

WALK 8

Coppet Hill and Goodrich

Start/Finish	Goodrich Castle car park (SO 575 196)
Distance	12km (7½ miles)
Ascent	235m (770ft)
Time	3–5hrs
Map	Outdoor Leisure 14
Public transport	Service 34 between Ross-on-Wye and Monmouth runs through Goodrich every two hours
Parking	Large car park and visitor centre south of Goodrich Castle

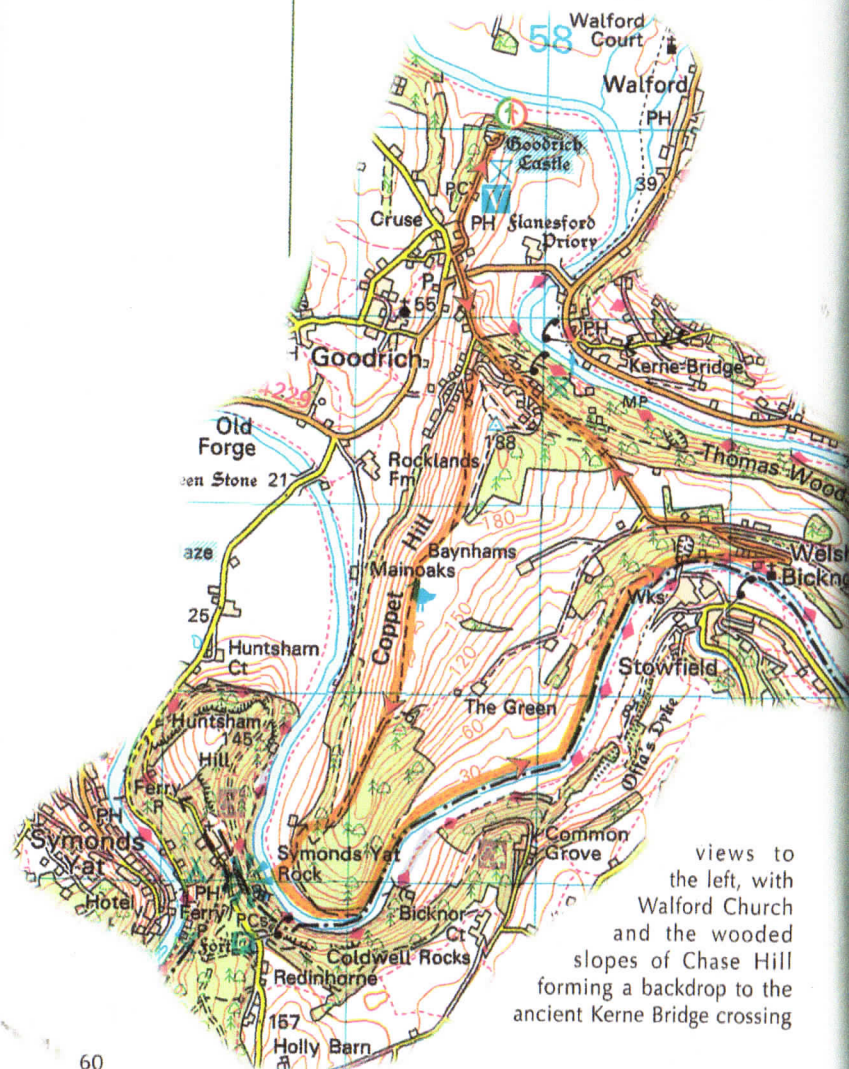
This is an outstanding walk with unrivalled views of the Wye as it leaves the plains of south Herefordshire and enters the gorge that defines the lower river. Coppet Hill is an important nature reserve and a wonderful recreational resource, and there is a suitably impressive climax to the walk at Goodrich Castle.

From the **castle car park** go back to the main road through Goodrich and turn left onto the lane signposted to Welsh Bicknor, crossing high above the B4229 on the Dry Arch – a brownstone bridge built to connect Coppet

*The village of
Goodrich and the
Herefordshire hills*



Hill and more especially the local landowners, the Vaughans of Courtfield, with the village. There are superb



views to the left, with Walford Church and the wooded slopes of Chase Hill forming a backdrop to the ancient Kerne Bridge crossing



Kerne Bridge and the flooded Wye from Coppet Hill

of the Wye, and then to the right, with Goodrich Church prominent on its ancient site.

Just beyond Charlton (a 19th-century country house), the road divides. Take the steps rising steeply between the two branches, quickly reaching the pebbly quartz conglomerate outcrops (known as puddingstone) that underlie much of the ridge of **Coppet Hill**. The green path rises more gently now, running through woodland before emerging on the open hillside with the first of a series of sensational aerial views of the Wye floodplain as the river meanders round Huntsham Hill and approaches Symonds Yat.

The long ridge of **Coppet Hill** has outstanding views of the Wye Valley, the hills of south Herefordshire, Goodrich Castle and the wooded northern slopes of the Forest of Dean. More distantly, the Brecon Beacons, Clee Hills and the Malverns can all be seen. Much of the hill is a nature reserve, with fallow deer, nesting birds including yellowhammer



The 18th-century boundary wall next to the path on Coppet Hill

Constructed from limestone quarried to the east of the ridge, the wall dates from the late 18th century and marked the boundary between the parishes of Goodrich and Welsh Bicknor.

and linnet, butterflies such as the large skipper and green hairstreak, adders and grass snakes, and a ground plantlife that includes several species of orchids and autumn crocus on the limestone east of the summit ridge.

A very easy stroll leads to The Folly (constructed as a focal point in Courtfield's picturesque landscape and with an attached chapel but now a disappointingly insubstantial stone ruin) and then to one of the highlights of the walk: the long promenade on springy turf along the summit ridge. The path keeps just below the apex of the ridge, with thin woodland beyond a dilapidated wall to the left and the Wye far below to the right. ◀

Some distance beyond the end of the wood a gate leads into a field on the left and another fine view, this time down to the east. A little further to the south the ridge path passes the scanty remains of Jelemly Tump – a deserted hamlet named after an 18th-century squatter but last inhabited in the 1970s. The path now re-enters copice woodland, still following the tumbledown wall and now descending quite gently but on slippery leaf litter to

reach a stile giving access to a riverside meadow, with the Wye flowing left to right in front of the striking limestone cliffs of Coldwell Rocks. ▶

Turn left at the stile, picking up a riverside path (which can be submerged after winter rains) and passing a monument commemorating a tragedy when a child was swept away while swimming in the river. The path emerges from woodland and traverses a series of fields below **The Green**, with the Wye Valley Walk on an old railway line on the far bank. Somewhat incongruously, the derelict Edison Swan cable works (a crucial supplier of telephone cables in two world wars) appears across the river, which is then crossed by a bridge carrying the disused railway. It is worth climbing up onto the old bridge (now a footpath) to see the retrospective view down the Wye, with the conical hill of Rosemary Topping now very prominent to the left of the river.

Climb back down from the bridge, noting the entrance to the 600m-long Coppet Hill tunnel straight ahead and, slightly to the right, the concrete Second World War pillbox that defended the railway bridge. Continue along the riverbank for another 200m before

Since the 1970s, the rocks have achieved fame as a nesting site for peregrine falcons; the RSPB's observation point at Yat Rock, equipped with telescopes, can be seen to the right of the cliffs.

The riverside church at Welsh Bicknor



Courtfield was the ancestral home of the Vaughan family, the boyhood home of the future Henry V and more recently a retreat house run by the Mill Hill Missionaries.

taking a left fork to reach the two buildings at the heart of **Welsh Bicknor** – the austere youth hostel, once a rectory, and the flamboyant High Victorian Church.

There is a choice of routes here: a lane to the left of the youth hostel zigzags up onto the plateau, while a path just west of the hostel climbs steeply up on steps then slants up to meet the lane (the path is more direct but is poorly signposted and was blocked by a massive fallen tree when last walked). The access lane to the former manor house at Courtfield soon comes in from the right. ◀ Keep straight on here to return to Goodrich, walking through attractive parkland on the plateau and then descending easily through woodland, passing a limestone quarry that supplied limekilns higher on the hill, and then walking past the puddingstone outcrops of Coppet Hill Nature Reserve.

Keep straight on along the lane, with another aerial view of Kerne Bridge and the refectory of the Augustinians' Flanesford Priory, to pick up the outward route by the steep steps and go over the Dry Arch to the Goodrich Castle access road. Turn right here to return to the **castle car park** and, more importantly, the castle itself, which forms a fitting climax to a superb walk.

The present red sandstone **castle**, magnificently sited on a spur above the river, dates largely from the 13th century and is well worth exploring, with an imposing barbican, a deep wide moat cut into the rock itself, a gatehouse with attached chapel, a tiny Norman keep and the substantial remains of the curtain wall with four corner towers.