

## A “Rural Urban” Race at Chalford on 29<sup>th</sup> April

We will be holding our first event at Chalford on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April, and this will be part of the NGOC League. It will be an urban event, but not as you know it.... Chalford's intriguing and eclectic mix of scenes and terrain, offers great charm and historical interest. It will be an urban race in beautiful rural surroundings!



When I have mentioned to people that I've been making a map of Chalford in readiness for an event there, most people look blank and reply “huh, where's that?” Well, if you've ever taken the train from Gloucester, Cheltenham or Stroud towards Swindon and London, you will probably have glanced out of the window some 3 miles outside of Stroud and been struck by the beauty of a lush, green, steep-sided valley, strewn with lovely Cotswold stone houses and cottages. Well this is the Golden Valley and Chalford.

Chalford's valley is the largest of the Stroud Valleys and is where the River Frome runs down the bottom of a deep narrow gorge from Sapperton to Stroud. Chalford village is highly attractive and owes its existence to the early years of the Industrial Revolution. It is built on ascending terraces on the south facing slopes of the 'Golden Valley' and approached by a bemusing series of narrow and often steep lanes and alleyways. This large village (apparently, the second largest in England) grew up in the late 18th and early 19th century in a totally unplanned and higgledy-piggledy manner. Delightful stone cottages once inhabited by humble weavers rub shoulders with grander houses, formerly owned by prosperous mill owners.



Chalford village is as steep as it is beautiful, so donkeys were used until the 1930s to deliver bread, coal and other household items to people's doorsteps. In fact, many front doors can still only be accessed by the winding network of 'donkey paths'. In those times, Chalford was known as 'Neddyshire' which derives its name from the use of donkeys. In recent years, the donkey delivery service was resumed and two donkeys ran the Chalford Community Store's weekly delivery service for 5 years. Unfortunately, this service has now ceased.



The maze of narrow alleys and quiet lanes is interspersed with parks, fields and small woods to add variety and spice for orienteering. At the valley bottom, attractive old mill buildings, the river, the Thames & Severn Canal, the railway and the A419 are all crowded into the narrow space. Undeniably, there will be some challenging contours, but the top of the hill is much flatter and here, in stark contrast, a modern housing estate has been built, offering plenty of cut-throughs and green space.



The mapped area is large, and would need a piece of A1 paper to fit on all of it at urban scale! It actually covers 6 separate villages: Chalford, Chalford Hill, France Lynch, Bussage, Brownshill and Eastcombe. This will leave lots of scope for other events to use different parts of the map.

Put the date in your diary and come and try out this charming new "urban-rural" area.