

5. Cleeve Hill Common ring

This breathtaking walk leads you over open hilltops, across streams and through woodlands, immersing you in one of the country's most fascinating and precious habitats – limestone grassland. Over half of this wildflower and butterfly rich natural resource is within the Cotswolds and some of the finest examples are on Cleeve Common. The unsurpassed views along this route therefore, are the perfect backdrop for getting even closer to the outstanding natural beauty of the Cotswold Way.

Distance:
6 miles (Shorter route 4 miles)

Duration:
3½ - 4½ hrs (Shorter: 2 - 3 hrs)

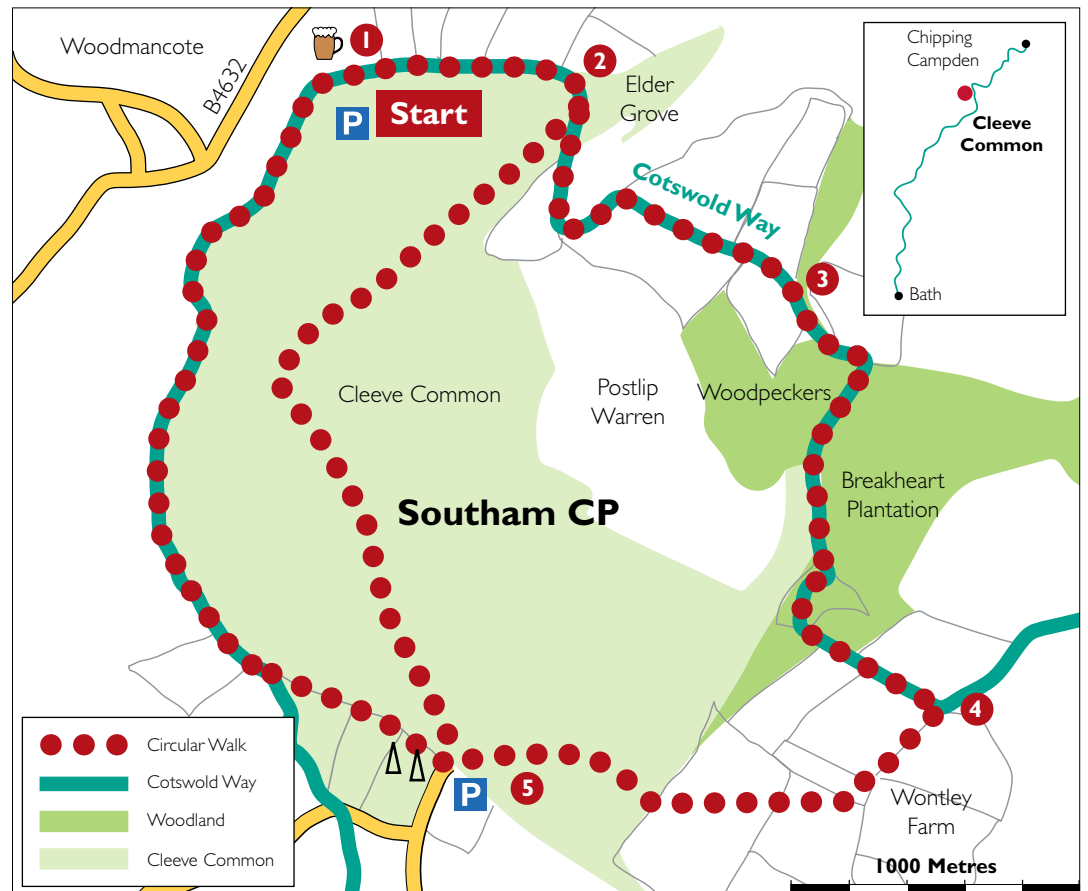
Difficulty:
Moderate, no stiles but some steep sections (Shorter: Easy, no stiles and mostly level)

Public transport:
No. 606 bus from Cheltenham/Winchcombe – ask for Golf Course junction (See Cotswold Way public transport leaflet, or call Traveline on 0871 200 2233)

Start/Finish:
Grid reference SO989272 (OS Explorer sheet 179)
Postcode GL52 3PW

Refreshments:
Bar café/restaurant at Golf Club. Toilets and extra parking for customers.

1 Start at the quarry car park across the track from golf clubhouse. Leave the car park and turn right to follow the track down around the bottom of the hill. As a wonderful view of Winchcombe nestled in its valley opens up to your left, carry on following the



Cotswold Way down through two metal field gates.

2 For a shorter route that avoids the steep climbs but doesn't miss out on the views, turn right immediately after the second gate to leave the Cotswold Way and follow the track around the bottom of the hill. Continue all the way along the side of the gully, eventually turning left onto the wider track at the top. Head straight across the common and make directly for the radio masts at the end to rejoin the route at point 5.

Follow the Cotswold Way down towards the trees and through the gate at the bottom, past farm buildings and through a few more gates. Once you meet the road at the end, turn right and continue uphill, past the houses on your left. Continue through to the end of the farmyard, and take the gate

on your left, turning right downhill towards the stream at the bottom.

3 At any time of the year, the shade of the woodlands and the calming sound of peacefully flowing water make this little bridge the ideal spot to stop and rest awhile before the climbs ahead. When you are ready, cross over the bridge and follow the trail up to the right. At the top, pass through the gate and across the paddock, turning right when you meet the road. Carry on past the stable, and continue to follow the signs through the woods. After the steep climb snaking up the wooded hillside, a kissing gate is well placed on which to lean and catch your breath. Keep on following the Cotswold Way to the end of the woods and along the edge of an open field, until you reach a kissing gate and finger post at the far side.

4 Leaving the Cotswold Way behind for the time being, turn right and follow the unmade road down towards the deserted farm buildings. Immediately afterwards, turn right through the gateway and follow the path slowly uphill through the fields towards the radio masts in the distance. Pass through a gate back onto the common and take the path on the right towards the waymarker post, and continue to head for the masts.

5 At the masts, turn right to follow the fenceline until you meet the Cotswold Way. Continue right along the edge of the escarpment, past some of the finest views in England, over the golf course, and down towards the reward awaiting you at the clubhouse. A rest at the end of your walk is a chance to plan the next...