

A river with its source in the cotswolds

A River with its Source in the Cotswolds: Tracing the Churn's Journey

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A River with its Source in the Cotswolds: Tracing the Churn's Journey

I. The Churn - An Unsung Cotswold Jewel A. The Cotswolds, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, presents a picturesque panorama of rolling hills, honey-colored stone villages, and verdant pastures. This bucolic landscape is interwoven with a network of waterways, the most prominent being the River Churn. B. Unlike its more celebrated neighbors, the Thames and the Avon, the Churn often remains unheralded. Its quiet charm and ecological significance deserve far greater recognition. C. The Churn's journey, a meandering odyssey of approximately 30 miles, exemplifies the inherent beauty and fragile ecological balance of a quintessential Cotswold river. Its serpentine course carves through a diverse tapestry of habitats, impacting local ecosystems in profound ways. **II. The Source: A Humble Beginning** A. Precisely pinpointing the Churn's nascence proves surprisingly elusive. Multiple small springs coalesce near the village of Yanworth, making a singular source difficult to definitively establish. However, the area surrounding Yanworth is widely accepted as the approximate point of origin. B. The karst geology of the Cotswolds, characterized by limestone bedrock, creates an intricate network of subterranean channels. These fissures and subterranean conduits contribute significantly to the Churn's headwaters, creating a complex hydrogeological system. C. The upper Churn's hydrology is predominantly fed by these springs, with a significant contribution from groundwater recharge, making it particularly susceptible to seasonal variations in rainfall. This ephemeral nature results in fluctuating flows throughout the year. **III. The Upper Churn: A Pastoral Passage** A. The upper reaches of the river are characterized by their tranquil, slow-flowing nature. The Churn meanders lazily through the undulating Cotswold landscape, creating a serene and idyllic setting. B. This relatively slow flow supports a rich biodiversity. Aquatic invertebrates, crucial components of the food web, thrive in these waters. The riparian vegetation, the lifeblood of the riverbanks, provides vital habitat and shelter for a plethora of species. C. Intensive agricultural practices in the Cotswolds have left their mark on the Churn. Runoff from fertilized fields can introduce excess nutrients, leading to eutrophication and potentially harmful algal blooms. D. Human intervention in the form of weirs and sluices, historically implemented for water management and milling, has altered the river's natural flow regime. These structures, while

historically important, now present ecological challenges. **IV. The Middle Churn: A Widening Influence** A. As the river progresses, its gradient increases subtly, resulting in a discernible rise in flow velocity and an increase in its width. This transition marks a shift in the river's dynamics and its associated habitats. B. Geological variations along the Churn's course, from the predominantly limestone upper reaches to the more varied substrates downstream, influence the riverbed morphology and aquatic life it supports. These changes often present pockets of unique microhabitats. C. Several charming Cotswold villages and small towns are nestled along the banks of the middle Churn, their history inextricably linked to the river's resourcefulness. These settlements, historically dependent upon the river for water and transport, exhibit a unique architectural character. D. Relics of past industrial activity, such as abandoned mills and remnants of former water-powered industries, pepper the landscape. These serve as poignant reminders of the river's former economic importance. **V. The Lower Churn: Towards the Severn** A. As the Churn approaches its confluence with the River Severn, its width and depth increase considerably. The river assumes a more powerful character, reflecting its growing volume and influence. B. The floodplain, periodically inundated during high-water events, acts as a vital ecological buffer, providing habitat for a wide array of species and mitigating the impact of floods. This is a particularly important area for biodiversity. C. The Churn's confluence with the Severn marks a significant hydrological event, as the smaller river contributes its waters to a much larger and more powerful system. It is a watershed moment in the Churn's journey. D. The Churn's contribution to the Severn Basin is undeniable, augmenting the Severn's flow and impacting its water quality and ecosystem. This contribution should be considered vital for regional water resource management. **VI. The Ecology of the Churn** A. The Churn supports a diverse range of fish species, including brown trout, common dace, and chub. Their presence is an important indicator of water quality and ecological health. B. The invertebrate fauna of the Churn is particularly rich, including a diverse array of mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies. These often overlooked creatures form the cornerstone of the river's food web. C. The avifauna associated with the Churn is equally impressive, with kingfishers, grey wagtails, and dippers regularly sighted along its banks. These birds are highly sensitive to environmental changes. D. Otters, water voles, and badgers are among the mammalian inhabitants found along the river and its environs, benefiting from the river's rich biodiversity and adjacent habitats. E. The riparian flora, encompassing a variety of plants adapted to damp conditions, is crucial in stabilizing the riverbanks, filtering pollutants, and providing habitat for various species. This vegetation is essential for maintaining the river's ecosystem. **VII. Conservation and Management** A. Pollution from agricultural runoff, sewage discharge, and industrial effluent poses a significant threat to the Churn's water quality and ecological integrity. These pollutants can have devastating effects on aquatic life. B. Various conservation initiatives, involving local authorities, environmental groups, and landowners, are underway to protect and enhance the Churn's ecosystem. These efforts are vital for the river's long-term sustainability. C. Sustainable water management practices, such as reducing water abstraction and implementing responsible irrigation techniques, are essential to ensure the Churn's continued health. Water resource management is critical. D. The future of the Churn hinges on the continued commitment to conservation efforts and the implementation of sustainable practices. The river's preservation requires the collective effort of the community and stakeholders.

The Lifeblood of the Cotswolds: Discovering a River's Journey from its Idyllic Source

The Cotswolds. Just the name conjures images of honey-coloured stone villages nestled in rolling green hills, of ancient market towns buzzing with life, and of a landscape so quintessentially English it feels plucked from a storybook. But what truly breathes life into this beloved region? What carves its valleys, nourishes its flora and fauna, and historically shaped its very existence? It's the rivers, of course. And today, we're going to embark on a journey to explore a specific, yet representative, river that begins its life in the heart of the Cotswolds, tracing its path from its humble source to its eventual embrace by a larger waterway. While many rivers grace this picturesque corner of England, we'll focus on the essence of a typical Cotswold river, embodying the characteristics and charm of many that spring forth from these gentle uplands. Think of it as a composite, a narrative that captures the spirit of these vital arteries. We'll delve into its origins, its passage through stunning landscapes, its ecological significance, and the human stories woven along its banks. So, grab a metaphorical cup of tea, settle in, and let's discover the journey of a river with its source in the Cotswolds.

The Genesis: A Humble Beginning in the Cotswold Hills

The story of any great river begins with its source. For our Cotswold river, this is typically a place of quietude and natural beauty, often found high in the Cotswold Hills. Imagine a series of tiny, bubbling springs, perhaps emerging from porous limestone rock. These are fed by the abundant rainfall that soaks into the Cotswold escarpment, a geological feature that dictates the region's hydrology. The ground here acts like a giant sponge, holding onto water and releasing it gradually, ensuring a consistent flow even during drier periods. These springs might not be dramatic cascades, but rather gentle seepages, often hidden amongst dew-kissed bracken, moss-covered stones, and vibrant wildflowers. The air here is crisp and pure, carrying the scent of damp earth and wild herbs. It's a place where you might only hear the trickle of water, the rustle of leaves, and the distant bleating of sheep. This is where the river is born, a tiny thread of water, unassuming yet full of potential. The geology of the Cotswolds is crucial here. The prevalent Jurassic limestone is highly permeable, allowing rainwater to infiltrate the ground. This creates an underground network of aquifers, from which our river's source emerges. The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a protected landscape, and many of these sources are found within its tranquil embrace, a testament to the region's commitment to preserving its natural heritage.

From Trickle to Stream: The Early Stages of the Journey

As our nascent river gathers momentum, it transforms from a series of trickles into a discernible stream. It winds its way through the upper reaches of the Cotswolds, often cutting through shallow valleys and meadows. The landscape here is characterized by its gentle undulations, with fields of vibrant green dotted with ancient hedgerows. In these early stages, the stream is likely to be shallow and clear, its bed composed of smooth pebbles and gravel. You might see water voles darting along its banks, or kingfishers flashing their iridescent colours as they hunt for tiny fish. Dragonflies hover over the water's surface, and the banks are alive with a tapestry of wild grasses, buttercups, and bluebells in spring. This is where the river begins to interact with the land in a more visible way. It carves small channels, nourishes the roots of trees, and provides a vital habitat for a variety of aquatic invertebrates, the foundation of the river's food web. The presence of these clear, clean waters is a hallmark of a healthy river system, indicative of the pristine nature of its origin in the Cotswolds.

Through Villages and Valleys: The River's Passage

As the river descends, it often encounters the charming villages and market towns that are synonymous with the Cotswolds. Imagine it flowing past ancient watermills, their great wheels long since stilled but their stone structures still standing as a testament to the river's historical importance. Picture it meandering beneath old stone bridges, worn smooth by centuries of traffic, both human and animal. In these populated areas, the river becomes a focal point. It's where children might paddle in the shallows during summer, where artists set up their easels to capture its picturesque beauty, and where residents enjoy leisurely strolls along its banks. The riverbanks might be lined with weeping willows, their branches trailing in the water, or with sturdy oak trees that have witnessed generations come and go. The river's flow might be gentle, but it's a constant presence, a calming influence on the bustling life of these settlements. It provides a serene backdrop to the daily rhythm of village life, offering moments of quiet contemplation amidst the picturesque surroundings. The iconic honey-coloured stone of the Cotswold buildings often mirrors the earthy tones of the riverbed and the surrounding landscape, creating a harmonious and beautiful vista.

Ecological Significance: A Haven for Wildlife

Beyond its aesthetic appeal and its historical role, a river with its source in the Cotswolds is a vital ecological corridor. It supports a diverse range of flora and fauna, many of which are specially adapted to life in and around freshwater environments. The clear, oxygen-rich waters are home to various fish species, from minnows and sticklebacks to larger trout and grayling in well-established stretches. These fish, in turn, attract predators like herons, otters, and the aforementioned kingfishers. The riverbanks provide crucial habitats for amphibians such as frogs and toads, and the surrounding wetlands and floodplains are essential breeding grounds for numerous bird species, including warblers and waterfowl. Insects play a critical role in the river's ecosystem. The larvae of mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies thrive in the clean water, forming a vital food source for fish and other invertebrates. Their presence is a key indicator of water quality; a healthy river will boast

a rich diversity of these "indicator species." The vegetation along the riverbanks is also important. Reeds and rushes help to filter the water, and trees provide shade, helping to regulate water temperature. They also offer shelter and nesting sites for birds and small mammals. The preservation of these riparian habitats is crucial for maintaining the biodiversity of the Cotswolds.

The River's Evolution: From Gentle Stream to Wider Waterway

As our river continues its journey, it gradually widens and deepens. It might pick up tributaries along the way, each contributing to its growing volume and power. The landscape might change, becoming less hilly and more open as it approaches the broader valleys and plains. In its more mature stages, the river might be navigable by small boats or canoes, offering opportunities for recreation and a different perspective on the landscape. You might see swans gliding serenely on its surface, their cygnets trailing behind them. The sound of the water might become a more constant murmur, a soothing soundtrack to the surrounding countryside. The river's course is rarely straight. It meanders, following the path of least resistance carved over millennia. These meanders create diverse habitats, with faster-flowing sections supporting different species to the slower, deeper pools. The river's dynamism is part of its charm, a reminder of the constant forces of nature at play.

Human Interaction and The River's Legacy

Throughout history, rivers have been central to human settlement and development. Our Cotswold river is no exception. It provided drinking water for communities, powered mills for grinding grain and other essential tasks, and served as a means of transport, albeit on a smaller scale than major arterial rivers. The names of villages and towns often bear a connection to the river, hinting at its significance. The legacy of this connection can still be seen in the preserved watermills, the ancient bridges, and the village layouts that often developed along its banks. Today, while its industrial role has diminished, the river remains a cherished amenity. It offers opportunities for angling, kayaking, and simply enjoying the tranquility of its surroundings. The conservation efforts aimed at protecting its water quality and its habitats ensure that its legacy will continue for generations to come. Organizations like the Environment Agency and local conservation groups work tirelessly to monitor and improve the health of these waterways, recognizing their immense value.

Preserving the Magic: The Future of Our Cotswold River

The future of a river with its source in the Cotswolds hinges on continued commitment to environmental stewardship. As a landscape that attracts millions of visitors, managing the impact of human activity is paramount. Protecting its sources from pollution, maintaining healthy riparian zones, and ensuring sustainable land management practices in the surrounding catchment area are all crucial. The 'source of the Cotswolds' is not just a geographical point; it's a symbol of the region's natural beauty and its ecological vitality. By understanding and appreciating the journey of our river, from its humble beginnings to its eventual confluence, we gain a deeper insight into the intricate tapestry of this beloved English landscape. So, the next time you find yourself wandering through the picturesque Cotswolds, take a moment to listen. You might just hear the gentle murmur of a river, a lifeblood that has shaped this land for centuries, whispering stories of its origins, its journey, and its enduring magic. The very essence of the Cotswolds flows within its waters, a constant reminder of the profound connection between landscape, life, and legacy.

A River Born from the Cotswolds: Nature's Gentle Flow Through England's Green Heart Nestled within the rolling hills and picturesque landscapes of the Cotswolds, a river springs forth like a whisper from the earth—its source a quiet, pristine emergence that reflects the quiet majesty of this iconic English region. This river, drawing its life from the limestone uplands and ancient woodlands, is more than just a watercourse; it is a living thread woven through centuries of natural history, cultural heritage, and ecological importance. The Cotswolds, renowned for its golden stone villages, sweeping vistas, and rich biodiversity, provides a unique backdrop where water meanders through valleys, feeding meadows, and nourishing wildlife in a slow, steady dance that shapes both landscape and legend. The river's origin lies deep within the undulating terrain where subterranean springs converge, fed by seasonal rainfall and the porous limestone that characterizes the Cotswold geology. This natural filtration system ensures a clean, consistent flow that sustains diverse ecosystems—from

delicate riparian zones teeming with insects and amphibians to deeper pools where fish glide beneath the surface. As the river winds its way outward, it carves gentle curves through ancient stone pathways and lush pastures, embodying the quiet power of unspoiled countryside. Its journey reflects the timeless rhythm of nature, shaped by centuries of erosion, weather patterns, and the slow but persistent work of water finding its course. Beyond its ecological value, this river holds a profound cultural significance. For generations, communities along its banks have depended on its waters for agriculture, milling, and domestic use, embedding the river into local traditions, folklore, and identity. Today, it continues to inspire artists, writers, and visitors drawn to the Cotswolds' timeless beauty. Its serene presence offers a sanctuary for quiet reflection, a place where urban visitors can reconnect with nature's calm. Moreover, the river supports conservation efforts aimed at preserving water quality and biodiversity, serving as a living model of sustainable coexistence between human activity and environmental stewardship. Looking ahead, the future of this river is intertwined with broader efforts to protect freshwater ecosystems in the face of climate change and development pressures. Initiatives to monitor flow rates, reduce pollution, and restore natural habitats ensure that this Cotswold river remains resilient and vibrant. As awareness of water conservation grows, the river stands as a symbol of balance—reminding us that even the most humble streams are vital lifelines. Whether viewed through the lens of science, culture, or personal wonder, the river from the Cotswolds is a testament to nature's enduring grace, flowing steadily through England's heart, sustaining life, and inspiring generations to come.

The Serpentine Journey of the Thames: From Cotswold Spring to Global Icon

The Cotswolds, a picturesque region of rolling hills and honey-hued villages, conjures images of idyllic rural landscapes. Yet, this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty harbours a secret – the humble beginnings of one of the world's most iconic waterways. While many associate London's mighty River Thames with its grand historical monuments and bustling urbanity, its genesis lies far from the capital, in the tranquil, unassuming springs that bubble forth from the ancient limestone bedrock of the Cotswolds.

This article delves into the fascinating origins of the River Thames, tracing its nascent journey from its Cotswold sources, exploring its early character, and highlighting the vital ecological and historical significance it holds even in its infancy. We will uncover the often-overlooked springs that give birth to this colossal river, the geographical peculiarities of its source, and the initial chapters of its serpentine voyage towards the North Sea.

The Elusive Birthplace: Pinpointing the Thames' Cotswold Source

For centuries, the exact source of the River Thames was a subject of debate and romantic speculation. Unlike some rivers with a single, dramatic waterfall or a well-defined mountain lake, the Thames emerges from a network of springs, a characteristic that has led to a degree of mystique surrounding its true origin. Modern cartography and hydrological surveys have largely settled the matter, identifying several contenders within the Cotswolds, with the most commonly accepted source being near the village of **Kemble** in Gloucestershire.

The Thames Head Spring: A Humble Beginning

The most widely recognized source of the Thames is a spring known as **Thames Head**, located approximately two miles south-east of Cirencester and a short distance from Kemble. Here, amidst pastures and ancient woodlands, water trickles to the surface from underground aquifers within the Jurassic limestone. This seemingly modest emergence is the true starting point of a river that will eventually stretch for over 200 miles, traversing diverse landscapes and playing a pivotal role in Britain's history.

It's important to note that Thames Head is often dry during periods of drought, a testament to the river's reliance on groundwater. In such instances, other nearby springs, such as those near the village of **Seven Springs** (also in Gloucestershire), have been historically cited as alternative sources. Seven Springs, which feeds the River Avon (a tributary of the Severn, not the Thames!), adds to the geographical intrigue. However, for most of the year, the springs around Kemble are considered the primary fount of the Thames.

The Significance of Limestone: The Cotswold's Gift

The Cotswold landscape, formed from layers of oolitic limestone, is crucial to the formation of the Thames. This porous rock allows rainwater to infiltrate the ground, creating extensive underground reservoirs. The springs emerge where these underground water tables intersect with the land's surface, releasing the accumulated water in a steady, if initially delicate, flow. This geological feature not only dictates the river's source but also influences its early water quality, often providing a clear, mineral-rich flow.

The limestone also contributes to the distinct character of the early river. The water, having percolated through the rock, is typically hard, meaning it has a high mineral content. This characteristic, while often invisible to the casual observer, has subtle impacts on the river's ecosystem and the industries that would eventually develop along its banks.

The Early Life of the Thames: A Cotswold Brook

Upon its emergence from the Cotswold springs, the River Thames is far from the majestic waterway we know today. In its infancy, it is a mere brook, a shallow stream weaving its way through the undulating countryside. This early phase of the river's life is characterized by its intimate connection with the rural landscape.

From Trickle to Stream: The Genesis of Flow

Initially, the water from Thames Head and its associated springs forms a series of small rivulets. These join together, gradually gathering momentum and volume as they are joined by further drainage from the surrounding hills. The early Thames is a relatively fast-flowing stream, tumbling over pebbles and through reed beds, its path dictated by the natural contours of the land. It is a far cry from the slow, navigable channels of its lower reaches.

The environment surrounding this nascent river is one of pastoral beauty. Ancient woodlands, wildflower meadows, and open pastures define the landscape. Wildlife thrives in this unspoiled habitat, with the early Thames providing a vital water source for a variety of fauna. The delicate balance of this ecosystem is a testament to the natural processes that have shaped the region for millennia.

Navigating the Cotswold Hills: The River's First Turns

The journey of the early Thames is one of gentle descent and winding paths. It carves its way through the Cotswold escarpment, its course initially following the natural gradient of the land. The river's serpentine path, a characteristic it will retain throughout its journey, is evident even in these early stages. It meanders through valleys, skirts small copses, and passes by the isolated farmsteads and hamlets that dot the rural landscape.

As it flows, the river begins to collect additional tributaries – smaller streams and drainage channels that feed into it. These early inflows contribute to the river's growing size and power, transforming it from a simple brook into a more substantial stream. The landscape begins to open up, with the river flowing through wider valleys and past more established settlements.

Ecological Significance of the Cotswold Source

The Cotswold springs and the initial stretch of the River Thames are not merely geographical curiosities; they are vital ecological assets. The purity of the water, filtered naturally by the limestone, supports a diverse range of aquatic life. This

pristine environment is crucial for the health of the entire river system downstream.

A Haven for Biodiversity: Early Aquatic Life

The clear, oxygen-rich waters of the early Thames provide an ideal habitat for various species of fish, invertebrates, and aquatic plants. Small trout and grayling may inhabit these upper reaches, feeding on insect larvae and smaller aquatic organisms. The surrounding wetlands and riverbanks support a rich diversity of birdlife, attracted by the abundant food and shelter.

The health of these headwaters is intrinsically linked to the health of the entire river. Pollution at the source can have cascading effects downstream, impacting the water quality and the ecosystems of much larger stretches of the Thames. Conservation efforts in the Cotswolds are therefore crucial for safeguarding the entire river basin.

The Role of the Water Cycle: Groundwater Recharge

The Cotswold springs are not static entities; they are part of a dynamic hydrological system. The porous limestone allows for significant groundwater recharge, meaning that rainwater that falls on the Cotswolds replenishes the underground aquifers that feed the springs. This continuous replenishment ensures the perennial flow of the Thames, even during drier periods.

The health of the surrounding landscape, including its vegetation cover and land management practices, directly impacts the rate of groundwater recharge. Sustainable land use in the Cotswolds is therefore essential for maintaining the long-term water security of the Thames and the many communities that depend on it.

Historical Echoes: The Thames' Ancient Roots

While the grand history of the Thames is often associated with London's ancient bridges and royal palaces, its story begins much earlier, in the sparsely populated landscapes of the Cotswolds. The river's presence has shaped human settlement and activity in the region for millennia.

Early Human Interaction: From Prehistory to Present

Evidence suggests that early human communities were drawn to the presence of the River Thames from prehistoric times. The availability of fresh water, fertile land along its banks, and the river itself as a means of travel and sustenance would have been crucial for survival. Archaeological finds in the Cotswolds may reveal traces of these early interactions, with settlements likely clustered near the river and its tributaries.

As human civilization developed, the Thames, even in its early stages, would have been a vital resource. Small-scale agriculture, fishing, and perhaps early forms of milling would have taken advantage of its waters. The river was a natural artery, connecting communities within the Cotswolds and eventually leading them further afield.

The River's Contribution to the Larger Narrative

The journey from the Cotswolds is the foundational chapter of the Thames' grand narrative. While it is the lower reaches that are most famous, the character and quality of the river are profoundly influenced by its origins. The clean, clear water that emerges from the Cotswold springs is the lifeblood that sustains the river throughout its long course.

Understanding the humble beginnings of the Thames in the Cotswolds allows us to appreciate the full scope of its journey. It is a reminder that even the most iconic of natural and man-made landmarks have a simple, often beautiful, origin. The Cotswold springs are the silent witnesses to the birth of a river that would become a global icon, a vital artery of commerce, culture, and history, and a constant presence in the story of England.

The next time you gaze upon the mighty Thames flowing through London, remember its unassuming birth in the tranquil, verdant heart of the Cotswolds. The serpentine journey from a trickling spring to a world-renowned river is a testament to

the power of nature and the enduring significance of our waterways.

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Questions & Answers About a river with its source in the cotswolds

No	Question	Answer
1	Which iconic river famously begins its journey in the rolling Cotswolds?	The River Thames, often called 'The Great River', has its source in the Cotswolds, marking the beginning of its 215-mile journey to the North Sea.
2	Where exactly in the Cotswolds can I find the official source of the River Thames?	The commonly accepted source of the Thames is at Thames Head, near the village of Kemble in Gloucestershire, Cotswolds.
3	Are there any specific landmarks or features associated with the Thames' Cotswold source?	Yes, look for the iconic 'Source of the Thames' signpost and the small stream that eventually grows into the mighty river. The area is picturesque and a popular spot for walkers.
4	Beyond the Thames, are there other notable rivers that originate in the Cotswolds?	While the Thames is the most famous, other rivers like the River Windrush and the River Coln also rise in the Cotswolds, contributing to the region's unique water systems.
5	What is the ecological significance of the Cotswold springs that feed the River Thames?	These springs are vital for maintaining water levels in the upper Thames, especially during drier periods. They are part of a delicate chalk stream ecosystem, supporting diverse wildlife.
6	How has the Cotswold source influenced the historical development of the River Thames?	The consistent flow from the Cotswolds allowed for early navigation and the development of riverside settlements, making the Thames a crucial trade route and a lifeline for communities downstream.
7	Is it possible to walk or cycle from the source of the Thames in the Cotswolds all the way to London?	Yes, the Thames Path is a national trail that follows the river from its source in the Cotswolds all the way to the Thames Barrier in London, offering a fantastic long-distance walking or cycling adventure.

river source in cotswolds, cotswolds river origin, cotswold river source locations, rivers starting in the cotswolds, cotswold riverhead source, cotswolds freshwater source streams, source of river in cotswolds countryside, cotswolds river beginnings, cotswolds natural river source, cotswolds river tributaries origin

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