

The Magic of the Rollright Stones



After a valley walk you'll climb to discover a prehistoric mystery on the Jurassic ridgeway. Return through the hidden hamlet of Little Rollright.

Distance: 8.3km/5 ¼ miles with ups and downs of 140m/460ft including one short steep climb.

Time: 3 hours

Start: Salford village (SP290282) off the A44 two miles W of Chipping Norton. To reach the start drive past the Salford Inn pub & village hall up Cooks Lane for 300m to a junction on a grassy area with swings and benches. Please park here with consideration.

Refreshments: Salford Inn, Salford; Wyatt's farm shop and tea room 1 mile (1.6km) NE.

Route:

Just past the swings, where Cooks Lane meets Rose Lane, take the track straight ahead with Rectory Farm on your left. Continue straight on with the hedge on your right; ignore signs turning off right to the Trout Lakes.

- 1 Where the track ends there is a gate into a field, turn right to walk for 120m with the hedge on your right.
- 2 Turn left to follow a worn track straight across the field to a ditch on the other side. Here wiggle L and R and carry on along the valley with the hedge on your left, crossing a stream, as far as the road.
- 3

Cross the road and take the marked path across the field to a gate in the corner. Once through the gate continue uphill with the hedge on your left. Look for a gate

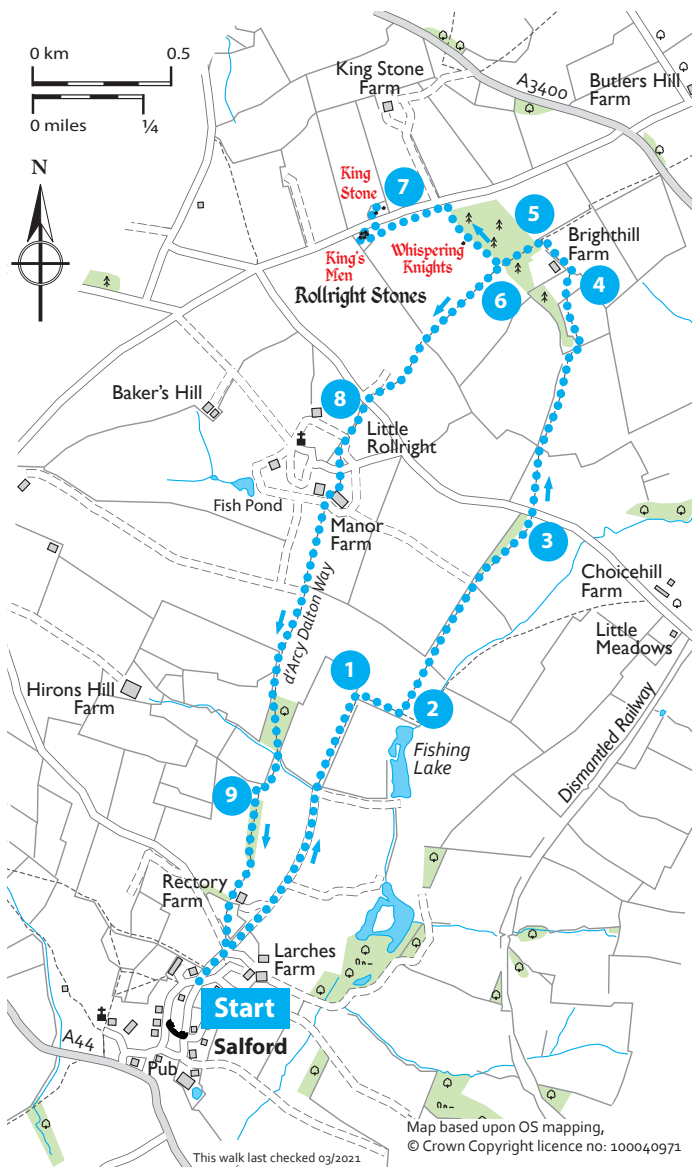
on your left with a small spinney and pond next to it. Go through the gate keeping to the left of the field and making towards a finger post. NB The path here has been re-routed. Go as directed diagonally in front of the house towards a gate at the far side of the farm buildings.

Take the wide track to go past the farm buildings and beyond where you reach a plantation on your left. Look out for a waymark sign pointing left along an avenue in the woodland. This is the D'Arcy Dalton Way. At the far end cross a stile and you can see the Rollright Stones on your right. Turn right to reach the first small group of Whispering Knights. Then take the all-weather path round the field to reach the big stone circle: the King's Men.

Cross the road into the field where the King's Stone stands alone. This is a good picnic stop, with wonderful views.

Now retrace your steps back to the Whispering Knights and the D'Arcy Dalton Way where you turn right across two fields, dropping to cross the same lane as crossed previously.

Cross the drive at the bottom and follow the signs which takes you uphill between hedges. At the top you reach two metal gates, another good view point. Head straight on back to



Salford over farmland and though a string of small woods. The first ends at a tiny stream which you cross a stile.

Now walk 120m along the next field to a wide gateway in the hedge on your R. Turn R to go through this and immediate left with the hedge on your left to enter

another wood. Leave this wood over a stile and go along the left edge of the field to yet another copse with in-and-out stiles. Walk across a paddock to the last stile near some trees. Once over this you go through a few trees to reach a track. Turn left and after a few metres turn R to join the lane where you started.

See the next page for more details about the walk

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Three prehistoric enigmas

Each of these groups of stones dates from a different century. Nobody knows what they represent, but the hilltop site suggests generations of prehistoric people honoured their dead here under the open sky.

First you'll pass the Whispering Knights (3000 BC), a tall group of stones, huddled together as if plotting against their king. This may have been the entrance to a burial chamber.



Disappearing stones

Follow the path round the field to the King's Men, a huge 2000 BC circle of stones encrusted by the Cotswold air with white, yellow and



gold lichen. Some have been stolen, but there are still 77 and people come to count them, even measure them.

Drovers' magic chips

Now cross the road that follows the ancient Jurassic ridgeway from Dorset to Lincolnshire and be astonished by vast views to the north.

The 8-foot-tall King Stone has stood here since 1800 BC, perhaps to mark a cemetery. And the magic of the stones lingered until at least 1800 AD, when drovers heading for Banbury market would chip bits of stone off the King to ward off the Devil.



Disappearing witch

But then in 2012 the King had company: one Mother Shipton, a witch created by environment artist David Gosling from twisted redwood branches. She loomed wickedly over the King and was very popular with young visitors. But Mother Shipton was not archaeologically correct, so one moonless night she vanished in a puff of smoke. And the children lost their playmate.



Once upon a time

Once upon a time a local warlord led his army to this high ridge when up popped a witch. She challenged him: "Seven long strides thou shalt take And if Long Compton thou can see King of England thou shalt be."

But as he strode forward a mound rose up to hide the view. She laughed:

"As Long Compton thou canst not see King of England thou shalt not be. Rise up, stick, and stand still, stone. King of England thou shalt be none! Thou and thy men Hoarstones shall be, And I myself an eldern tree."

And so the King became the King Stone, his men the King's Men in a Stone Circle, and his treacherous knights petrified as the Whispering Knights.

And the witch turned herself into an elder tree, to keep an eye on them.

(Can YOU see Long Compton from here?)

A hard night for a sweet knight?

As you walk back to Salford, the tiny church at Little Rollright deserves a visit. It's an unspoilt gem. One knightly figure has his helmet for a pillow. The other prays between his wives (but surely he was not a bigamist?).

