

A WALK ON COTSWOLD EDGE

Andrew Swift

This walk takes about one and a half hours, and starts – and ends – in the car park of the Beaufort Arms at Hawkesbury Upton. Stunning views over the Vale of Berkeley, a brush with history (and prehistory), a Victorian pagoda, and the prospect of lunch at a country pub add up to a fairly unbeatable combination for a morning's walk.

Take the footpath to the right of the new house being built at the back of the car park. After a few yards, turn right. There is a choice of paths here: take the left-hand one leading in front of the cricket pitch.

On the far side, go through the gap in the hedge and follow the line of the old hedgerow straight across the field. Carry straight on until the path meets a farm track, and turn left.

You will soon see a kissing gate on the right-hand side. Go through it and follow the track downhill. The view ahead is reckoned to be one of the finest in Gloucestershire. Keep your fingers crossed it'll be clear enough to appreciate it. Across the fields to the right you'll get the first glimpse of the tower you'll be visiting later.

Carry on down the track and enter the woods. A word of warning: in some places the track has worn down to the rock and if it's damp, as it almost certainly will be, it can be slippery. Walking shoes – and a stick – will come in handy.

At the bottom of the track, cross the stile and turn right along the lane. At the T junction ahead turn right. Soon you enter the village of Hawkesbury – what's left of it. The enormous medieval church gives an idea how important it once was. Just about everything else went when the population moved to the new village – Hawkesbury Upton – centuries ago. The few buildings left, though, testify to the village's former importance, while inside the church is a monument to Lord Liverpool, son of Baron Hawkesbury, one of Britain's longest-serving Prime Ministers.

After looking around Hawkesbury, turn left up the farm track opposite the church. As you climb, you will see below you the fish ponds of the vanished manor house. Out of sight atop the hill to the right is a Bronze Age burial mound. The terraces on the hillside are the remains of medieval strip lynchets, dating from the time when the hills were cultivated. It may be quiet today, but this area has been continuously settled for thousands of years.

At the end of the lane, go through the gate and carry on down the lane signposted Hillesley. About 100 yards along on the right – you'll have to look out for it because the footpath sign's broken off – cross a stile and walk straight up the field to another stile. There's another one a few yards ahead, after which you bear left and follow the hedgerow. At the end of the field go through a gate.

Turn right and walk along to the road, where you turn right again. For a minor road, this can be quite busy with cars and light vehicles, but it's wide and straight enough to see what's coming, with generous verges. And, as the Cotswold Way, one of Britain's most popular long-distance paths, follows it as well, you're unlikely to experience any problems. As always when walking along roads, though, stay on the right, facing oncoming traffic.

Before long you reach the pagoda-like Hawkesbury Tower, built in 1846 in memory of General Lord Robert Somerset. From here, walk along the pavement back to the Beaufort Arms. There's lots to see along the way: stone buildings, ancient barns, now converted to houses, and an old Drover's Pool, now sadly choked by weeds. This was once used by the drovers who passed this way with flocks of sheep, en route from Wales to markets in London.

There are few finer ways of working up a thirst – and an appetite – than walking the Cotswold Edge, and there are few better places than the Hawkesbury Arms to satisfy them. Beer comes from Wickwar Brewery, three miles away down the hill, and generous portions of home-cooked food provide a fitting accompaniment. Lamb Shanks, Haddock, Chilli, Scampi, Faggots and Chicken & Broccoli Bake are among the dishes on offer. Puddings include most of the usual suspects, with a few specialities such as Raspberry Meringue Nest and Hot Cherries in Brandy. Be warned, though ... the Beaufort Arms is very popular, and bookings are essential. It would be terrible to think, after all that walking, there was no room at the inn.

Hawkesbury Upton is signposted off the A46, six miles north of junction 18 of the M4. Lunch at the Beaufort Arms is served from noon to 2.30pm. Phone: 01454 238217.