

12-Month Training Plan for Cotswold Way

Goal

By trip time, you should be able to comfortably handle:

- **8-13 miles per day**
- **Rolling hills**
- **5-7 consecutive walking days**
- A light daypack around **10-15 lb**
- Several hours on uneven surfaces
- Walking even when a little sore or tired

The full Cotswold Way is about **100+ miles**, usually done over **7-10 walking days**, though many people stretch it longer.

Weekly structure

Use this basic pattern most of the year:

| Day | Training |
|-----------|---|
| Monday | Rest or gentle mobility |
| Tuesday | Short walk |
| Wednesday | Strength training |
| Thursday | Short/moderate walk, ideally hills |
| Friday | Rest |
| Saturday | Long walk |
| Sunday | Easy recovery walk, later becomes back-to-back training |

You do **not** need to run. Walking is the main thing.

Phase 1: Months 1–2 — Build the habit

Goal: Make walking automatic and painless.

Weekly target

- **3 walks per week**
- Total: **4-8 miles per week**
- Long walk: **2-3 miles**

Example week

| Day | Workout |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Tuesday | 20-30 minute easy walk |
| Thursday | 20-30 minute easy walk |
| Saturday | 2-3 mile walk |
| Wednesday or Sunday | 15-20 minutes basic strength |

Strength work

Do 1-2 rounds:

- 10 body weight squats
- 8 step-ups per leg
- 10 glute bridges
- 20-30 second plank
- 10 calf raises
- Gentle stretching after

Keep this easy. Your job is to become consistent, not heroic.

Phase 2: Months 3-4 — Build base mileage

Goal: Get used to walking several times per week.

Weekly target

- **4 walks per week**
- Total: **8-14 miles per week**
- Long walk: **4-5 miles**

Example week

| Day | Workout |
|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Tuesday | 2 miles easy |
| Thursday | 2-3 miles, include hills if possible |

| Day | Workout |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Saturday | 4-5 miles |
| Sunday | 1-2 miles easy |
| Wednesday | Strength training |

Start wearing the shoes or boots you expect to hike in. Do not wait until month 10 to discover your footwear is wrong.

Phase 3: Months 5–6 — Add hills and pack weight

Goal: Prepare your legs for rolling terrain and longer days.

Weekly target

- Total: **12-18 miles per week**
- Long walk: **6-7 miles**
- One hill-focused walk per week
- Start carrying a light pack: **5-8 lb**

Example week

| Day | Workout |
|-----------|---------------------------|
| Tuesday | 3 miles easy |
| Thursday | 3-4 miles with hills |
| Saturday | 6-7 miles with light pack |
| Sunday | 2 miles easy recovery |
| Wednesday | Strength training |

Strength focus

Add:

- Split squats or lunges
- Step-downs from a low step
- Farmer carries
- Calf raises
- Side planks

For Cotswold Way, downhill resilience matters. Knees often complain more on descents than climbs. Step-downs help.

Phase 4: Months 7–8 — Longer walks and back-to-back days

Goal: Train for cumulative fatigue.

Weekly target

- Total: **18-24 miles per week**
- Long walk: **8-9 miles**
- Sunday recovery walk: **3-5 miles**
- Pack: **8-12 lb**

Example week

| Day | Workout |
|-----------|--------------------|
| Tuesday | 3-4 miles |
| Thursday | 4 miles with hills |
| Saturday | 8-9 miles |
| Sunday | 3-5 miles easy |
| Wednesday | Strength training |

At this point, you should start testing:

- Socks
- Shoes/boots
- Insoles
- Rain jacket
- Daypack
- Blister prevention
- Trekking poles, if using them
- Snacks and hydration

Do not treat gear as an afterthought. Bad socks can ruin a trip faster than weak lungs.

Phase 5: Months 9–10 — Trip-specific conditioning

Goal: Make 10-mile hiking days feel normal.

Weekly target

- Total: **24-32 miles per week**

- Long walk: **10-12 miles**
- Back-to-back weekend days: **10 miles + 5-7 miles**
- Pack: **10-15 lb**

Example week

| Day | Workout |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Tuesday | 4 miles easy |
| Thursday | 5 miles with hills |
| Saturday | 10-12 miles with full daypack |
| Sunday | 5-7 miles easy/moderate |
| Wednesday | Strength training |

Once per month, do a bigger weekend:

- Saturday: **10-12 miles**
- Sunday: **6-8 miles**

This is probably the most important part of the plan. You are teaching your body that it can get up the next morning and walk again.

Phase 6: Month 11 — Dress rehearsal

Goal: Prove you are ready.

Do at least one **mini hiking trip or simulation weekend**.

Best option

Three days in a row:

| Day | Distance |
|----------|-------------|
| Friday | 6-8 miles |
| Saturday | 10-12 miles |
| Sunday | 8-10 miles |

Carry the pack you expect to use. Wear the exact shoes, socks, and clothing system you plan to use.

What you are testing

- Can your feet survive repeated days?
- Do your knees tolerate hills?

- Does your pack rub?
- Do your shoes cause hotspots?
- Do you know how much water/snacks you need?
- Do you recover well enough to continue?

If you can do this weekend without major foot or joint problems, you are in good shape.

Phase 7: Month 12 — Taper and protect your feet

Goal: Arrive fresh, not overtrained.

4 weeks out

- Long walk: **10-12 miles**
- Weekly total: **24-28 miles**

3 weeks out

- Long walk: **8-10 miles**
- Weekly total: **20-24 miles**

2 weeks out

- Long walk: **6-8 miles**
- Weekly total: **14-18 miles**

Final week

- Two or three easy walks only
- No big workouts
- No new shoes
- No new socks
- No “last-minute fitness panic”

You will not gain meaningful fitness in the final week. You can only injure yourself.

Milestone checklist

Use this to know whether you are on track.

| Time before trip | You should be able to do |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| 9 months out | Walk 4-5 miles comfortably |

| Time before trip | You should be able to do |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 6 months out | Walk 6-7 miles with hills |
| 4 months out | Walk 8-9 miles with a light pack |
| 3 months out | Walk 10 miles without drama |
| 2 months out | Do 10 miles Saturday + 6 miles Sunday |
| 1 month out | Do a 2-3 day hiking simulation |

Strength training plan

Do strength training **1-2 times per week**. Keep it simple.

Workout A

- Squats: 3 sets of 8-12
- Step-ups: 3 sets of 8 per leg
- Glute bridges: 3 sets of 12
- Calf raises: 3 sets of 15
- Plank: 3 rounds of 30-45 seconds

Workout B

- Reverse lunges: 3 sets of 8 per leg
- Step-downs: 3 sets of 8 per leg
- Romanian deadlifts or hip hinges: 3 sets of 10
- Side plank: 2-3 rounds per side
- Farmer carry: 3 short carries

You can use body weight, dumbbells, kettlebells, or a loaded backpack.

The key muscles: **glutes, quads, calves, hamstrings, core, and feet/ankles.**

Foot and blister preparation

Start this early.

Buy good hiking socks and test them. I would look at **Darn Tough, Smartwool**, or similar merino hiking socks.

Learn your blister system before the trip:

- Leukotape or KT tape for hotspots
- Small scissors
- Blister pads

- Foot powder or anti-chafe balm
- Spare socks
- Toenails trimmed before long walks

Any hotspot during training should be treated immediately. Do not “tough it out.” That is how you turn a small problem into a trip problem.

Shoes or boots?

For the Cotswold Way, I would lean toward **trail runners or lightweight hiking shoes**, not heavy backpacking boots, unless you already know you need ankle support.

You want:

- Comfortable over many miles
- Good grip on wet grass/mud
- Enough toe room for descents
- Broken in, but not worn out

Buy them early enough to put **100+ training miles** on them before the trip.

Hills if you live somewhere flat

If you do not have enough hills nearby, substitute:

- Stairs
- Parking garages
- Treadmill incline
- Repeated hill loops
- Step-ups while wearing a pack
- Weekend hikes in the mountains when possible

Since you’re in western North Carolina, you actually have a huge advantage. Use local trails once your base is built. You do not need brutal hikes every week, but regular rolling terrain will make the Cotswolds feel much easier.

Pack training

Start light and build slowly.

| Month | Pack weight |
|-------|--------------------|
| 1-4 | None or very light |

| Month | Pack weight |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 5-6 | 5-8 lb |
| 7-8 | 8-12 lb |
| 9-11 | 10-15 lb |
| Final month | Normal trip weight only |

Do not overdo pack weight. You are not training for a military ruck. You are training to enjoy a long-distance walking holiday.

Target before the trip

By the end, I'd want you able to do this comfortably:

- **Saturday:** 11-12 miles with hills and a daypack
- **Sunday:** 6-8 miles the next day
- No serious blisters
- No lingering knee/hip/back pain
- Able to walk again Monday if needed

That is "ready."

You do **not** need to be an elite hiker. You need to be durable, consistent, and smart with your feet.

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