

Miles Without Stiles

Marshfield town and country

Enjoy wonderful views of the southern Cotswolds. Walk along old green lanes (some may be muddy) and across high pasture back to the church on a hill.

Distance: 7km/4¼miles with an up and down of 100m/330ft. There is a steep little climb at the end of the walk.

Time: 2½ hours

Start: Marshfield (near Bath) limited parking in the Market Place behind the war memorial ST781737

Route:

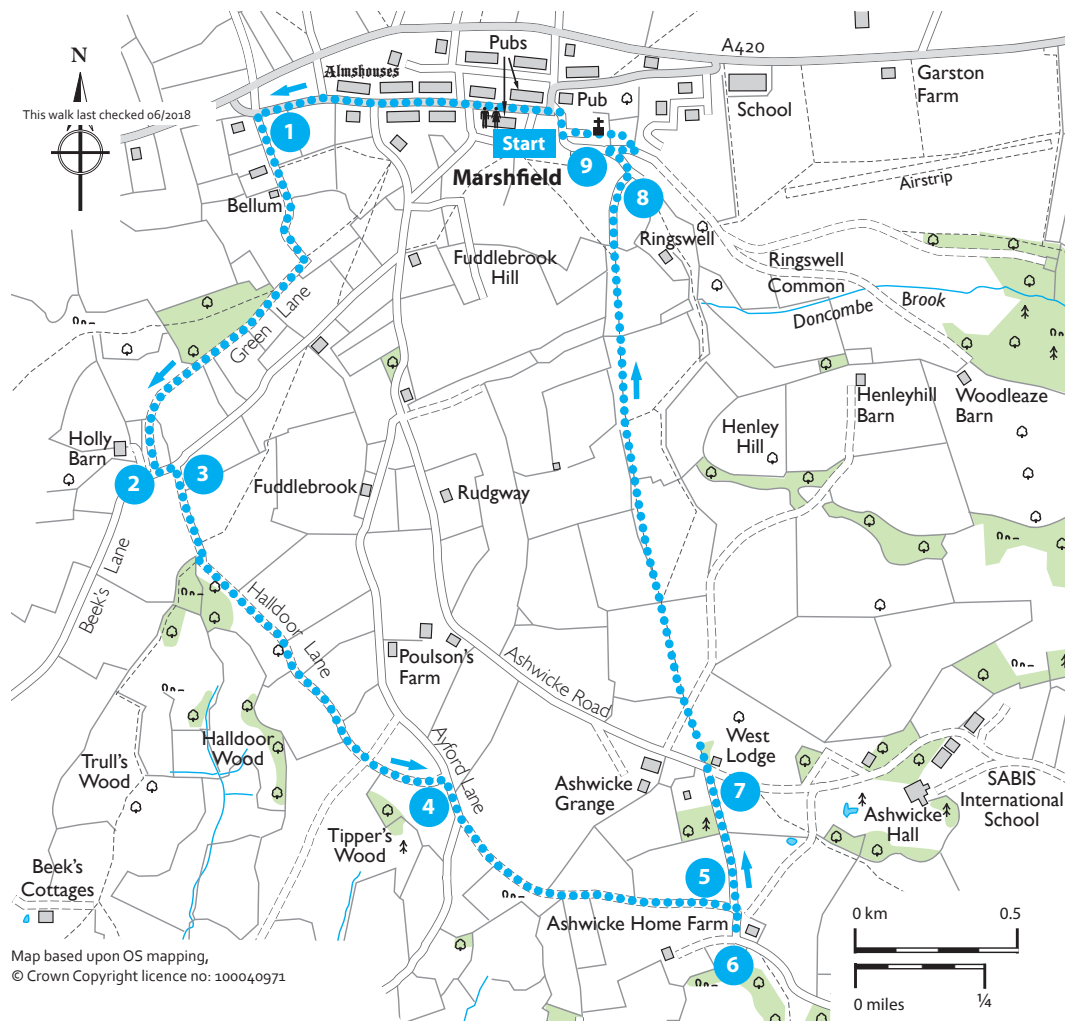
From the war memorial walk along the High Street out of town for 700m, passing the almshouses.

Just before an old toll house ahead **1** turn left down Green Lane which soon becomes a stony track with a short steep descent into a small valley. At the bottom bear right and climb gently between hedges for 800m to Beek's Lane **2**.

Turn left along the road for 70m, then right **3** onto another green lane, with occasional views to Cold Ashton, St Catherine valley and Charmy Down. Where the track bears left don't go through a double gate on your right. As you drop down out of the high hedges pause by a gate on the right for an even better view.

Press on across a tarmac farm track (cattle grid on the right) to a T junction (Ayford Lane) **4**. This is your halfway point.

Turn right downhill and in 120m leave the road, bearing left on another track between hedges. Along here



you may spot Marshfield Church tower on the horizon to your left. After 700m you'll reach a wide gate onto a road **5**.

The route home goes left here, but it's worth turning right for 100m to **6** to enjoy a wonderful view to Claverton Down (University of Bath), Limpley Stoke valley and the distant Mendips.

Turn back along the road for 400m to West Lodge **7** a gatehouse to Ashwicke Hall.

The road turns left but you go straight ahead through a kissing gate onto grass. From here it's straight ahead to Marshfield across open fields (there may be cattle) through a variety of gates.

Approaching the crest of the hill keep to the right of a ragged hedge and your destination comes into sight. The path looks like a straightforward down-and-up, but there's a hidden switchback ahead. Grit your

teeth and head on upwards to the church. Approaching modern houses go through the farm yard **8** and turn left uphill on a narrow road.

At the top **9** take a small zigzag to the back gate of the churchyard, then go past the church and out of the main gate to the Market Place.

See the next page for more details about the walk.

A walk on the southern edge of the Cotswolds

Marshfield stands on a limestone ridge at the very southern end of the Cotswolds. It is a medieval settlement, with evidence of Saxon, Roman, and Bronze Age habitation.

The town's character derives from its medieval layout of a broad High Street with narrow plots running back to a pair of back lanes. Several farmhouses were established along the High Street, and the spaces between these were gradually closed off. The aspect today is to a large extent as it was in the 1880s.

The town's fortunes were built on sheep and corn, but when sheep farming declined the growing and malting of barley became a major feature, and 14 malting houses can be identified in the High Street.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin dominates the skyline for miles around. It is open to visitors, and detailed descriptions and guides are on display.

Refreshment facilities include the Catherine Wheel and Lord Nelson inns, Sweetapples teashop, and Central Stores. There are regular (but sparse) bus services, except on Sundays. Parking is free.



An ever changing landscape

There are stark contrasts in the countryside around Marshfield. To the north there are long stretches of flat-looking fields bordered by dry stone walls. To the south one is quickly into wooded valleys and hedge lined fields.

This dictates the flourishing local agriculture: to the north mainly arable, with barley, wheat, potatoes and more modern oil seed crops dominating, and to the south some arable but mainly pastoral fields, with the number of cattle and especially sheep increasing sharply in recent years.

A few surprises you'll find along the way

At the end of the High Street you'll pass the town's 17th century almshouses. And in the little vegetable garden next door you may bid good day to the lady gardener.



On the quiet lane between points 6 and 7 find this tiny ruin behind a wall.



Peep through the gate at point 7 for a glimpse of Ashwicke Hall, set in an elegant 200-acre estate.