

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, on the river
bridge by the Swan Inn
SP 115069. Refreshments
at two pubs or the Trout
Farm. Toilets near the start.

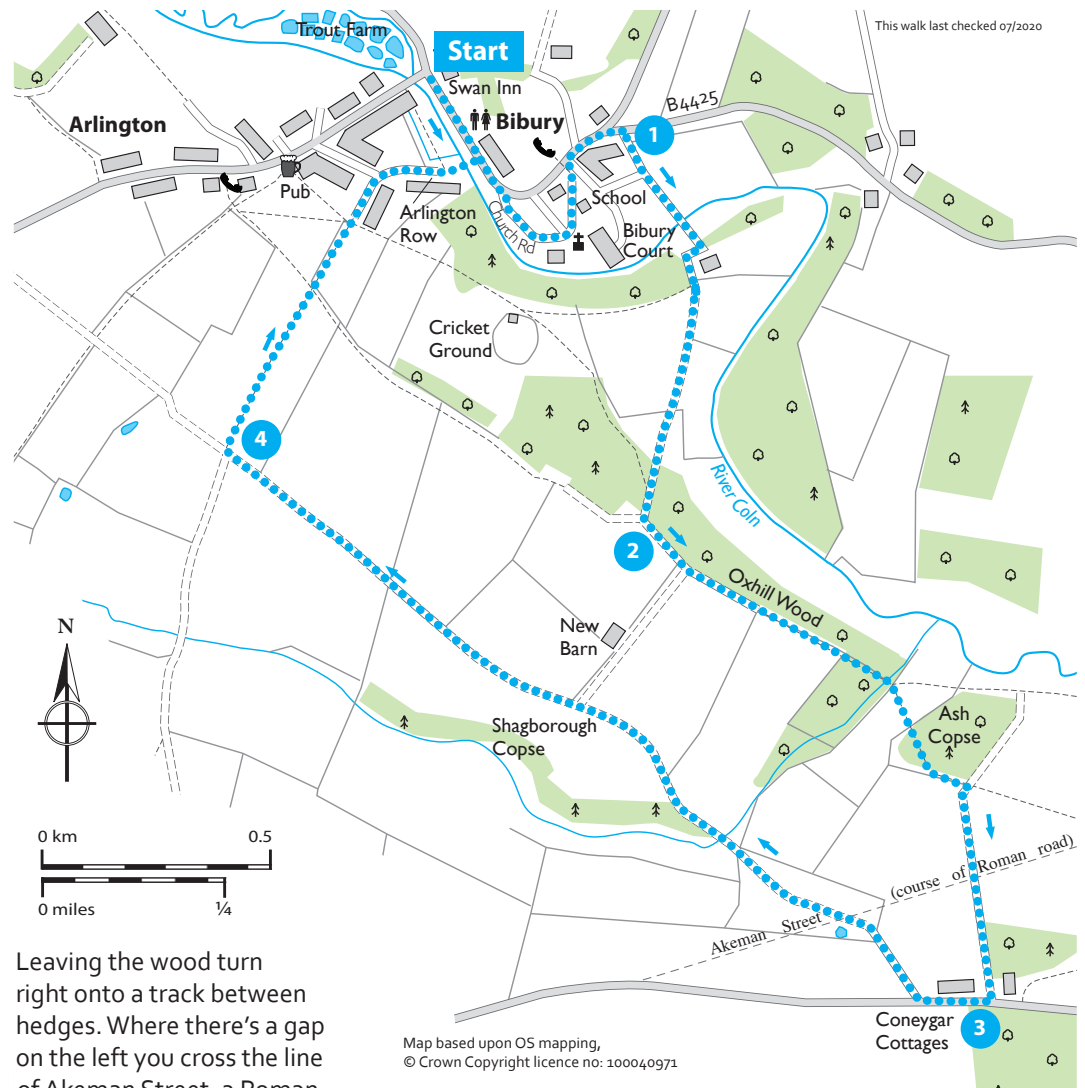
Bus 855 (Pulhams) from
Cirencester to Moreton.
Swanbrook 853 from
Gloucester, Cheltenham
and Oxford.

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 Bibury Court **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.
With a dry stone wall on
your left and with the path
gently sloping downwards
you will see houses ahead
in the distance. Then just
further on at the prominent
cross track **4**, turn right on
a grassy path and head for
the gate ahead that leads
between houses to a tiny

triangular green. Fork right
downhill to the photogenic
Arlington Row.

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.

See the next page for more details about the walk.



“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?