

Miles Without Stiles

Guiting Power and Castlett



This easy route follows drovers' trails and quiet lanes through woodland and along the Guiting Stream. A good family walk at any time of the year, with much to see on the way.

Distance: 7.2 km / 4.5 miles with an up and down of 140m/460 ft

Time: 2 ½ hours

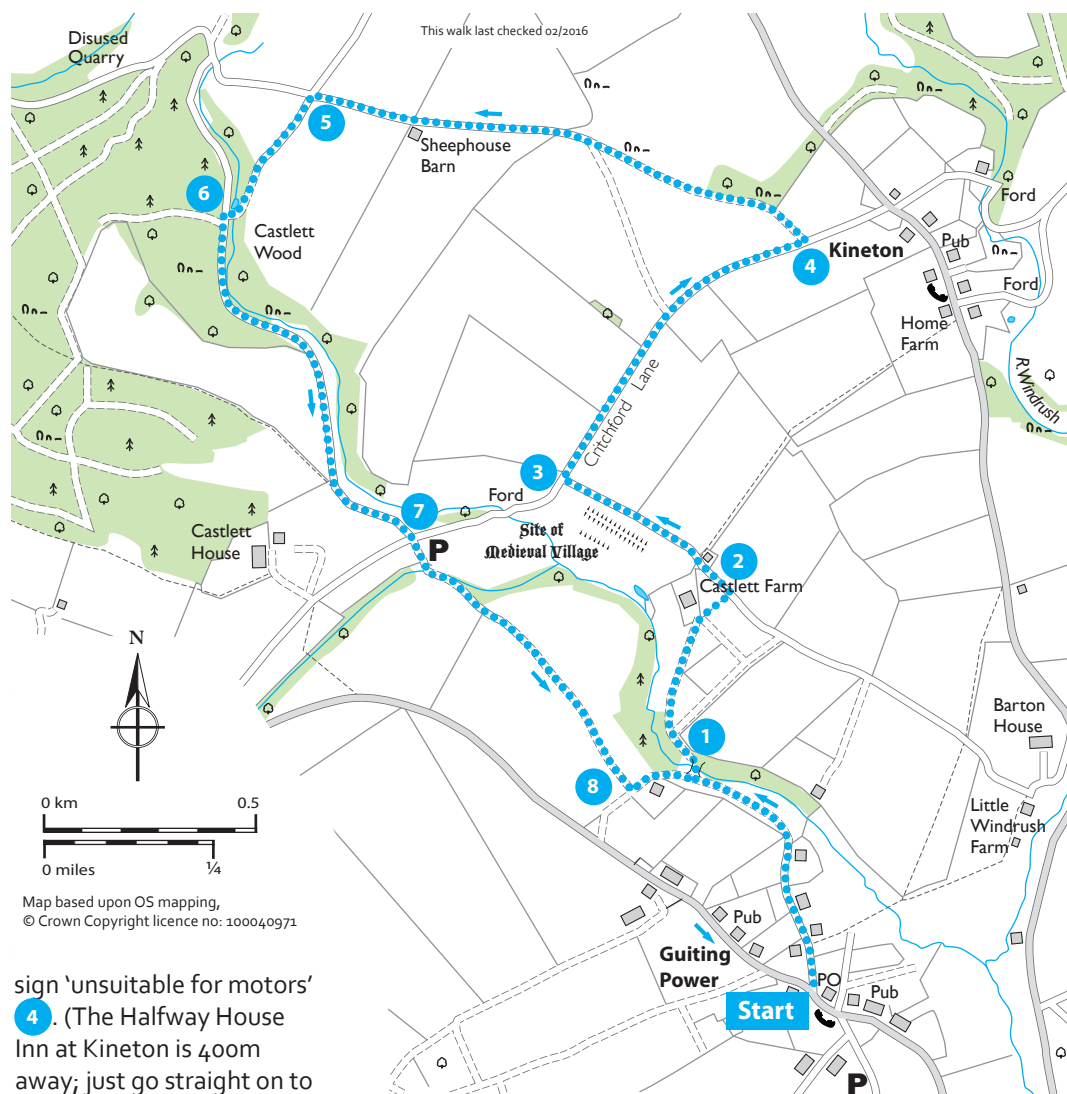
Start: Guiting Power (near Stow on the Wold) village hall car park (50p), signed from the village green SP095/246. Shop and pubs in Guiting, also a mid-way pub at Kinton.

Route:

Walk back to the green, cross to the post office and turn left. Go carefully round the corner and fork right onto a lane (Wardens' Way) leading to a path down to the Guiting Stream.

Here **1** turn right over a small stone bridge (or ford the shallow water). Climb to a gate and take the grass path ahead alongside horse paddocks, with good views on the left, to reach a lane **2**. Turn left along the lane and look out for 'polo mint' stones in the wall ahead. *Read about those on the next page.*

Carry on past more paddocks to a T-junction **3**. Just before you get there look left to see bumps and hollows in the last field: all that remains of the deserted village of Castlett. Turn right uphill on the lane (you may hear buzzards or skylarks) and once over the crest turn left onto a track at a blue



sign 'unsuitable for motors' **4**. (The Halfway House Inn at Kinton is 400m away; just go straight on to the village and turn right).

Walk past several signs of badgers to your summit then carry on downhill past Sheephouse Barn. For centuries this was an overnight stop for drovers and their animals walking to Banbury market.

Three minutes further on, at a cross roads **5** look half-left for two boulders in the hedge. One is roughly

carved as a toad. Walk between the stones and down into the valley (more signs of badgers) past a lake on your right. At the bottom turn right below the earth dam (this can be muddy) and out onto another quiet lane **6**.

Turn left downstream through beautiful woodland, out into parkland and to a crossroads with a car park

7. (You could start a shorter walk from here).

Carry on along the track ahead for five minutes. At a cottage and barn look over your right shoulder for more polo-mints in the wall **8**.

From here bear left down a short stony path to point **1** and retrace your steps back to the village and the Farmer's Arms.

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The surprising world of Guiting Power

When Mr E. R. Cochrane bought the manor estate of Guiting Power in 1958 the land was meagre and the village dilapidated. He set up a trust and devoted the rest of his life to restoring the houses, improving the land and creating a community.

Building craftsmen were offered cottages in exchange for their labour, and some still live here. Although an integral part of the trust, the 1,500 acre farm is a profit earning business working arable crops, sheep and woodland. Natural wildlife has flourished thanks to careful crop rotation, planting and laying hedges, and leaving wide edges of cropped fields to encourage the growth of wild plants and ground-nesting birds.

Skylarks have returned to Guiting, also yellowhammers, barn owls, little owls, sparrowhawks, visiting merlins and the occasional hobby. Over 50 different bird species are recorded annually. For more information about the farm see www.guitingmanorfarms.co.uk.

When the village school was closed the trust bought the building and opened a nursery school. There's an annual music festival in the village hall.

Why Guiting?

'Gyte' was the old English word meaning to flow fast, and that's what the Guiting stream does.

To spy along the way



Wooden horses and Polo mints

After your first river crossing and a pretty pond you'll meet the wooden horses of Castlett farm. They don't bite. Then, just after the front gates look out for the wall with a stone with a hole right through it.

Would you believe that 200 years ago someone thought he could make Cotswold stone pipes for the growing demand by the Manchester Water Company? They leaked or burst under the pressure, and the company went bust.

Vanished village



Carry on past the horse paddocks and before point 3 look down left at a few bumps and hollows. In the middle ages there was a thriving village of Castlett here.

'Animals welcome' at this Cotswolds B&B



After point 4 of the walk, Sheephouse Barn appears on your left. For centuries it was a welcome overnight stop for drovers from Wales and the west country.

They were walking to Banbury market and beyond with sheep, cattle, pigs, horses or bales of wool. The men had a roof over them and the beasts settled down in walled pens. The Welsh black cattle wore simple iron shoes on their hooves for the long march, until the railways opened and put the drovers out of business.