

IN DEEPEST GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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For this month's walk we head to South Gloucestershire to discover a little-known corner of the Cotswolds, a couple of country pubs – and a monument in the form of a pagoda. Hawkesbury Upton is off the A46, five miles north of junction 18 of the M4.

Take the footpath to the right of the Fox Inn in the centre of the village, go through a gate into the garden, straight on over a stile into the orchard, and over another stile into a field. Carry straight on, with the wall on your left. Once over the next stile, bear right, following the waymark sign, with the wall on your right. At the next stile follow the waymark pointing diagonally down the field to a metal kissing gate.

Go through the gate (watching out for a hidden step) and turn right along the road. When a road branches off to the right, look for a waymark sign in the hedge on the left and follow a path down to a metal kissing gate. The waymark signs peter out at this point, although the route should be easy enough to follow.

Go through the gate, turn right and follow the track down the field, through a five-bar gate, diagonally down towards a gap in the hedge on the far side, and then down to another five-bar gate. Once through it, ignore the bridge over the stream on the left, but carry on diagonally down the field, crossing a spring coming down from the right, making your way across the stream (easy enough to step across at this point) and heading towards another five-bar gate.

This leads into a broad swathe of meadowland through woods – a secret, sheltered and strangely silent valley which you follow for a mile and a half. Even without waymarks, you shouldn't go wrong. The swathe of grass leads through a five-bar gate and curves gently, following the stream. Don't be tempted to cross a bridge over the stream or to take well-rutted tracks leading off uphill to left and right, and eventually you will come to a gate leading onto a road.

Turn left here and walk along the road for a three-quarters of a mile until you come to a Cotswold Way signpost, and turn up the path on the left. From now on, the route is clearly waymarked. When the path forks, bear left and carry on uphill. Over the next stile, follow the waymark to the right and walk through a field, with the hedge on your left and superb views over the valley below.

At the end of the field, turn left uphill, following the Cotswold Way sign. (This is a recent rerouting of the Cotswold Way which doesn't appear on most maps. It used to carry straight on, but the new route avoids a busy stretch of road.)

Carry on uphill and, when you come to a well-worn track, turn right. An improbable pagoda-like structure will shortly come into view ahead. This is the Somerset Monument, built in 1846 in memory of General Lord Robert Somerset. The views from the top are said to be fantastic, but, as it's been closed to the public for years, you'll have to take this on trust.

Just before you reach the monument, take a permissive path leading off to the left (unless you want to take a detour to have a closer look at the monument). When you reach the road, turn left along the pavement, passing the curiously-worded village sign, the sadly weed-choked pond, and some impressive eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings.

Hawkesbury Upton is blessed with two pubs. You've already seen the Fox; as you walk back through the village, you'll see the Beaufort Arms on your right. Both are open all day and serve excellent beer as well as good food at lunchtimes and in the evening. On our visit, we opted for the Beaufort, decorated with a fascinating collection of brewery memorabilia, serving beer from nearby Wickwar Brewery, and famous for its lamb shanks, generous portions of fish and chips and extensive sweet menu. There are

few finer ways of working up an appetite than a brisk walk in this little-known corner of the Cotswolds.

Length of Walk: 4.5 miles

Approximate Time: 2–2.5 hours

Refreshment Stops: None en route; two inns in Hawkesbury Upton

Level of challenge: An relatively easy walk mostly along well-marked footpaths, with several stiles

Map: OS Explorer 167 & 168