

side. Straight ahead you will have views of Vagar Hill and its distinctive communications tower. This Common features in the Snodhill Walk, another in this series.

Follow the woodland edge to your left through the waymarked gate and on down, still following the woodland edge, keeping a narrow belt of trees to your right. Cross the next stile adjacent to a gate and head diagonally right over and down the hill to the bottom fence. Follow this keeping it on your right, through the field gate in the corner and continue down along the short, defunct hedge line to the overgrown hedge, keeping it on your right to the bottom of the field to a stile. Cross stile and turn right and then you are at point **B** above.

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## HISTORY AND FABLES

### St Peter's Church

Legend has it that St Peter visited the Black Mountains early in the first century where he is said to have established a chapel on the site where the later Saxon church was built in 786AD, the event still celebrated on St Peter's day. This church was replaced by the present Norman one in about 1130 after destruction by the Welsh. A yew tree in the churchyard is said to date from the late C13th. The tower is now made of fibreglass and at 186 ft is one of the tallest in England. The stone altar is 5,000 years old and is made from one of the stones from the nearby ancient burial site known as Arthur's Stone.

### The Golden Valley Railway

On the opposite side of the river from the church was the C19th Peterchurch station. To the west of this is a dry watercourse where the river was diverted so the railway line would not have to cross it.

### Vowchurch and Turnastone

It is said that the names of the parishes of Vowchurch, which means 'multi-coloured church', and Turnastone, which probably signifies a thorn thicket, came about from two medieval sisters who each wanted to build a church. The one living in Vowchurch said to the other "I vow I will build my church before you turn a stone of yours". However, since both churches are of Norman foundation this can hardly be more than a neat pun.

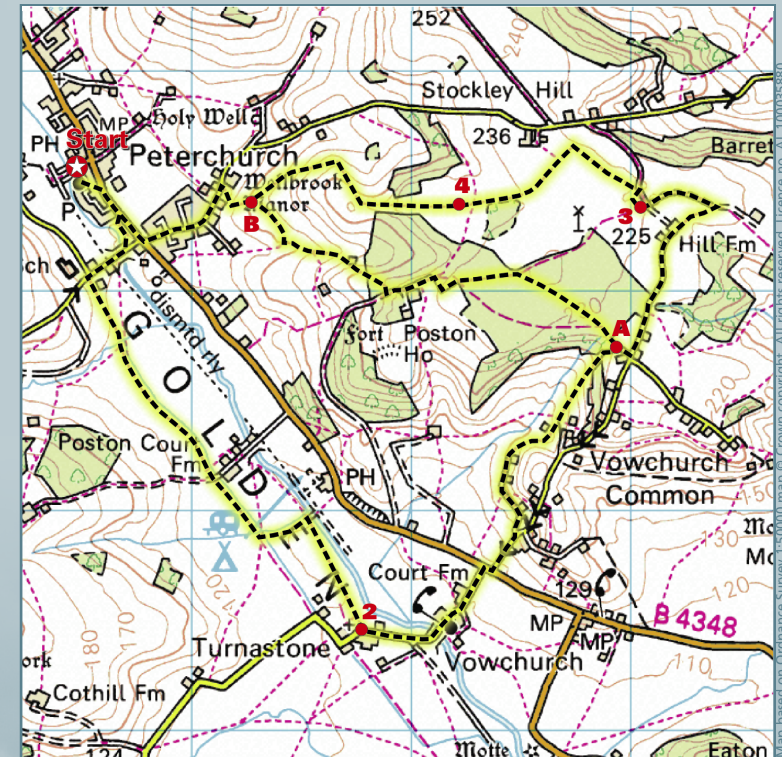
St Bartholemew's Church at Vowchurch, close to the River Dore, was a favourite church of the poet John Betjeman. Lewis Carroll's younger brother, Skeffington Hume Dodgson, was vicar of the church from 1895 to 1910 and is buried here with his wife.

Turnastone is one of the smallest parishes in the county with only 530 acres and a population of only around 30, half that of a century ago. The parish church dedicated to St Mary Magdalene is probably of late C12th origin.

For bus timetable information contact Traveline 0870 608 2 608 (open 07.00-22.30 daily).

# Golden Valley Walks

## Peterchurch



This walk begins close to one of the most significant landmarks in the Golden Valley, St Peter's Church, and follows the River Dore to the hamlets of Turnastone and Vowchurch before ascending Vowchurch Common for its spectacular views to the Black Mountains. After further ascent the far reaching views of northern Hereford and southern Shropshire open up.

OS Map no: Explorer OL13

Distance: Long route: 9 km (5¾ miles)

Short route: 8 km (5 miles)



From the car park go into the churchyard, stop to admire the wonderful veteran yew, probably many hundreds of years old, walk along in front of the church (noting the Irish yew on the right) and through a gate onto a path which brings you out by the Police Station on the main road. Go right and just past Closure Place take the footpath on your right and go diagonally left to a stile into the lane.

Turn right and follow the lane, over a small brook (the River Dore), to the crossroads by a school. Take the bridleway left, cross the brook and continue along the bridleway with the brook on your left. *Here in its upper reaches the Dore is a fast flowing brook, with natural pools and riffles, lined with trees and shrubs which help protect the banks. Continue through four more fields, noting the beautiful large hollow field maple in the third. The hillside up to your right has a number of small copses which could be isolated islands. However, the network of wonderful thick hedges provides corridors between the woods allowing insects, mammals and birds to move safely, essential for the dormouse in particular. The hedges contain a mixture of native plants which provide food (nectar, berries and nuts), shelter and nesting places.*

At the end of the fourth field go through the field gate and cross a footbridge to your right, then turn left and cross the stile. Follow the brook on your left for two fields (crossing one stile). The footpath turns sharp right (you could cross the bridge and walk through the caravan site to the Poston Mill Inn for refreshments) and follows the Dore. Continue along the Dore and field margin till you get to a field gate (you may go through a temporary field gate by the overhead power lines). Go through the gate and diagonally over to the road in Turnastone.

*Take five minutes to visit the quaint, simple church. Up to your right is Turnastone Court Farm, recently acquired by the Countryside Restoration Trust who farm the land in an environmentally friendly way and produce rare breed meat such as Tamworth pig, Ryeland lamb and Hereford beef.*

2. Leaving the churchyard turn left and follow the road past Vowchurch church to the main road. Cross and head up the steep lane signed to Vowchurch Common. Take the first footpath to the left just below the large house, and follow the track up the hill. *The views as you follow the track up and round the hill are spectacular over the Black Mountains and the Black Hill (Cat's Back Hill) and you can clearly see the network of woodlands and hedgerows amongst the small fields higher up the hillside. As the track bends to the right look out for a badger pit latrine on the verge under the second large oak on your left. Just past this the views open up onto Cwm Du Cottage and hill where there are traces of a hill fort. You may well hear buzzard calling as the woodland is a great habitat for this large bird of prey.*

As you continue the track turns into a green lane lined with superb multi-stemmed oaks or pollards. *These trees were cut for a renewable source of firewood etc. Normally these trees would be cut to ground level – coppicing. In this situation, on grazed pasture, the trees were cut at head height to stop cattle browsing the re-growth. On the right is a wonderful thick mixed hedge which could easily support dormice, with its mix of hazel and holly providing food and shelter, the thick hazel coppice behind providing links and travelways to other woods, and honeysuckle providing essential nesting material.*

In the summer the open stretches of the lane become rather overgrown; please persevere – as soon as you get back into the sheltered green lane the vegetation opens up again!

Continue up the steep track. *Gradually the soils get thinner and the lane more shady and cool. From the first rocky outcrop across the path look out for typical woodland plants, such as sanicle, sweet woodruff, wood avens, violets, enchanters nightshade, the delicate grass wood melick, and the strap-like frond of hart's tongue fern.*

At the top of the lane you reach a flat grassy area and here you have two options for returning to Peterchurch – slightly shorter and through the woods, or longer with magnificent views – your choice could depend on the weather!

#### **Short route starts here (Point A on map)**

To return through the wood turn left through the gate marked with the blue bridleway mark, and follow these waymarks through the wood; the track can be very muddy!! *You will pass an area on your left where the conifer crop has been removed. The extra light favours pioneer species such as silver birch, rosebay willowherb and bracken. As tree species such as ash and oak come though the canopy closes and the pioneers are shaded out.* Turn left down the surfaced road, past the mast on your right and follow the bridleway waymarks behind the farm, through one small gate and then down the main drive. Just before the cattle grid turn right and follow the path to the stile.

Cross the stile and go slightly diagonally right to another stile in the hedge. Cross the stile then turn sharp right down to the corner of the field. Follow the hedge/tree line on your right through a gate and into the next field till you come to a break in the hedge with a crossing point. Go right following the waymarks and cross the stream over a small bridge and then straight ahead up to the stile in the hedge. Cross the stile and continue straight ahead, bear left through the gate and between the two fences to the second gate.

**B.** Go through the gate and keep to the left of the field, down into the sunken lane (can be very muddy). At the bottom turn right and cross to the field gate. Go through gate and turn left onto the lane which takes you down to the main road. Turn right and return to Peterchurch.

**To continue with the longer route (Point A on map)** turn right to the crossroads, and take the fingerposted footpath to the left opposite Blackberry Cottage. Keep straight on with Cider House to your right, through the metal gate to the end of the track. Follow the waymarked lane to the right of Hill Farm, and cross the stile into the field. Stay on the right side of the field and cross the next stile onto the track. Turn left and follow the bridleway signs. *The views from here are wonderful to the north of Herefordshire and into south Shropshire.*

3. Where the track takes a sharp right turn by the entrance to Hill Farm continue straight on for 30 metres and cross the stile to the right into the field. Follow the right hand field boundary (*noting the wonderful veteran oak and ash in the corner – old boundary trees*) around to the top left corner, through the field gate ahead of you following waymarks. Go straight ahead following the track through the next field passing under the power lines. Go through gate and follow track passing through a copse and into a small field keeping along the right hand boundary.

4. Opposite you will see an old stone stile with a new wooden one behind; cross these and go straight across to the wood on the opposite

