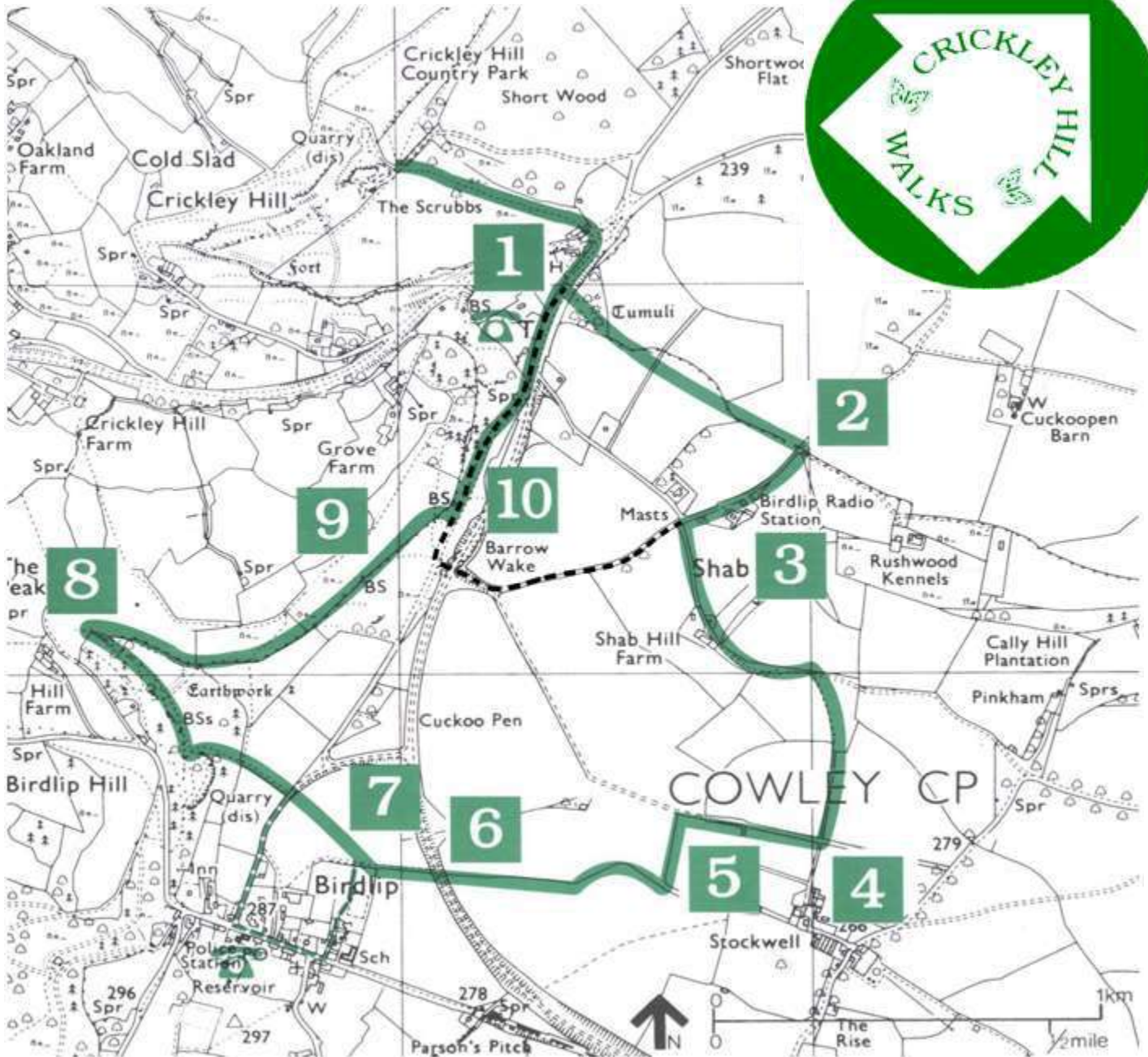


Birdlip Walk 5mls



This walk of about 5 miles (8km) starts at Crickley Hill Country Park and explores the countryside near Birdlip, the highest village in the Cotswolds. The walk will take you about 2 hours to enjoy. Points of interest along the way are mentioned in the text.

The walk has waymarks along the route, but you will also need to follow the map at the front of this leaflet to keep you safely on the trail. Follow the arrows marked Crickley Hill Walks on the round discs with a GREEN background (arrows with a red background show the way for the longer Leckhampton Walk). The colour of the arrow itself tells you what kind of public right of way you are on – yellow for a footpath and blue for a bridleway.

Note: There is an optional diversion route to avoid crossing the A417 near the Air Balloon Pub [see the dotted line on the map]. At the Air Balloon Pub continue to walk up the pavement. Follow this path up the hill and you will come to a car parking area. At the vehicle entrance to the car park turn left passing under the A417. Walk along the road until you rejoin the original route.

To start the walk: With your back to the visitor centre walk to your right out along the pavement alongside the access road and turn through the first gateway on your right into the woodland.

1. A New Inn? The pub at the top of Crickley Hill first opened its doors to travellers in 1777 when it was known as the New Inn. The name was later changed to the Air Balloon probably to celebrate man's first flights by hot air balloon in the 1780s.

The pioneers of hot air ballooning took great risks, and a plaque on the wall inside the pub tells of a man called Walter Powell who apparently took off from Malmesbury near Swindon around that time and disappeared without trace!



2. It's a dog's life! As you walk towards the radio station you will almost certainly hear the noise from dogs barking at the nearby Rushwood Kennels. The kennels provide quarantine and boarding for 100 dogs and 40 cats.

3. Radio Silence. The Birdlip Radio Station on Shab Hill was established by the Air Ministry early on in the Second World War and was later used for air traffic control. Today the building is used by several security firms. At this spot you are 945ft above sea level.



Barley



Oats



Wheat

4. Stockwell. From this point on the footpath you can see Stockwell Farm. The buildings are on the site of an earlier settlement which is thought to have grown up around a green or well in medieval times

Before the mid 18th century the land surrounding you would have been a mixture of open fields and commons. By about 1850 much of the land in the area had been divided up into field systems as a result of the Enclosure Acts, so the pattern of fields you see today dates from around that time. The only land to escape these enclosures was at Birdlip Hill and Barrow Wake which have remained as open commons to the present day.

5. A White Way? Just past Stockwell Farm the footpath continues for a short distance on a new farm track cut into the bare limestone. All lanes in the Cotswolds would have looked like this in the days before tarmac. The name 'White Way' may date back to medieval times when many lanes were the routes for salt traders travelling from the Midlands. The story that they spilt so much salt en route that the lanes became white is probably stretching the imagination just a bit too much, but as the Old English word for salt was 'hwit', there may be a link. A more likely explanation is that as the thin soil was worn away, or removed, the white limestone beneath was revealed. The best known White Way is the ancient road used by the Romans which runs from Winchcombe near Cheltenham to Cirencester.

6. The Birdlip Bypass opened in 1988 to divert traffic around the village. Take care crossing the road.

7. Birdlip Village. About 200 metres after the bypass you can make an optional detour into Birdlip where there is a pub and telephone. Just after the playing fields there is a stile on the left. To stay on the main route take the path across the field to the right. To take the detour, go over the stile and follow the path into the village rejoining the original route by following the main road around to the right.

In medieval times Birdlip was spelt 'Brydelep' which may have come from two Old English words — 'bridd' — a bird, and 'hleþ' — a leap. Ancient place-names often referred to features in the landscape, so Birdlip may have originally got its name due to its position — in the sense of a steep place from which only a bird could safely 'leap'. Another romantic suggestion is that the name came from 'bride's leap', perhaps relating to an ancient folk-tale where a bride flung herself down the cliff in a desperate bid to avoid marrying the man her father had selected!

The Royal George Hotel was once an important resting place for coach horses and travellers.



8. Peak Viewing. The beautiful beech woods along the Cotswold edge are a complete contrast to the open windswept farmland you have walked across. Beech trees grow well on the shallow limestone soils and the woodlands provide important habitats for wildlife. The footpath through the woods brings you to a spur of the Cotswold hills known as The Peak. The remains of a neolithic settlement have been found here but much of the earthwork boundaries have been destroyed by quarrying and ploughing over the centuries. Discoveries of animal bones show that the occupants kept pigs, cattle and some sheep.

From The Peak there are dramatic views on three sides as the land drops away steeply to the Severn Vale below.

9. The Cotswold Edge. As you walk from The Peak along the edge of the escarpment you are following a section of the Cotswold Way. This long distance National Trail stretches for almost 100 miles from Chipping Campden in the north to Bath in the south, following along the western edge of the Cotswold hills. You will notice how the steep edge of the hills (the scarp) is quite different from the agricultural land around. Intensive farming is not possible on the steep slopes so grasses, wild flowers and shrubs have remained largely undisturbed. This unimproved limestone grassland provides a refuge and haven for wildlife. Areas like this are becoming increasingly rare in the Cotswolds and are now of national importance for their wildlife value. Many are now protected by law as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The scarp edge is a favourite hunting ground for birds of prey like the kestrel. You may be lucky and see one hovering above the grassland, on the look-out for insects and small mammals on which it feeds. Sparrowhawks and the occasional buzzard also visit the area.



Wild Thyme



Viper's Bugloss



Harebell



Kestrel



Common Rock-rose

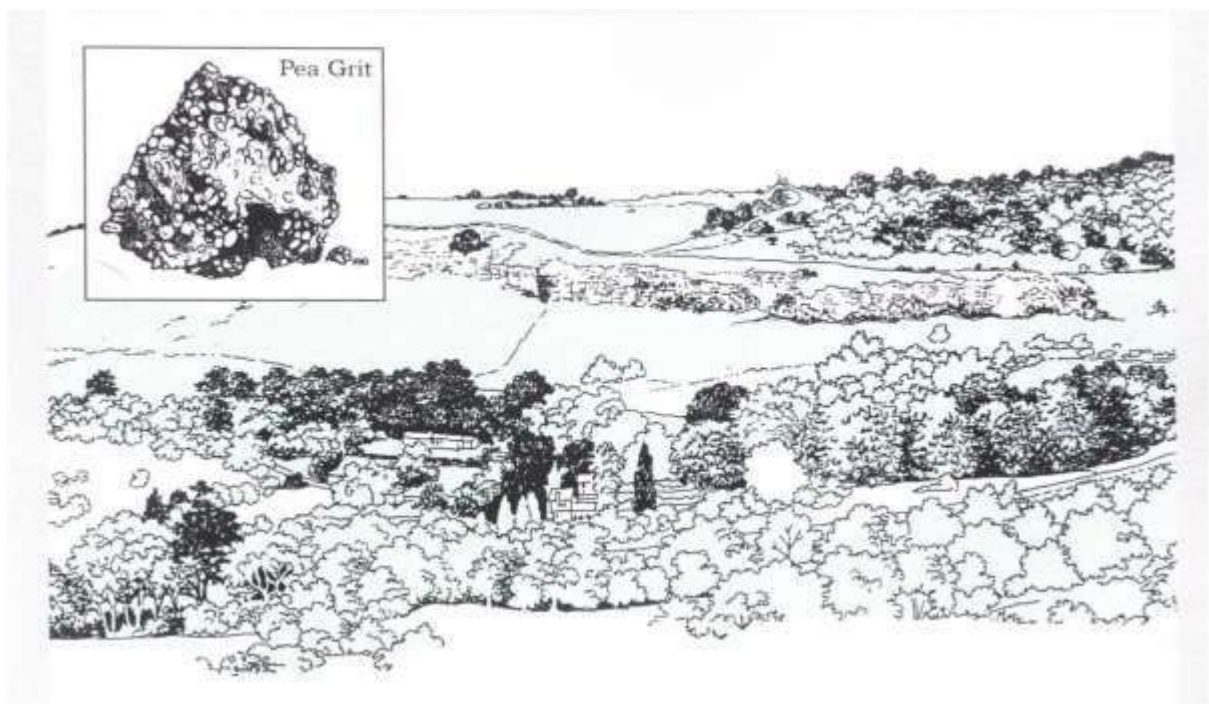
10. Barrow Wake. The view over the Severn Vale at this point is considered to be one of the finest in the Cotswolds, and on a clear day you can see the Brecon Beacons in Wales — almost 60 miles away.

The wild, windswept area of grassland and scrub was once extensively quarried, and as you follow the footpath you will notice the many grassy mounds and hollows which are the remains of this once important activity. It was at one such quarry in 1879 that a workman stumbled across an ancient Iron Age burial site. In the simple stone tomb he discovered skeletons, bronze bowls, amber jewellery, and the now-famous Birdlip Mirror. Details about this discovery and other points of interest in the area are given at the viewpoint information panels which you will find beside the footpath near the car park.



The Birdlip Mirror

Points of view. From Barrow Wake you get a good view of Crickley Hill and the exposed limestone cliffs. A type of crumbly limestone called pea grit, which is made up of pea-like nodules, is found on Crickley Hill and this outcrop is the finest in the country.



If you look carefully, on the flat part of the hill you can see the remains of a defensive wall which is about 2500 years old. Originally it was over 5 metres high and may have had a walkway along the top. Archaeologists think it defended an early Iron Age settlement which was later destroyed and the wall burnt around 500 BC.

The hummocky ground seen below the escarpment at Barrow Wake is composed of sands and limestones which have slipped down the steep slope over the underlying clays. This slow process, which started at the end of the last Ice Age, still continues today.

If you have enjoyed this walk then why not try the longer Leckhampton Walk (9 miles) also starting from Crickley Hill Country Park. For more information please contact: Crickley Hill Country Park, Crickley Hill, Birdlip, Gloucester Glos. GL4 8JY.

Tel: 01452 863170

Email: countryparks@gloucestershire.gov.uk

