

4. Winchcombe and Belas Knap

This scenic and interesting little walk takes you from the delightfully unspoilt town of Winchcombe, along Cotswold Way routes old and new, and up to one of the area's most intriguing ancient monuments, Belas Knap - A combination of history and scenery that will leave you eager to discover more of the National Trail and the inspirational landscape through which it runs.

Distance:

5¼ miles
(Shorter route 3½ miles)

Duration:

3 - 4 hrs (Shorter route: 2 - 3 hrs)

Difficulty:

Moderate, some steep sections and stiles

Public transport:

No. 606 bus from Cheltenham
(See Cotswold Way public transport leaflet, or call Traveline on 0871 200 2233)

Start/Finish:

Grid reference SP024282
(OS Explorer sheet OL45)
Postcode GL54 5LL

Refreshments:

Several excellent pubs and cafes in Winchcombe. Public toilets at the top of Vineyard Street.

1 Start at the war memorial on Abbey Terrace, opposite the Plaisterer's arms. Facing the pub, turn right and make for Vineyard Street. Turn left down this little road bordered by picturesque terraced cottages and pollarded trees until you reach the stone bridge at the bottom.

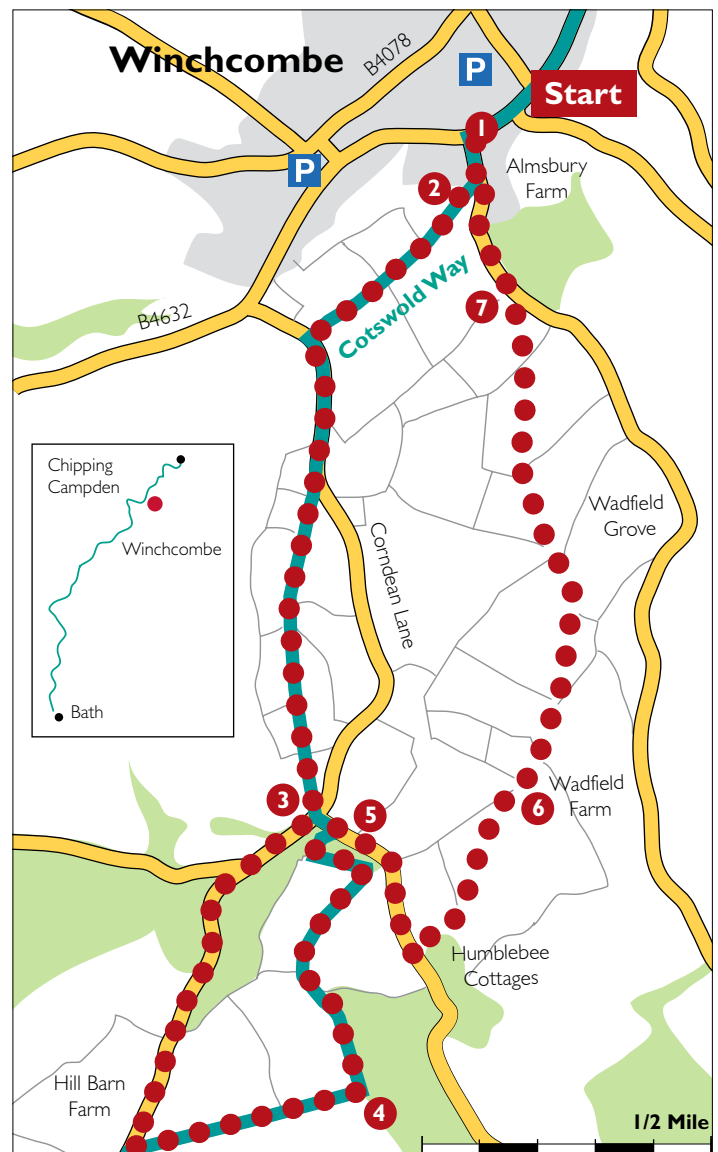
2 Just after the bridge, take the Cotswold Way through the gate on your right and cross the grassy meadow in the shadow of St Peter's Church, towards the gate on the other side. Continue to follow

the signs along the field boundaries until you reach Corndean Lane. Watching for traffic, turn left and head up the lane until the Cotswold Way branches off through a wide gate on the right. Carry on up this access road, past the cricket ground on the right, until a fingerpost guides you through a kissing gate on your left. Head on up through the middle of the rolling green fields towards the woods at the top of the hill.

3 The kissing gate at the top is an excellent spot to rest awhile and take in the wonderful views over the town behind you. Once you've caught your breath, go through the gate and leave the Cotswold Way to head right, up the road between the trees. (If you don't fancy the last climb up to Belas Knap, follow the Cotswold Way path through the woods and cross over the stile to take up the route on the road at point 5). Not long after you pass Hill Barn Farm on your right, turn left at the fingerpost next to the large oak tree to rejoin the Cotswold Way and head towards the mound of Belas Knap rising up at the far side of the field.

4 This Neolithic long barrow, or burial chamber, is surrounded by many myths and legends. The first recorded excavation took place in 1863, and since then hundreds of human bones have been uncovered, some of which date back over 6,000 years. It is one of the most intriguing and iconic structures in the Cotswolds, and an excellent place to pause and soak up the past. Leaving the barrow behind, cross over the stone stile at the far side and continue to follow the Cotswold Way for half a mile along field boundaries and down through woods until you meet the road.

5 Keeping a good ear out for traffic, cross over the stile to



leave the Cotswold Way and follow the road to the right for a quarter of a mile until you reach a turning on your left. Follow this track, the old route of the Cotswold Way, down past Humblebee Cottages all the while taking in the incredible views eastwards into the heart of the Cotswolds.

6 Follow the path to the right of the farm buildings and continue between the metal fence and hedge towards the stile at the end. Again, wonderful views open up below you, this time over Winchcombe and the stunning

Sudeley Castle with over a thousand years of royal history and some of the most magical gardens in the country. Continue to follow the waymarked path downhill, around and across fields and over stiles, finally passing through a kissing gate onto the road.

7 Turn left, and follow the road back towards point 2, retracing your steps back into Winchcombe. Whatever the time of year, this fascinating, living, breathing town has a wealth of tea rooms, pubs and places of interest ready to welcome enquiring minds and weary walkers. Rest and enjoy!