dogs under close control (especially on salt-marsh and coastal areas where birds are feeding).
- Avoiding sites which you know are used by birds at certain times of the year and states of tide.
- Taking your litter home.
- Keeping noise to a minimum, both on shore and on the water (birds are sensitive to noise and disturbance).
- Avoiding damage to saltmarsh.
- Always following your activity's national codes of conduct where available.

Enjoy the estuary, and please be considerate about the wildlife you share with it. If you are interested in the wildlife, or any other estuary issues, please contact the Severn Estuary Partnership. Tel 029 20 874713, or go to [www.severnestuary.net/sep](http://www.severnestuary.net/sep)



## *An exhilarating walk where the river meets the sea...*

### **The magnificent Severn**

The majestic Severn is Britain's longest river and forms part of the border between England and Wales. It's a huge, powerful river, over two miles wide in places, and is known locally as the Severn Sea. It really does have a maritime feel about it, with the smell of the sea, gulls calling and pieces of seaweed along the banks. The river looks very different according to the state of the tide. At high tide, it's full to the brim, and is often choppy with waves breaking on the shore. At low tide vast stretches of sand and mud are revealed, gleaming with water and teeming with thousands of feeding waders and wildfowl in the winter months.

For all its awesome beauty, the Severn can be a treacherous river as well. It often looks slow moving and calm, but the reality is very different - despite its impressive width, parts of the river are fast-flowing with strong currents, quicksand and shifting shallows. On a rising tide the river fills at a tremendous rate, rising more than two metres in under an hour in places.



*View towards the first Severn Suspension Bridge*

### **The lonely sea and the sky**

The River Severn is only a few miles away from the thriving city of Bristol, but it's a completely different world out by the river and estuary, with open skies, the wind blowing in from the Atlantic and hundreds of birds for company. It is a landscape of contrasts, with the two engineering masterpieces of the Severn Bridges, tall cliffs and secret salt marshes, power stations and historic inns, isolated farms. The Severn Way is an attractive walk at any time of the year, but it is perhaps at its most exhilarating in winter, when low sunlight gives the water a silvery sheen and flocks of wild birds slice through the huge skies overhead.

### **Trading ports and trows**

At one time, the Severn was Britain's busiest river, full of boats carrying people and cargo up, down and across the river. The ancient ports of Chepstow and Newport were bustling and busy in medieval times, as was Bristol, which was the major port on the estuary long before it began its lucrative trade with the New World in the fifteenth century. Severn trows were one of the most common boats, specially designed for the sailing conditions of the Severn, with a flat bottom to let them sail over sandbanks if necessary. An image of a Severn trow is depicted on the Severn Way waymarker.



*Way Marker*

## A powerful river

**T**he Severn is an extremely powerful river, with hundreds of millions of litres of water, carrying huge amounts of silt as it moves downstream. The estuary has the highest tidal range in Europe (and second highest in the world) with a difference in height of more than 11 metres between high and low tide. The lower reaches of the river are strongly tidal, right up to Gloucester, over 30 miles upstream of the Severn Bridge.

### Water energy

People have been thinking of ways of using the power of the river and the estuary for many years.

A Severn Barrage was first suggested back in the 1840's, to raise the water level of the estuary to benefit shipping. More recently the Government Department of Energy and Climate Change has begun to investigate harnessing the tidal power of the estuary to generate electricity. No decisions have been made yet, but a series of detailed feasibility studies are being carried out to assess the likely impact of the proposals on estuary wildlife and ecology, the local communities and the region's wider economy and environment.

The two nuclear power stations at Oldbury and Berkeley (now closed) have also made use of the river, although in a different way. They use river water to cool the steam from the turbines that generate electricity.



*Oldbury Power Station*

### Severn Bore

The Severn Bore is a tidal wave that makes its way up the river several times a month. It happens during the highest or spring tides, when the water from the Bristol Channel is funnelled up the river by the incoming tide. The rising tide sweeps up the lower reaches of the river as a wall of water, overpowering the river water flowing downstream, and forming a large wave that rushes noisily upstream. The height of the wave, or bore, depends on the width and depth of the river, as well as the height and power of the incoming tide, and the weather. The tapering shape of the estuary and the large tidal range makes the Severn Bore the largest in Britain. Bores over 2m high have been recorded, travelling upstream at speeds up to 12mph, depending on local conditions. Small-scale bores occur throughout the year, but the largest ones only happen on about 25 days of the year, peaking in March and September at the time of the spring and autumn equinoxes.



*Surfing the Severn Bore (Tim Cooper)*

The best places to see the Bore are further upstream at Newnham, Minsterworth and Stonebench, where the estuary narrows as it approaches

Gloucester. The bore now regularly attracts large groups of surfers who compete to see who can ride the wave the furthest. To find out more, and to check the Bore timetable, go to [www.severn-bore.co.uk](http://www.severn-bore.co.uk).



## *A river of passage*

**L**ike all rivers, the Severn is a river of passage. People have travelled over and along the river for thousands of years, using boats, ferries, steamboats and paddle-steamers as well as the two motorway crossings over the Severn.



*Severn Tunnel entrance at Severn Beach*

There is even a route under the river, along the Severn Tunnel that carries passenger and goods trains between Bristol and South Wales.

### **Teeming with wildlife**

The Severn is famous for the passage of wildlife, especially fish and birds, which use the estuary as a feeding station on their annual migration routes. The huge mudflats, gravel beds and sand bars of the Welsh Grounds and Bedwin, Oldbury and Shepperdine Sands are some of the most important feeding grounds in Britain. During the winter, there can be huge numbers of ducks, geese and wader birds feeding on millions of burrowing worms and snails that live in the mud of the estuary. The sight and sound of thousands of birds wheeling and turning in the sky as they get ready to settle at a roost is one of the most spectacular sights of the Severn Estuary.

### **Gourmet treats**

Severn salmon and eels have been famous local food delicacies for centuries, and many of the riverside villages have grown as a result of their fishing. Fisheries are known to have existed on the Severn in Saxon times and, down the centuries, a unique fishing tool, known as a putcher, has been used to catch salmon. Putchers are conical baskets, which are set out on the banks of the estuary in winter. As the salmon swim upstream to spawn, the turbulent and muddy water makes it almost impossible for the fish to see and they swim blindly into the open mouths of the putchers and quickly drown as they get wedged in the narrowing basket. The remains of old rows of salmon putchers can be seen at low tide in places, stretching out into the water along the banks of the river.

### **Walking over the river**

Amazingly, the Severn has also been a crossing route for walkers, riders and cattle over the centuries. In the past, there were routes across the river, known mainly to local people, which could be safely navigated on horseback or by wading between the treacherous shifting sandbars and gravel beds. There are stories of the Romans fording the river, as well as tales of cattle being herded over the river at low tide, to shorten their journey to market. Nowadays it is much safer and easier to use the walkway on the old Severn Bridge, which offers walkers and cyclists a dry and spectacular route over the river! There is no path or cycleway on the second Severn bridge.





## SECTION 1 *(See Map 1)*

### *South Gloucestershire Border to Oldbury Power Station*

**Oldbury Power Station** has been in operation since 1967. It's a Magnox station and its twin reactors produce enough electricity to supply a city about one and a half times the size of Bristol. Like most power stations, Oldbury is built next to a large water supply, because it needs huge amounts of water to cool the steam from the turbines. When it's running at full power, Oldbury needs about 70 million litres of water per hour. There's a large tidal reservoir on the eastern bank of the river to make sure that there's a continuous supply of water available for the station, whatever the state of the tide. You can see the triangular-shaped reservoir at low tide, but at high tide it is covered by water.

**Oldbury Power Station Nature Trail** is 2 km long and links with the Severn Way. It gives a vivid and living introduction to the wide range of wildlife which thrive around the grounds of the Power Station. There are nature trail leaflets available in the car park by the Power Station and interpretative boards placed around the trail. The area of wildlife habitat comprises grass meadows, hedgerows, reed beds, an orchard, freshwater ponds and silt lagoons. **Please keep to the marked paths and stay off the lagoon surface.**



*Oldbury Power Station and silt lagoons*

### **The Windbound at Shepperdine**

The former Windbound inn got its name from a traditional mariner's excuse. Severn bargees, having had a few drinks too many, tended to blame local weather conditions for their reluctance to get back to work on their boats.

Their habit of telling their employers that they were 'wind-bound' was so widespread that the inn changed its name from the New Inn to the Windbound. The inn is now closed and a private residence.



*Saltmarsh at Northwick Warb*



*Lapwing (Paul Bowerman)*



# South Gloucestershire Border to Oldbury Power Station



View to Oldbury  
Power Station & the  
Tidal Reservoir







## SECTION 2 *(See Maps 2 & 3)*

### *Oldbury Power Station to Severn Bridge Services*

#### **Oldbury-on-Severn**

This former salmon fishing village is tucked away more than half a mile from the Severn, between two monuments to 1960's technology - Oldbury Power Station and the original older Severn Suspension Bridge. The names of the two inns, The Ship and The



*The Ship Inn at Oldbury-on-Severn*

Anchor, reflect the village's long history as a busy Severn port, when men from the coastal villages manned the fishing boats and trows which

plied their trade around the estuary and along the river. The village is at the end of a small inlet called Oldbury Pill, which is now the base for the local sailing club. St Arilda's church is separate from the village, built in a prominent position on the top of Cow Hill. The church was whitewashed in the eighteenth century, to serve as a landmark for sailors on the Severn.

#### **Across the river....**

The site of the first Severn Suspension Bridge has been a crossing point for centuries, linking England with Wales. It's a natural crossing place as the river is significantly narrower here with the Beachley peninsula jutting out into the river. But it's still a treacherous stretch of water, with powerful tides creating rough water over shifting sandbanks and mudflats, making it

a potentially dangerous crossing. Over the centuries numerous boats are recorded as being lost, often with the loss of all those on board. Over the years there have been all kinds of boats crossing here, from Severn trows to paddle boats and steam ferries. The most recent regular service was the Aust Ferry, which carried cars, people, cargo and cattle up until 1966, when the suspension bridge opened.

**The first Severn Suspension Bridge** was opened in 1966 to replace the Aust ferry. This elegant toll bridge has a 988m central span between twin towers that rise 130m above the swirling waters of the Severn. At the time it was built, it was one of the longest suspension bridges in the world and was unique in its design with slender, widely spaced suspension wires hanging in V-form to give extra rigidity. The number of vehicles crossing the Severn increased dramatically during the 1970's and 1980's, causing congestion and delay, and, when it became clear that one bridge could not cope with the increasing volume of traffic, the decision was made to build the Second Severn Crossing.



*Sunset over the Second Severn Crossing  
(Paul Bowerman)*





# Oldbury Power Station to Severn Bridge Services



*The Anchor Inn &  
St Ailda's church  
at Oldbury*





### SECTION 3 (See Maps 3 & 4)

## Severn Bridge Services to New Passage

### A second bridge



*Second Severn Crossing*

The Second Severn Crossing was opened in 1996 and carries the busy M4 motorway, linking

London and southern England with South Wales. The bridge is the first major structure in the world to be built with full wind shielding for traffic. This innovative design protects vehicles from the strong winds that often blow along the estuary and allows the bridge to stay open in weather conditions that make it necessary to close the original Severn Bridge to high-sided vehicles. The Second Severn Crossing cost £330m and was completed in just four years. At peak times over 1400 people were working on the project.

### Hundreds and thousands of birds



*Little Egret (Paul Bowerman)*

The Severn Estuary is of international importance for its wildlife, especially for wading birds and wildfowl.

At low tide, vast areas of mud, sand and rock are exposed, and these are excellent feeding grounds for

all sorts of waterfowl, especially in winter when there can be many thousands of waders feeding on millions of invertebrates living in the mud and sands. Most of the birds are shore feeders, with dunlin, knot and shelduck being the most common, though more exotic visitors have begun to arrive in recent years, including egrets. Find out more about the birds of the Severn estuary by going to [www.severnsidebirds.co.uk](http://www.severnsidebirds.co.uk). The estuary is such an important place for wildlife that it is protected by international and national legislation and is designated as a Ramsarsite, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Protection Area.



*Knot (Paul Bowerman)*





## Severn Bridge Services to New Passage



*Aust Cliff*







## SECTION 4 (See Map 4)

### *New Passage to South Gloucestershire/Bristol Border*

#### **Severn Beach - a seaside resort**

Severn Beach is a small town which blossomed in the 1920's as a popular destination for day trippers from Bristol. It was a lively seaside resort with its own fun-fair and open-air swimming pool. Most visitors arrived by train from Bristol, travelling on the line that runs alongside the River Avon through the beautiful Avon Gorge to Avonmouth and on to Severn Beach.

Although the population of Severn Beach has steadily increased, tourism has declined since the 1970's as the increase in car ownership means that tourists travel further afield for their day trips. Today Severn Beach is more of a commuter town, with a seaside atmosphere and impressive views of both Severn bridges and the South Wales coast. The town still offers a range of shops, together with a café and public toilets.



*Storm at Severn Beach (Paul Bowerman)*



*Bird watching on the tidal  
wall Severn Beach*

#### **Severn Trows**



For centuries the trow was the ship of the Severn. These sailing barges were used on the Severn for hundreds of years to transport goods across, up and down the river. They carried a huge range of materials to and from the cities,

towns and villages all along the river, including stone from Chepstow quarries, farm produce from Wales, coal from the Forest of Dean and exotic spices and goods that had been imported into Bristol. Trows were specially designed for river use, with flat-bottoms and rounded bilges so that they could travel on fast flowing water and in shallow water over sandbars if necessary. Their open holds made loading and unloading easy and cargo could be heaped up high, protected by canvas cloths in bad weather. They were in use up until the mid-1800's, but gradually disappeared with the coming of steamboats and tugs and the growth of the railways. But they haven't gone completely; there's one in Chepstow Museum and a popular seventeenth century Bristol pub is called the Llandoger Trow.



*A Severn trow is  
the logo used to  
way-mark the  
Severn Way.*



# New Passage to South Gloucestershire/Bristol Border



*View of the Severn Bridge from New Passage*



*View of flood bank at New Passage*



## *The Thornbury Link*

**T**he **Thornbury Link** follows way-marked footpaths and quiet country lanes between the Severn Way and the charming market town of Thornbury. The 7km/4 mile long route passes through an attractive rural landscape with isolated dairy farms surrounded by old orchards and pastures. Thornbury is on slightly higher ground than the farmland between the Severn and the town, which makes it easy to see St Mary's Church and Thornbury Castle as prominent landmarks along much of the route.

The Thornbury Link joins the northern end of Thornbury Streamside Walk, which leads into the town centre.



*Thornbury Castle & Thornbury Farmers Market*



## *Thornbury Tourist Information Centre to Rockhampton Rhine*

### **Thornbury markets**

Although Thornbury is only 4 miles from the banks of the Severn, agriculture has been more important in the growth of the town. During late medieval times, Thornbury was an important centre for producing woollen cloth, and, like many of its neighbouring towns in the Cotswolds, its large parish church, St. Mary's, reflects the economic wealth of this period. The church is next to Thornbury Castle, another Tudor building that was built at this prosperous time. In many ways Thornbury is a typical bustling English market town, with an attractive mix of historic houses, coaching inns and shops from Georgian and Victorian times lining the main streets in the town centre. Thornbury continues to be a successful and thriving town, with a popular Farmers Market now held on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month providing an opportunity for people to buy seasonal produce direct from local producers. For more information of local food initiatives in South Gloucestershire, go to [www.southgloslocalfood.org](http://www.southgloslocalfood.org)

### **Rockhampton Rhine**

Rockhampton Rhine is one of the main ditches draining water from the parishes of Rockhampton, Hill and Oldbury-on-Severn. It takes water from the higher-lying land to the east down to Oldbury Naite, where it joins the main rhine from Thornbury and passes through the village into Oldbury Pill. The rhines are wonderful wildlife corridors, offering food and shelter to all sorts of aquatic plants and animals including ducks, water voles, small fish and even otters.







# Thornbury Tourist Information Centre to Rockhampton Rhine



Rockhampton Rhine



View to the Cotswolds



## Rockhampton Rhine to Severn Way



### Cheese and rhines

Dairy farming is the main kind of agriculture on the rich, alluvial soils of the Severn Vale, and the whole area is famous for its cider apples and cheeses,

especially farm-produced Double Gloucester cheese. This is a traditional rural landscape, with isolated farms surrounded by fertile, low-lying fields and pastures bordered by an intricate network of ditches, known locally as rhines. The rhines help to drain water from the soils and this is important as all the low-lying land close to the River Severn is prone to flooding, especially during the winter months, when the river is swollen with rain water from the Welsh mountains. There was serious flooding in 1998 and 2000, when the Severn burst its banks and many fields were under water for several weeks.

### Ancient routes and markers

There are several green lanes and historic drovers roads criss-crossing the countryside around Rockhampton, Hill and Shepperdine. In the days before vans and lorries, these lanes and roads were important for farmers as routes to walk cattle to the local markets. Longpool Lane, which heads east from the footpath, is one of these old routes. It leads towards Bevington and farmers would then have taken their cattle on to Berkeley. White House is a navigation marker, to help sailors navigate the channels of the Severn. Boats travelling on the river manoeuvre so that White House and the nearby navigation light are lined up with another navigation light on the far shore. (See Map 1 for location of White House)



*The White House*



## *Additional information*

### **Links with other promoted walks**

The fold-out map on the front inside cover shows all the promoted recreational path networks in South Gloucestershire. The Severn Way officially ends at Severn Beach, although the walk can be continued along the Severn Link, which follows a route along the River Avon to Bristol. The Severn Way can also be linked with another long distance footpath, Offa's Dyke Path, which starts on the north side of the Severn Bridge in South Wales. For details of promoted walks in your area **Tel: 01454 863646** or go to **www.southglos.gov.uk**

### **Enjoy walking**

Parts of the Severn Way can be muddy at times, especially after rain and during the winter months. Wear sensible shoes or boots and carry a waterproof so that poor weather won't spoil your walk.

### **Ordnance Survey Maps**

O.S. Explorer maps 154 and 167 cover the route of the Severn Way through South Gloucestershire.

### **The Public Rights of Way Team in South**

**Gloucestershire Council** look after the Severn Way as well as undertaking essential maintenance on Public Rights of Way. To report problems, or if you have any queries, please contact **Tel: 01454 863646**, or go to **www.southglos.gov.uk**

### **Severn Way Partnership**

The Severn Way is promoted by the Severn Way Partnership, a partnership of six local authorities and the Environment Agency, working along the route from source to sea. *For more information go to [www.severnway.com](http://www.severnway.com). Copies of 'The Severn Way: the longest riverside walk in Britain' by Terry Marsh and Julie Meech can be obtained from the Environment Agency on receipt of a cheque for £6.95. Their address is The Environment Agency, Hafren House, Welshpool Road, Shelton, Shrewsbury, SY3 8DB*

*We would like to thank local representatives from Parish Councils and the Ramblers Association for their help in preparing this 2nd Edition.*

*Thanks to Paul Bowerman for use of Severnside Wildfowl images*





## **Countryside Code**

### **Advice for the public**

*Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs  
Leave gates and property as you find them  
Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home  
Keep your dog under close control  
Consider other people*

### **Advice for land managers**

*Know your rights, responsibilities  
and liabilities  
Make it easy for visitors to act responsibly  
Identify possible threats to the safety of  
visitors*

*To find out more about the Countryside Code,  
contact [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk) or email  
[openaccess@countryside.gov.uk](mailto:openaccess@countryside.gov.uk)  
or telephone 0845 100 3298*



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