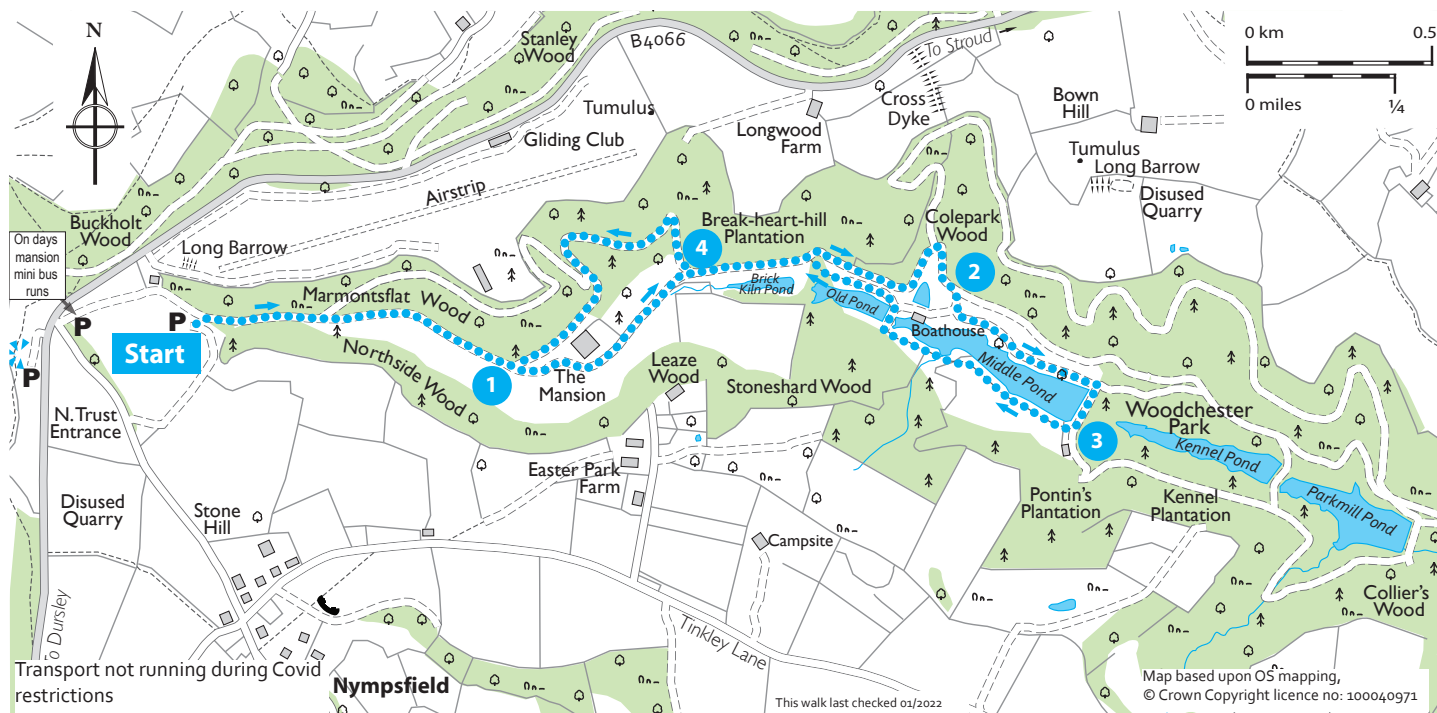


Woodchester Mansion and woodland walk



The Boathouse Walk passes the mansion and includes parkland, woodland, three of the ponds and the picturesque boathouse.



Distance: 6km/3¾ miles with a steady down-and-up of 209m/686ft. There are some steps between 3/4

Time: 2 hours

Start: National Trust car park, Woodchester Park, near Nympsfield signed off the B0466 between Dursley and Stroud. (£3 for non members). SO 799014

Refreshments: Rose and Crown, Nympsfield. Mansion cafe and toilets on open days.

Route: From the car park follow the path down the steps to a track. Turn R, and follow the track downhill, ignoring a track on the L, to a gate 1.

Here the track splits;

ignore the track on L and continue straight ahead. The track bends to the L and Woodchester Mansion comes into view.

Follow the track to the front of the building where the track splits. (If open, the mansion is worth a look inside). Take the R-hand track and follow it around to a gate. Continue along the valley through another gate and straight ahead.

The track follows the edge of woodland, with Middle pond on the R, to a field gate. Continue as the track turns sharp L, in front of conifers, with the boathouse down on your right.

Follow the track through a gate for 100m; here the track bends sharply R with a footpath on the L. Follow the track for another 100m

to a junction with a track on the R 2.

Bear R down the track towards Middle Pond (pink arrow) through a gate. Where the track turns R, turn L down a less well-defined track through reclaimed grassland to a junction.

Turn R along the track and cross the dam to the far side. Turn R through a gate (pink arrow) 3 to another gate immediately ahead. Go through and follow the R hand fence to the far side and a gate.

Continue through the gate and follow the path by the edge of the pond to meet steps leading up to the top of the dam of Old Pond.

Cross the dam, with the boathouse on your R then L along a track to a gate. Go through and follow the path to steps leading up to a track. Turn L along the track retracing your outward journey to the gate ahead.

In front of the gate 4 turn R along a track up to the woods. Pass through a gate and follow the track as it turns L and slowly climbs through the wood. The path meanders before it drops to the mansion and close-up views of its rooftops.

Continue along the track down to a junction 1 here turn R to re-join the original track and follow the track back to the car park.

Read all about the mansion on the next page

Miles Without Stiles

Woodchester Mansion and woodland walk

It makes you wonder

It truly makes you wonder, this unfinished Victorian mansion hidden in a green valley below Nympsfield.

Why here? Why the collision of Cotswold and French Gothic building styles? Local quarries yielded the raw material, but the giant gargoyles' natural home is on Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

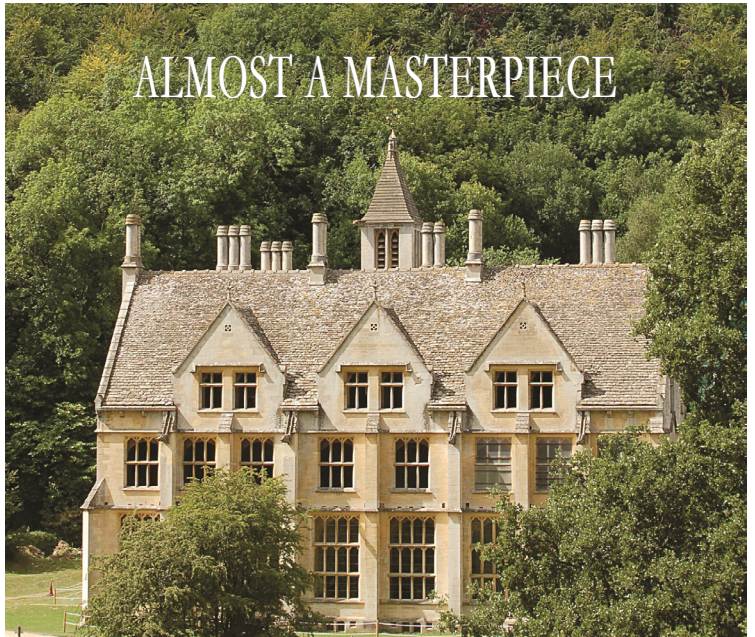
Why is it made entirely of stone: walls, ceilings, vaults, floors, stairs, gutters – even the bath and the shower?

And why, one day in 1873, did the builders creating the magnificent interior simply lay down their tools and go, leaving the windowless shell of Woodchester Mansion to the thousands of bats who live there still?

Answers to most of these questions will be revealed once you have found and walked through this, the most intriguing of the Seven Wonders of the Cotswolds, standing proud in its private glen.

Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Woodchester Mansion Trust has created a self-guided exhibition inside the house. You can walk through it, admiring the masons' work and soaking up the history of the valley from Roman times. There's a children's tour too.

You'll find much more information on the fascinating website www.woodchestermansion.org.uk



Open from Easter until end of October

The Mansion is open to the public on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and most Bank Holidays when there is usually a volunteer manned service with guided or self-guided tours.

An hourly minibus shuttle from and to the track immediately below the National Trust car park (at base of steps from car park, subject to volunteer availability).

A café also operates in the Mansion on the same days, sometimes more during the summer school holidays.

If there is no minibus you can walk the approx. one mile down to the Mansion.

Dogs are not permitted in the Mansion.

Thousands of bats and two green men

The ever-open windows of the mansion attract many varieties of bats. A thousand Horseshoe bats, an endangered species, have been coming here for at least 60 years. They use the house as a maternity ward, arriving in April or May to have their babies (pups) in June or July, and most of them leave in September to spend the winter hibernating in old stone mines up to 25 miles away.

The bats come out only around dawn and dusk, but you can be sure to find two green men, carved in the ceiling by the masons before they left. A green man isn't necessarily green, but he's always shaped from leaves, branches or tree trunks. As a mystic symbol of natural rebirth he has figured in pagan mythology, medieval fables and often (as here) in gothic architecture. Can you find him?

