

Cropredy Festival - a short guide for the first-time visitor.

Cropredy village lies a few miles north of Banbury in Oxfordshire. Every August, the 800 or so inhabitants welcome an invasion of some 20,000 music-lovers for the Festival, organised by Chris and Dave Pegg, featuring Fairport Convention and some other people.

The Festival is held on the second full weekend of August, from Thursday night to Saturday.

It's.... different. This guide will attempt to describe why, but you really ought to go. You'll like it, promise. Most people who have been before try to get back every year. Once you've been, you'll understand why. The Festival has been an annual feature since the 70's, and Fairport have been around since the 60's, so the audience these days includes children and even grandchildren of people who have been coming back year after year. This guide originally summarised everything I know about Cropredy, but it has been added to by others (credited where possible). Any questions not dealt with should be mailed to the FC list at fairport-list@mcvax.org (you don't need to be a member to send mail there, but if you want to see any = replies, you will need to sign up.) Similarly, any tips that can be added should be mailed to the same place.

Once you have decided to come along, you'll need to decide on accomodation. Believe me, a tent on one of the many campsites spread around the site is your best bet by far. A tent allows you to remain connected to the spirit of Cropredy, it's fun, it's cheap and there are toilets, showers and food at anytime nearby. Your middle-aged correspondent eschews camping at almost any price, pleading a bad back, an aversion to damp, a fear of tentpegs... yet for three days in August, he wouldn't be anywhere other at night than in his large tent, with the sounds of other music-lovers doing what they do at night as he falls gently asleep. If you have no tent, or are coming from abroad, camping equipment can be hired. Phil Widdows mailed me to mention http://www.beansonline.co.uk/on_hire_main.htm and <http://www.activeoutdoorandski.co.uk/outdoors/hire.asp> and both seem worth investigating.

If you really can't stand the idea of camping, there are many hotels and bed and breakfast establishments in the area, but they tend to get booked up fairly early. Anything within walking distance gets booked very quickly. Take a look at <http://www.banburytown.co.uk/accom/> for some of the accomodation nearby. If money is not a large consideration, you may want to investigate hiring a narrowboat. They are not cheap, but they can be moored at Cropredy. *Please* check that you can moor the narrowboat there for all three days, and try to find out how early you will have to arrive - lots of them turn up for the Festival. The agency you hire the narrowboat from should be able to advise on the above points. It wouldn't be right to recommend any one hire firm, it's not ethical, and none of them have offered me any money. However, <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=narrowboat+hire+oxfordshire> will find lots of them. Honestly, you really would be best to take a tent.

How do I get there? (I don't live in the UK, and I have no idea of what an "Oxfordshire" is.) How you get to England is up to you. Try to get a road map of Britain before you arrive, or pick one up at the airport, station or ferry port. Even if you are not hiring a car, at least you'll know roughly where you = are. You need to get to a town called Banbury. There is a railway station there, and some trains from London or Birmingham will stop at Banbury. You can get a train to London or Birmingham from *anywhere*. Check the map, decide which is nearest to you, and go to the nearest railway station to buy a ticket to Banbury. The staff at the station will be happy to tell you which train to catch, and where to change to another train. British trains are probably not as good as the ones you are used to. We're working on it. Very slowly. Once you get to Banbury, ask the staff at the station where you can catch the bus to Cropredy. During the festival, buses to Cropredy are frequent. If you have hired a car, you need to find the M40 - it will be a blue road on your map. The M40 goes to Banbury, and when you get to the turn-off (or off-ramp, for US pals) marked "Banbury" - take it. At the roundabout, circular gyratory system, call it what you will, that you will come to, you will find signs to "Music Festival". Follow them, and you will shortly find yourself driving down country lanes that become alarmingly narrow. Have no fear, within twenty minutes or less you will be in a queue. It's the queue for parking and camping at Cropredy, and it usually starts in or before the next village, Williamsote. Turn the engine off if the queue shows no sign of moving, wind a window down and enjoy the silence. Relax... You're nearly there. If you prefer a little music, "Leige And Lief" works well at this point.

So, you're coming to Cropredy.

As you drive into the village, helpful people, often sporting uniforms marked "Police" will guide you towards the entrance to the Festival. They are your friends, and will welcome a joke or two. A note about the police appears later, but for now, just know that they, like you, chose to be here. Nobody forced them, they want to be at the Festival, saves buying a ticket, and they get paid to listen to the music. They think it's a good deal.

Once you get to the entrance, you'll find a parking space if you need to buy a ticket. If you have a ticket, show it to the person

on the gate. In return, you will be given a rubbish sack and, possibly, a note from several worthy groups in the village stating where local people will be cooking breakfast (to raise funds for a good cause) or where a boot sale will be held (to raise funds for another local amenity).

A quick word about the rubbish sack. If you put the detritus from your tent in it, it will make clearing the campsite really easy when you go. Simply knot it at the top when you leave, and discard it in a nearby skip. Easy, ain't it? And so simple, yet so well thought out. You'll find that this festival features lots of well thought out ideas.

As you drive through the entrance, smiling marshals will indicate where to go. If you have small children and prefer silence at night, tell the people at the gate and you'll be directed to the family field, where music is not welcomed after 11-ish. If you have arrived on a motorcycle, you can be directed to the bikers field - experience has shown that bikers like to be together, but if you prefer to be amongst the tents, that's fine. If you are in a motorhome, or towing a caravan, there's a special field for you, too. Camper vans are welcomed on both the tented fields and the caravan field.

Hopefully, you're reading this on the FC list FAQ. (If not, royalties are due!) FC listmembers like to camp together, and we organise a convoy so that we all arrive together. This way, we all get directed to the same area. Details of the convoy usually appear on the list in early August.

Right, you're in a field, the tent is set up, the liquid refreshment of your choice is in your hand, what next? Go and get some water, you'll need it. Taps are nearby, and a note on them will tell you if the water is safe for drinking, or if it is for washing/boiling. If it's not yet 6-ish on Thursday, have a wander around the field, chat to neighbours, or take a walk down to the village (of which more later). Nothing else is happening, until the tent near the entrance to the main field opens. If it's open, there will be a queue outside it.

The people in the tent will exchange your ticket for a wristband. Showing the wristband will get you into the main field. Try not to lose it, it will be impossible to get another without paying again.

Shall we head off to the main field? Why not.

The main field.

This is the concert field, the main field, call it what you will. The stage is at the bottom of the field, and around the perimeter are stalls. Take a wander up the field, see what there is to see, then go over to the other side and find somewhere to sit. Why the other side? Because the bar is over there!

The bar is a wonder... real ales served in the open air, no fizzy tasteless stuff here. May I recommend a pint of Wadworths' 6X? "Old Henry" is a toothsome IPA, others at the bar will extol the virtues of the real cider, the lager... even the soft drinks. One end of the bar serves as the wine area. If you would prefer your beer served in something other than a plastic glass, take your preferred receptacle. And here's an important point - there is no backstage bar. So if you find yourself rubbing shoulders with someone who looks really like a well-known musician... they probably are that musician.

On this side of the field you'll also find the Woodworm tent. If you like the band that is playing on the stage, you'll find their latest CD at Woodworm. If you would like your CD signed, go to the Woodworm tent after the set has finished, the band will arrive shortly. The staff at the tent also sell programmes, another requirement, and whatever FC ephemera the band have authorised for sale this year. (There may also be discounted ephemera from last years festival, but don't count on it - and get there quick if you want an option to purchase, they get swamped by people who didn't buy last year, didn't read this guide, and now regret it.)

Down at the bottom of this side of the field, the merch tent will sell you a commemorative T-shirt of this years festival. It might be an idea to buy one. By Saturday night, you'll be vowing to come back next year, and every year after, so in ten years time you'll regret not starting your collection now. While we're on this side of the field, look out for Leons' veggie stall. It's a Cropredy fixture. Your correspondent is a confirmed = carnivore, and usually has no truck with the vegetarian persuasion... but Leon and his staff provide a tasty, overfilled plate of lots of different dishes for around £6 (\$10 at current rates of exchange). Like what you're eating? Leon will sell you a recipe book. Oh, and the puddings are to die for. Probably by = cholesterol poisoning. But, knowing Leon, probably not, they just taste that way.

Enough stalls, you're here for the music! You know where you can get a drink, you've probably seen half a dozen places selling things you'd like to eat or buy, so sit down and enjoy the music. Sitting down brings us to the sometimes vexed question of - on what? You may wish to bring a waterproof sheet, or a blanket. You may also care to bring a chair. Many do, but please consider the feelings of the people behind you. A large folding affair will block their view of the stage, so try to purchase something with tiny legs. If you bring a chair from your patio set, the best option is to strike base camp about half way up the

field. If, during the first evenings entertainment, you realise that some form of support will be needed for the rest of the weekend, go into Banbury (bus times are printed in the programme) and ask for directions to Millets, where a variety of camping chairs can be purchased.

When the music ends and it's time to go back to your tent (or whatever) you can exit the field from the top or the bottom, over on the other side. Find your accommodation and do whatever feels right, brew coffee, chat to the neighbours, open a bottle, take a wander round the campsite, linger with people who are singing and playing, they'll be pleased to see you. At a certain time in the morning, you'll slide into your bed with a soft exhalation of satisfaction, and a nearby generator will hum you to sleep....

It's morning!

Lord, is that the = time....? Some folks make breakfast outside the tent, some find it elsewhere. If you prefer the elsewhere option, take yourself down to the village, where breakfast can be found at several locations, all advertised by signs. There are two pubs in Cropredy, both have been known to do breakfast. People are probably hurling hot fat in the village hall, and the Canoe Club by the canal (stand on the canal bridge and look to your right) welcomes breakfast seekers. Mark Barton recommends it for both vegetarians and meat-eaters. = "Sitting by the canal, watching the ducks and boats go by - nothing can beat it." Plus you get that warm feeling of helping the canoeing community continue their activities in the year ahead.

This is a personal guide to Cropredy, so I'll recommend a perfect breakfast. Make coffee. Fry some bacon. Enclose it in two slices of bread. Fry an egg until the yolk is soft. Dip bacon sandwich in yolk. Eat. Enjoy the sunshine. Doesn't life look wonderful? Since this guide was first published, one or two potential visitors from abroad have asked, "Where can I get a proper cup of coffee?" As the debate over how to make a "proper" cup of coffee will rage forever if you take a representative sample of British, American, French, Italian and Turkish caffeine-lovers, the best answer is this. You can get a "proper" cup of coffee at your tent. Bring your favourite brand and your preferred method of brewing it. If your preferred method involves espresso machines, bring a generator with the machine. Cultivate a tolerance of instant coffee, if you can. Ground, filtered coffee is available from the stalls in the main field. Expect to pay around £1 per cup.

Cropredy village. Post-breakfast, assuming you got up at some reasonable time (and only you or one of Her Majestys' judges can decide what is "reasonable" - small legal joke), you may care to take a stroll around the village. Let's start with the bridge over the river. This is a historic place. During the English Civil War, a battle took place here, commemorated in the Ralph McTell song "Red And Gold", recorded by FC on - oh, you guessed. Today, it's a place where traders sell interesting and unusual items. Over the bridge, you'll find a shop, and there will probably be a queue outside. It sells the things you forgot to pack, and newspapers. Your preferred newspaper will have sold out, sadly, you really should have got up earlier. As you are strolling around the village, you might care to look into the church. There are some frescos on one wall, but the real item of interest is the brass eagle that serves as a lectern. As the Battle of Cropredy Bridge loomed, the villagers took care to preserve the one item in their church that could be considered ornamental, even popish... their eagle lectern. If the Parliamentary forces won the battle, there was every chance that the lectern would be melted down to become part of a cannon. Rather than have this happen, the villagers decided to hide it.... Now, they could have buried it in the ground, hidden it in a nearby house, but they decided to throw it in the river, where it could be recovered easily if the Royalists won the battle. The Royalists duly drove off the Parliamentary forces, and the villagers rushed to the river to retrieve the lectern... except it wasn't there. It had been carried downstream by the river. Over one hundred years later, the lectern was discovered, some distance down the river. It was restored to the church, and you ought to take a look at it. The church hosts a non-denominational service on the Sunday of the Festival, so if you'd like to thank God for the good time you've had, head down there. Don't forget your guitar, squeezebox, drum, harmonica - or whatever instrument you brought, it will be welcomed. The rest of the village is a good place to wander and exercise dreams of "If I won lots of money, I'd have **that** house" ... Personally, I'd settle for an address in Creampot Lane.

There are two pubs in Cropredy, The Brasenose and the Red Lion. Both serve good beer, and have a barbecue, if you're hungry. The Brasenose hosts live music in the back garden, and if the music in the main field is not to your taste, the Brasenose garden is a useful alternative. The Red Lion is just across the street from the church, and more music can be found in the rear car park. Patrons often take their pints over to the churchyard, where gravestones provide a seat. It's OK, the vicar doesn't mind. Just clear up after yourself. If you sit on a gravestone for too long you risk indentations that proclaim that your bum died in 1654. More information about the village can be found at <http://www.cropredy.btinternet.co.uk/home.html>

Back to the field Your programme will inform you of which band is playing, so if they are a favourite... well, you know where to sit. If you have little interest in whoever is on stage, now is probably the time to check out the stalls. A typical selection will include jewellers, food, clothing, eastern accessories, CDs, instruments and really quite a lot of food. Some of the traders reduce their prices late on Saturday afternoon, but if you find something that you cannot possibly live without, get it now.

Ooo... gotta take a whiz.... The toilets at Cropredy are famous, plentiful, and the ratio of mens toilets to womens is biased in favour of women. Cropredy is organised by a woman, that's why. These are the cleanest, most fragrant toilets you'll find at any music festival. Admittedly, in the early hours of the morning, they may be a bit dodgy, but if you need to use them in the early hours you're not going to be too choosy. Otherwise, I stand by my recommendation. For those that need to sit down for relief, there are wooden seats, and PAPER. If there is no paper, check next door, and tell a steward when you leave. Paper will be restored soon. (You may want to bring some paper, though, you never know.) As you flush, scented water will flood the toilet. Last year, the scent was called "bubblegum". Make of this what you will. Andrew Parry sent a tip - use the toilets in the main field early on (when they have had fewest customers) and those on the campsite later on (when they have been cleaned and restocked). Not because of smells, but because they have the smallest queues. Andrew also recommends taking a "Porta-Potti", left in the outer tent - if you have one. "Surprisingly, they don't smell, and seem quite hygienic - and it beats taking the kids across the field in the middle of the night."

I'm hungry now.... Good, because so am I. The various stalls around the main field will sell you good food, reasonably priced by the standards of other British music festivals. However, if you are looking for dreadful boiled burgers at rip-off prices, you may have to hunt for them, because they are not allowed. You'll find good curries, pizzas, baked potatoes with a variety of fillings, pancakes, Chinese food, a rather good sausage stall, the previously mentioned Leons, steak sandwiches, chips, kebabs... in fact, lots of choices for the vegetarian or meat-eater.

The police. You will find police officers strolling around the site, usually in the main field. All of them are very approachable and will welcome a chat. Cropredy is a favourite for them, there's very little crime, and their duties usually comprise escorting lost children to a meeting point or helping the inebriated to find their tent (or a stomach pump). At the end of the evening, they direct the surging crowd as they exit the field. If your preferred choice of relaxant involves herbs that do not meet the standards of the Good Housekeeping Institute, keep it to yourself, don't approach a copper with a joint in your hand, don't try to deal (especially not to police officers) and I daresay all will be well. In other words, don't be silly. If you deal in anything that could be considered a "hard" drug, you'll be shopped in an instant. Cropredy has an excellent crime-free record, and the returning folks want to keep it that way. There are many tales of the police at Cropredy, but two should give you the flavour... A uniformed copper strolls past, his helmet replaced by a jesters' cap. Someone cries "Like the hat!" Copper stops, leans over and says "Shhh... I'm working undercover..." (Thanks, Colin!) On another occasion, as the crowd were leaving the main field, three police officers, standing in line, were directing the flow of bodies. Each had a cardboard strip over the badges on their helmet. Each strip had "Hello" written on it. And they posed together for many photographs.... If you need the cops, they can be found at the top of the main field. In order to police 20,000 festival goers, less than 30 officers are allocated. That should tell you something about the conduct of Cropredy. Crime is rare, and in the eighteen years I have been going to the festival, there have only been two serious injuries that required removal to hospital. One fool tried to cook in his tent, and set it on fire. Another person slipped over and broke his neck, but he lived. Indeed, the last time I heard of him, he was making excellent progress. Not bad for eighteen years...

That was a wonderful day... what happens now? If you're reading this on the FC List FAQ, the fun doesn't stop when you leave the field. The listmembers convoy will have camped together, and somewhere within their tented area you will find the fabled Stage 2. Present yourself there, introduce yourself, find somewhere to sit, and coffee will appear shortly. Tea may be an option. Some of the people gathered here will be sporting instruments, and quite a lot of them will be able to play them. Songs will be sung, guitars will be strummed and sometimes tuned. If you can bang out a few chords, you'll be very welcome. If you want to have a bit of a sing, you'll be in good company. If you sing like Jimmy Page and play the guitar like Pavarotti, you'll be in good company. Just get in there and enjoy. A bottle will be passed around from time to time, indeed, you may wish to bring your favourite tippie. If you have neither instrument or bottle to bring to Stage 2, bring yourself, a voice, some jokes and an iron constitution. Sessions at Stage 2 have been known to go on until after 5 a.m. As the session progresses, firm friendships are made, the repertoire of the artistes (hah!) drifts beyond the folk-rock canon to encompass Led Zeppelin, The Who and The Wombles, bodies crash to the floor... Leave when you've had enough.

A new day has dawned and I appear to have slept in my clothes. They may be someone elses' clothes. Additionally, I have gone blind and could possibly have contracted some tropical disease. What did I say about leaving when you've had enough? You've probably got a hangover. Plenty of fluids and the analgesic of your choice will probably do the trick, but if you really need medical assistance, get someone to find a steward who will radio for a first aid team. The first aid tent can be found at the top of the main field, but help is available 24 hours a day. Oh, and if you have a blinding hangover, don't go to sleep in the sun. You'll wish you'd died.

Is it always hot and sunny, then? No, this is England. We are often lucky at Cropredy, but it's best to be prepared for a downpour. Waterproof boots and jacket should be packed, and you might want to consider a spare groundsheet so that you can sit on wet grass. A tip - leave a set of clothes in your car/van. If the weather is truly dreadful, you'll always have a few dry clothes to change into. Another point to consider is that even the hottest day can turn into a chilly night, so a thick jumper is worth bringing.

I am grimy, and in need of a good wash. No problem, matey, amongst the toilets on the camping fields you will find shower units. Or you could walk over to the Sports Pavilion, where showers can be taken. You'll be very welcome, because previous festival attendees raised the money to build the pavilion. Just a small "thank you" to the villagers who put up with this annual revelry. If you have the time to do so, you could always go into Banbury (bus times from Cropredy are listed in the programme) and find the swimming pool. Andrew Parry, of toilet-tip fame, reminded the author that the open-air pool boasts hot showers, and "nice toilets".

My children are getting bored.... I'm not surprised, younger children may find three days of any kind of music a little tedious. However, on Saturday afternoon a childrens entertainment will take place at the top of the main field. In the past, this has involved learning circus skills, improvising and performing a play, chasing around after huge inflatable objects, and goodness knows what else. Despite clear evidence that I am entering my second childhood, they never let me join in, so these observations are based on passing a pack of costumed, painted, overexcited screaming kids... but they seem to be having a good time. If your children are too old to accept the title "children", and you're worried that they won't enjoy the Festival because every time you play your music at home they beg you to "Stop playing that old rubbish" - bring them. They will love it. They won't be uncool enough to tell you so, but they'll be desperate to come back next year. You can safely leave them to wander and make new friends. It is entirely possible that you will hardly see them all weekend, until they run out of food or cash. Here, I do speak from experience, having taken a strategically shaved and pierced lover of nu-metal to Cropredy (the child of my partner, before any suggestion takes root in your mind). Whatever type of child you bring, organise a meeting place in case anyone gets lost.

This sounds like a good weekend, but I have a dog, and.... And you can bring your dog, if you want. Just do whatever you would normally do with your dog if you were out for a walk. Make sure it has a ready supply of water and *please* make sure you have some plastic bags in your pocket so that you can clear up any mess that occurs. No plastic bags? They can be obtained somewhere onsite, and a note in the programme will tell you where.

It is now Sunday, I have had a wonderful time, and I don't want it to end! And neither does it, just so long as the weather is fair. Pack up the tent, find any personnel you have brought with you, knot your rubbish sack, sling it in a skip and head over to the Sports Pavilion. A barbecue will be in full blast, and various members of Fairport, plus some of the guests, will appear in the fullness of time. A few may look a little green, one or two may look nervous, but all will be dressed in cricketing whites ready for the annual Fairport versus Cropredy cricket match. The bar is open, so grab a pint, find somewhere to sit, and be ready to cheer, gasp and giggle. On the other hand, if it's pouring with rain, the cricket match will be cancelled, and you'll want to head home anyway.

The end bit. Cropredy is different. Unlike many music festivals, profit is not the only motive. Cropredy has grown organically. Back in the mid-seventies, several Fairport members lived nearby, and the band played a set for the annual village garden party. When FC disbanded in 1979, their final gig was in a field near here. They enjoyed it so much that they did it again the next year. By 1983, the festival was on the current site, attracting a few thousand people. As the years have passed and the crowds have grown, the organisation has kept up, the residents have continued to accept a population explosion during the second week of August, much money has been raised for local causes, and everyone has had a good time. The site is now at maximum occupancy, fire regulations will not allow more than 20,000 people at Cropredy. Everyone, the organisers, the villagers, the police, want you to have a good time. They don't want you to get hurt, sick or ripped off. But there's one other thing to consider. Cropredy is magic. It's the word that most people eventually get round to using. When you are standing in the field late on Saturday night, singing "Meet on the Ledge" with everyone else, knowing that if you = *really* mean it, it all comes round again... it's magic. When you stroll down a Cropredy lane in the sunshine, with the thought of a pint at the end of it, and it's soooo quiet... it's magic. When you are sat in a circle with good friends, singing songs... it's magic. When you walk through the campsite and realise that everyone around you kind of likes you just because you're here... it's magic, and the magic will seep into your soul. Next year, you'll want to come back, possibly for the music, possibly for the atmosphere, or maybe just for another taste of the magic. And you'll say "I think I'll go to Cropredy. Gonna see all my friends..."