

7. Cranham, Cooper's and the Beechwoods

This beautiful little walk shows you around one of England's most treasured habitats, beech woodlands, and leads you to the site of perhaps the Cotswolds' most iconic and intriguing tradition, cheese-rolling. Follow these four short miles and discover the cathedral-like calm of Buckholt Wood, richly carpeted by bluebells in May, and wonder at the dizzy heights of Cooper's hill where for hundreds of years the foolhardy have risked their necks for cheese and glory...

Distance:

4 miles

Duration:

2 - 3 hours

Difficulty:

Easy. No stiles, but some moderately steep sections.

Public transport:

No. 46 bus - frequent daily service between Cheltenham and Stroud and ½ mile walk to start, or 232 from Cheltenham (Monday only)/256 from Gloucester (Wednesday only) to Cranham centre. See Cotswold Way public transport leaflet, or call Traveline on 0871 200 2233.

Start/Finish:

Grid reference SO893131

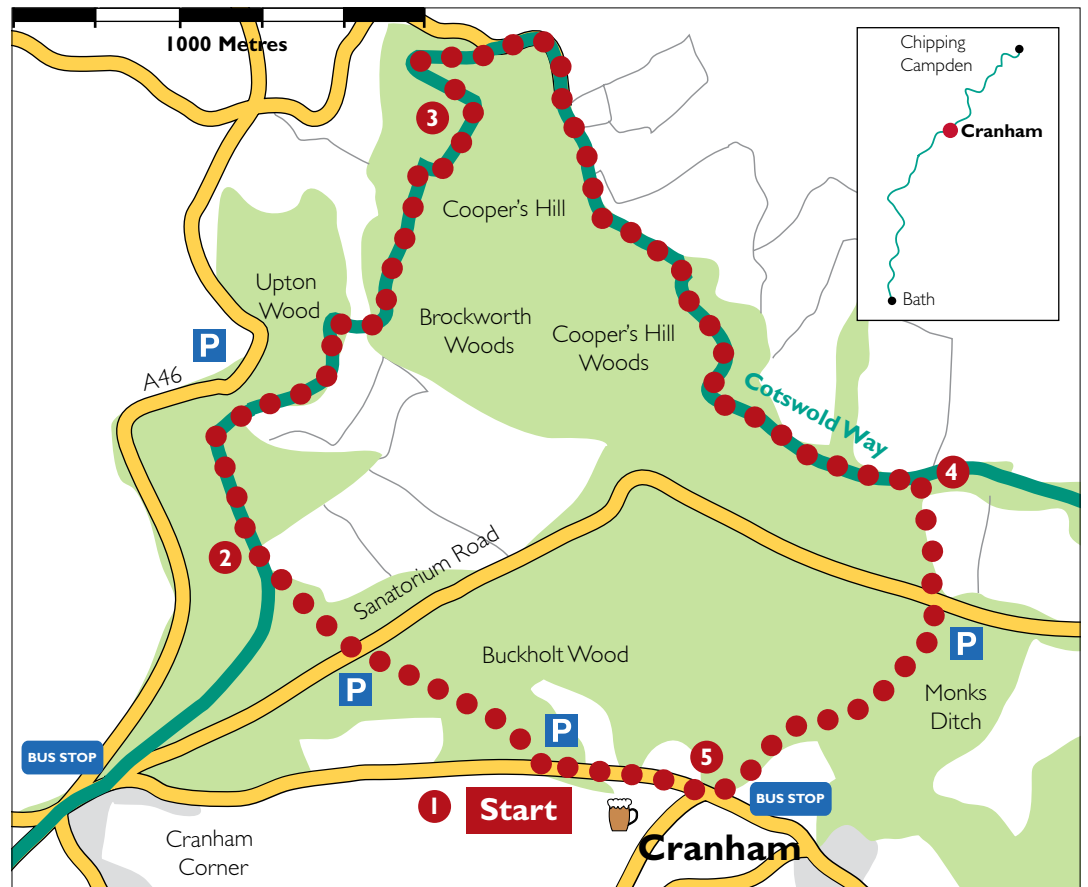
(OS Explorer sheet 179)

Postcode GL4 8HP

Refreshments:

Excellent pub in village centre.

1 Start out under the ancient beech tree in the little car park on the outskirts of the village. Entering into the majestic woodlands, part of a national nature reserve expertly managed by Natural England, take the middle of the three clear paths ahead of you. Continue up the path for just under half a mile until you reach the small car park next to the road. Keeping a good ear out for traffic, cross straight over and continue to follow the path through the woods on the other side.



2 At the top of the hill, veer right to follow the Cotswold Way as it comes in from the left and follow the signs for just over half a mile. At the top, turn right and pass through the kissing gate with pasture on either side and continue to follow the Cotswold Way off to the left. Stay on the trail as it snakes up through the woods until you emerge out into the open.

3 You are now at the top of Cooper's Hill, which for generations has been home to the annual cheese-rolling festival. The origins of this intriguing tradition are lost in the mists of time, but there are records of the event dating back to the 1800s when it was part of a larger event called a 'wake'. Nowadays, thousands of spectators flock from all over the world on the spring bank holiday to watch people hurl themselves down the hill after a speeding 7lb Double Gloucester. Gazing down this vertiginous slope, it is hard to believe that anyone ever walks away – some don't!

To start the second half of your walk, follow the Cotswold Way steeply downhill to your left and back into the woods, turning right and emerging out through a kissing gate at the bottom of the hill. Continue on to the road, turning right to head along past the last few houses. At the end of the road, pass through a gate onto an un-made track.

4 After following this track along the edge and through the woods for a mile, you reach a marker post and a field gate on your left with a view down to the lakes in the distance. Leaving the Cotswold Way behind, take the path up to the right and back into Buckholt Wood. After a short while, emerge out onto a drive and head right up towards the road. Keeping a good look-out, cross the road and take the path directly opposite. As you reach the small car parking area under the trees, make for the track at the far side, and head downhill past the large house.

Continue down the track and straight onto a footpath with a crumbled old stone wall on your left, eventually passing over a trickling stream next to another ancient beech tree. Carry on up through the woods until you emerge out into open common land, and follow the track past the houses on the right until you meet the road opposite the little bus stop.

5 Take the road down through Cranham, and should you have a thirst in need of quenching turn left opposite the next footpath sign up towards the inviting Black Horse Inn. After this most pleasing of detours, continue to follow the road down through the village and back up towards the car park at the start. Another walk has now come to an end and yet another side of the wonderful Cotswold Way has been revealed, but rest well in the knowledge that it has so much more to entice you back.