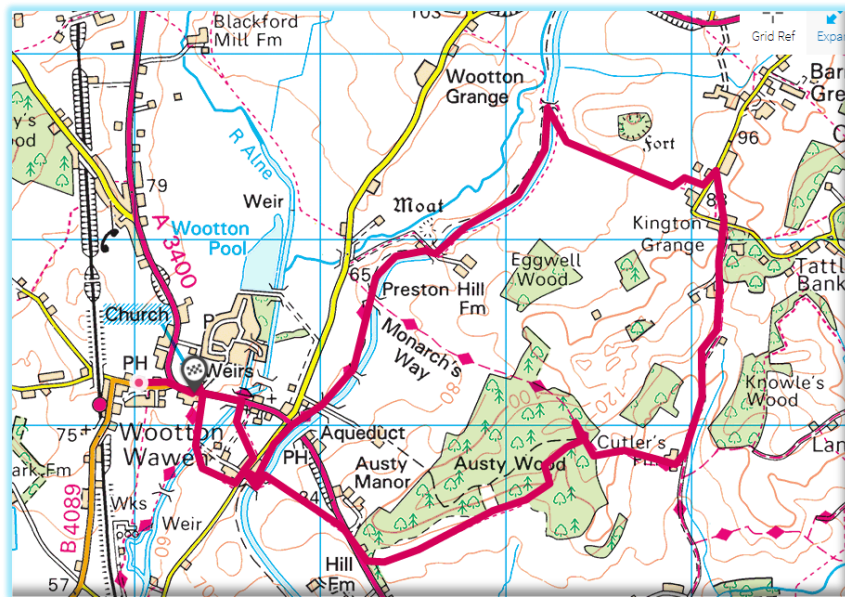


## Austy Wood from Wootton Wawen

This is a varied walk across fields, through woods, which can be muddy and slippery, and along the canal. At the end of April or beginning of May Austy Wood is awash with bluebells, but the walk is pleasant at any time of year.

It starts from Wootton Wawen, just off the A3400. Turn right on the left bend by the Bulls Head pub. There are places to park along the road.



1. Walk back to the A3400, turning right. Across the road you will see a Saxon Church which is worth a visit – pick your spot carefully to cross this busy road, though at least the speed limit is reduced to 30mph these days. *The church inside shows an entertaining hotchpotch of different remodelling attempts over centuries – doors halfway up walls, infillings, quite an architectural treasure hunt to work out the different elements. The current arrangements are still rather quirky.* After your visit, continue up the road, noting the stately home on your left, complete with lakes and weirs, but we are looking for a path on the right, just before a building, after a field. Take the gate through to the track and walk along. Soon a field appears on the left, and about half way along this there is a kissing gate. Go through this and bear half right to the next gate in the middle of a dividing fence, and then continue in the same direction to the field edge where there is another gate. Turn left and emerge at the road.
2. Turn right at the road and walk along for 20 yards or so where there is a track to the left. Go up this track and over the canal bridge. Go through the gate and turn left to walk the field perimeter (the official path, though the waymark suggests cutting off the corner). You are



looking for a stile which is about 10 yards to the right of the far left field corner. Cross this into a large field. You are now aiming half left to a field gate about two thirds along the left hand side of the field, which is set into the field. Pass through the gate and turn right keeping to the right hand verge of the A3400. Walk along for about 100 yards, looking for a double gate on the other side with a smaller gate to the right of it, not long past an electricity sub-station building with a “no pedestrian access” sign. Carefully cross the road (50mph limit here) and go through the gate.

3. Go forwards through the small paddock and emerge into a large field. Walk in the same direction down a clear path the middle of the field. *Note: some people are inclined to walk round the perimeter of the field by the wood but this is not the footpath and it upsets the landowner who does not want the woodland birds disturbed.* Continue on this line until you are parallel with a corner of the wood which jinks back a bit. The path then diverts 1/3 left towards the wood. *If there are crops planted, you may well hear the liquid song of a skylark walking through here.* The path eventually merges with a track that runs alongside the wood, and in a corner, look for a waymark post and a path that leads into the wood.

4. Walk up following the clear, but often muddy, path through the woods, following its twists and turns. After some time you will reach near the top of the hill with a waymark. Remember this mark, noting the open field to the right, but for the moment we will turn left and walk on a few yards. *In spring, this is where the best display of bluebells can be found.* Return to the waymark and now bear left a few yards up the hill to the gate, ignoring a path through the woods to the left. Through the gate, follow the clear path to the right of the field down the hill. This eventually arrives at a farm, where you walk straight ahead through the farm buildings.



5. At the lane on the other side, turn left then take the right hand fork between fields and a rather uninviting stream down a gully. You follow a rough track for some time, passing through some farm gates. Eventually the track becomes a properly made road and bears right next to a new dry stone wall and continues down the hill to a junction. Turn left and in a few yards look for a stile in the hedge on the other side of the road. Pop across this and bear half left to a stile in a dividing fence ahead. Continue across this in the same line and you eventually emerge onto a road beside Barnmoor Farm. Turn left and walk a few yards down the road, looking for a clear waymarked metal gate on your right. This enclosed path skirts around a paddock and farm yard and then arrives at an enclosed track to the right. Follow the track to its end, then go through the farm gate and follow the same line, passing a telegraph pole in the centre of the field and arrive at a waymarked gate in the hedge on the other side.
6. Your target is a canal bridge half right on the other side of the field. *Looking up on the hill to the right, notice Preston Bagot church standing alone on the hill.* Go through the trees by the canal and you will find a steep stile to climb onto the bridge. Cross the bridge and turn left on the towpath. *You will often see that these bridges have a gap in the middle of them. This is for the days when barges were towed by horses and the gap allowed the tow rope to be*

*fed through the gap, saving unharnessing the horse.* Follow the tow path for about a mile, ignoring the various bridges and roads to either side.

7. You will eventually reach a basin full of hire boats and ahead you will see one of the famous aqueducts on this section of the canal. Cross the aqueduct and continue along the towpath to the next bridge. This is the same bridge you crossed in step 2. Turn right down the track and at the lane at the bottom go left. In a few yards there is a gateway into the field on the right with a kissing gate. Go through and follow the right hand edge of the field. *This is currently a building site, but keep an eye open as you walk through here for an eclectic collection of old traction engines and rusting cars.* You then go along a more enclosed path and at the end of this go through a gate and bear half right to the far right corner of the field, where hidden behind bushes you will find a concrete bridge over the river. On the other side, turn right and follow the path past houses. Go through the gate (*at the time of writing this gate was jammed and had to be climbed*) onto a driveway and then emerge onto the A3400 again. Turn left and find your way back to your car.

