

Westonbirt – The Holford Legacy

A walk around and through the Westonbirt Arboretum to the village, and back through Westonbirt School.

Distance 4.7km (3.0 miles), Walking Time approx 1.5 hours (Grade A on scale A = easy to D = hard)

Starting point: take A433 (Bath Road) from Tetbury for 4km, turning right at crossroads just before the Hare and Hounds Hotel. Turn sharp left after 250m into a minor road. Park on left in small lay-by.

Refreshments: Hare and Hounds Hotel near start/end, café off route within Arboretum



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- A** **Beaufort Polo Club Ponies:** can often be seen in the fields to the right. The actual club is further up the road and often holds polo events at weekends open to the public.
- B** **National Arboretum:** an outstanding collection of trees and shrubs, begun by Robert Stayner Holford in 1829 and continued by his heir Robert Holford in 1839 at a time of great excitement in the plant world when Victorian plant-hunters were collecting new and exotic species. The Arboretum has been continuously developed by successive heirs until it was handed over in 1956 to the Forestry Commission who made it accessible to the general public. It is now the largest arboretum in the country and possibly the finest in Europe.
- C** **Westonbirt Village:** much of the village (and its inhabitants), and the Hare and Hounds Hotel, were moved from their original sites in the mid 19th Century by RS Holford to enable Westonbirt House to be surrounded by magnificent gardens and parkland.
- D** **Westonbirt House:** built at great expense by RS Holford in 1870, it was the third and most splendid house of that name to be built here. Since 1928 it has housed a well-known girls' public school (the stables are used as classrooms). The house has a fine Italianate garden and lakes on the south side, often open to the public.
- E** **Hare and Hounds Hotel:** built for George Holford in 1854 on the site of an earlier coaching inn on the Bath – Cirencester road. Extended in 1928 to provide a hotel onto the original inn.



Description

- 1 Retrace steps to the sharp left turning, and take the stile into a field on the left (the Monarch's Way and Macmillan Way). Continue straight ahead keeping the boundary wall to the right (polo ponies from the Beaufort Polo Club can often be seen in these fields). At the end of the field, cross a stile to the side of a five-barred gate. The boundary wall to the left marks the perimeter of Westonbirt Arboretum. Cross the field, following the boundary wall to the left, and cross the stile into another field. Continue through this field and cross a stile by a wooden gate. There are electric fences on the right in field 3. Go through a squeeze gate into field 4, then another squeeze gate and stile into field 5, and over a stile into field 6. About two thirds of the way to the trees is a gate on the left into the Arboretum.
- 2 This gate is set at an angle in the boundary wall. Go over the stile and into the Arboretum. Follow the grass path downhill and slightly left to where there is a valley on the left. There is a marker post; do not take the Macmillan Way but the Public Bridleway on the left.
- 3 Continue along the valley bottom, keeping close to the fence on the right. Cross a surfaced drive on to a track and continue along the valley for a further 600m, following the fence line, to emerge through a wide metal gate on to the main drive leading into Silk Wood. There are good views of Westonbirt's Silk Wood from this path.
- 4 Cross over the drive and under the elevated walkway, continuing in the same direction and passing the Chair Making Centre on the left. Continue straight ahead through a wide squeeze gate and along the track, now fenced on both sides, to reach the main road. Cross directly over the road, continuing down the minor road opposite for 200m to reach a crossroads. Continue straight ahead, following the sign for the church and golf course.
- 5 Continue through the hamlet of Westonbirt to the end, then turn left through a pedestrian gate into the grounds of Westonbirt School. Follow the metalled track to reach the main drive to the school (which can be clearly seen to the right). Cross the drive, go through a kissing gate and continue in the same direction across the parkland. After 100m bear slightly left, next to an oak tree, away from the boundary hedge to a metal kissing gate next to a wide gate in a fence.
- 6 Pass through the kissing gate into a field and go straight ahead just to the right of two trees. There is an electricity pole straight ahead. Then bear slightly left towards a stile in the hedgerow along the A433 main road. There is a sign for the Hare and Hounds just across the road. Cross the stile to the junction with the minor road opposite and return to the starting point.

