

Chiltern Walks, No. 13: Aston Rowant Reserve

Maggie is in the shower, so I shout through the door.

‘I’m off now. Aston Rowant. For the book.’

‘Oh, okay. Take care.’

Nothing more.

At the car park, I dictate the first of my notes.

‘Waypoint One. This is a circular walk, starting and finishing at Cowleaze Wood.

Grid reference – whatever.’

I brought Maggie here shortly after we met. Bare legs, I remember, under a yellow dress. Beautiful. I start walking.

‘This first part is signposted. It’s level and undemanding.’

The path through the trees emerges in a wildflower meadow. I cross and slip through the kissing gate – chastely today.

‘Waypoint Two. Left, up the track. From Three, a moderate climb loops back to the ridge.’

It’s harder going than I’d expected. At the top, I catch my breath.

‘Four. The reserve is home to junipers and orchids. The car park is nearby if you’re tempted to bail out early.’

Below me runs the motorway cutting. I called it a wound, but Maggie disagreed.

‘It’s like a river: that graceful curve, the ceaseless flow.’

Now, I think, what if we abandoned it? Would the wound heal? I trudge down the chalky slope, kites mewing overhead.

‘Descend the hill to Waypoint Five. Follow the path around Bald Hill.’

She’ll have left by now. She’ll have loaded the car and dropped her key through the letterbox onto the cold tiled floor.

‘Six. An uneven path leads up to the road. Cross with care. You are now back where you started.’

[END]