

to gather bracken and fern. The dense bracken cover is being cut to keep paths open and encourage grazing.

Continue until you reach a fence on your right. Follow this and go through the second metal gate on your right marked with a blue waymark. Walk down the lovely cool sunken lane in to Twyn Coed mixed woodland. *Most of the large trees here are oak and ash (with some conifers) with a hazel understorey.* Follow the blue bridleway waymarks along the main track, bearing left when you come to the surfaced road (right is signed 'Private Road'). *The plantation of larch on the left is at final spacing before cropping. The roadside verge is full of flowers such as violets, wood sorrel, enchanter's nightshade, bluebell, dog's mercury and wood avens.*

Continue along the track, *spotting the mistletoe in the apple orchard on your right*, which will bring you to the crossroads and thence to the Castle where we started. Well worth the walk up the hill for a closer look.

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HISTORY AND FABLES

Snodhill Castle

The name 'Snod' comes from the Anglo Saxon 'Snoed' signifying a piece of land separated from a manor. The tower is Norman, so the castle was built before the end of the C12th. The Castle suffered severely from a bombardment by the Scottish Presbyterian army in the Civil War. All that remains now is the keep and its gate towers.

The ruins feature in the diary of Rev Francis Kilvert. He describes a glorious picnic held there in June 1870. A string of horses and carriages bore members of the local gentry, 'an unwonted sight to the dwellers of the Golden Valley', up to Snodhill where they lit a fire to bake potatoes and ate and drank sumptuously.

Snodhill Court

'Court' signifies that the local magistrates dispensed justice in this house which was built in the C17th from the stone of the castle ruins.

Ley Lines

In the 1920s Alfred Watkins of Hereford suggested that these lines marked by burial mounds, standing stones, hill forts, old moated sites and church towers were formed deliberately. One such Ley Line can be drawn from Skirrid-Fawr (mountain) northwards to Arthur's Stone, passing over the camp and southern point of Hatterrall Hill, Old Castle, Longtown, Urishay and Snodhill castles. There also appears to be a line from Monmouth north, passing through Snodhill Castle to Whitney.

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

Golden Valley Walks

Snodhill



This walk starts at the ruins of Snodhill Castle. It takes you through remote and secret country, over hills with spectacular views and through woodland and wooded stream valleys. From Vagar Hill there are views to the Black Mountains towards the SW and across to the Shropshire hills in the opposite direction.

OS Map no: Explorer OL13
Distance: 9¼ km (5¾ miles)



Cars may be parked with consideration on the wide verge opposite the gate to the castle remains but not directly in view of the cottage, or on the verge further round the bend in the road.

Leaving the entrance to the castle on your left follow the road between Snodhill Court and its farm buildings to the crossroads and go straight over up the 'no through road'. After the stone cottages on the right take the tarmac track to the left with the wooden footpath fingerpost, through the edge of a wood of standard oak with coppice hazel. *Tall oaks like these were highly valued for building and ship timbers. These oaks were also coppiced to provide a constant supply of timber for making charcoal for early power stations and an extract of the bark was used in the leather tanning process.*

As you leave the woodland an old apple orchard appears on the right. *Traditionally these orchards were undergrazed, and so produced meat as well as fruit for eating, cooking, selling and brewing!* Go through the field gate across the track and follow it until it runs out staying to the right of the field and aiming for the windmill in the trees ahead. Go below the recently fenced area with its plantation of walnut trees and through the field gate, along track to left of the buildings and straight ahead through waymarked field gate.

2. Follow the path down to the stream and bear right immediately after the bridge and cross the stile. Follow the trees on your right (*note the plantation of larch, the only conifer that drops its needles in winter! Its fresh needles in the spring are the brightest lime green, and its timber makes good fence posts*), going past the old wicket gate to the far corner of the field, cross the stream and follow the fence on the right.

These small dingle woodlands have survived because of their inaccessibility. They are havens for wildlife with a variety of habitats in a small area: stream, old trees, dead wood and coppice. They not only support their own wildlife but provide important havens for creatures on the move, acting both as stepping stones and corridors when linked by hedges to other woodlands.

Look out for the well hidden stile in the fence straight ahead and cross it and the field towards the farm buildings following the waymarked path to reach the lane. Turn right and walk past the farm buildings between the converted barns and through wooden gate. Turn diagonally left towards large wooden stable. Go through gate into stable yard and pass to left of stable and go through wicket gate by corner of stable into small field. Go diagonally across field through gate and head to bottom left hand corner of field. Climb left up short slope and through metal waymarked gate on your right.

Bear left uphill, aiming for the top right hand corner of field, turn right and follow the old ditch and wood bank on your left. (Do not cross stile). *Woodlands were essential to life, providing everything from fuel to tool: lop and top – silver birch, especially, bound tightly into faggots, was used for the quick hot burn for bread ovens; ash, so pliant when steamed, for bending to make wheel rims: medicine to building materials – willow, the source of natural aspirin; green oak timbers which have remained solid over so many centuries. Young trees and coppice re-growth*

needed protection from grazing animals, especially deer, so deep ditches were dug around the wood with the soil piled up on the woodland side. The remnants of these can be seen along here. The bushes and trees along the top of the wood bank are likely to be very old, and along these sunny edges in the spring you get a flush of ancient woodland species, such as bluebells and wood anemone.

3. Go through the next gate and continue with the remnant wood bank on your left, topped by ancient hazel coppice. The ditch is particularly wide here and wet judging by the flush of rushes. Walk through the remnant holly hedge, and go on up with the old hedge and fence on your left. *The hedge is fantastic for wildlife, nice and overgrown and full of nectar flowers, fruits, berries and nuts, and some winter cover: holly, hawthorn, hazel, rowan, apple, ash and silver birch.*

At the top of the field go through the small gate on your left. *The dry stone walls are a complete micro habitat, hosting some wonderful limestone loving plants such as thyme, harebell, mouse ear and spleenwort.* Follow the wall right through an unimproved field margin, *managed unintensively to allow grasses and flowers to flourish. This kind of field margin provides invaluable habitat for wildlife.*

At the top go through the gate onto Vagar Hill. *Vagar Hill is a registered Common.*

'Common land' is a misnomer as all common land is owned by someone, even if it is the local council. In the case of Vagar Hill it has one private owner, and there are twelve registered commoners with rights to graze sheep, cattle, horses and one right of estovers (collecting vegetation for firewood, bedding and fodder).

4. Walk across the rough common, keeping roughly parallel with the stone wall on your right, and heading towards the communications tower. *Tracks meander through the gorse and bracken which have taken over the acid grassland. Some sheep graze the common but not enough to keep the grassland open. You may see patches of burnt gorse. This management opens small areas for the sheep. The stone wall is very distinctive, having a very solid structure topped in places with ancient gnarled and twisted hawthorn. You will pass the ruins of Glis Farm on your left before you reach the end of the wall.*

Turn right through the field gate and follow the track past the communications tower and straight down the hill. Turn right at the crossroads along the 'no through road', past a barn on the left.

5. Just after the track turns sharply to the right take the bridleway marked with a fingerpost on the left. The path turns sharply back down into the woodland. Cross the stream and continue following blue waymarks through the gate and following, with the stream on your left, another lovely little dingle woodland.

Keep on the track as it rises away from the stream onto the bracken covered West Lawn Common. *No owner has been found for West Lawn Common, and so, under the Commons Registration Act 1965, it is ministered under the auspices of the council. There are eight rights of pasture, for sheep, cattle and horses, one right to take tree toppings and one*

