

# EXPLORING THE COTSWOLD WAY NATIONAL TRAIL

NATIONAL TRAIL



*Six Walks in South Gloucestershire*

# CONTENTS



<b>Welcome to the Cotswold Way National Trail</b>	1
Acknowledgements and Information	2
<b>What are the Cotswolds?</b>	5
Historical Snapshots and Human Imprints	6
Working Woodlands	7
Woodland Laws and Rights	8
Coppicing	8
Cotswold Stone	9
Quarries	9
Dry Stone Walls	10
Rivers	10
Transport	11
Shrunken or Deserted settlements	11
<b>WALK 1: The Hawkesbury Trail</b>	13
<b>WALK 2: The Sodburies Trail</b>	21
<b>WALK 3: The Tormarton Trail</b>	29
<b>WALK 4: The Dyrham &amp; Hinton Trail</b>	37
<b>WALK 5: The Marshfield &amp; Cold Ashton Trail</b>	43
<b>WALK 6: The Bath &amp; North Stoke Trail</b>	51
<b>MAP KEY</b>	57



## WELCOME TO THE COTSWOLD WAY

The Cotswold Way National Trail National Trail is one of the 15 National Trails of England and Wales. For around 100 miles it follows quiet paths and lanes between Chipping Campden and Bath, crossing some of the finest and most fascinating scenery in Britain. This guide offers six circular walks that follow sections of the Cotswold Way National Trail National Trail and also explore the surrounding hills and valleys, helping you discover some of the remarkable history and human stories that lie hidden in South Gloucestershire's rural landscape. Each walk takes around half a day to complete, walking at a comfortable pace and allowing for rests and refreshments; Walks 5 and 6 are the longest and may take more than half a day. You will be walking through an ancient countryside of villages, farms, hedges, dry stone walls, copses, bridging points, lanes and paths. The historic network of paths that you will use was established by numerous generations taking everyday journeys between villages, fields, markets, mills and churches over the last thousand years - and more.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cyril Hartington	Marshfield and District Local History Society
Gwynne Stock	Tormarton Parish

## HOW TO GET HERE

The South Gloucestershire Cotswolds are close to Bristol, Bath and Cirencester and the area can be easily reached from the M4 and M5 motorways. The nearest railway stations are Yate, Bristol and Stroud. The walks can be accessed by bus from many local villages and towns.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMATION

Traveline 0870 6082608

### National coach and rail operators:

National Express 08705 808080

National Rail Enquiries 08457 484950

### Useful Contacts:

South Gloucestershire Public Rights of Way Team 01454 863646

Cotswold Way National Trail National Trail Office 01453 827004

Cotswolds Conservation Board 01451 862000

Forest of Avon Team 0117 9532141



## VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

For information on the area, including accommodation, caravan and campsites and guided walking tours, contact the relevant Tourist Information Centre:

Bristol	0906 711291 ( <i>premium rate</i> )	<a href="http://www.visitbristol.co.uk">www.visitbristol.co.uk</a>
Chipping Sodbury	01454 888686 ( <i>summer only</i> )	<a href="http://www.sodburytowncouncil.gov.uk">www.sodburytowncouncil.gov.uk</a>
Cirencester	01285 654180	<a href="http://www.cotswold.gov.uk">www.cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Thornbury	01454 281638	<a href="http://www.thornburytowncouncil.gov.uk">www.thornburytowncouncil.gov.uk</a>
Bath	0906 711200 ( <i>premium rate</i> )	<a href="http://www.visitbath.co.uk">www.visitbath.co.uk</a>

## MAPS

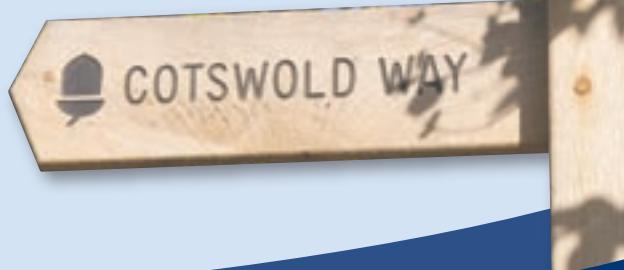
All the walks are way marked and walkers using this publication should be able to follow the routes without difficulty. The Ordnance Survey Explorer 1:25,000 Maps 155 and 167 cover the routes, as do Ordnance Survey Landranger 1:50,000 Maps 162 and 172.

## THE COTSWOLD WAY NATIONAL TRAIL

The Cotswold Way National Trail follows the western edge of the Cotswolds from Chipping Campden to Bath. It crosses beautiful countryside, offering breathtaking views, passing places of historical interest, through pretty towns and villages and crossing fertile farmland with fields and woodland. You can find out more about the Cotswold Way National Trail and other routes at [www.nationaltrail.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk)

## SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL

The council's Public Rights of Way and Countryside Officers work in partnership with other authorities and organisations to improve the Cotswold Way National Trail and surrounding path networks. There is an ongoing programme of improvements covering access, signing, habitat and interpretation projects.





▲  
**War Memorial**  
- North Stoke

## COTSWOLDS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

The Government has designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks as our finest countryside. They are recognised as being of national importance and described as the jewels of the English landscape.

With its rolling hills and valleys, the Cotswolds is the largest AONB and is protected by law to ensure that its beauty and special character are conserved. It covers 2,038 square kilometres (790 square miles), stretching from Warwickshire and Worcestershire in the north, through Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, down to Bath and Wiltshire in the south.

The Cotswolds AONB is cared for by the Cotswolds Conservation Board - an independent organisation which works with others to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area and is the only organisation to look after the whole AONB. You can find more about the Cotswolds AONB and work of the Cotswolds Conservation Board at [www.cotswoldsaonb.com](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.com)

# WHAT ARE THE COTSWOLDS?

The Cotswolds are one of Britain's best known and internationally recognised rural landscapes. It is a man-made landscape that has been worked, farmed and formed by people and their activities for over 6000 years. Geology is the key to the Cotswolds identity, as all the towns, villages, farms and woodlands lie on one kind of rock, known as limestone. The Cotswold hills are formed from a distinctive creamy golden limestone, part of a geological outcrop that stretches across the country, from Dorset on the south coast to Flamborough Head in Yorkshire.

The geology of the Cotswolds is important in two ways - it has determined the shape of the landscape and it has provided local people with their building materials. The limestones have been laid down and eroded over time to form an abrupt edge, or escarpment, to the west. This has produced the dramatic Cotswold 'edge', with its steep hills and fine westward views to the Severn Estuary, over the rich alluvial farm lands of the Severn Valley. East of the edge, the rocks slope more gently down to the Thames and Windrush valleys. This is known as the dip slope. Here are the shallow, broad valleys of the Cotswolds, with farms and villages carefully placed to avoid the winter winds.

The second impact of geology comes from the use of its stone. Numerous local quarries have yielded a range of Cotswold stones, worked and crafted to build the field walls, churches, manors, houses and whole towns that give the Cotswolds their characteristic identity. Distinctive house building techniques have evolved over the centuries to make the most of Cotswold stone, including steeply pitched roofs to carry the heavy Cotswold stone slates, beautifully carved stone work around windows and doorways, and a range of rubble and masonry walls.

Although the mellow Cotswold stone acts as a unifying thread, a keener eye will begin to identify individual landscape features, stone work and building styles in different parts of the Cotswolds. The landscape of the South Gloucestershire Cotswolds has its own special character, with the dramatic steep slopes of the edge in the north, dropping to the gently rolling Avon and Severn valleys full of rich alluvial deposits and laden with coal measures.





## HISTORICAL SNAPSHOTS AND HUMAN IMPRINTS

When Neolithic farmers started burning and cutting down trees with their stone axes and clearing the forests for agriculture, they began a process of landscape modification and management in the Cotswolds that has continued ever since.

The six walks in this guide reveal snapshots of different periods of human history. **The Bronze Age**, 6000 years ago, is notable for burial mounds known as barrows. It was also a period of intense competition which led to small-scale warfare. **The Iron Age**, 2750 years ago, has left us the dramatic series of hill forts along the Cotswold Ridge, including those at Hinton and Sodbury. **Roman colonisation**, 2000 years ago, brought a network of strategic and military roads, some of which, like the Fosse Way, are still in use today. The Cotswolds are rich in Roman farm and villa sites; the southern end of the Cotswold Way National Trail, Bath, was one of several important Roman towns in the region.

Many of our Cotswold villages can be traced back to the **Saxon period** (7th - 11th century) when settlers from northern Europe shared out and cultivated large, open fields, working in common. Villagers used the land beyond their fields to forage for fuel, to hunt, to fish and to graze their animals.

After the **Norman Conquest** in 1066, the land, fields and villages became the property of a lord or the church; the people, as serfs, were bound to the estates by duties and dues. Estates were known as manors, from the French manoir meaning hall or great house.

During the **Early Medieval period** in the 12th and 13th centuries new market towns, such as Chipping Sodbury and Hawkesbury Upton, were established. By the **Late Medieval period** more efficient farming methods and the loosening of traditional land ties led to a massive increase in wool production. The well drained and fertile Cotswold pastures were well suited to extensive sheep rearing and wool remained at the heart of the Cotswolds economy from the 13th to the 18th centuries. Wool sales funded the construction and repair of numerous fine churches, manors and houses. **The Dissolution of the Monasteries** in the 16th century enabled the creation of large estates, ultimately leading to the construction of fine country houses and historic parks and gardens, such as Dyrham Park and Horton Court.

In the **18th and 19th centuries** the wool of the region led to the establishment of many woollen mills, especially those around the Stroud valleys, injecting new economic life into the region. Canal and railway building, each with their characteristic architectural features, went on in that period too. Competition from the coal fired woollen mills of the north of England led however, to a slow decline in the Cotswold mills in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**KEY HISTORIC THEMES** to think about on your walks include:

### **WORKING WOODLANDS**

Lower Woods beneath Hawkesbury and Horton are the most extensive woods in the area but these six walks explore many smaller woods and copses, including Little Sodbury Wood, Dodington Wood, Great Moody's Wood, Tenant's Wood and Kelston Park. It is hard to appreciate nowadays that rural life once literally depended on woodland products. They were a vital and critical part of the rural economy. The trees, their major branches and the shrubs growing under the trees, the 'underwood' were all put to use, supplying fuel for heating and power and providing the raw materials for building, tools and equipment. Everyone used wood. Hazel, field maple, ash, oak and willow were used for hedging, hurdles for sheep and cattle inclosures and wattle for building house walls. Wood was used to make rakes, pitchforks, shovels, baskets and panniers. It provided hoops for barrels, spars for the thatcher, faggots for bakers' ovens and household fires. Charcoal was used for the blacksmith's forge and oak bark for the tanner's vats.



## WOODLAND LAWS AND RIGHTS

The importance of timber to the local community is illustrated by the rights known as “common of estovers” - the right to take timber for a variety of purposes such as “cartbote, plowbote, harrowbote, gatebote, stilebote and firebote”, are all mentioned in Horton parish leases from the 17th and 18th centuries. Pannage, the right of pasturing pigs within woodland, is also mentioned for both Hawkesbury and Horton parishes

## COPPIING

Coppicing is a form of woodland management that has been used for centuries to provide renewable crops of timber. Each year part of the wood would be coppiced. The smaller trees, known as underwood, typically hazel, maple, ash and oak, would be cut back to just above ground level to provide small section timber. The newly coppiced area was then left to re-grow, fenced off with brushwood and poles for several years to protect the tender new shoots from browsing by cattle. The inclosure, or coupe (from the Norman-French word coupe, to cut), would then be re-opened to the right-holders' cattle and pigs for several more years, until it was time to cut, or coppice, that area again.



As the system of coppicing developed, coupes were defined by ditches and earth banks topped by hedges. The basic procedures for coppicing were fixed by statute, like one of 1543 penalising failure to maintain the fences. Old coppices can be seen in many of the woods along the walks, such as Southfield Clump near Dodington. Some trees, mainly oaks, were not coppiced but were left as “standards”, growing on to maturity and providing shelter to the underwood and a supply of acorns for pigs. While the coppice wood was sold or distributed by lot to the parish right-holders, the standard timber, belonged to the landowner.



## COTSWOLD STONE

The rocks of the Cotswolds are known to geologists as Oolites. The term Oolite comes from the Greek for egg *oon* - and earth - *lithos*. The Oolites are limestones made up of large numbers of small grains of sand and lime which look rather like fish roes or eggs, over 70 million years old. Fossil rich, they form the durable yet easily worked stone so characteristic of the region. Just as all parts of the forest were used for timber, so the many different variations in Cotswold stone have been used for many different purposes. Fine stones and stone dust were used for road making and mortar mixes. Poor quality large stones were used for field walling. Better stones were used for house building. The best stones were prized for carving - for the decorations on great houses and churches, and for the production of church and churchyard monuments.

## QUARRIES

Quarries mark the places where Cotswold stone was, and is, extracted. While some Bath stone is produced underground in mines, as in the Bath area, most Cotswold stone comes from quarries. At the height of the 19th century building boom there were several hundred Cotswold quarries. Most were very local: as you walk, look out for overgrown depressions in fields that mark the site of old quarries. Modern quarrying - even for building conservation - is a contentious issue - few people want to live near quarries - even those who live in Cotswold stone houses!



## DRY STONE WALLS

The field boundaries over much of southern England are formed by hedges. In the Cotswolds, however, stone walls dominate the rural landscape. Some have stood for several hundreds of years. They mark parish, ownership and field boundaries. The majority of the walls were built by farm labourers between 1750 and 1850, following the Enclosure Acts. The new enclosed fields allowed better animal management, and were part of the period known as the Agricultural Revolution. It is estimated that the Cotswold walls are equivalent in length to the Great Wall of China!

Some walls were built from stone lying on the surface of fields; other walls used poorer quality quarried stones. Many dry stone walls are now in poor repair; maintaining them is labour intensive and costly. Please take care not to damage the walls if you use stiles to cross them. The craft of dry stone walling does, however, still live on - with annual competitions in the Cotswolds (for more information about dry stone walls visit [www.dsوا.org.uk](http://www.dsوا.org.uk))



Photograph by  
Peter Milner

## RIVERS

Water is a rare commodity on the Cotswold plateau. Most of the rainfall sinks into the porous Cotswold stones, to re-appear as springs far below, where the permeable limestone meets an impermeable rock. Valleys are often dry, except after heavy winter rainfall, when winter streams (often called winterburnes) appear for short periods. But even in the Cotswolds, rivers used to have a much more important role in people's lives. They were an endless source of food; fish were trapped, netted and hooked. They were a source of energy used to turn the water wheel and grind corn. Rivers were also borders, barriers and frontiers. Crossing points were strategic places in the landscape to be controlled, and fought over. And, of course, they also acted as transport routes, connecting places together.



## TRANSPORT

Transport routes across the Cotswolds have always been important. In the Roman Period, the Fosse Way running from Exeter to Lincoln, passed close to Marshfield, and was a key route in the process of colonisation, initially in moving troops and supplies quickly along this frontier zone to quell incursions and later to carry goods for trade. Cirencester (known in Roman times as Corinium) grew to become one of the greatest Roman cities in north-western Europe, with many roads radiating from its centre.



For reasons both financial and geological, the Cotswolds proved resistant to the development of an efficient railway system despite the “railway mania” of the 19th century. Numerous local lines were closed many years ago, though the main inter-regional lines still cross the area. The London to Cardiff route tunnels under South Gloucestershire, and its route can be traced by its distinctive ventilation shafts. Places which had been important stage-coaching points, such as Northleach, Burford, and Marshfield, never got a railway link and steadily lost business as a result.

## SHRUNKEN OR DESERTED SETTLEMENTS

While the Cotswolds have had long periods of prosperity in the past, there have also been many periods of decline and change. There are almost eighty sites of deserted or shrunken medieval settlements in the Cotswolds. Between 1348 and about 1380, the bubonic plague swept across Europe to Britain, spreading to the Cotswolds from the coastal ports. Known as the Black Death, the disease was spread by fleas living in the fur of rats and attacked a population already weakened by earlier famines. A long decline in population levels began. The population was also affected by agricultural change, with landowners choosing to reduce the labour intensive open arable fields in favour of extensive sheep production, which needed fewer workers. By the late 15th century some villages had been abandoned and are now only bumps and hollows in the fields. Many more had shrunk, to leave only a church and a farm with remains of house plots nearby.