



## Walk 4

### *The Upper Hill*

(9km, OS map 179, 1:25 000)

1. For a map of this walk, have a look at Walk 4 in the Local History series. Numbers on this map appear in brackets in the text. One of the differences, between the natural history and local history walks, is the impact that the season will make to what you see, hear and smell. This walk is written in springtime, so your walk may be quite different in another season.
2. Starting from the small car park opposite the church (1), begin by listening. What birds can you hear? In most seasons you will hear the more common garden birds around here – Blackbird, Robin, Great and Blue Tits, Jackdaw and Magpie, and Woodpigeon.

3. Set off along Church Road, passing the Old Rectory on the left and carry on until you reach the war memorial. All along this road the gardens are full of flowers and all of these flowers are a fabulous resource for the pollinating insects in summer. How many different types of Bee can you see? Can you see any other pollinators? Cross Church Road and continue on to Leckhampton Road.
4. Turn right and head up Leckhampton Road. You should see and hear Blackbird, Robin, Goldfinch, Great and Blue Tits and Woodpigeon. As the road ascends, you will start to see and hear Carrion Crows from the fields and woods above.
5. Soon you will reach a small estate known as *Leckhampton View*. Turn in here, then go immediately left and find the footpath that leads alongside the Scout Hut and begins to climb the hill. This footpath is quite choked with vegetation in spring and summer.
6. Halfway up the track a footpath leads out to your right. Take a moment to stop and listen for what birds you can see and hear (5). When you're ready, carry on up the path. When you reach it, carefully cross Leckhampton Road and enter Daisybank. The landscape and vegetation begin to feel quite different. You've climbed quite a way and the woodland is more mature and primarily Beech.
7. Walk along *Daisybank* and go right through the gate into the car park. From the display boards, follow the footpath that heads off at 10 o'clock, uphill. You quickly reach an intersection. Turn right and head more steeply uphill. On reaching a level area, look around (10). Above you on the hill are the disused quarries that brought the Oolitic limestone down into Cheltenham during the Victorian period. These quarries now make an excellent home for Jackdaw, Raven and Buzzard. They also create a habitat for many insects on which a Wren may be feeding.

8. Head uphill at 9 o'clock, up the sloping woodland trail. Look out for fungi growing in the leaf litter or as brackets on the trees. There is a lot of downed wood here which makes great habitat for beetles. Deer, Fox and Badger are common in these woods. Woodpecker will call and drum. Find a spot to stop and listen. How different is the woodland life here, to what you saw and heard in the gardens below?
9. Finally, you emerge on top of Leckhampton Common. This is a limestone upland habitat and quite different to the woods below. There are many different flowering plants up here, including Field and Devil's Bit Scabious. In spring, the gorse will be in bloom.



[Gorse]

10. Turn to your right and follow the Cotswold Way to the tremendous viewpoint over Leckhampton and Cheltenham beyond (15). This is an excellent spot to enjoy that carefully packed lunch! This can be a good area to look for butterfly; Speckled Wood, Small Tortoiseshell and, if you're lucky, the Chalk Hill Blue, but strong winds may limit this.

11. Follow the escarpment to the south, passing the Devil's Chimney. You may see a Buzzard below you now. In late spring, you may will come across a Wheatear passing through on migration. Skylarks will call overhead. Linnet and Yellowhammer will be on the fence lines. Tree Pipit will be in the Silver Birch. Swallow, martins and Swifts will be in the air in summer. If you see a large beetle on the path in spring, it will be one of the Oil Beetle family.

12. When you emerge onto Hartley Lane, turn left. When you reach a modern house on your left, turn right down a track that was an old Roman Road. The fields to your left are a good spot to see buntings and thrushes in winter. There will be Woodpigeon in this field but look closely and you'll spot some Stock Dove. It's also a great place to look for fossils, once it's been ploughed in the spring. There is Yellow Archangel along this path.



[Yellow Archangel]

13. Follow this lane to Ullenwood (marked \*). Look out for 'Roman' snails in this area. Turn right and walk along the road until you again intersect with Leckhampton Road. Cross very carefully and proceed along Greenway Lane.

14. When you reach a Severn Trent building on your left, look into the field and, over by the trees you will see the clear outline of Crippetts Barrow, a Neolithic long barrow. On the lane verges you will find Greater Stitchwort and Orchid. There is a lovely Bluebell wood on your right.



[Greater Stitchwort]

15. Just after the road crosses the edge of the escarpment, pass through the old iron gate on your right that marks a public footpath. Follow the path down between wonderful mature trees. and around the Crippetts, boyhood home to Edward Adrian Wilson of Scott's ill-fated Antarctic expedition. The young 'Ted' Wilson would often be found observing and drawing wildlife in the fields you are now walking through.

16. Follow Crippets Lane downhill. The lane has large patches of Ramsons (also known as wild garlic) near the top. It is bordered by mature trees - Oak, Ash, Sycamore and London Plane. This is a good spot to see a Little Owl.

17. Just before you reach the white wrought iron gates with pigeons on top, there will be Sweet Chestnut trees on either side. Around the base of one of these on the right, you will find a large bed of Wood Anemone in spring.



[Wood Anemone]

18. As you pass the farms you will again find many of the familiar woodland and garden birds. The farm encourages more finches than you may have seen and there will be Goldfinch and Chaffinch, but also look out for a Siskin, especially in winter. Before you reach the crossroads, take the footpath to your right and follow it over Hatherley Brook and through a flower meadow, with Cuckoo Flower, White Dead-nettle and Green Alkanet. Soon you will be back to where we started, at St Peter's.

19. If you spot something of interest that you think we might want to add to this walk, please drop me a note to the email address copied below.