

AMBLING AROUND AVENING

Would you like to join me on my favourite walk? Well, it's not just one walk, there are so many variations en route that you can adjust it according to the time of year, the weather, and how fit you are feeling. So let's start off at the Bell Inn, and see how far we can manage in about two hours, allowing for several stops to marvel at some of the views. You'll need boots or wellies, as there are bound to be one or two muddy bits where we join bridleways.

Let's amble down past the Memorial Hall and school and head up Woodstock lane. Look in that window, there's a photo of Bob Hill drawing water from this pump in pre-war days; it's so good



that we retain these reminders of what life was like less than a hundred years ago. We'll carry on up the hill, keeping to the right, past the Savage's site... looks like they won't run out of wood for a while yet. Let's get our breath



back after that climb and look out at this terrific view across the fields to Gatcombe House; we're so fortunate that Princess Anne allows us access through her estate, it makes for a very pleasant walk to Minchinhampton, or to cut across the golf course to Nag's Head.

We've arrived at Longman's Farm, now incorporating a smart equestrian centre. And just look at that superb barn. I was going to take us up the path opposite the stables back towards Avening via West End, but it would be a crime to miss out on Hazel wood in springtime, so let's carry straight on. But first, take in the view towards Minchinhampton, you can see the church clearly from here.



Let's take the far left-hand footpath through the wood, as you get to see more birds, and sometimes deer, in the adjacent field. Whichever way we go, the wood is a carpet of bluebells and wild garlic at this time of year. We often harvest some of the garlic and have it in soups and salads, even bread, it's very good for you. When we reach the end, we'll turn left after the gate to follow the bridlepath towards Nailsworth for about 300 yards, and then head left again at the junction. The right track there takes you down to the Weighbridge Inn.



After a few hundred yards we've now reached a track wide enough for vehicles, but as it gets very muddy we'll cross over and take the parallel path through the ancient woodland, heading left towards Avening. We'll come out of the wood and follow the road down to

Brandhouse farm, with its imposing new house there. If there's no-one about, we'll take a peek inside the old barn, it's massive and the construction of the beams is fascinating. There are now goats housed in the old stables, with sheep and their lambs in the field. Later in the year there are so many pheasants about that you imagine that you are going to trip over them. But not for long...



Let's stop at the gate on the right further down the hill: there is something about the slopes of the hills there that make the view very appealing. There's usually a buzzard around here... in fact I can hear one calling.. there are two! They have caught a thermal and almost disappear from view, surely they must do that simply for the sheer enjoyment of flying high. We're so well off for birds: this year I've already seen a kingfisher shooting down the stream, and a bullfinch on the edge of the recreation ground. Not to mention the family of jackdaws, polishing off everything on the bird table, plus the half a dozen pigeons out to strip our cherry tree every morning...



After passing Vale farm we could simply follow the road back into the village, but let's take the footpath behind the disused stable block and work our way up past Avening Park House. There's the tennis court; when I arrived here, twenty years ago, I asked Reverend Celia how often I needed to go to church to use the court... "Not necessary", she said, "but you can run the tennis club for me."

OK, that was a bit of a steep climb, but once we reach the top of the field, let's turn round and take in the view across the village towards Gatcombe, it's spectacular. We now head left along this road, but let's go right for a few yards to get a sneaky peek at that incredibly long line of trees heading down to the house, which is out of sight. I came across this avenue once, on a day when there was a hoar frost, it looked surreal. Anyway, back to our route, and we'll climb over the stile on our left after a



couple of hundred yards, and follow the Macmillan Way a short distance down to the village. It won't worry the two horses if we keep to the track past Picket house. Just look at the colour of the field, yellows and whites mixed in with the green, fantastic!

Let's go straight across the road and over the two stiles to reach the church. I do find this churchyard fascinating, as of course it reveals so much of Avening's history. I've sat on the bench in Cherington's churchyard too, next to Brian Trubshaw's grave, recalling those views of the sleek silver Concorde every evening, announcing it's departure from Heathrow en route to the States with a sonic boom over Gloucestershire. I'm always drawn to military headstones, and here we have Corporal and Private Ayres, presumably two brothers, both killed in the First World War. But I want to show you John Rowland's grave,

a carpenter who lived with his family in my house in the High Street, having extended it from a weaver's cottage; he died in 1889. I'll just clear some of the ivy away... good heavens, it says his grandson was a second lieutenant who was killed in 1918, I didn't know that.

As our wellies are so muddy, let's go and stomp in the stream by the school and clean them off. Whenever I pass it, I can't help it, I check to see whether there's enough water flowing to enable Ron Major to launch the ducks at the Church fete. I'm sure that the fete's universal appeal is because it is timeless: a brass band, traditional games and stalls, great fun and it probably hasn't changed since the 1950's. Just like this walk, it all adds to that wonderful feeling of well-being that you derive from living in Avening.



Well here we are back at the Bell Inn.. what's that you say, you fancy a sit down here? Fair enough, you've deserved it!



Roger Lindley

