

4. Winchcombe and Belas Knap Long Barrow

This scenic and interesting little walk takes you from the delightfully unspoilt town of Winchcombe, along Cotswold Way routes old and new, and up to one of the area's most intriguing ancient monuments, Belas Knap Long Barrow. A combination of history and scenery that will leave you eager to discover more of the National Trail and the inspirational landscape through which it runs.

Distance:

5¼ miles or 8.5km. Shorter route avoiding Belas Knap 3½ miles or 5.6km.

Duration:

3 - 4 hrs (Shorter 2 - 3 hours)

Difficulty:

Moderate, some steep sections and stiles.

Public transport:

No. 606 (Cheltenham - Chipping Campden) or W1/W2 from Cheltenham. (See the 'Explore the Cotswolds' public transport guide or visit www.traveline.info)

Start/Finish:

Grid reference SP 024/282 (OS Explorer sheet OL45)
Postcode GL54 5LL

Refreshments:

Cafés and pubs in Winchcombe.

Parking

Back Lane car park £1 all day.

1 Start at the war memorial on Abbey Terrace, adjacent to the Plaisterer's Arms pub. Facing the bus shelter, turn right and walk to Vineyard Street. Turn left down this little road bordered by picturesque terraced cottages and pollarded trees and over the stone bridge.

2 Just after the bridge, take the Cotswold Way through the metal gate on your right. Go straight across the small field ignoring paths on your left and right to meet a kissing gate. Through the gate and follow the signs until you reach Cordean Lane. Watching for traffic, turn left and head up the lane for ¼ mile (0.4km) until the

Cotswold Way turns right through a wide gate. Follow this driveway, past the cricket ground on the right, until a fingerpost guides you through a kissing gate on your left. Head on up through the middle of the rolling green fields towards the woods at the top of the hill.

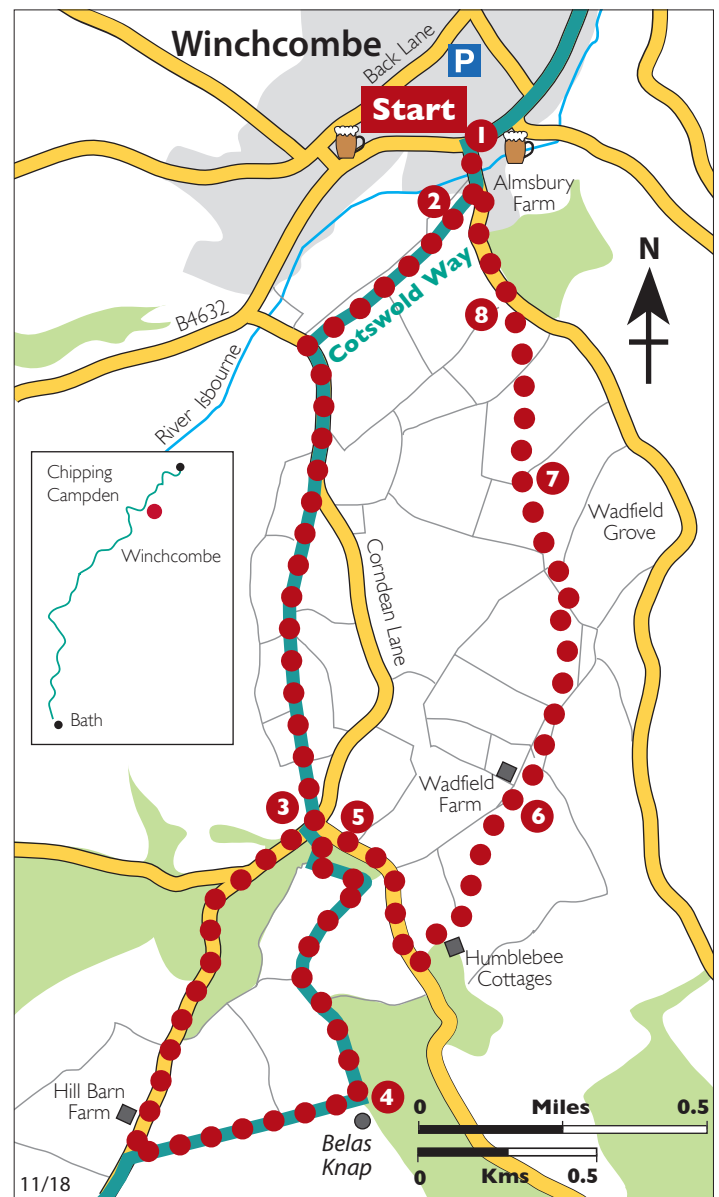
3 The kissing gate at the top is an excellent spot to rest awhile and take in the wonderful views over the town behind you. Once you've caught your breath, go through the gate and turn right up the 'No through road' and leave the Cotswold Way.

(If you don't fancy the steep climb up to Belas Knap, follow the Cotswold Way path opposite. Go through the gate, the path follows the road for 60m then turn left to the kissing gate by the road at point 5.)

Bearing left at the next road junction you will climb steadily to pass Hill Barn Farm on your right. Approx 300m after the farm turn left at the fingerpost to rejoin the Cotswold Way and head towards the mound of Belas Knap rising up at the far side of the field.

4 This Neolithic long barrow, or burial chamber first recorded excavation took place in 1863, and since then hundreds of human bones have been uncovered, some of which date back over 6,000 years. It is one of the most intriguing and iconic structures in the Cotswolds, and an excellent place to pause and soak up the past. Leaving the barrow behind, cross over the stone stile at the far side, go through the kissing gate and follow the Cotswold Way through trees to another kissing gate. Through the gate, follow the right hand field boundary to the bottom of the field and turn left to follow the edge of the wood to a kissing gate on the right. *Please avoid taking an unofficial short cut across the field.* Go down through woods until you meet the road, the Cotswold Way turns left just before a kissing gate.

5 Go through the kissing gate to leave the Cotswold Way. Turn right along the road, taking care of any traffic approaching for



approx ¼ mile (0.4km) and take the second footpath on the left signposted 'Winchcombe Way'. Follow this track, the old route of the Cotswold Way, down past Humblebee Cottages, bearing left at a junction of tracks, taking in the incredible views eastwards into the heart of the Cotswolds.

6 Follow the path down past Wadfield Farm buildings on your left to the corner of the field. Follow the narrowing path down between hedges towards a stile at the end. Again, wonderful views open up below you, this time over Winchcombe and the stunning Sudeley Castle with centuries of royal history and some of the most

magical gardens in the country. Continue to follow the waymarked path downhill before turning right over a stile / footbridge and turn left to the bottom of the field. Cross the next field to a footbridge. **7** Enter the next field and cross a track to bear rear right over the field to a kissing gate, cross the final field passing through a kissing gate onto the road.

8 Turn left, and follow the road back towards point 2, retracing your steps back into Winchcombe. Whatever the time of year, this fascinating, living, breathing town has a wealth of tea rooms, pubs and places of interest ready to welcome enquiring minds and weary walkers.