

WALKING THE COTSWOLD WAY IN ENGLAND

The Cotswold is a region in southwest-central England, approximately 80 miles west of London. The area is a popular destination for tourists from all over the world. It covers 878 square miles, 80% of which is farmland, and occurs along a range of rolling hills that rise to a steep, long escarpment.

The area is defined by a unique limestone bedrock that is quarried for its golden colored 'Cotswold' stone. The predominantly rural landscape contains stone-built villages, towns, and stately homes and gardens, featuring the local stone.



The word Cotswold first appeared around the mid-1600's. "Cots" means a rural laborer's hut or tiny dwelling. "Wold" means rolling hills. The word also refers to a breed of sheep distinguished for its long wool, that was developed here.



The Cotswold Way is one of many National Trails in England. It was officially opened in 1970. The pathway is 102 miles long, and follows a southwesterly course, beginning in the charming village of Chipping Camden, and ending in Bath. The trail meanders through farms, field and forest paths, rural roads, and green lanes, often lined by hedgerows (Green lanes are historic tracts and minor roads used mostly by walkers, cyclists, and horses, rarely by cars). You're constantly ascending hills, then

traversing downward again. One moment you are walking along the escarpment's edge, with beautiful views of towns and farmland down on the nearby plains. Then you're hiking down, to explore those picturesque villages. Then you head up again, zigzagging back into the rolling hills, to the top of the escarpment. This trail encourages each hiker to take an unhurried approach. There are so many places of interest along the way, that no walker should resist the temptation to stray here and there to broaden their appreciation of the region.



Our Group: Dave Kloster, Dave Crooks (our faithful leader) Suzanne Gramas-Fernandez, and her mom, Peg Gramas, Scott McDonald, and Bill Sarther

Our party of six made the trip to England in June of 2022. It was my first international trip since 2019, due to Covid. The fun thing about hiking in England, Scotland, or Ireland is that you make your reservation through a local tour company, and they book rooms in different village B&Bs along the way. We hiked for 6 days, averaging 10 miles a day. Each morning a baggage truck picked up our suitcase, and moved it on to the next night's lodging. So, all we needed to carry was a day pack. There was always a place along the way where we could get a snack, or have lunch. A shower every night, then dinner and a nightcap. That's my idea of roughing it.

When I got home from this trip, and showed pictures to my wife (she's not a hiker), she said "I think I could do that, and enjoy it." So, the following year, 2023, I hiked the exact same trail again, with her, and two other gals from our group, that missed the first hike. The pictures that follow are a compilation of both treks.



Gina and Scott McDonald, Nancy Stanley, and Maria Kenigsberg





The lovely town of Chipping Camden, our first stop. It is known as the jewel of the Cotswold. Notice the 'honey yellow' color of the stone, used to build almost every home and business. The Market Hall is the official start of the Cotswold Way. It was built in 1627 and intended to provide shelter for merchants and farmers selling goods, like cheese, butter, and poultry (but not wool!). It is still used as a market place today, several days a month, from March to December. Our first night's lodging at the Volunteer's Inn, an 18th century Bed and Breakfast.





On our first morning, we walked out of Chipping Camden, rose on a field path and over a few low hills, eventually being deposited back down, into a flat field of wheat. The trail literally took us directly through the farmer's field.



This is a typical view of what the picture-book English countryside looks like. Border Collie in foreground.

Sheep were everywhere. They are the most common farm animal in England.

Notice the beautiful views from up on the escarpment.





Five miles into our hike on day 1, we came to the Broadway Tower, an iconic landmark on top of the Cotswold escarpment. Built in 1798, the castle commands panoramic views of the surrounding plains. It has turrets and battlements, gargoyles and balconies. Unfortunately, it's privately owned and they wanted too much money to take the tour and climb to the top. So, we passed. From the Tower, we hiked a long way down to the quaint village of Broadway.



Naming one's house is an old British custom which began with the Gentry naming their manors, halls, and castles. Now everyday folk name their homes as well. Sadly, Farthing Cottage became Farting Cottage, as a result of the thumb of Dave Kloster.

That evening, we stayed in Stanton, often called the model Cotswold village. In the eyes of a Hollywood director, it is the 'perfect', quaint English village. It is basically a collection of 16th century cottages and farmhouses all build from local stone. Unlike Broadway, tiny Stanton has few cars, no traffic, no advertisements, and no stores.





Both times, I stayed at The Vine, Bed and Breakfast. Stanton is located in horse country. The Vine caters to riders from all over the world who enjoy riding horses in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Others from our group stayed at The Old Post House B&B. This residence (bottom picture) is a traditional 400-year-old stone building. Accommodations are located in a converted stable block.

Braid-like head covering to help keep flies away.





As we left Stanton the next day, several horses were in a grassy paddock and they enjoyed being petted.

The trail commenced through peaceful meadows and fields known as the Parkland of Stanway House, where stately oaks and chestnut trees towered above us. It was an easy stretch of walk.





Stanway House, an extraordinary Jacobean gatehouse is famous for its late-renaissance architecture.



The 12th century church of St Peter and its very old graveyard, lies adjacent to the gatehouse

It was fun reading the inscriptions on the gravestones. Several of us decided we needed to lay down in front of a headstone, and practice being dead.





A mile down the road, we passed through a farm with cows in a barnyard. Suzanne, our animal whisperer, just had to touch this cow's tongue, to see what it felt like. They both liked it!

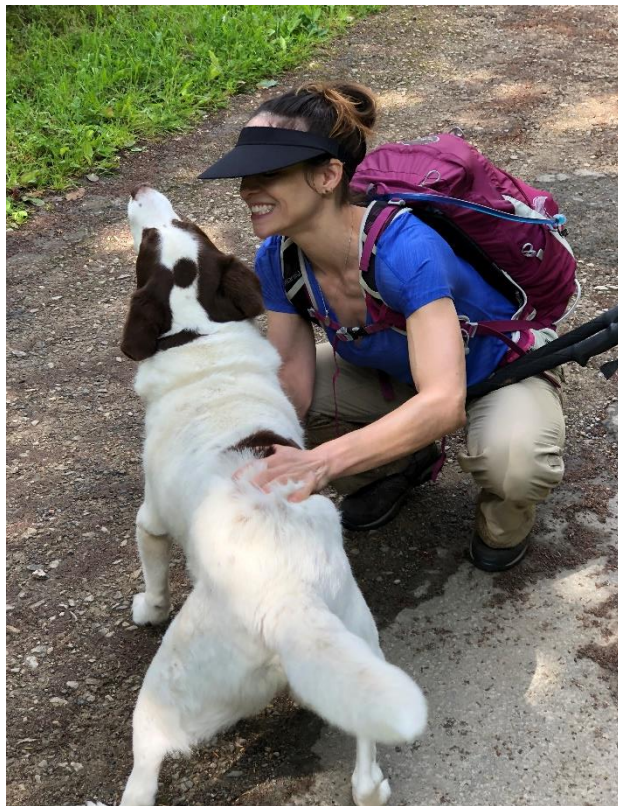
The following year, while passing through the same farm, we crossed a field of cows, just as the owner showed up in his pickup truck. They all came running!





With the rancher there, the cows felt secure, and allowed us to pet them. The one on the right pretended I was a tree, and rubbed his head all over me. Upon leaving the farm, the trail traversed upward. A strategically placed bench provided a respite and beautiful view.





The English love their dogs! They take them everywhere, including restaurants and onto trains. We saw many locals walking their dogs on the Cotswold Way. I was especially fond of these 3 Collies, and of course, Suzanne had to pet and scratch them all.



We stopped for lunch at the 12th century Church of St Nicholas. Inside, some people had been buried in the center aisle of the chapel. Kind of creepy. This gravestone I'm standing on, inside the church, was dated 1683.



The English love their gardens. The height of the growing season is May through July. Great Britain is at quite a northerly latitude, therefore there can be more than 16 hours of daylight during the month of June. The girls met one of the homeowners who shared her tips for gardening and the names of unusual plants and flowers.



The 3rd night we stayed in the picturesque small town of Winchcombe. My accommodations were at the Wesley House, named after John Wesley, an English theologian and evangelist, who was a leader of the revival movement within the Church of England known as Methodism. He supposedly stayed here.



Most B&Bs laid out the spread of the Traditional English Breakfast every morning. It includes eggs (any way you like them), bacon (really ham), cooked tomato, prunes, and baked beans. Yogurt, fruit, and bread were always available, as well as juice, milk, coffee, and tea. It was great for the first few mornings, but after that, everyone cut down on how much, or what they ate.

We left Winchcombe and walked through beautiful English countryside. So many trees and shrubs were in full bloom. We next encountered Belas Knap, a Neolithic burial chamber. The mound dates back to 3000 BC and is Saxon in origin. It's 180 feet long, 60 feet high and 13 feet high. It was excavated in 1863.





Postlip Hall. The most impressive Jacobean manor house on our whole trip. The imposing, multi-gabled 'house' is divided into 8 private homes, each with its own private entrance. It sits on 15 acres. Postlip is an established community with its heart in the origin of the Cohousing movement. People of all ages, who live in the eight separate units, move freely between private life and group live.

Cleve Common lies behind Postlip Hall, and is the highest land on the Cotswold escarpment. It covers an area of 3 square miles and contains many different natural habitats. It is popular with walkers and golfers, as an 18-hole golf course, Cleve Hill Golf Club, is situated at its heights.



Dave Kloster, avid golfer, and never one to miss visiting a golf course, wherever we're hiking in the world. The Cotswold Way passed right through it, including the Club House, where we were able to stop, sit, and share a pint.



Nancy, Gina, and Maria hiking over the wind-swept terrain of Cleeve Hill on a cold, raw, cloudy day. At least no rain, in fact it never rained on either trip.





We continued another 5 miles on country lanes and trails alongside fields and hedgerows to a busy hwy, where we waited for a taxis to take us to our B&B, in the nearby city of Cheltenham. While waiting, Suzanne showed us some of her exquisite yoga poses. Kloster thought he could do just as well, if not better. You be the judge.





In Cheltenham, Crossways Guest House was where we stayed. After a shower, we put on our bathrobes and posed for this picture. This is for you, Diane Sarther! Where was Bill and Dave?

There's Dave...at the local pub. Bill had the start of a cold.



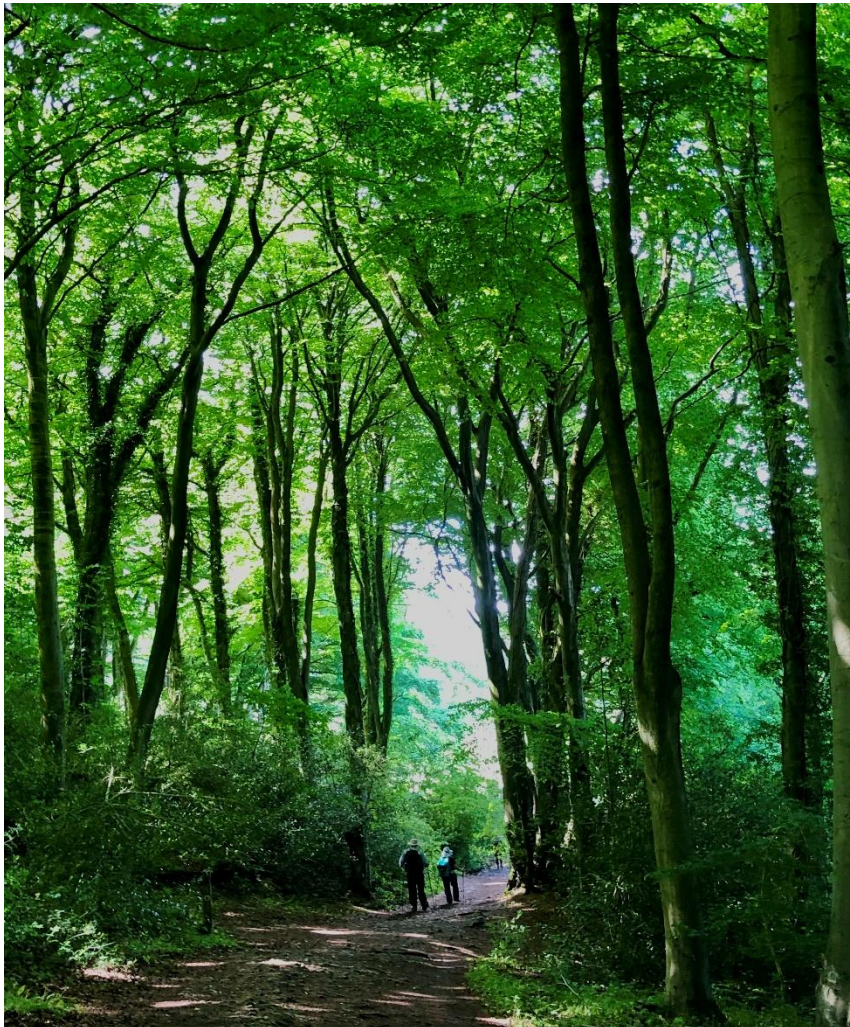
Dinner at a charming, elegant restaurant in the heart of Cheltenham





After walking through forested lanes, we came onto the flat-topped Leckhampton Hill. The trail can be seen along the scarp's edge.

A major landmark on this part of the walk, is the Devil's Chimney, a craggy finger of rock projecting from just below the top of the scarp edge. In the 18th century, extensive quarrying took place here, and the exposed pinnacle was a result. Quarrymen sculptured the chimney as part of a hoax. Climbing it is now prohibited, but for many years it was popular to do so. The record stands at 13 people on the top at one time. It's a lot scarier a climb than it looks!



Walking through a dense canopy of tall trees.



This was the name of the town where our B&B was located tonight. How appropriate for me.

The syllable 'lip' is used as a description for a steep slope at the top of the Cotswold escarpment.

Bird is just what you think it is.



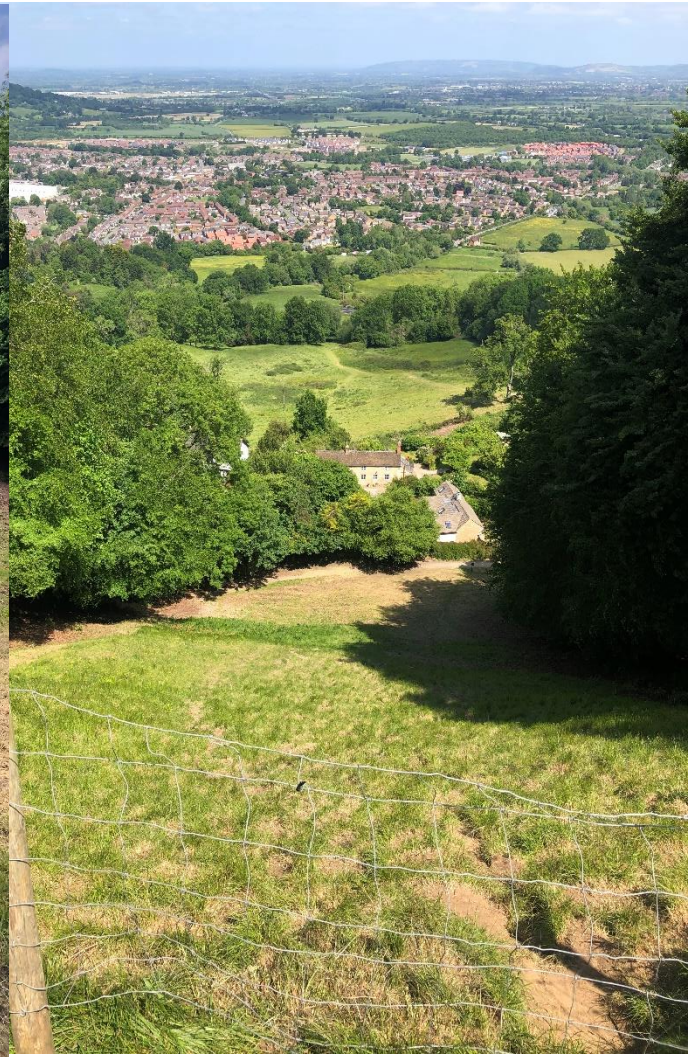
The Royal George Hotel. A cool place to stay. Built in the 18th century, it sits atop a steep hill (lip). Good accommodations, nice pub with excellent food, and great atmosphere.

The next day, Bill's cold was worse. He wasn't feeling well. He decided to take a 'zero' day. He ultimately went to an urgent care facility to see if he could get some kind of medication. They did some testing on him. He took a cab to the next B&B in Painswick, where he was waiting for us when we arrived.

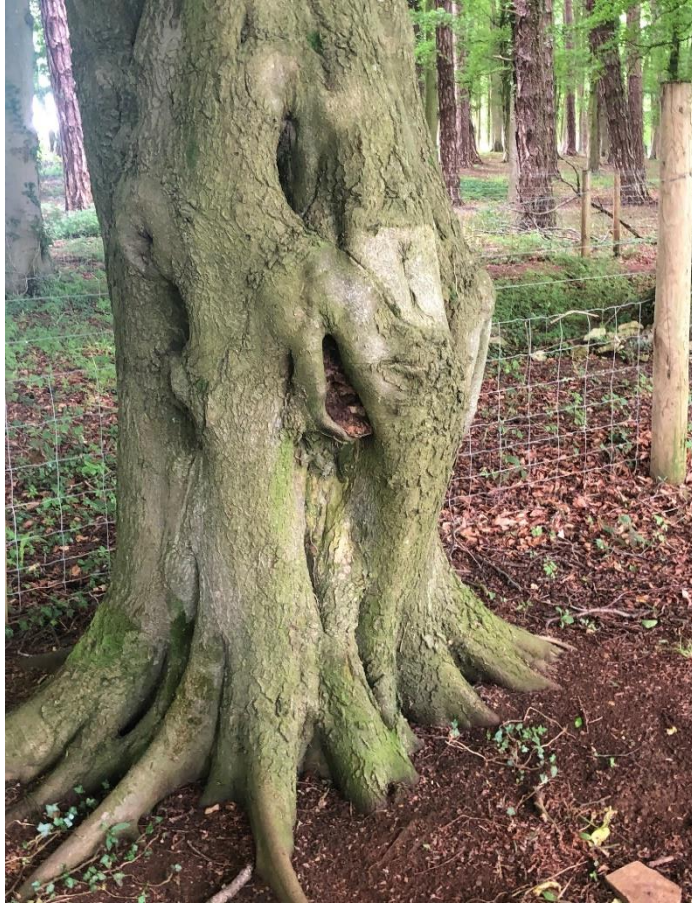


After a few miles of walking through beautiful woodlands, along the scarp's edge, we took a short detour off the main trail, to see the remains of the Whitcombe Roman Villa. The villa was built between 100-200 AD, during the Roman occupation of Britian. It was thought to have been occupied into the early fifth century. It was one of the largest Roman houses found in Britian and was part of a cluster of very wealthy villas in the Cotswold area. A wealthy family lived here, together with their slaves and freedman.





The trail went over Coopers Hill, made famous for its annual cheese roll. Several hundred contestants plunge down the 200 foot, rough-surfaced hill, chasing a mock, 7 lb wheel of Double Gloucester cheese. Numerous injuries occur, especially broken bone, in both the participants and a few of the spectators, who get too close to the bottom of the hill.



It's amazing how some tree trunks resembled faces. The upper left one looks like an elephant. Then a happy face. The lower stump sure looks like a snake to me.





On most days we passed at least one food bus, trailer, or truck. A cup of tea or coffee, pastry, or crumpets, were a welcome refreshment. A crumpet is a small griddle bread, made from an unsweetened batter of water or milk, flour, and yeast. If made right, they are crispy, chewy, and delicately spongy. Lathered with butter, jam, or honey, they taste wonderful.



This evening we stayed in Painswick, another delightful old market town. All the stone buildings here are strangely white or gray in color, unlike Chipping Camden, in which they are all golden-yellow. Painswick owes its elegance to the cloth trade. In the early 19th century, as many as 30 cloth mills were being powered by local streams. Only 4 or 5 remained by the beginning of the 20th century. The last one closed down in 1982.





In Painswick, almost all the homes are two stories high, cemented together, and have no front yards. Our B&B in 2023, St Anne's, was an early 18th Century former wool merchant's house (see pic above). Gina, doing some stretches before breakfast. This was the beginning of our last day of hiking.



In 2022, we stayed at the Royal Oak Inn. When our group arrived that afternoon, Bill was waiting for us with bad news. He had Covid. Crooks, his roommate, tested himself, and he was positive also. It was depressing, because at that time, you couldn't get on an airplane if you

were Covid positive, and if so, you had to quarantine yourself and wait 10 days before flying. Unbelievably, that very evening, President

Biden removed the requirement of a negative preflight Covid test. In the end, 5 of the 6 of us on the 2022 trip eventually tested positive. I was the only one that remained negative.



One shouldn't leave Painswick without visiting St Mary's church, its accompanying graveyard, and the yew tree garden. The church dates back to the 11th century. There are supposed to be 99 manicured yew trees. Legend has it that if a 100th tree is planted, the devil himself, will come and pull it out by the roots. I liked this yew tree with a trimmed-out tunnel going thru it. Heading out-of-town.



**A few picturesque photos looking towards the Severn Valley below.
This was a wonderfully scenic section of the Cotswold.**



This picture was taken of Stroudwater Canal in the parish of King Stanley, which is a suburb of the town of Stroud. It was completed in 1779. It enabled trows (long narrow barges designed specifically for this canal) to carry goods from Stroud to ports on the River Severn, near the city of Bristol. The canal

was initially commercially successful, but abandoned in 1954. Much of it is still intact today.

Our last night's lodgings were in the village of Leonard Stanley. On both trips we dined at a nearby restaurant called the Frocester George.



CAST OF CHARACTERS



No one is more photogenic than Kloster. This ewe had eyes for him.



Next was Suzanne. She was constantly looking for new locations to do her yoga poses. Not sure what the cows thought of this. However, this horse certainly liked her touch.





It's hard to get a good photo of Dave by himself. He doesn't like his picture taken. Thanks again for all you do setting up these trips for all of us. It's been very much appreciated over the years!

It was good to have 'Grumpy' Bill alone for the walk. He made it 4 days before Covid stopped his progression. He always adds a lot of 'spice' to our conversations.



It's always good to have Peg along on these hikes. She's a steady hiker and never seems to complain. She goes with the flow and she's good company. I can attest to this since we've hiked as a two-some for a week, on the Appalachian Trail, a few years back.



Scott and Gina. We're still talking nicely and smiling after a week together on the trail. This was Gina's first real, long-distance hike. She made it!



Nancy was our hesitant hiker, always a bit nervous about the terrain, animals we might encounter, or the weather. But she did great. Maria has been hiking with our group for over 20 years. She's a strong hiker, fun to be with, and has a great sense of humor.



Thanks to everyone for two wonderful trips to the Cotswold. While it's fun to trek, it's the people you are with that really makes the trip memorable.