

This is a level walk apart from one descent and a later ascent of Cleeve Hill. In between there is a leisurely stroll along the River Avon. The route from Middle Littleton to Cleeve Prior is through typical 'Vale of Evesham' countryside. Map reference of start SP 078 469.

The walk starts from Middle Littleton which is just off the B4085 Bidford-on-Avon to Badsey road, 2 miles north-east of Evesham. It is reached from the A439 (T) at Bidford by crossing the Avon and following the signs through Cleeve Prior, or from turning on to the B4035 and turning on to the B4085 just before the 'Round of Gras' at Badsey. Cars can be parked at the beginning of Manor Road, which is opposite the British Legion Club.

The three Littleton's – North, Middle and South – are sheltered on the west by slightly higher ground and away to the east by the Cotswold's. The Littleton's lie in one of the most important market garden districts in 'The Vale' and this walk goes through some of the market gardens, with their crops of rhubarb and thyme, onions and asparagus (known locally as 'gras'). In the 1930's there were some 3,000 small units of between three and five acres round Evesham and the same around Pershore. The break up of the large estates in the 19th century was greatly encouraged by the acceptance of the 'Evesham Custom', whereby tenants owned the improvements they made to holdings and could realize the added value as 'ingoing' paid to the new tenant. Life in 'The Vale' was almost in another world- hard work for little return, save the freedom of working the land for oneself and being one's own boss in the open air.

Walk the few yards back to the 'T' junction and turn right. Go around the bend and when the road turns right keep straight ahead. On the right is the entrance to a huge tithe barn owned by the National Trust. It can be visited without charge and is still used by the farmer. Built about 1300 by the Abbey of Evesham and restored by the National Trust in 1977, it has eleven bays and is partly aisled.

Continue the walk by going to a gate at the end of the track. From here bear right to the second of two stiles in the right-hand hedge. In the next field turn left and with the hedge on the left, go to the road on the edge of North Littleton. Cross the road and follow the track which is signposted to Cleeve Prior. On the left are some of the traditional crops of 'The Vale' but further on, competition from foreign imports has forced the smaller landholders to turn to

cereals, some to 'set-a-side'. In ½ mile this track turns left but you keep the same direction

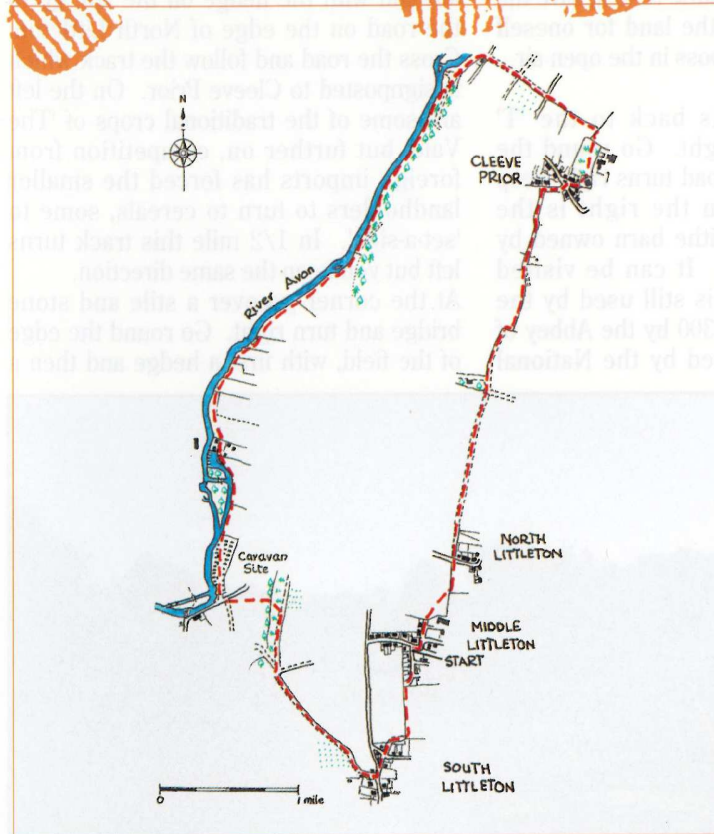
At the corner go over a stile and stone bridge and turn right. Go round the edge of the field, with first a hedge and then a ditch on your right, to join a track. This will take you into Cleeve Prior.

Cleeve Prior was held in the Middle Ages by the Prior of Worcester – Prior's in contrast to the Bishop's Cleeve which was held by the Bishop of Worcester. The remains of a number of Roman period settlements have been found in the area

and Cleeve Prior was one of over forty early medieval farms established on the highly productive land of 'The Vale'.

Go straight across the road to 'The Green', noting the group of fine stone cottages on the right, and on into the churchyard. Bear left, following a faint path past the church, to go out between the eighth and ninth poplars from the right. Pass through the present graveyard to go to the left of a large old chestnut tree. On the right is the very fine 16th century Manor House. At the end of the field cross a stile and a footbridge and follow the path round

WALK 11 MIDDLE LITTLETON



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6 miles

OS Maps:

Landranger 150
Pathfinder 1020
(SP 04/14)

the field to the left. Go forward with the hedge on the right to pass through a gap in the corner and keep the same direction, but now with the hedge on the left. At the lane go straight ahead and at the next cross-track keep the same direction.

On reaching the bridleway along the ridge, cross straight over to go down and round to the left following the garden fence. At this point there is a wonderful view over the Lenches. The path goes down to a wide turning area for cars. A riverside path can be found on the right a few yards up the track which comes down from Cleeve. Follow this path for ¾ mile to a stile at the end of the wood, where a track comes down from the left. If you walk quietly you may see a heron, as this is one of their favorite haunts. Another bird often seen here is the kingfisher.

Walk on along the riverside passing through the ends of many long narrow fields, each having its own individual stile. After one mile the path goes to the left chalet, opposite the old mill house at Harvington. This is now a well-known hotel and restaurant. Continue, to go through a caravan park and out to the road. Along to the right is 'The Fish and Anchor Inn' and a natural weir, which strangely enough has a public right of way for people on foot along the top of it - - but it is NOT to be recommended!

From the caravan park entrance bear left across the road to a gap in the hedge. Follow the path across the field and up to the top of the ridge. Turn right along the bridleway. At the junction turn right and then left to follow the hedge on the left for ½ mile to the church at South Littleton. Cross the main road and turn left.

In a few yards bear right along the front of South House, a fine Georgian building, with the old bakery opposite. Cross the beginning of Farm Lane to a footpath. This path takes you into the field which divides South and Middle Littleton. The switchback effect as you cross the field is caused by the ridges and furrows made by medieval farmers when they ploughed. It has remained unploughed ever since. Life before the 19th century was very different from that of today because most people were farmers. For example, in the 16th century the Vicar of Badsey, just down the road, was responsible for the parish bull – but in South Littleton the vicar was only responsible for the parish 'heylfur'.

Keep to the left of the field and at the end pass between the houses to the road. You should be able to see the car along to the left.