

3·1 Cheltenham Spa to Winchcombe

28 31

Distance 8·5 miles 13·7 km

Terrain brief stretches of tarmac, good tracks, mostly around fields and over Cleeve Common near the start, a long ascent to Cleeve Hill (330 m/1083 ft), followed by level or gently undulating ground, then a long easy descent

Food & drink none between Cheltenham and Winchcombe

Summary a satisfying introduction, ascending from Cheltenham to the highest point in the Cotswolds, with some need for careful navigation, then easy walking down into Winchcombe



- From Cheltenham Spa station, you can take a bus to Clarence Street in the town centre, or stay on for a further 2 km to Pittville Pump Room (route D, in 2017 every 10 minutes). It's about 2 km to walk to the town centre.
- Cheltenham's bus and coach station is nearby, as is The Wilson (with Tourist Information Centre which sells a good street map, in 2017 for £0.30). You could visit St Mary's Minster, or for shops explore the handsome Promenade.
- Once ready to begin the route, head for the High Street and continue to its junction with Winchcombe St: turn left (north). (When you reach Clarence Road, the Holst Birthplace Museum is just 50 m to your left.)
- Continue north to go through large green gates. Walk ahead along Pittville Lawn, and cross Wellington Rd to enter Pittville Park, with café and toilets. Go ahead to its far end and the beautiful Pump Room (open to the public Wednesday to Sundays, 10.00-16.00, events permitting).
- With your back to the Pump Room entrance, walk east along the East Approach Drive and turn left into Albert Road. At the T-junction, turn right along Newbarn Lane.
- Within 40 m, look for a public footpath ('Green Acre') on the left. Follow this until you reach a kissing-gate at a large open area near the racecourse.
- Go straight ahead to the path around the racecourse and turn right to follow it. After 300 m cross the stream by footbridge, and on its far side turn right to continue beside the racecourse.

North-west towards the Malverns

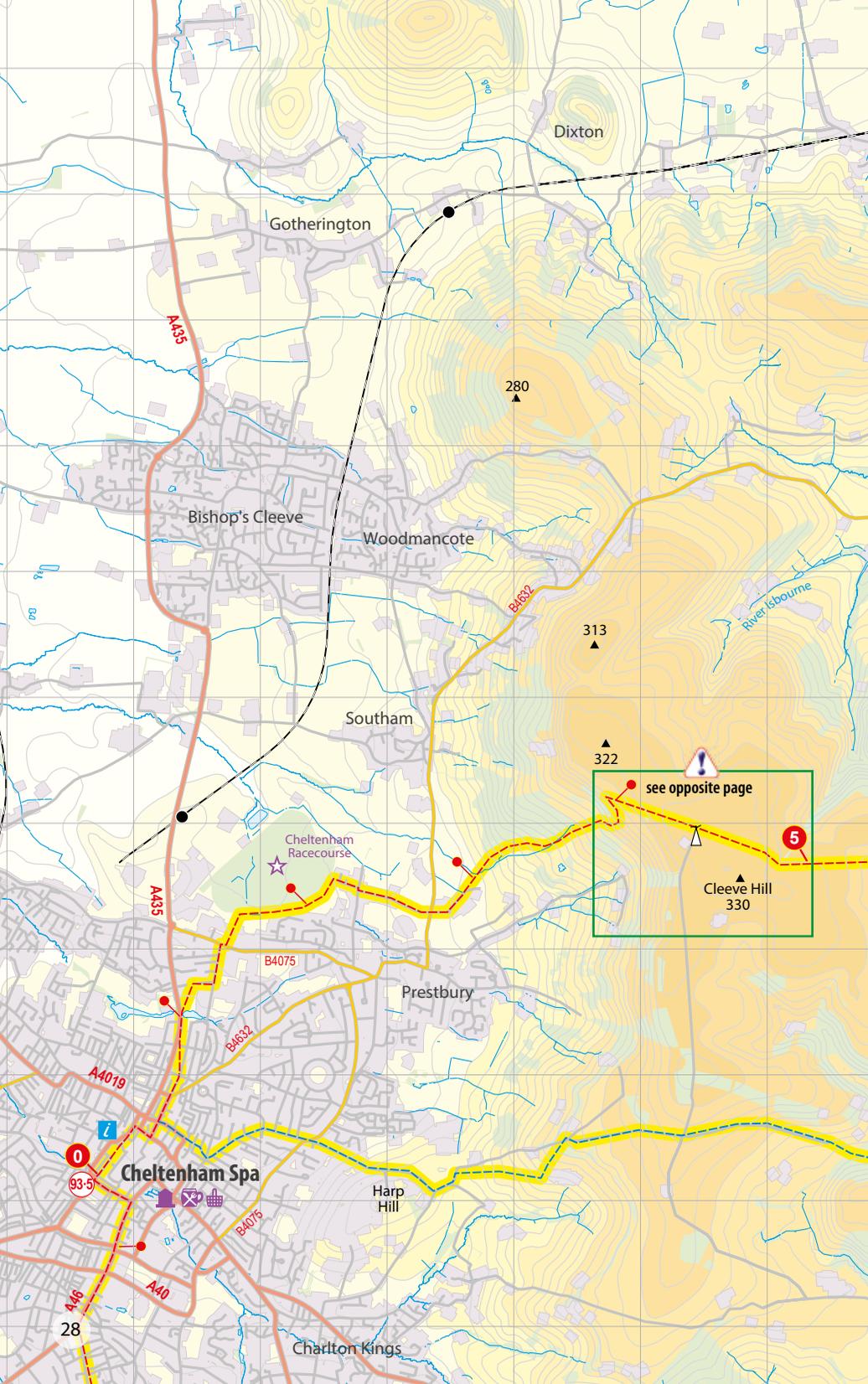
- Look up ahead and you may see the cluster of three radio masts on top of Cleeve Hill, that will soon become a crucial landmark.
- After a further 500 m, at the corner of a small field, turn right along the field edge soon to reach Park Lane.
- Go ahead for 150 m to reach a junction in Prestbury, one of England's most haunted villages. Cross over, angling right, to walk up Shaw Green Lane.
- Within 600 m, reach and cross the B4632 main road and enter Gravel Pit Lane. After 150 m, turn left along a farm road.
- Where this road bends right, leave it across a stile to enter a field ahead. Cross the field slightly diagonally right to reach another stile. Enter another field and turn right to reach its top.
- Go into another field via a stile/gate. This long, rough field climbs gradually: keep to its left side, alongside Queen's Wood, eventually to reach the field's top corner, where you climb the stile.
- Bear left and continue to climb, following the natural route as it veers right, to head up to a stile/gate at the edge of some trees. Continue through trees, soon crossing a small clearing, and then ascend a path rising up through woods.
- The path emerges onto an area of flattish grassland, with a wall beyond the bushes in front of you. The radio masts are beyond the wall, to your right.

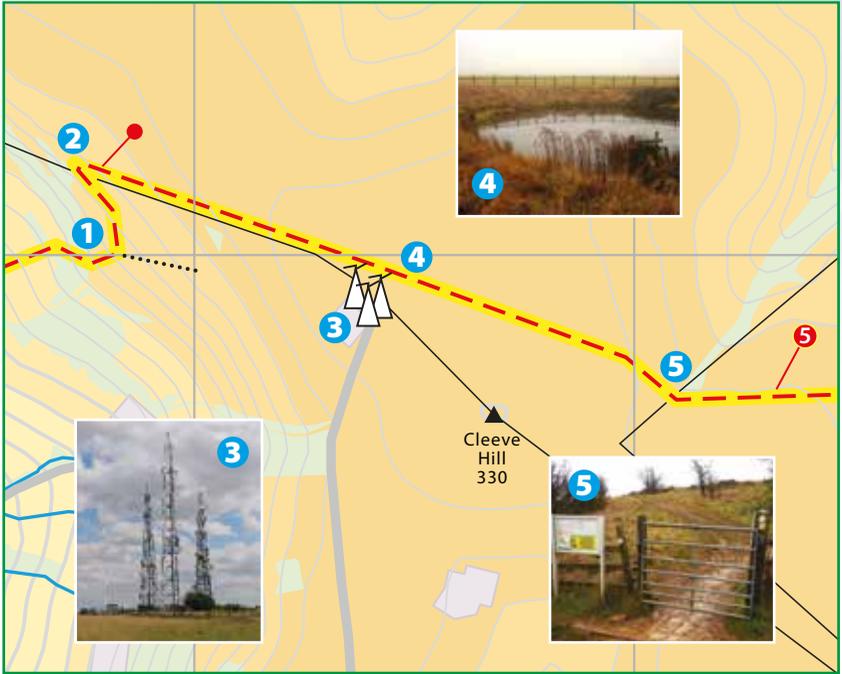


Trod path to field's top corner

Approaching the radio masts







- To approach the masts, at a fork in the path bear left ❶ (away from the masts) for 140 m until you can go through a small gate in the wall onto Cleeve Common.
- On the far side of the gate, turn sharp right ❷ (east-south-east) to follow its edge, with the wall now on your right. The photo on page 27 (lower) was taken from here.
- Continue towards the radio masts ❸. (From here, the summit of Cleeve Hill is nearby: at 330 m/1083 ft, it's the highest point in the Cotswolds.)
- As you draw level with the masts, make sure that you are about 200 m to their left, near gorse bushes. Pass a wooden enclosure surrounding an ancient dewpond ❹ .
- Keep ahead, generally heading towards pylons in the far distance. About 700 m beyond the masts, the ground descends to a wall in front of you, marking the boundary of Cleeve Common. Ignore the electric fence with gate on your left, instead looking ahead for the boundary gate ❺ .
- Go through the metal gate (with waymarks for Winchcombe and Holst Ways) onto a track heading for Wontley Farm, passing beneath the overhead power lines.
- Follow this track down to Wontley Farm (mile 5-4), which is deserted and derelict. After the gate into the farmyard be sure to turn left at the fingerpost (Winchcombe Way).
- Follow the stony track uphill for 900 m until you see a fingerpost pointing right for Belas Knap (now rejoining the Cotswold Way which you follow all the way to Winchcombe). Ahead to your right lies Belas Knap, an ancient long barrow.



- Follow the track beside the edge of a field. Within 700 m you reach a stone stile leading into Belas Knap, a superbly conserved ancient burial chamber: see panel.
- After examining the barrow, exit its enclosure over another stone stile, adjacent to the information board. Turn left through a kissing-gate and walk along the edge of a field, through some trees and with more woodland on the right.
- After you emerge from the trees, keep going until you come to another kissing-gate on the right. Go through to descend a field at its right margin.
- Follow the field edge as it curves left at the bottom, with more woodland on the right. At a steep dip, turn right through a kissing-gate to descend sharply amid trees to approach a road. (From here, there are fine views to Winchcombe and Sudeley Castle.)
- Just before the road, turn left along a path and emerge through a gate. Cross the road (Corndeane Lane) and go straight ahead into a field (signed Cotswold Way). Bear slightly right to go diagonally down the hillside, towards a cricket pitch.

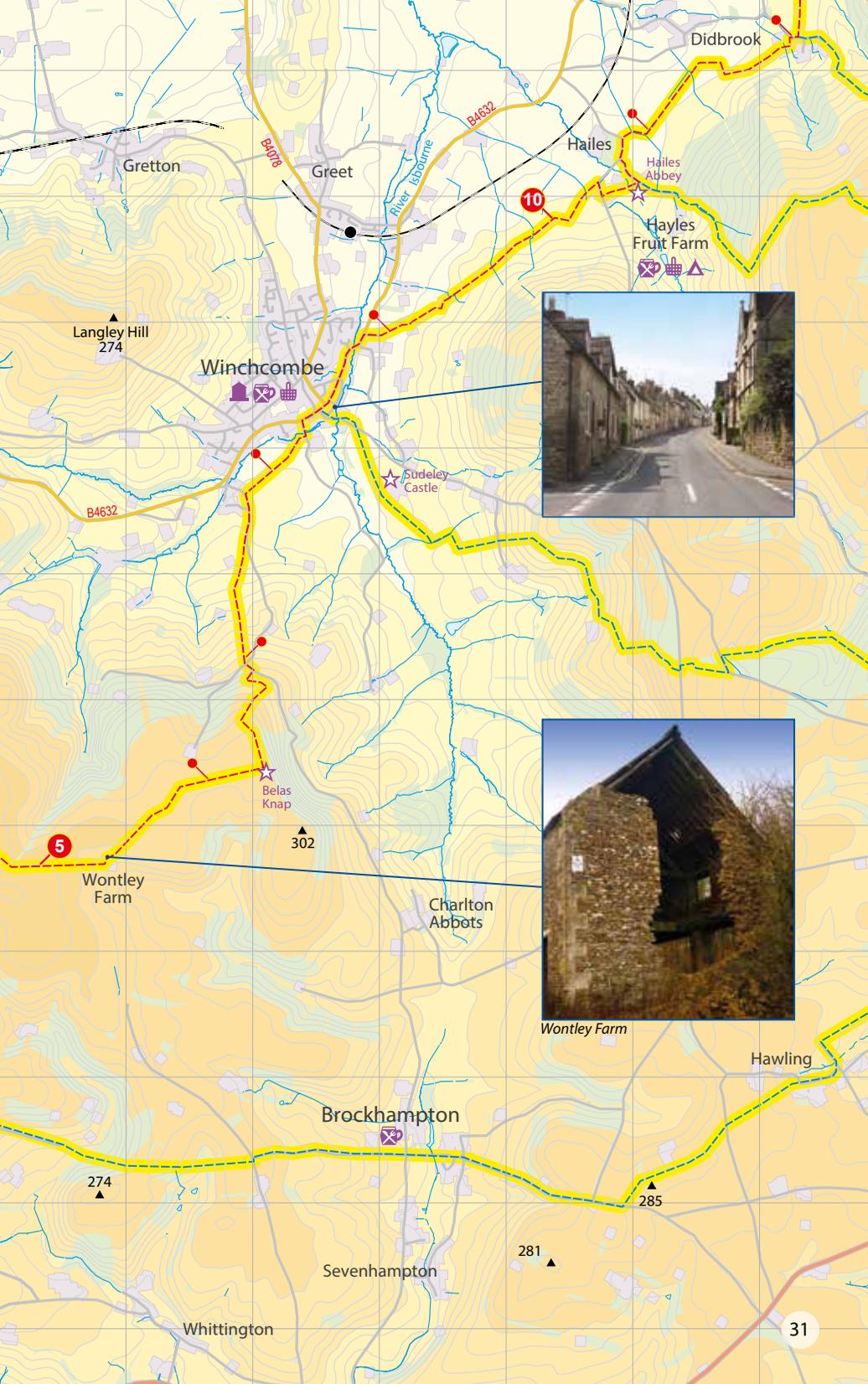


Belas Knap

One of Britain's finest neolithic long barrows, Belas Knap was constructed about 3000 BC. Its chambers were deliberately blocked up after at least 38 people had been buried over a long period. At its northern end is an impressive false entrance, perhaps for security, and access to its four burial chambers was from the sides. Bronze Age skeletons and animal bones are buried behind the false entrance; its forecourt was used for ceremonies. The barrow has been restored on several occasions and is cared for by English Heritage: www.english-heritage.org.uk.

Descent to Winchcombe





Wontley Farm



Sudeley Castle

- At a tarmac road, turn right and continue past Winchcombe Cricket Club to another road (Corndean Lane again). Turn left and continue along the road for 330 m to reach a track on your right (signed Cotswold Way).
- Follow this track for 700 m to reach Vineyard Street: turn left for Winchcombe (or right for Sudeley Castle). At the B4632 main street, turn right towards the village centre.



Sudeley Castle

Sudeley Castle is a largely 16th century mansion, still inhabited but partly open to the public. Henry VIII's son, Edward VI, gave it to his uncle, Thomas Seymour, in 1547. For visitor information, see www.sudeleycastle.co.uk. Katherine Parr was born in 1512 and became one of the wealthiest and best-connected women in England. After her second husband died in 1543, she was Henry VIII's choice for his sixth (and final) wife. Henry was Katherine's third, but not final husband. Only six months after Henry's death in 1547, she married Thomas Seymour and moved to Sudeley. She died there a year later, and is entombed in its 15th century church.

Winchcombe

This Cotswold village has a long history. In Anglo-Saxon times it was a seat of the Mercian kings and the county town of Winchcombeshire until its incorporation into Gloucestershire in the 11th century. Its abbey, established in AD 798, was dedicated to St Kenelm, the son of its founder, King Kenulf, and Winchcombe was a significant place of pilgrimage.

After the abbey was destroyed by fire in 1151, it was rebuilt (concluded in 1239). Sadly, three centuries later it was surrendered to Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries and razed to the ground. However, the parish church of St Peter survived, and is a fine example of a 'wool church': see page 16. Its fine gargoyles are said to be modelled on local people. Inside, an embroidery is said to be the work of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife.

Winchcombe is a Walkers Welcome town and hosts a walking festival each May. Despite its modest population (about 4500) it has retained a good range of shops and services. It also has two small museums: the Folk & Police Museum is on the corner of North Street, and the Railway Museum & Gardens on Gloucester Street celebrates the village's Great Western Railway past (1906-1960).

