

WALK 5

Trellech and Beacon Hill

Start/Finish	Trellech Church (SO 500 055)
Distance	12km (7½ miles)
Ascent	310m (1015ft)
Time	4–5hrs
Map	Outdoor Leisure 14
Public transport	Service 65 between Chepstow and Monmouth calls at Trellech every two hours (no Sunday service)
Parking	Small car park at the south end of the village

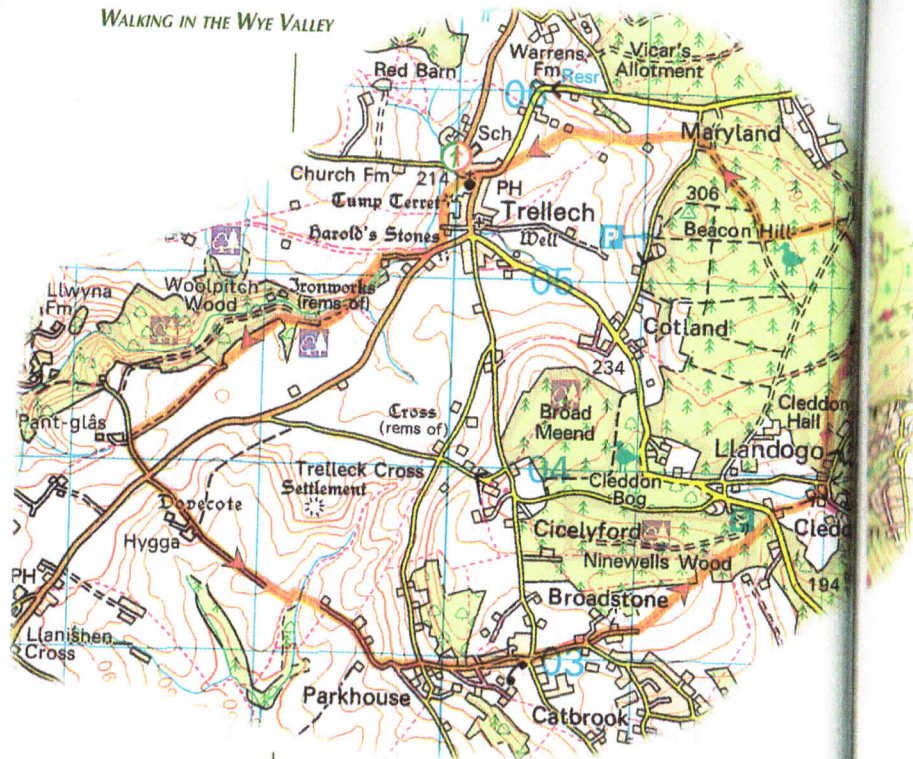
This is a very varied walk high above the western side of the Wye Gorge, taking in an ancient Welsh town, a fascinating late medieval farm complex, the waterfalls of Cleddon Shoots, and the superb woodland and heathland on Beacon Hill.

Take the lane running along the western edge of **Trellech churchyard** – pausing to take in the impressive church with its soaring spire and 17th-century sundial – and continue through a series of gates to reach **Tump Terret**, the motte of a 12th-century castle. ►

Trellech was one of the most important towns of medieval Wales, with 378 burgage plots in the late 13th century, but it was destroyed by Welsh raiders in 1291 and further ravaged by the Black Death in the 14th century. Extensive remains of the medieval town, including the manor house, have been uncovered in fields to the south of the village. The stone-lined Virtuous Well, a place of pilgrimage in late medieval times, reputedly cured a variety of ailments.

A lane between holiday cottages leads back to the main road, but turn immediately right to cross a damp field, following a path signposted to **Harold's Stones**, which are only two minutes away.

Established by the de Clare family, the castle mound still rises 6m (20ft) and is partly protected by a ditch and outer bank. A 19th-century summerhouse built on the summit has since disappeared.



Legends associate these three **upright stones** – which are local quartz or puddingstone – with King Harold, the mythical Jack o' Kent, and with local chieftans slain in battle nearby; but in fact they date much further back and were probably erected in the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age to be used in rituals.

Go along the road for 100m, keeping straight on along a good, wide track when the road bends left. Go through a gate, then leave the main track to drop down left to cross the Penarth Brook on a wide bridge and climb to a fingerpost just beyond. Turn right here, climbing a field and then skirting above woodland to reach a stile.



The origin of Harold's Stones, near Trellech, is a matter of much speculation

A permissive path drops steeply down into the valley here to visit the somewhat scanty remains of Trellech Furnace – once the site of an iron smelt mill driven by a waterwheel – but the main route continues across a series of fields above the wooded slopes of the deeply incised Penarth Brook valley, following signposts for Llanishen and enjoying views of the high hills to the west until turning left onto a metalled lane just before The Granary. Cross the B4293, making for the ancient farm complex at **Hygga**. Some of the buildings here, including barns and a shippin, date from the 16th century, and there is a striking circular **dovecot**. ▶

Beyond the horse pool a long, straight and somewhat dusty track makes for Parkhouse, with the Iron Age hillfort of Y Gaer crowning the slopes to the left and the woodlands above the Wye Gorge dominating the view ahead. A dog-leg to left and right leads to a footbridge over the Angidy Fawr – the stream flowing over the Old Red Sandstone bedrock here – and then to a climb past cottages to reach a lane next to the long-defunct Parkhouse Inn, once home to a deep-sea fishing club known as the Taverners' Angling Club. Keep ahead, climbing past the

East of the farm is an unusual horse pool, walled on three sides, into which the carthorses were led to drink and be washed down after a day's work.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell, the son of Viscount and Lady Amberley, was born at Cleddon Hall (then called Ravenscroft), just to the left of the route.

Restored heathland on Beacon Hill



straggling houses of **Parkhouse** and then the village green at **Broadstone**, but when the road bends right take a gravel drive on the left, going through the entrance pillars of the Woodside Farm estate.

Pass to the left of the Woodside stables, keeping on along a track and then, beyond a stile, going diagonally left across three fields with substantial stone walls and passing the picturesque ruins of a limekiln before entering sparse woodland, with the squatter hamlets of The Hudnalls on the hillside across the Wye Valley. The way lies straight ahead at a footpath crossroads, down an unexpected flight of stone steps and across a road onto a byway – very boggy for a short distance as the ground levels out – leading to a cottage on the edge of the hamlet of **Cleddon**. ◀

Turn left onto the lane by the cottage and right onto a minor road for 100m to reach the lip of the Wye Gorge at the top of the picturesque cascades known as Cleddon Shoots. The falls are impressive after rain, and the view down through the acid woodlands to the river far below is stunning. Follow the Wye Valley Walk to the north for

500m on a good track through mature woodland, but at a complex junction go left, across a forest road and past a seat, onto a narrowing but well-defined path that heads uphill for a while before becoming a wide track on the eastern plateau of Beacon Hill.

Cross a forest road, then go through a gate onto a gravelly track climbing very gradually through heathland, with heather, gorse, and naturally regenerated small trees – predominantly larch, silver birch, oak and Scots pine. ▶ Turn right onto a forest road at the John Chivers memorial bench (the path ahead quickly reaches the summit of **Beacon Hill**, famous for its panoramic views of the Wye Valley, Forest of Dean and Welsh mountains, and also for its nightjars, which can be heard churring on summer evenings). Beyond a cattle grid the forest returns, but the way remains downhill to pass a barrier and turn left, reaching the tarmac of Beacon Road after 50m.

A fingerpost just to the right indicates the return route to Trellech, first going diagonally across a series of small fields mainly grazed by horses, with the village and especially the church spire increasingly obvious. Turn right through a gate onto a gravelly track, then left to cut a corner off across a final sheep pasture and reach the road on the outskirts of **Trellech**, only 100m from the **church**.

This is the site of a Forestry Commission heathland restoration project, using Welsh mountain ponies to encourage the return of heathland species and conserve this locally threatened habitat.