

Miles Without Stiles

Bibury and the River Coln



Away from the sightseeing crowds in Bibury, a delightful walk through woodland and meadow rich in wildlife, across a Roman road and past a hidden dewpond.

Distance: 6.5 km/
4 miles with an up and
down of 110 m/360ft

Time: 2 hours

Start: Bibury (near Cirencester) on the river bridge by the Swan Inn (SP 115/069). Refreshments at two inns or the trout farm, and toilets near the start.

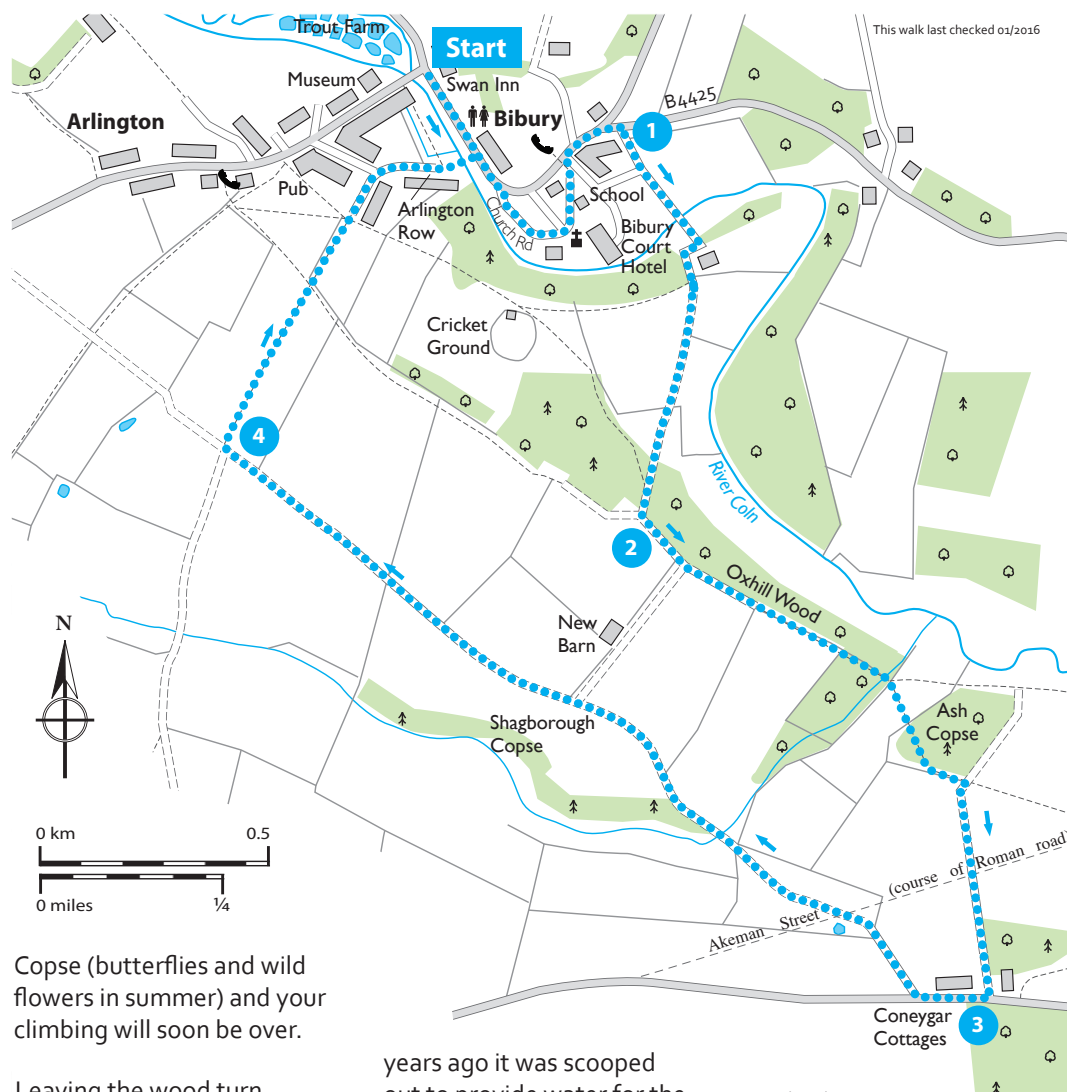
Bus 855 (Pulhams) from Cirencester to Moreton. Swanbrook 853 from Gloucester, Cheltenham and Oxford.

Route:

Park by the river near the Swan Inn and walk downstream along the B4425. After a footbridge bear right into the village, then left before the church uphill to the main road. Turn right along the pavement for 80m then fork right on a lane signed to Coln St. Aldwyns for 40m. Here turn right downhill on a private road alongside the former Bibury Court Hotel **1**.

Cross the river and bear right uphill past the old mill stones following the tarmac past a big house on your left. After a wide gate take the track ahead, soon climbing into Oxhill Wood. At the top **2** bear left for 600m (muddy at times) and drop down to a gate or a stone stile into a meadow via a footbridge.

Now head half right uphill through a gate into Ash



Copse (butterflies and wild flowers in summer) and your climbing will soon be over.

Leaving the wood turn right onto a track between hedges. Where there's a gap on the left you cross the line of Akeman Street, a Roman road from London to Cirencester.

At the road **3** turn right past Coneygar Cottages for 200m, then right again on a footpath gently downhill. After a gate at 200m walk across to your left to a mound that hides a small pond (it may be dry). Many

years ago it was scooped out to provide water for the sheep grazing on the high pasture.

Follow the track, crossing the invisible Roman road again and go straight ahead gently down and up for 2km. Look out for a water tank on bricks on your right, because you'll soon turn right. Follow the stone wall until it ends **4**, turn right on a grassy path and head for the gate ahead that leads between

Map based upon OS mapping,
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houses to a tiny triangular green. Fork right downhill to Arlington Row, the most photographed cottages in the Cotswolds.

From here you can turn left before the cottages and walk alongside the meadow back to the bridge; or go past the cottages to the river and the road where you started.

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"Surely the most beautiful village in England"

WILLIAM MORRIS

Bibury is actually two small villages separated by the River Coln. On the left bank it's Bibury, and on the right bank Arlington is on the road towards Cirencester.

The history of Bibury goes back at least to the Iron Age, with the remains of a hill fort above the village. Akeman Street, the Roman road from Cirencester to Saint Albans is close by and the ancient Salt Way from Droitwich to Lechlade can be followed just up the hill towards Burford.

The local church, St Mary's, contains some signs of Saxon origins, and close by is the splendid Bibury Court Hotel, built in 1633.



Wildlife reserve amid the crowds



Set between the river and the weavers' cottages at Arlington Row (every visitor's must-shoot picture), the ancient water meadow of Rack Isle is an important wildlife refuge. It takes its name from the days when the wool weavers spread their cloth to dry on wooden racks here.

It provides a habitat for water voles and is a wildfowl breeding ground, though you may find some ducks are far from wild when they demand to be fed.

A fine church



In St Mary's churchyard the tombs of affluent 17th century clothiers hint at the architectural riches inside the church. There are traces of its existence in Saxon times, but all was changed (frequently) by the Normans. Their extension to the chancel is spectacular.

After the church you might say hello to the two sheep guarding a cottage.



Can you find the Roman road and the ancient dewpond?

Up on the high pasture there are two things to find: the first one is almost invisible, and the second sometimes disappears too.

You'll cross the Roman road of Akeman Street twice: as you approach point ⑤ (marked on the map) and again when you leave the road after Coneygar Cottages and go through the first wide gate downhill.



Turn left and you'll find a rare old dewpond, scooped out in a stony hollow. They're called dewponds, though most of their moisture came from rain and were dug for the sheep who grazed far above the streams down the hill. Perhaps the Romans' sheep drank here?