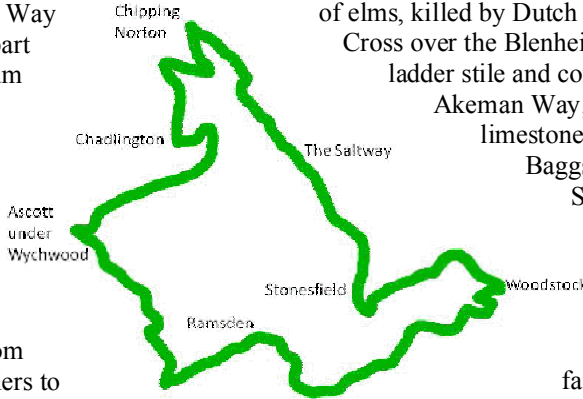


Wychwood Walks

The Wychwood Way

To encourage you to walk off the Christmas pudding and survive the dark days of January, we introduce you to the Wychwood Way, a 37 mile circular trail following the way-marked rights of way around the heart of the former Wychwood Royal Forest.

The Wychwood Way was created as part of the Millennium celebrations to honour 1000 years of the Forest's history. It takes the walker on a journey through time from pre-historic settlers to the present day, and through the wonderfully varied gently rolling landscape of our limestone uplands with their dry-stone walls, meandering rivers, well developed hedgerows and formal parklands and estate farmland. There is an accompanying booklet which you can get for £4.95 from the WODC offices in Welch Way, Witney. This essential guide splits the trail up into a series of six shorter walks of between 3 and 9 miles. Start anywhere and go for as long as you please, but have a car at each end of the proposed section!



of elms, killed by Dutch Elm Disease. Cross over the Blenheim Park wall by a ladder stile and continue down the Akeman Way, past the limestone grassland of Baggs Bottom into Stonesfield. Patches of scrub in the fields to the right mark the position of the famous Stonesfield Slate quarries. Did you know that the very first dinosaur fossil was found here in the early 19th century?

Stonesfield to the Saltway

After the previous 9 mile stretch, you have an easy walk today! Turn left off Stonesfield Ridings onto the Saltway, an ancient broad trackway along which salt was taken from Droitwich down to Princes Risborough and later used as a Drovers Road. Before crossing the B4437, you will see on your right a very special hedge. Its approximate age can be calculated by counting the number of species on a 30 metres length and then multiplying by 100. Continue past Dustfield Farm, the unimproved limestone hosts a huge variety of flowers, but not in mid winter! The walking continues to be easy, crossing into Ditchley Park, a Palladian style house built in 1722 for the second Earl of Litchfield. It became a favourite weekend retreat of Winston Churchill.

Woodstock to Stonesfield

Park one of the cars in Market Street, by the Woodstock Visitor Centre, where you can pick up copies of the guide. Entering Blenheim Park through the wooden gate opposite the Black Prince pub, follow the tarmac path around the lake, up to the brow of the hill and through a wonderful double avenue of lime trees, planted in 1977 to replace the original grand avenue

The Saltway to Chadlington

Along a grassy track past Shilcott Wood, you cross the Charlbury/Enstone road and then continue along the Saltway until you reach the busy Charlbury to Chippy road. Turn right on a bridleway to Lidstone and along a gravel path to Stone Farm. Look out for the pretty white cattle with black

ears and noses, these are British White Beef Cattle, apparently one of our oldest breeds.

Walking on towards Old Chalford Farm there are lovely views of former forest landscapes.

At this point the Glyme has been dammed, walk down through Old Chalford Farm across the causeway between two lakes, admiring some stately black swans and the remains of an Old Mill. Turn left uphill along another section of the Saltway, crossing with care the Charlbury/ Chippy road at Chalfont Green and then heading down a track into Chadlington, where your second car awaits. However, do remember not to leave the car keys in the glove compartment of the first car!



The Saltway

Chadlington to Ascott

Chadlington is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as ‘Ceadla’s Farm’. Walk through the hamlet of Dean, where lives a certain Prime Minister, past the re-cycling centre and through the Dean Common Community Wood. Follow the Oxfordshire Way along our very own Evenlode river, admiring the pollarded willows, past Pudlicote House, past the remains of a deserted 11th

century settlement on land belonging to Eynsham Abbey and into Ascott, crossing the railway bridge by the remains of an old bailey and motte castle.

Ascott to Ramsden

Past the plaque on the village green to commemorate the 16 women martyrs,

there are lovely views across the Upper Evenlode valley, with Bruern bluebell woods visible just below the skyline.

Kingstanding Farm reminds us of the days when Royal hunts took place in the Forest. Ahead are the private woodlands of

Cornbury Park, the largest area of ancient woodland remaining in Oxfordshire. Arriving at the old Navy Oak pub reminds us that timber was extracted locally to fuel the Napoleonic Wars. Onto Akeman Road and so to Ramsden.

Ramsden to Woodstock

The wheel comes full circle! Look out for the remains of the Roman Villa in North Leigh and the 15th century wall paintings in St Lawrence Church, Combe. At Combe Lodge re-enter Blenheim Park, continuing down the hill to the lake. Take the opportunity to admire the Column of Victory and the Palace buildings designed by Sir John Vanbrugh. For now you are arriving at the end of your 37 mile circular walk through the Wychwood countryside.

That should have settled the Christmas pud down!

Liz Clarke-Watson