

Off-road cycle ride 1

Chedworth Withington – 12 miles



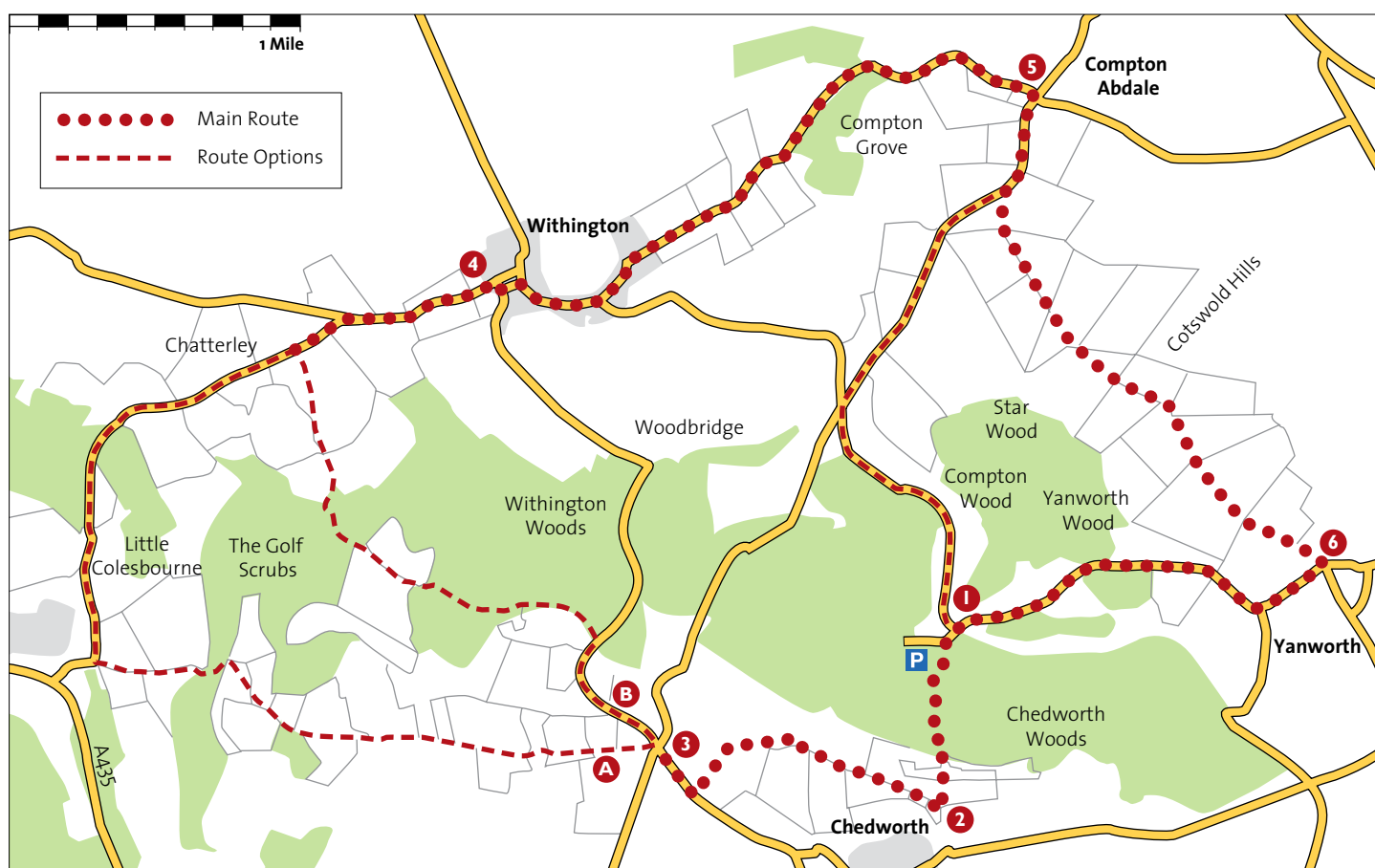
One of the Cotswolds greatest secrets is how good the area is for mountain biking. The network of good tracks designated as byways and bridleways makes mountain biking one of the best ways to discover the area.

You can cover a fair bit of ground in a ride and still find the secret places inaccessible to cars. It's also great fun. I view mountain biking as a means of exploration rather than a sport, which is another way of saying that I like to walk up the steep and or muddy bits! You too may find you have to get off for short stretches.

You will need a bike that is sturdy enough to handle off road conditions, a road bike would be unlikely to survive. Please wear a helmet and be aware of changing conditions. Off road riding is much easier in frozen or dry conditions than when the mud is wet, but not necessarily more fun! Riding a bicycle is permitted on public roads (not motorways!), byways, restricted byways and

bridleways but not footpaths. Rights of access aside, mountain bikers are a relatively recent arrival in the countryside, please be considerate of other users.

This ride combines quiet back roads with some off road stretches on bridleways. It explores the wide open vistas of the high wold and dips down into the villages, woods and pasture of the Upper Churn and Upper Coln valleys. You can start the ride at any point, please try to get to it on your bike if possible. If you do drive please park with consideration for the local community. Brackets indicate the wording of signs and the route is described in a clockwise direction. Enjoy!



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The Route

1 Left at the large red sign (Chedworth Roman Villa) onto the bridleway. Through the gate and the gate with a stile. Follow the bridleway across the glade. Take the left hand fork for a muddy climb through a sunken track way which levels out when it leaves the wood. Between the sheds to '5 ways' a point where 5 routes converge.

2 Right onto another bridleway. Left when it joins an old runway at a beech clump. Right at the road.

3 At the triangular road junction you have a choice. Option A is longer and contains more road but it also has a fantastic off road valley crossing. Option B takes you on an off road track through woods and fields. As both are too good to leave out you will just have to do this ride more than once!

A At the triangular road junction left, right and left (Woodlands Farm only). Leave the lane when it turns right towards a farm (private road) to carry straight on along a bridleway. Keep the drystone wall to your right. Carry on through the gate in the field corner now keeping the hedgerow to your left. Through another gate in a field corner to take the track through a conifer plantation. When you emerge from the plantation follow the bridleway across the valley to the gate in the wood opposite. Climb through another sunken track way. Left at the top and once over the brow there is a lovely descent to the road. Turn right and follow the road to Withington. Option B rejoins at the brow of the hill.

B Straight on at the triangular road junction (Withington 2 Andoversford 5) to join the next road (Withington 2 Andoversford 5 again). Left onto the bridleway at the large sign (Woodlands Farm Ltd, Main entrance, No Parking). Follow the bridleway through the white gate next to the telecommunications mast, past the cottage and through the woods. When you emerge into a field carry on with the wood then a hedge on your left. Back into the woods in the field corner, you emerge into fields after a nice drop. The bridleway now follows a good track through a farmyard and onto the road where you rejoin option A. Turn right at the road and follow it to Withington.



4 At Withington right (Chedworth 3 1/2, Cirencester 9) then left (Unsuitable for heavy vehicles) then right again. Follow the road, after a sharp ascent you are rewarded by a truly pretty, mostly downhill ride to Compton Abdale.

5 In Compton Abdale turn right at the crocodile – yes the crocodile (Roman villa 2 1/2, Yanworth 3 1/2) for a short steep climb. Turn left onto a bridleway near the brow where a roadside strip of trees starts. Now for one of the finest off road stretches in the Cotswolds. Follow the bridleway towards and through the belt of trees behind the pylons, Then all the way to Yanworth bearing right at the footpath/bridleway sign at its midpoint.

6 At Yanworth go through the brown gate and straight on to the T-junction. Turn right (blank on the side facing the bridleway, Roman Villa 1 3/4 on the side facing the road) and stay on this road for a great descent. At the bottom leave the road to carry straight on towards the red sign (The National Trust Chedworth Villa).

Mini-rides

This area also has a couple of very good short rides, handy for a summers evening after work. Options A and B can be combined for a mostly off road experience or a circuit around Compton Abdale, Yanworth and Cassey Compton offers fantastic views and one of my favourite off road stretches.

Maps

This ride in its entirety can be found on both the Ordnance Surveys Landranger 163 'Cheltenham and Cirencester area' map and the Explorer Map OL45 'The Cotswolds'. Both are good for mountain biking. The 1:25,000 Explorer series has more detail and I prefer it for route finding. The 1:50,000 Landranger series is better if you tend to cover more ground.

Words and photographs by Simon Smith

Cotswolds National Landscape Cotswold Business Centre, 2 A P Ellis Road, Upper Rissington, Glos. GL54 2QB Tel: 07841 663607.

www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk