

Cotswold Way Diary

Day 1. Saturday 11th April 2015

I caught a bus from Stratford on a cold damp morning just after 9 o'clock and arrived in Chipping Campden just before 10. The official start of the Cotswold Way is by the old Market Hall where there is a marker in the pavement, and from there I started to walk. The first part was the steep hill out of Chipping Campden but, once upon the top, most of the walk was along the ridge of the hill. After passing the top of Dover's Hill with its views in one direction, I crossed the road to walk a tree lined drive with views to the opposite side. The walk goes through a pleasant picnic area about halfway up Fish Hill and then on to the folly that is Broadway Tower. From there it is a steep descent to Broadway. The fields were full of sheep and lambs and although the sun was shining I was accompanied by a bitterly cold wind. This made Broadway feel much warmer. There I was early so I caught a bus back to Stratford earlier than expected.

Day 2. Saturday 2nd May 2015

Today my walk was from Broadway to Winchcombe; about 12 miles. The weather was not forecast to be sunny but it did stay dry for the whole day. It was quite cold but the walking soon warmed me up, although the wind was biting cold in exposed areas. The day comprised two stiff hill climbs and descents and other more pleasant walking across fields and through woods. I left Broadway by the Snowhill road and then using tracks and footpaths went slowly up hill to Shenberrow Camp, the first of many Iron Age sites that I will pass on the way to Bath. There were lots of bluebells in the woods as I climbed. The steep descent took me into Stanton, a quintessentially Cotswold village, unspoilt, as it is not on a main road. From here it was a walk across farmland to Stanway. All along the route there was livestock, predominantly sheep with lambs large and small and also cows with calves and horses. From Stanton to Wood Stanton it was easy walking but then it was a climb first to Stump Cross and then on to Beckbury Camp, another Iron Age Fort. I passed a stone Monument before descending to Hailes Abbey and over fields to Winchcombe where I waited for Edwin to pick me up as I was far too early for the bus back to Stratford. Some of the views were spectacular, particularly with the lowering black skies. On a sunny day they must be amazing.

Day 3. Saturday 23rd May 2015

Winchcombe was the starting point for this 11 mile stretch of the Cotswold way. Edwin dropped me off in the village itself before going on to the steam festival at the nearby Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway. My first point to aim for was Belas Knap a Neolithic chambered long barrow. On the way up the hill I passed one of the gates to Sudeley Castle - a much smaller gate and obviously not the public entrance. After this I walked down to Postlip Manor and then up Cleeve Hill. Cleeve Common is a large open space with a myriad of paths, bridle ways, a golf course and sheep. Being a Saturday there were plenty of people about, walking, riding and of course playing golf. The walk goes along the escarpment passing another Iron Age fort and eventually descending through nature reserves to Dowdeswell where I finished for the day. I ate lunch in one of the reserves and was amazed at the number of people out with their cameras

looking for the rare butterflies to be found there. One downhill section of the path was very rough as motorbikes had been using it and the adjacent disused quarry as a course for riding their bikes. A barrier had been put across the track but the path has not recovered yet. Near the reservoir the woods were filled with wild garlic just as they had been filled with bluebells a month before. When I got to the main road where Edwin was to pick me up, I was very disappointed to find that the pub marked on the map was now an Indian restaurant and, as such, not open for long cold drinks.

DAY 4. Wednesday 22nd July 2015

After going on holiday and a period of hot weather I returned to the Cotswold Way. Edwin took me to Moreton-in-Marsh where I caught the bus to Dowdeswell, just outside Cheltenham. I started where I had left off previously and climbed through Lineover wood to the top of Leckhampton Hill. The views were magnificent but spoilt by the incoming rain. I walked over the open land on the edge of the escarpment in squally showers and gusty wind eventually descending into the more sheltered valley. After lunch I then tackled Crickley Hill which is surmounted by an Iron Age Fort. After the peace and quiet of the hills I came to the road at the Air Balloon Roundabout. This was full of queuing traffic and I was glad to turn off the road again for the woods of the Peak and Birdlip Hill. Here I left the path to go to my hotel in Birdlip for the night.

Day 5. Thursday 23rd July 2015

From Birdlip I walked predominantly through woods with glimpses of Gloucester in the distance. The first point of interest was Cooper's Hill, the site of the annual Cheese rolling. I was quite disappointed with this as it looked huge on the TV and in reality the area is quite small. However it is very steep and of course climbing it was on the path. From here it was more sheltered woodland walking until the open grassland of Painswick Hill. Here you walk across another golf course, past the imposing Painswick Beacon (another Iron Age Fort) and eventually into the attractive town of Painswick. I stopped by the church to eat lunch and meet Edwin to go to Painswick Rococo Garden before returning home.

Day 6. Tuesday 18th August 2015

I caught the bus from Moreton-in-Marsh to Cheltenham where I changed to a bus for Painswick arriving there at 11.45. I started walking with the usual mix of woodland and common land. Today I saw wild orchids near the Edgemoor Inn. As I walked, I joined company with two other walkers as far as Haresfield Beacon with its marvellous views of the Severn Estuary and there I stopped for lunch. I continued through Standish Wood where I lost time having lost the markers and ending at a dead end. On regaining the path, I joined another walker passing through squeeze stiles on the way to King's Stanley. The climb up to Pen Hill was very steep but there was more woodland and open grassland towards Coaley Peak. I passed a well kept Nymphsfield Long Barrow and decided to use the road from Coaley to Uley as it passed Hetty Pegler's Tump which was disappointingly less well kept. At Uley I found my B&B at the Old Crown Inn.

Day 7. Wednesday 19th August 2015

Leaving the Old Crown I passed the enormous Uleybury hill fort covered in trees and regained the path to go to Dursley. As I came towards Cam Long Down, it became overcast and damp so I opted for a public footpath along the bottom of the hill instead of going up and then down it again. I soon walked down and through Dursley. I climbed Stinchcombe Hill and decided to take the alternative shorter route across the golf course rather than round it as the weather was worsening. I passed through fields where the wheat had been harvested and across maize fields where the crop was above my head. At one point there was a fridge by a house with chilled water for walkers but in the damp, I did not need it.. At North Nibley I found a bench for lunch but did not stay long as the rain became harder and I needed my umbrella as I climbed towards the Tyndale Monument. On a good day the views must be fantastic but regrettably I was in the clouds. By the time I came down to Wotton-under-Edge past the Waterloo Victory Commemorative trees, it was raining hard. There I met Edwin and we came home.

Day 8. Wednesday 26th August 2015

A pleasant walk out of Wotton-under-Edge by a little stream was followed by a very steep climb through trees and up a road until I reached a track along the escarpment where I had a glimpse of the towers of the Severn Bridge Crossings. A very deep sunken lane followed but much of the day's walk was on pleasant tracks, fields and roads. After lunch at Lower Kilcott, there was another climb and then an open walk to the Somerset Monument. General Lord Robert Somerset fought at Waterloo. By Horton Hall there was a new tower building which had been built for owls to nest. The double ditch and ramparts of Sodbury Camp, another Iron Age Hill Fort followed and then it was down to meet Edwin at Old Sodbury Church.

Day 9. Saturday 29th August

The magnificent view of the Severn Valley from Old Sodbury churchyard was admired by us both before I set off again. The walk continues with more fields and tracks instead of the woodland walks of further north. I crossed the A46 for the first time today, walked through Tormarton and crossed the M4 on a minor road. Then I walked back to cross the A46 for the second time. Here it was very busy but a traffic island helped. I lunched at a picnic area and then walked round the outside of Dyrham Park deer park. Going through Dyrham Wood, I stopped at the bench by the message box, now more of a geocache point, for a drink before descending to the A46 again. This I crossed with difficulty as it was very busy in both directions and went on to Cold Ashton. As it was early in the afternoon I decided to continue to Sir Bevill Grenville's monument although this meant traffic dodging across the A46 yet again. A couple of steep hills and valleys later, I arrived at the site of the civil war Battle of Lansdown Hill and the monument to the General killed in the battle. Here I met Edwin.

Day 10. Sunday 30th August 2015

I left Edwin by Sir Bevill's monument and continued on for my last 7.4 miles. There were fine views until it began to rain. A golf course, the racecourse and a last hill fort were passed until I

came to Prospect Stile. From here it was a long slow descent to the Bath suburb of Weston and then my last steep climb to the hill above Bath. I passed my last golf course at High Common and had lunch in Victoria Park. Here the dampness turned to real rain but I went on past Royal Crescent, the Circus and the Roman Baths to be greeted by Edwin at the West Door of Bath Abbey having completed this year's personal challenge.

Statistics

The Cotswold Way is 102.5 miles long.

I passed:-
6 Long Barrows
10 Iron Age Hill Forts
6 Golf Courses
6 Hill top monuments