

Miles Without Stiles

Cleeve Hill and Common



Roam across the Cotswolds' highest common for fabulous views to the Malverns and into Wales. But if the top is covered by cloud you will be wise to come on another day.

Distance: 6.5km/4miles with an up and down of 168m/550ft and some steep sections.

Time: 2½ hours

Start: Cleeve Common, off the B4632 3 miles north of Cheltenham at top of hill. Drive up narrow lane signed to golf club and at the top cross a bumpy cattle grid and turn L on rough track into old quarry car park. SO 989/271 satnav GL52 3PW.

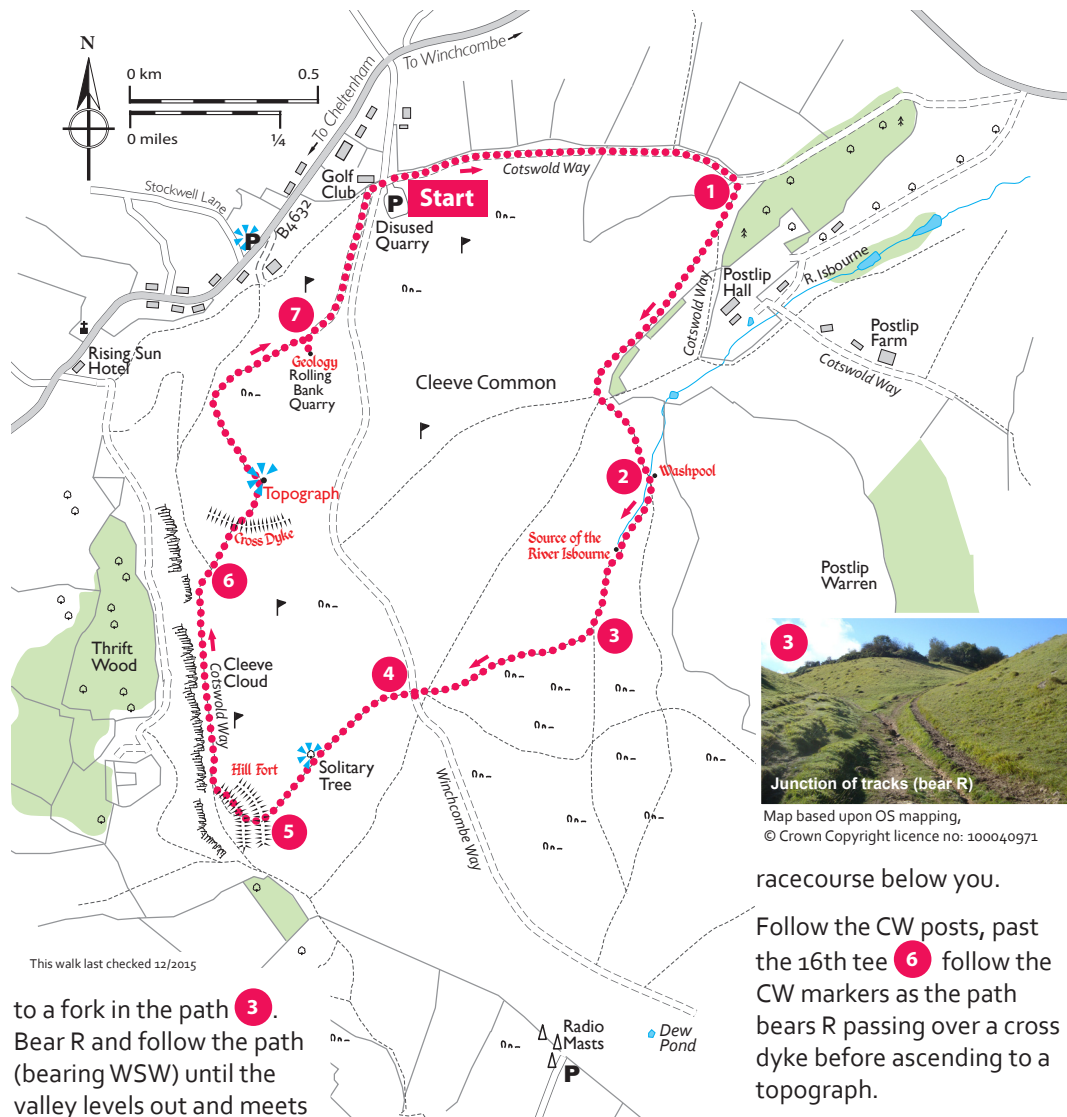
Refreshments: Municipal golf clubhouse open to the public.

Route: Exit the quarry car park and turn R to follow the track signposted Cotswold Way (CW) past the tee. Go through a gate and continue to another gate **1**.

Here the path splits, take the middle path and bear slightly R as the path descends to a CW post. Ignore the L-hand path (CW) and continue ahead on a level grassy track to meet a wall and trees on your L. The track widens and curves L to meet a small pond and a sheep washpool (More about that on page 2) on the L.

Follow the track to a white post **2** and turn R following the lower path up the valley floor following the stream. Further up by some loose stone on the R water bubbles out of the ground, the source of the River Isbourne.

Continue up the valley



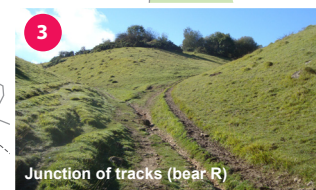
This walk last checked 12/2015

to a fork in the path **3**. Bear R and follow the path (bearing WSW) until the valley levels out and meets a track joining from the R. Turn L and walk 50m up to a well-defined track with a Winchcombe Way sign **4**.

At the post turn R and follow the track for 60m; cross the main track and continue straight on along a grassy track, bearing slightly L where the path splits. Walk across the common keeping the radio masts to your L and head for a solitary tree inside a stone wall, with all-round views.

From the tree aim towards the centre of Cheltenham in the distance (SW) to a hill fort approx. 200 m ahead. (head towards the three trees and turn R to circle the hill fort). Turn L at the golf green.

At the fort **5** turn R along the top of the mound (N), skirt L around a golf green and head for a CW post. You are now on the scarp edge of the Cotswolds with Cheltenham and its



Junction of tracks (bear R)
Map based upon OS mapping,
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racecourse below you.

Follow the CW posts, past the 16th tee **6** follow the CW markers as the path bears R passing over a cross dyke before ascending to a topograph.

Here turn L (west) and descend to a CW post, bear L and follow the CW posts. The path levels and further on you reach disused quarries on the R. Before two CW posts close together, turn R towards a small exposed cliff face in a disused quarry **7**.

A notice board here explains the geology. Retrace your footsteps to the path; turn R to follow the now stoney track back to the clubhouse and the quarry car park.

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Top of the Cotswolds

Of the few trees that cling to the Cleeve skyline, the wind-sculpted Single Beech is the highest. You'll walk this way and read the family memorials set around it.



The old English name of the hill is Cleeve Cloud, or 'Lump on a Cliff.' At 330metres above the sea this is the Cotswolds' highest point, and its 1,000 acres of common land find room for walkers, horse riders and

golfers, sheep and cattle, butterflies and snakes. Cleeve is great all-year walking on springy turf. But the wind blows cold, and in mist you can get lost, even fall off the edge. So we treat Cleeve Cloud with respect.



The fantastic views on the town side of the hill stretch from Cheltenham and its racecourse over the Malverns, the Severn Vale and the Forest of Dean to the mountains of Wales.



Centuries of quarrying have left rocky notches in the landscape, of huge interest to geologists. Nature lovers come for the rare plants and bird breeding areas on the limestone grassland. Hundreds of sheep graze it in the summer and a herd of pedigree Galloway cattle help fight the invasion by ground-greedy gorse.



Once turn your back on the popular side of Cleeve Cloud and you could be in Wales. The wild aspect is unique in the Cotswolds. Hidden in this valley is the source of the little River Isbourne.

DIRTY WASHING

At point ② you'll come to a pond and an old sheep washing machine.

In springtime the flocks would be herded off the hill and every adult sheep thoroughly cleaned ready for shearing. Mucky wool doesn't sell well in the market.

A sluice from the pond provided running water, each sheep was lowered into the washpool and, once rinsed, freed to clamber up the ramp and dry out. If a sheep was really dirty one shepherd had to jump into the water and give it a thorough hand wash.

There are dozens of old washpools around the Cotswolds. Some, like this one, have been restored by the Cotswold Wardens.

