

# ON THE BLACK HILL

Sid Palmer of the Ramblers' Hereford Group leads a walk through the county's most mountainous terrain

The Black Hill is the most mountainous part of Herefordshire on the eastern side of the Black Mountains. The Black Hill is also known as the "Cat's Back". If approaching from the east towards the Black Mountains the shape of the hill appears like the back of a hunched sitting cat.

1 Walking past the picnic tables climb over the stile and follow the path leading up the grassy/bracken slope towards the rocky area ahead of you. Take your time and stop to admire the views behind you and to the east. To the west and below you is the Llanveynoe valley. Above this is Hatterall Ridge where you will see people walking Offa's Dyke. Of further interest is that virtually due west and on the lower west flank of Hatterall Ridge is The Vision, the home of the two brothers described in Bruce Chatwin's famous 1982 book *On the Black Hill*. The book centres on the lives of Lewis and Benjamin Jones whose lives were led almost entirely around "The Vision". Chatwin was a regular visitor to this area from the age of 15 and towards the end of his life often came here to write. There is also a powerful film, with wonderful photography of the area, directed by Andrew Grieve (1987).

Continue to walk along the ridge, take care when crossing or climbing on the rocky outcrops and enjoy the panorama as it unfolds ahead of you. In the springtime look out for the ponies with their foals. After walking for almost 1.5 miles you will reach the trig point 2,000 ft above sea level.



Walk along the Black Hill to Trig Point

2 From the trig point, walk to the left around the waterlogged area, and follow the track which moves away from the ridge in a north westerly direction. Continue to follow the track northwest moving away from the ridge. Walk gradually downhill until you reach the bridleway identified by a small pile of stones.

At the bridleway turn left almost going back on yourself, now walking southeast along the bridleway which descends with a steeper gradient. Take care when walking over wet patches as you proceed along the track. Enjoy the superb views of the Llanveynoe valley as you walk. Stop to admire the tumbling stream, however, carefully negotiate the rocky patch of the bridleway beyond the stream. Go down the bridleway until you reach a tree-lined area. Then continue southeast until you reach the minor road.

3 Continue straight on, along the road, and note the now derelict moss-covered farm buildings which continue along this road into Llanveynoe. These indicate a time of an active population at Upper Bleun which existed over hundreds of years, and the

importance of these tracks during that period.

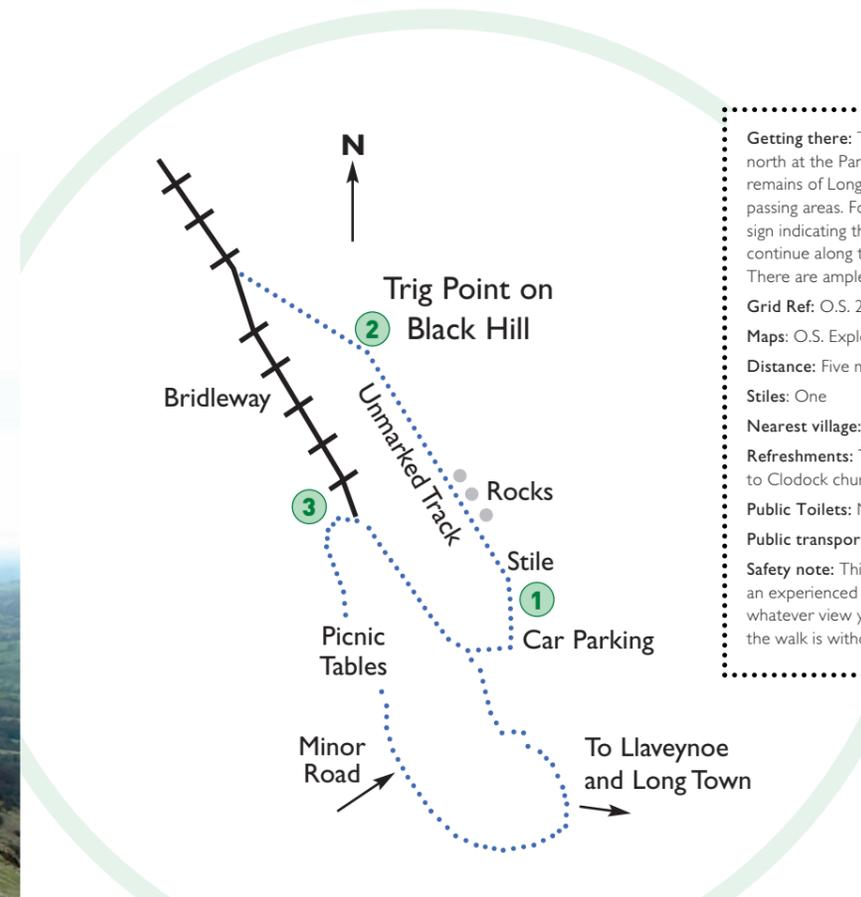
Continue walking along the tree-lined road, admiring the views until you reach the turning on the left taking you up the steep incline to where the cars are parked.

Although not part of the walk there are two other places of interest extending back over hundreds of years which are well worth a visit after the walk.

Retracing your car journey south and just beyond the second junction, on the right is Llanveynoe church dedicated to St Beuno and St Peter and rebuilt in the 13th century. St Beuno was a Celtic saint who is believed to have founded the church c.AD 600. The major dedications of St Beuno are in northern part of Wales.

Within and around the church are a number of ancient stones and a cross which have been discovered in the vicinity of the church. These are considered to be of considerable antiquity and can now be seen displayed within and outside the church.

Particularly look at those within the church which were installed during the enlargement of the church in 1912, also take



**Getting there:** The easiest way to the Black Hill is to follow the A465 to Pandy, then turn north at the Pandy Inn and follow the road signposted to Longtown. Continuing past the remains of Longtown Castle, the road then becomes a single track road with frequent passing areas. Follow the signs to Llanveynoe. At the next two junctions, follow the first sign indicating the Black Hill and the second sign indicating the picnic area. At this junction continue along the left road for ¼ mile and turn right up a steep hill to the picnic site. There are ample areas to park your car.

**Grid Ref:** O.S. 288327

**Maps:** O.S. Explorer map OL13

**Distance:** Five miles

**Stiles:** One

**Nearest village:** Longtown

**Refreshments:** The Crown Inn Longtown (08721 077077), Cornwall Arms turning next to Clodock church (evenings and weekends only)

**Public Toilets:** None

**Public transport:** None

**Safety note:** This area is at times subject to low cloud. In these conditions, unless you are an experienced mountain walker with appropriate equipment, simply turn back and enjoy whatever view you have. On a fine day it is as well to take sun cream and a hat as most of the walk is without tree cover. In any weather you will need an OS map and compass.

## THE RAMBLERS



The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and to improve conditions for all walkers. With 139,000 members in England, Scotland and Wales, The Ramblers have been working for walkers for 70 years. In Herefordshire we have four local groups, Hereford, Mortimer, Ross on Wye and Leadon Vale and organise about six walks a week.

**For more information contact Tom Fisher, tel: 01886 821544 or email: tom.fisher@virgin.net**



Above left to right: Llanveynoe Church was rebuilt in the 13th century; stream tumbling down from bridleway; view of Black Hill on the approach from Llanveynoe  
Below: Ponies on the ridge



time to look at the very ancient stone cross now erected on the south side.

Continuing south, the second place of interest is Longtown castle. At one time this extended over three acres. This castle was built about the beginning of the 12th century. However the existing buildings are considered to be 14th century. An earlier version of a motte and bailey was originally erected further south. From the west of the tower there is a stunning view of the valley towards Llanveynoe and if you are lucky, you may see a sheep hurrying for its lunch. ■