

# SEVEN WONDERS OF THE COTSWOLDS

chosen by popular vote

## The Magic of the Rollright Stones



After a valley walk you'll climb to discover a prehistoric mystery on the Jurassic ridgeway. Return through the hidden hamlet of Little Rollright.

**Distance:** 8.3km/5 ¼ miles with ups and downs of 140m/460ft including one short steep climb.

**Time:** 3 hours

**Start:** Salford village (SP290282) off the A44 two miles W of Chipping Norton. To reach the start drive past the Black Horse pub and the village hall up Cooks Lane for 300m to a junction on a grassy area with swings and benches. Please park here with consideration.

**Refreshments:** The Black Horse, Salford; Wyatt's farm shop and tea room (1 mile NE).

### Route:

Just past the swings, where Cooks Lane meets Rose Lane, take the level lane ahead past signs for Trout Lakes and Rectory Farm with a line of tall trees on the left. The tarmac soon becomes a farm track along the valley. Where the track turns right **1** go straight on following the blue bridledway sign with a hedge on your R.

At the next gate turn R alongside the hedge for 120m, then turn L **2** across the field on a marked path to a ditch on the other side. Here wiggle L and R and carry on along the valley with the hedge on your L, crossing a shallow stream and past a young plantation to cross a lane. **3**

Take the marked path across the field to a gate in the

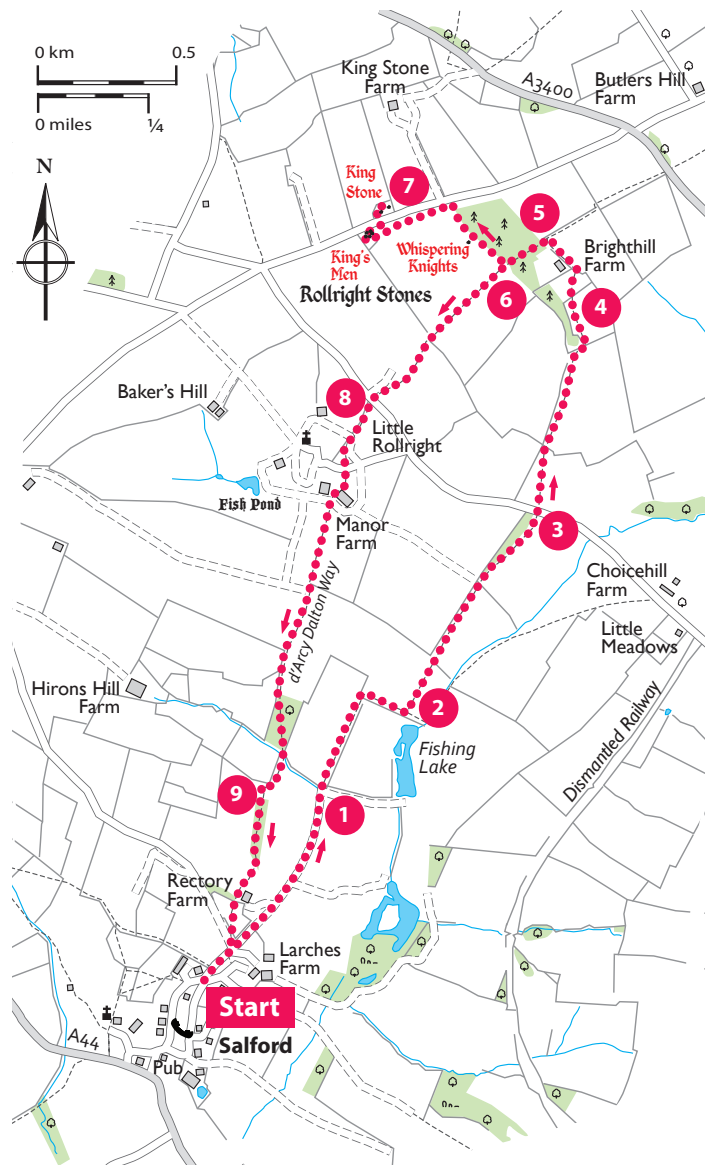
corner, then head up the hill with the hedge on your left (there may be horses) and through two more gates. Just below Brighthill farm cut diagonally R to a wide gate and stile on the far R corner of the buildings. **4**

Take the track along the R side of the house and barns a short way into a young wood where you turn L (on the d'Arcy Dalton Way) **5** along an avenue between the trees. Leaving the wood over a stile you'll see the Rollright Stones on your right. **6** Turn R to reach the first small group of Whispering Knights. Then take the all-weather path round the field to a big stone circle: the King's Men. **7**

But there's more to come. Cross the road into the field where the King Stone stands alone. Alone that is until a wicked witch recently arrived. This is a good picnic spot, with wonderful views. **7**

Now retrace your steps back to the Whispering Knights and the d'Arcy Dalton Way **6** where you turn R across two fields, dropping to cross a lane and a view of the gentrified hamlet of Little Rollright. **8**

Walk down between the hedges to cross a sandy drive, and the signs will take you round houses and farm buildings, then up to a fine viewpoint at two metal gates. Head straight on back to Salford over rolling



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farmland and through a string of small woods. The first ends at a tiny stream which you cross on an easy stile.

Now walk 120m up the next field to a wide gateway in the hedge on you R. **9** Turn R and go through and immediately turn L with the hedge now on your L to

enter another wood. Leave it over a stile and press on along the left edge of a field to yet another copse with in-and-out stiles. Walk across a paddock to the last stile and a track where you bear L and R onto the lane where you started.

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### THE KING WHO WAS TURNED INTO STONE BY A WITCH

Once upon a time a King aiming to conquer all of England led his army of knights to this high ridge. Up popped a witch and challenged him:

“Seven long strides thou shalt take  
And if Long Compton thou can see  
King of England thou shalt be.”

But as he strode forward a mound rose up to hide the view. She laughed:

“As Long Compton thou canst not see  
King of England thou shalt not be.  
Rise up, stick, and stand still, stone.  
King of England thou shalt be none!  
Thou and thy men Hoarstones shall be,  
And I myself an eldern tree.”

So the King became the King Stone, his men were magicked into a Stone Circle, and three traitors were petrified to form the Whispering Knights.

And the witch transformed herself into an elder tree, to keep an eye on them.

*(Can YOU see Long Compton from here?)*

### Three prehistoric enigmas

Each of these three groups of stones dates from a different century BC. Their function is not clear, but the large stone circle on a hilltop site suggests astronomic rituals and a burial chamber.



1 First you'll visit the Whispering Knights (3000BC), so named because they are huddled together as if plotting against their king.

They may have been the entrance to a burial chamber.



2 Next, walk round the field to the King's Men, a 2000BC circle of stones. Some have been stolen, but we think 77 are still there. You might check?



3 Finally, cross the road behind the King's Men into Warwickshire, with new views to the north. This old drovers' ridgeway holds the high ground from Dorset to Lincoln.

The 8-foot-tall King Stone has stood here since 1800BC. We're not sure why, perhaps to mark a cemetery.

Much later, in Victorian times he was still considered to be so magical that passing drovers would chip small pieces of stone from him, as lucky charms to keep away the Devil.

Then in the 21st century the King had company: a witch, known by some as Mother Shipton.

### Meet the witch

Inspired by the legend, artist David Gosling added a witch to the Stones in April 2012.

Made of twisted redwood branches from the Compton Verney estate, she looms over the King and has become a popular figure, especially for children.

A year later she's still there, though she has lost her magic wand. See: [www.witneytv.co.uk/videos/rollright-witch](http://www.witneytv.co.uk/videos/rollright-witch).



### A hard night for a Knight?

On your way back down to Salford, the tiny church at Little Rollright is an unspoilt gem. One knightly memorial has a very hard pillow. The other one dines with two wives (presumably not at the same time).

