

Woodchester Tree Walk

Approx 1.5 miles

- 1 Start from St. Mary's Church green.

Small-leaved lime This small, much branched tree is a cutting from the ancient coppice lime at Westonbirt Arboretum. It was planted to mark the Millennium. This native species is one of the parents of the hybrid common lime, many of which can be seen around the village.

Deodar Note the fine specimen of this cedar in the corner of the green nearest the church.

Take the path through the churchyard.

- 2 On the opposite side of the road to the right note a **Wingnut**. Spring catkins are followed by tassels of two-winged nuts.

Turn left and follow the road.

On the right is a North American **Red oak**. Its large leaves have pointed lobes. Go through the kissing gate in front of you and follow the footpath across the fields towards South Woodchester.

- 3 Up the hill, in the field on your left, note **Sweet chestnut**. Two old trees. These are stag-headed which can give the impression of a dying tree but is a natural stage in the life cycle, when the tree can no longer support the earlier rate of growth. New shoots are produced lower down resulting in a smaller crown, as can be seen in the tree nearest the path. They still have many years of life left, but oaks have been planted which will eventually replace them.

White poplar A large tree in the far corner of the field.

Birch A recent plantation of various non-native species.

Continue through the kissing gate.

- 4 Outside Woodchester House is a **Common lime**. This is a large tree which supports plants of mistletoe for which lime is a frequent host. Lining the drive, **Sycamore**, a variety with red backs to the leaves.

Continue along the footpath beside the garden wall for a short distance.

- 5 In the field on your left is a very fine **Oriental plane**. The London plane is a hybrid between this species and the North American plane. Various **Eucalyptus** species were planted by the present owner, an Australian. Some of them failed to survive two cold winters. In the top right hand corner of the field is a **Southern beech**, native to South America; and a group of **hybrid Black poplar**.

Continue a few yards to the houses.

- 6 The garden of Woodchester House on your right was developed as an arboretum in the 19C when this was a fashionable activity for gentlemen with large gardens. Some of the original trees still survive. Stop where there is a small gate in the wall of Woodchester House. To the right of this is a **Ginkgo (maidenhair tree)**. This tree is a native of China and is the only living member of a group which flourished in the Jurassic period. The fan-shaped leaves are unlike any others and turn bright yellow in the autumn. On its left a small shrub of **Buck-eye** from North America, currently almost obscured by a bramble. Related to the horse chestnut which it resembles in leaf shape and the tall spikes of flowers. On the right **Walnut** with large leaves consisting of pairs of leaflets.

Continue along the drive keeping to the right, through the kissing gate to South Woodchester High Street. At this point the walk can be shortened by turning left down the road and right at the junction, noting the **London plane** behind the war memorial. Rejoin the walk on the cycle track on your left at the bottom of the road, or follow Southfield Road back to the church.

Walk along High Street and Atcombe Road, then into the field.

- 7 This field was once a pear orchard, growing perry pears. One **pear** tree survives, the stock on which it was grafted is growing vigorously. The official part of the tree is mostly dead. At the top of the field is a particularly splendid example of the much-maligned **Sycamore**. The field also contains some well-grown oaks.

Take the path half left and walk down the field and leave by the gate at the bottom. Follow the road right bearing left across the bridge and left along the A46 for a short way into the lay-by. Head towards NorthWoodchester along the cycle track.

- 8 Pollarded **Willows** beside the track, last pollarded in 1995. **White willow** can be distinguished from the very similar **Crack willow** by the smaller leaves, covered with hairs which give the white appearance.

Follow the track to

- 9 Bird's Crossing. The group of white willow at the edge of the field here are of a variety which has bright orange twigs in winter – spectacular against a blue sky. The land here was at one time osier beds.

Continue along the cycle track. Next to the forge **Corsican pine** with grey bark and needles in pairs. In the garden of the first house **Monterey pine** with needles in threes.

On reaching the housing estate turn left and return to the church.

R C Hemming

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