

# SWC Walk DRAFT

## Kemble circular: the source of the River Thames.

The main feature of this tranquil walk is a visit to the source of the Thames (the Thames head) which is in a field just 3 km from Kemble station

Beyond the source the route continues along a section of the disused Severn and Thames canal which is not a typical towpath walk but more like a trail through dense woodland as the canal is completely overgrown and has become an important wildlife corridor, particularly for butterflies. You reach Sapperton Tunnel and the aptly named Tunnel pub for your lunch. Leaving the pub you go over fields to the village of Coates and then on rarely walked tracks along field edges to pick up the Monarch's Way and then cross the busy Fosse Way (Roman Road). From here you head south on quiet tracks and lanes to the lovely village of Ewen where you can have a refreshing drink before walking through the village and picking up the meandering Thames path for the final stretch back into Kemble. Adjacent to Kemble station there is another pub for any final refreshments while you wait for your train.

This is a summer walk best done between June and September. In winter the source of the Thames and surrounding fields often flood and other sections of the walk will be very muddy.

The main 10 mile walk has been checked – but not any extension of the route to Cirencester. However the publisher cannot accept responsibility for any problems encountered by readers.

<b>Length</b>	16km (10 miles)
<b>Maps</b>	Explorer 168 and 169 for Kemble and Cirencester Landranger 173
<b>Toughness</b>	2/10. Virtually flat
<b>Features</b>	<b>Kemble</b> Kemble was the site of a 7th-century pagan, Anglo-Saxon cemetery. The village church today has a Norman door and a tower dating from 1250, to which a spire was added in 1450. The full restoration in 1872 included bringing the chapel of ease at nearby Ewen here brick by brick to form a new south transept.  <b>Wysis Way</b>  An 88km (55 mile) path linking Offas Dyke and the Thames path at Kemble. You will be walking this path, which joins up with the Thames path to the lunch –time pub.  <b>Thames Path</b> A National trail following the River Thames from its source to the Thame Barrier in East London a total of 296km (184m);although you can continue

further east should you wish to Crayford Ness. There is a wealth of information about the path on the Internet including personal stories and photos of people who have walked the entire route.

### **Head of the Thames .**

The official source is a remote Gloucestershire meadow on the edge of Kemble called Trewsbury Mead. Although some dispute this as the actual source it is marked by a monument beneath an ancient ash tree with the now virtually illegible inscription:

**“The conservators of the River Thames 1857- 1974.  
This stone was placed here to mark the source of the River Thames”**

Up until 1974 the statute of “Old Father Thames” himself would have welcomed visitors to the source but this has been moved to a more accessible location at St Johns Lock. This is also the start (or end) of the 296km (184 mile) Thames path national trail. In addition to the monument there is a small circle of stones which mark a spring from which the Thames begins its journey. In summer there is no water flow here and it may be several kilometres before you see any water at all. In winter it is a different story and the fields may well be flooded.

### **Thames and Severn Canal and Sapperton Tunnel**

This disused canal, abandoned in the 1930s, is the subject of a major, and controversial, restoration project which has been going on for decades but the section you will walk is completely overgrown and you are hardly aware you are walking beside a canal at all. The rough path is completely accessible however. If you are a keen bird or butterfly spotter it is worth spending a little time to see what is lurking among the thick vegetation.

Along this section of the canal you will pass one of the five circular three storey cottages built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century for use by lock keepers and lengthmen. They were not particularly popular because of the limited amount of space and the difficulty of finding suitable furniture.

**Sapperton Tunnel** was for a short period the longest tunnel in the UK at 2.2 miles. It has no towpath so boats had to be moved along the canal by “legging”.- propelling the boat by using your feet against the tunnel wall; a particularly dangerous activity!

The tunnel roof has collapsed in at least two places so restoration would be major problem.

### **Restoration of the canal**

The restoration of this section of the canal and the tunnel is in the final phase 3 of the overall programme but no money has yet been identified for it and there are severe engineering difficulties. Moreover there are increasing calls for the canal to be left “unrestored “ as it has become an important wildlife

	<p>habitat for bats, birds and insects. For the foreseeable future this section of the canal looks likely to remain in its overgrown and attractive state.</p> <p>Both the canal and Sapperton tunnel have informative Wikipedia pages.</p> <p><b>Coates</b> This small village is actually closer to the Thames Head than Kemble. On the walk you go through the churchyard of St Matthews Parish church which dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and is well worth a visit.</p> <p><b>Ewen</b> A quintessentially English hamlet set among peaceful water meadows. The atmospheric Wild Duck Inn dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is an ideal spot for a drink in its courtyard gardens before the final stretch back to Kemble station.</p>
<b>Walk options</b>	<p>There are no specific options to shorten the walk . After lunch at the Tunnel House Inn you could choose to retrace your route back to Kemble station making a “there and back” walk of just over 6 miles.</p> <p><b>Lengthening the walk – a visit to Cirencester</b> This is a map-led option to lengthen the walk by visiting the town of Cirencester with its Roman amphitheatre, Abbey and many town centre pubs and shops.</p> <p>Depending on how much exploring you want to do in Cirencester then this makes the circular walk back to Kemble at least 21km (13.1m). Further information about this option with brief written details is at the end of the main walk instructions.</p> <p>If you do not want to walk back to Kemble from Cirencester then there is a limited bus service that will drop you at Kemble station.</p> <p>An 881 bus from Cirencester Corn Hall at 1552 and 17.50 (Mon –Fri) and at 15.08 and 17.00 on a Saturday. (No Sunday service) On weekdays only there is just the one 855 bus leaving Cirencester Corn Hall at 15.05 that will take you to Kemble station.</p> <p>Otherwise it’s a taxi costing around £15. (July 2015)</p>
<b>Transport</b>	<p>Kemble is served by First Great Western Trains out of London Paddington station. It is on the main line for Swindon, Bath, Bristol, Cheltenham and stations in South Wales. Direct trains to Kemble take around 75mins. You can take a train to Swindon and change there for a train to Kemble. This makes the journey about 1hr 30mins.</p> <p><b>Cost of train tickets (August 2015)</b> Unfortunately this is an expensive day out!. Kemble is outside the Network South East Railcard area. For those with a senior railcard and an older persons London Boroughs Freedom Pass a day return ticket will cost you just under <b>£30</b>.</p>

	<p>For those under pension age you can use your SE Network Rail Card to get a 1/3 off a return ticket to Reading <b>plus</b> a return ticket from Reading to Kemble. You can buy both tickets at London Paddington .</p> <p>Cost:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London to Reading £18 minus 1/3 (£6) = <b>£12.</b></li> <li>• Reading to Kemble – Super Off Peak return = <b>£25.70</b></li> <li>• Total cost of two tickets <b>£37.70.</b></li> </ul> <p>If you book in advance or travel as a group you may well be able to get reductions on these prices. The Saturday Walkers website section on train travel is a very helpful guide here.</p>
<p><b>Suggested trains</b></p>	<p><b>Saturday:</b> take the 10.15am direct fast train from London Paddington to Kemble arriving at 11.30am. This should mean you get to the lunch-time pub around 1.00 pm. If you want to do a longer walk and visit Cirencester you could take the 9.00am train and change at Swindon arriving at Kemble at 10.29am.</p> <p><b>Sunday:</b> For either walk option take the 9.30am train, changing at Swindon and arriving at Kemble at 11.01.</p> <p><b>For weekday walkers</b> there is a 10.30am train, changing at Swindon and arriving at Kemble at 11.52, which still allows you to get to the lunch-time pub at a reasonable time. For those with a senior railcard you can get the direct 9.36am train which arrives at Kemble at 10.51.</p> <p><b>Return trains</b> There is one train an hour on a Saturday and Sunday up to 20.45pm. For most of these trains you will have to change at Swindon. There is also one late night train after 22.00.</p>
<p><b>Lunch and Tea</b></p>	<p>Your lunch pub option on the main walk is the <a href="#">Tunnel House Inn (01285 770280)</a> 5 km (3.1m) into the walk. This is an attractive Cotswold pub above the canal with extensive outdoor seating overlooking Hailey Wood. It is a free house and has an extensive menu including cheaper sandwich options.</p> <p>From the Tunnel House Inn it is another 8km (5.0m) before you reach the <a href="#">Wild Duck (01285 770310)</a> in Ewen, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Cotswolds Inn where you can enjoy refreshments in a pleasant courtyard type garden. It is 3km from the end of the walk.</p> <p>If you do not quite time your arrival back at Kemble station to catch your train you can have a drink at the <a href="#">Tavern Inn (01285 770216)</a> which is adjacent to the station and described as “a small but cosy pub with a special charm.”</p>

## A. Kemble Station to the Tunnel House Inn ( 5km, 3.1m)

1. Cross the footbridge at Kemble station to leave Platform 1 following a Thames path sign. Go through the car-park. In 100m leave the car park and continue to a road 30m ahead of you. Turn left at the road.
2. In 40m you reach a footpath sign and cross the stile to your right to continue down the clear enclosed path – **the Wysis Way**. You are in open countryside. In 200m cross a stile to the right of an iron field gate and continue on the path. In 70m the track starts to bear right as it approaches a gate and a road bridge just beyond it. ! Here you turn left across a wooden pontoon bridge and continue on a narrow path in a field, a dried up stream bed (the nascent river Thames) just to your right.
3. In 80m you have a choice of routes: You can either:
  - (1) bear NNW (left) across an open field heading towards three mature trees just beyond which is the field boundary. At the field boundary you bear right to continue along the field edge which is on your left. In 80m you reach a wooden swing gate.
  - (2) Alternatively you can just continue along the edge of the river bed until you reach the field boundary where you turn left to reach the wooden swing gate above in 50m.
4. Go through the wooden gate, cross a concrete drive to go through another gate and continue on the path with the field boundary of trees and bushes just to your left (There is a road ahead of you and you, may hear and see traffic). ! In 250m you reach a post on your left with signs on it. Here you leave the field edge and following the Thames path sign head diagonally across the field towards two telegraph poles 130m away.
5. As you head towards the two telegraph poles you will see a wooden gate between them. Head towards the gate. Go through the gate, noting the footpath signs, and go up 5 stone steps to cross a potentially busy road to take a dirt track just away to your right where in 10m go through two steel gates and bear left to follow a route 10-15m from the field edge on your left. (You are in a large grassy field which slopes gently away to your right before rising again. In winter this is likely to be flooded.)
6. In 200m you reach a steel gate to the left of a steel field gate set in dry stone walls. Go through the gate and continue on the Thames path ,an intermittent line of trees just on your right . In 250m you go through a metal gate and follow the Thames path sign bearing gently right and heading towards some woods. **In 80m just beyond an ancient ash tree there is a monument marking the official source of the Thames. There is also a footpath sign and a small basin of stones marking the spring from which the Thames begins its journey.**
7. Continue past the monument with the field edge and woods just on your right. In 80m pass a redundant stile and two footpath posts and continue along a rutted track. There are mini-telegraph wires above you. In 100m cross a step stile over a dry stone wall and continue along the track. In a further 100m go over another step a stile in a dry stone wall and continue along a now enclosed car-wide dirt track.

8. The track starts to climb and in 15m you turn left following a footpath sign fingerpost to go through an ancient wire gate and descend to the path a few metres ahead of you where you turn **left**.\*\* This is the path of the disused Thames and Severn Canal – a section of the Monarchs Way. You stay on this path for the next 1.6km (1m) all the way to the Tunnel Inn pub.
9. **(\*\* If you want to visit Cirencester and have lunch there do not turn left on the path but turn right and follow the map-led route of the longer walk to Cirencester at the end of these directions.)**
10. Below the path on your right is the overgrown canal which is now completely covered in dense foliage. The path is quite safe but nothing like a “normal” canal side path so you need to take a bit of care as it will be uneven in places.
11. You continue on the path to go under a railway bridge. You pass a ruined circular tower on your left. (See walk features for further details.) You next pass an old wooden seat The path forks and you take the right hand fork to pass under an attractive road bridge. 30m before a tunnel (**Sapperton Tunnel**) you pass an information post and a seat to go up some steps to reach the gravel car park of the **Tunnel Inn pub** straight ahead of you.

## **B. Tunnel Inn pub to Fosse Way - the Roman Road (4.6km, 2.9m)**

12. On leaving the Tunnel Inn Pub turn left to cross the canal bridge over Sapperton Tunnel. 30m beyond the bridge there is a wooden gate leading into a field. Go through the gate and cross the small field to another gate 50m away
13. Go through the gate and after a short climb in 40m go through a wooden kissing gate with a public footpath sign and head down a path to cross some railway tracks. Go up the path towards a gate. Go through the gate and head straight across a large field on a possibly indistinct path towards the field boundary 130m away.
14. ! At the field boundary there is a gap in the dry stone wall with a public footpath sign showing your onward direction across a large field. Cross this field on another potentially indistinct path in the direction of the public footpath sign heading towards a grove of trees in the right hand corner of the field.
15. At the corner of the field go through a wide gap into the next field noting a public footpath sign and continue on the wide track with the field edge just on your right. A church can be seen ahead of you to your right.
16. You pass some farm buildings and circular steel containers to your right. Your track is now a concrete driveway. ! 40m after the start of the concrete driveway you turn right through the church gate of St Mathews Parish Church and continue down the narrow tarmac track through the cemetery. Leave the churchyard through a metal gate and continue down a narrow tarmac path.
17. In 80m you reach a T junction where you turn left down a tarmac lane. In 80m you pass the drive way to Setts Barton and continue down the lane. In 40m there is a 2 armed

footpath sign and wooden kissing gate to your right. Go through the gate and continue on the clear path with the field edge just to your right. In 80m go through another wooden kissing gate where in a few metres you take a faint diagonal path towards the right hand corner of the field heading just to the left of some cream coloured houses.

18. Exit the field through an old wooden kissing gate (there is a footpath sign ahead of you) to turn right on a tarmac lane passing the cream coloured houses on your right. In 70m you reach a T junction with a tarmac road where you turn left. You soon pass a Childrens play area on your right. The road swings gently right and you continue ahead. ! After 180m on this lane you reach a tarmac lane on your right opposite a telegraph pole to your left. Turn right down this lane heading towards some business premises.
19. ! In 60m there is a black painted gate on your left. Go through this gate and in 5m turn right on the path with the field edge immediately to your right and a large field on your left. You soon pass an ancient rusting field gate on your right. (**Note: For the next 1km or so, until you reach the car-wide dirt track in para 21, the way ahead on this rarely used public right of way may well be quite overgrown in summer which will slow your progress.**)
20. You reach the corner of this large field and go through a gap in the hedge line to continue ahead in the same direction through another field. The field boundary is just on your right. After negotiating some overgrown sections go through a wide gap into the next field and continue in the same direction.
21. In 150m the path turns sharp right and you then immediately cross a stile to your right to turn left on a path the field edge now on your left. In 300m you reach a car-wide dirt track where you turn left ignoring the stile ahead of you. (**This is where the Cirencester walk option also meets the car wide dirt track**)
22. In 100m the dirt track swings right past some farm buildings but you keep ahead on a grassy track into a field passing a telegraph pole on your right and an intermittent line of hedges just to your right and a large field on your left. You can see the Royal Agricultural College ahead of you to your left.
23. The track – the Monarchs Way- gently descends and enters a wooded area. The track leaves the wooded area and continues with a line of bushes either side. Your route merges with another track from your left and you continue ahead gently uphill.
24. ! The earth track turns sharply right and here you leave the Monarchs Way which continues ahead of you along the field edge. You turn right with the track where in 50m you go through a wooden gate to the right of a locked double fieldgate
25. You soon pass the attractive buildings of College Farm now on a wide tarmac lane. You go through some gates heading for the busy road 70m ahead of you – the very busy Fosse Way – the Roman Road.

### C. Fosse Way to the Wild Duck Inn, Ewen (3.4km, 2.1m)

26. Cross the busy road with great care and take a wide tarmac track with a bridleway sign on the other side of the road. The tarmac bridleway soon becomes an earth track.
27. In 200m the track forks and you continue ahead on the right hand fork on a car-wide dirt track through open countryside. You continue in this same direction through several fields.
28. Your track merges with another track from your right and you continue ahead with a line of telegraph wires just away to your left.
29. You pass Field Farm Barn on your right and in 80m you ignore a track to your left and continue ahead. ***(This tarmac track on your left however is where a suggested route back from Cirencester rejoins your route. See notes for Cirencester extension at the end of this walk.)***
30. You continue past Field Farm on your left, the track now swinging gently left. You pass a pair of houses on your left and continue on the now tarmac lane. You cross over a bridge over an old railway line and continue ahead down the tarmac lane.
31. You pass the entrance to a house on your left with a stone eagle on a parapet and continue on down the lane as it bears gently right. You reach a T junction with a minor road coming in from your left and you continue ahead down the road using as far as practicable the narrow grass verge to your right.
32. In 200m on your left there is an attractive stone cottage with a thatched roof. Turn left down the gravel approach to this house following a bridleway sign and in 7 metres take a gap in the fence following a narrow enclosed earth path. ***(Even in dry summer weather there may be very short muddy stretches on this path.)***
33. Continue on this possibly overgrown path and in 300m you pass a bridleway sign to come out onto a tarmac lane and opposite you is **the Wild Duck** a possible refreshment stop before the last leg to Kemble station.

### D. Wild Duck Inn to Kemble Station (3km, 1.9m)

34. Leave the Wild Duck to turn left on the road through the village of Ewen. (Or if not visiting the pub turn right on the road). At a T junction you continue on the road's pavement following the road sign to Kemble. In 80m you pass on your left another sign to Kemble and a sign for the Thames Path and you continue ahead.
35. You pass a bus shelter on your left and continue through the village walking on grass verges as the pavement has ended.
36. Just beyond the last houses of the village and just before two 50mph speed limit signs there is a Thames footpath sign and a wooden bench on your left. Follow this sign to take



the narrow earth path with the road just away to your right. On your left is a narrow dry river bed – the early course of the Thames.

37. The earth path eventually meets the road again and here you turn left on the road and in 15m turn right following a Thames footpath sign to continue along an earth path going away from the road soon with open fields away to your right. The earth path zigzags around the edge of a field to then enter some woodland through a gate with a no horse-riding sign.
38. The river bed of the nascent River Thames is just on your left and there may be some pools of water. The path emerges from the woodland and you continue along a grassy track with the field boundary just to your left.
39. Eventually you pass a wooden bench to your left and you go through a gate to a tarmac road bridge. Cross the road with care and head for the Thames footpath sign to go through a wooden gate and continue on the clear track to reach in 30m a wooden pontoon bridge on your right. **(This is the wooden bridge you crossed at the start of the walk. You now do in reverse the 400m start of the walk.)**
40. Continue past the pontoon bridge on the track – the Wysis Way -until you cross a stile to reach the road where you turn left and in 40m bear right to pick up the route through Kemble station car-park with the station 100m ahead of you. (The **Tavern Inn** is 3 mins walk away (200m). Bear left at the station to go up Railway Terrace and then turn right at the junction with Station Road bearing right again in 30m to reach the pub.)

## E. Extending the walk to explore Cirencester – map-led or GPS option only.

Cirencester, famous for its Roman history, is the self-styled Capital of the Cotswolds. It is a bustling town and one of the largest in the region without its own railway station. Hence the need for a large car-park at the remote Kemble station 4 miles away. If you plan to walk to the town and explore its attractions you are advised to visit its web site [here](#) for information on shopping, places to eat and drink and much information about what to see and do. There are maps you can download too. Its extensive Wikipedia entry is well worth a read.

This is a map-led option only. If you visit the town and walk back to Kemble station you will do at least 13 miles. There is only a limited bus service back to Kemble station (not on a Sunday). The OS map for the Kemble circular walk and the GPS route set out a route there and back from the town.

## F. Walk notes for Cirencester option. Missing lunch at the Tunnel Inn and eating in Cirencester.

Follow the main walk instructions up to **para 9**. Here turn **right** on the Monarchs Way passing the grounds of Trewsbury House on your right. You cross a road and continue on the path through four fields, the field edge to your right. At the field edge of the fourth field you turn left with the path. In about 100m you reach a car-wide dirt track to pick up the main walk instructions at **para 21**.

You continue with the main walk instructions to **para 24** where instead of turning sharp right towards College Farm you continue ahead along the **Monarchs Way** the field edge to your right.

Continue on the Monarchs Way as it swings to the right and eventually meets the very busy Fosse Road.(A429). Turn left along this road and keep ahead at a major roundabout.. As the A429 bears right you keep ahead along **Tetbury Road** passing a lake and a park on your left.

**Tetbury Road** merges with **Castle Street** and the historic centre of Cirencester with numerous places to eat and drink and where you can begin your exploration of the town.

## G. Returning from Cirencester to Kemble

You have a number of options here but the GPS route suggests you cross the dual carriageway A429 via **Sheep Street bridge**. Once over the bridge turn sharp right down **Cotswolds Avenue** which soon swings sharply left and continue on to the junction of **Chesterton Lane** where you turn right. ! In 100m turn left down an un-named public right of way passing the Lower Mill Estate- a high end “lifestyle” estate of award winning architecture..

Continue on this route and soon you will be in open countryside heading for **Chesterton Farm** which you pass on your left. You meet another right of way at a T junction and here you turn right but in a few metres turn left along another track to continue in your previous direction. At the field boundary you continue ahead now with a wood to your right. At the next field boundary bear left with the track and then a little further on bear right with a wooded area to your left. The wooded area soon ends and you continue on the track where you soon meet another track at a T junction where you turn left and continue with the main walk directions from **para 30**.

## **H. Longer walk option to Cirencester.**

If you wish to eat or have a drink at the Tunnel Pub you can continue with the main walk directions all the way to para 24 and then do not turn right towards College Farm but continue ahead on the Monarchs Way until you reach the A429. (See Section F, para 2 above.)