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 or 6.5km

Duration:
2 - 3 hrs

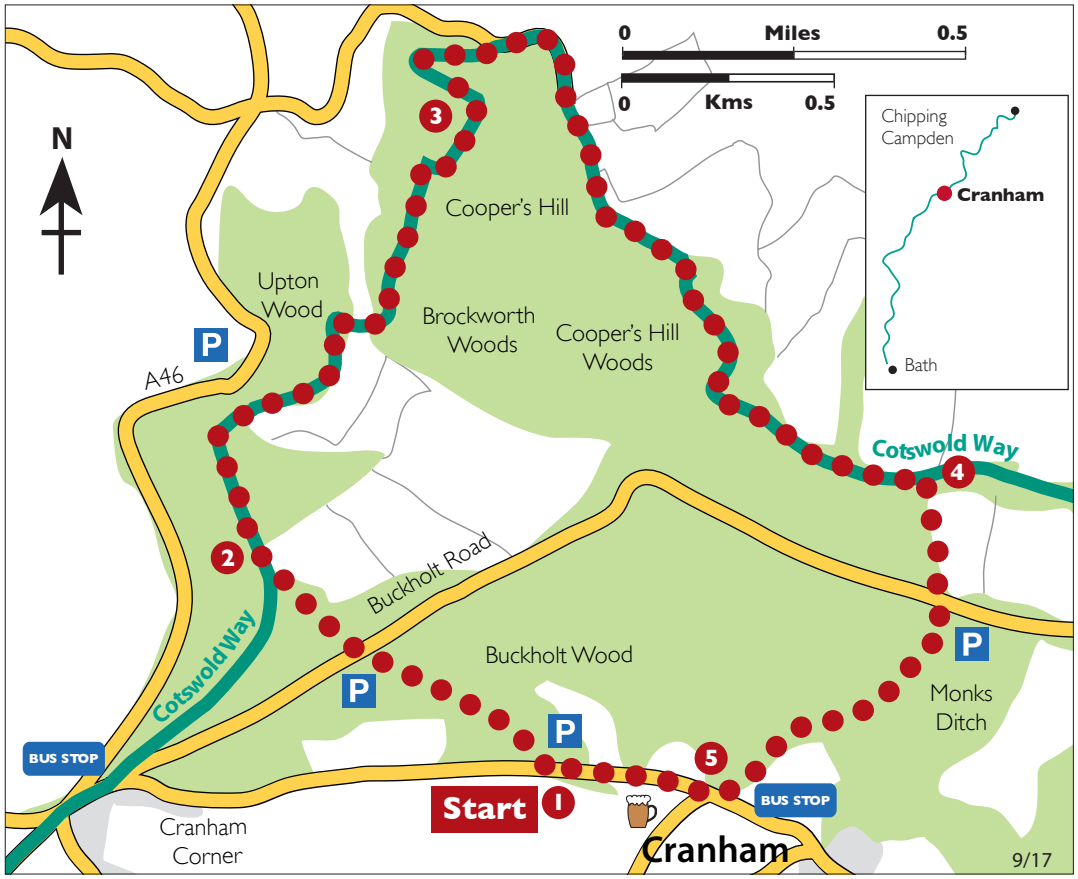
Difficulty:
Easy, no stiles but some moderately steep sections.

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 the 'Explore the Cotswolds' public transport guide or visit www.traveline.info

Start/Finish:
Grid reference SO 893/131
(OS Explorer sheet 179)
Postcode GL4 8HP

Refreshments:
Pub in Cranham

Parking
There is parking outside the village or at Buckholt Wood.



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 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 (0.8km) until you reach the small car park next to the road. Carefully cross the road and continue to follow the path opposite through the woods ahead.

2 At the top of the hill, bear right to follow the Cotswold Way as it comes in from the left and follow the signs for just over half a mile. (0.8km). 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 cheeserolling festival. The origins of this intriguing tradition are lost in the mists of time, but records of the event date 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 (3.1kg) Double Gloucester cheese. Gazing down this vertiginous slope, it is hard to believe that anyone ever walks away. – some don't! Continue to 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 a track.

4 After following this track along the edge and through the woods for a mile (1.6km), 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 over the road, follow the road to the left and then turn right at the next footpath sign. 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 wish to visit a pub turn left opposite the next footpath sign up towards the Black Horse Inn. After, the detour, 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.