

TO MONNOW, TO MONNOW

Hazel Alexander of the Hereford Group of the Ramblers takes collies Ludo and Mina on a spring walk where they encounter horses, sheep, cats and a giraffe

1 With thoughts of spring, lambs leaping and wild daffodils nodding Ludo, Mina and I set out from the village of Clodock, named after Saint Clydawg. Formerly in Wales, that language was spoken here until the early 19th century. We begin on, and tread part of the Monnow Valley Walk¹. Ludo and Mina will be on leads unless it is possible to spot a stock-free field. We head east along the lane toward Walterstone taking the first stile on the right opposite The Cornwall Arms, a parlour pub where a 'giraffe' nibbles the tree in the garden! Climb this stile and walk along the hedge to the next. Crossing this, a froth of sheep drives us forward as if on the crest of a woolly wave until we reach a footbridge with a stile. Head diagonally over the next field to a stile, to the right of a caravan, then cross to the gated footbridge and into the next field where you cut across left to a new gate. Cross this road and walk up the lane.

2 Past the farm on the right the road bends around to the left and becomes the drive to Cwm Farm. Mina easily navigates the cattle grid; Ludo approaches gingerly as if it might suddenly bite. Safely over, it is "leads on" as we climb onwards with the house on our left to a metal gate which I struggle to open. This green track is often muddy despite the proximity of a torrent on the right. Go through another gate into an open field, head for the double stile straight up ahead, but

pause to look behind at the views. No sheep today so Ludo and Mina speed up the hill and I plod on heading for the top left hand corner of the field. Follow the marker around to the left, cross this stile and the next. Follow the old trackway left along the bottom of Hatterrall Hill which looms high above. Soaring even higher ravens give their rasping rusty croaks. Sheep roam freely here and the dogs are uneasy as the creatures cross our path regularly, often at speed, leaving the air heavy with their scent. Keep on this path as it hugs the bottom of the hill. Where it splits and the main track goes down to the left, go through a gate to your right to keep the contour. Just past the house there is a stile on your left, climb this and descend steeply to the next one. The remains of the previous stone one, makes this problematic. Ludo regards it with trepidation, fearing for his little knees,



Looking back to Hatterrall

while I give Mina a hand. Continue down and diagonally right across the next field to a stile that is obscured until you are nearly upon it. Cross but do not, as the marker tells you to, turn right (as you will wind up in the corner with nowhere to go). Instead, keep on the same line which you have been walking. As you approach the edge of the field, a five bar gate sporting an arrow directs you right, along the hedge line. Follow this hedge until you come to an intersecting track before a house. Turn left through the farmyard of Oldcastle Court. Thank goodness the dogs are not free; a clowder of cats sits in an impressive multicoloured assembly outside the farmhouse. Movement in the barn implies there are more!

3 Head down the road beside the church. Do not be tempted to eat your sandwiches in the porch, as it is now private a house. Head straight down the lane, and at the T-junction. turn left for a few paces. Climb the stile on your right, and keep a straight line parallel with the hedge. Continue to the corner of the field even though you seem to be entering a dead-end. At the last moment, the path turns right and you will see the footbridge. Cross over the Monnow and continue parallel to the fence, as straight as you can, around the trees and water. As you start to ascend, look for a stile ahead near a building to your left. Climbing up the next field with the hedge on your left, you pass a long abandoned vehicle, then

a clutch of old chicken coops. Stop to view Hatterrall. To the south, Sugar Loaf peeps over where Hatterrall descends to the valley, and shapely Skirrid commands the far side. Continue to the lane and turn left.

4 When the lane bends right, if you need refreshment, walk along it to The Carpenters Arms at Walterstone. Otherwise, climb the stile beside the gate on your left. Facing north cross to the next stile in the hedge. There is a motte and bailey on your right, after which cross another stile. At the fence, follow the arrow directing you left. The footpath has been diverted here. Go down the path, then right along the fence. At the end, take a diagonal line

across to the top left-hand corner stile. After climbing over, turn left as indicated. Now a short stretch of field to cross, but a string of ponies swarm through from the field below, and stand between us, a lot of mud and the next stile, eyeing the dogs. Horses incense Ludo, and I have to frog-march him past quick as I can. Head down this track and just past the tree, before the bend, look out for the stile set back in the hedge on the right. Cross into a fallow-field straight over past the redundant stile, to an L-shaped bridge with two stiles taking you over a stream and onto a track. Here begins the ascent of the saddleback hill Mynydd Ferddin. On the track towards the farm, take the stile on your right and turn left ►

Ludo and Mina paddle in the Monnow



THE WALK

Start/parking Beside the church Clodock

Maps OS Explorer 202 ref.SO 490414

Distance 6 miles

Grade Moderate

Stiles 25+

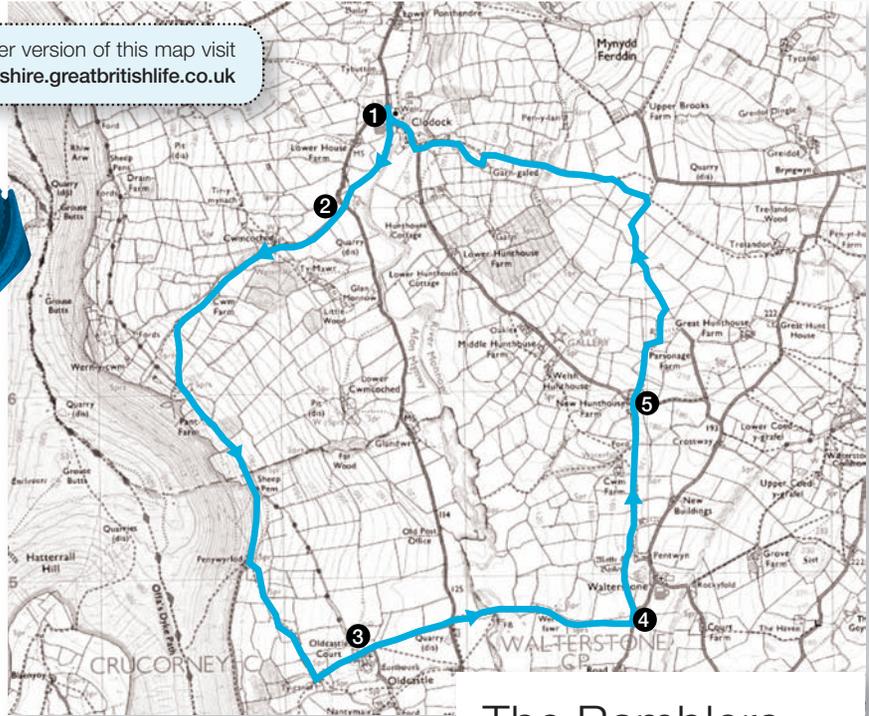
Public transport Nearest bus X4. 3.4 miles at Pandy. For details ring Traveline on 0871 708374

Nearest Town Abergavenny

Refreshments The Cornwall Arms, tel: 01873 860677 or The Carpenters Arms Walterstone, tel: 01873 890353

Toilets As refreshments

To view a larger version of this map visit www.herefordshire.greatbritishlife.co.uk



The Ramblers

The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and improve conditions for all walkers. In Herefordshire there are four groups: Hereford, Mortimer, Ross-on-Wye and Leadon Vale. **For more information contact Tom Fisher, tel: 01886 821544 or email: tom.fisher@virgin.net**



heading to a point between the farm and the barns, to cross the lane.

5 Enter the farmyard and head right behind the farmhouse. This is an objectionable few steps, to the tricky stile, due to the 'litter'. Head up the field, with the farm on your left, to a copse. Go over a stile into and through it to another stile into another field. Continue diagonally left upwards to a gate to the left of a house. Go along the side and then turn right where you will reach a driveway. I was perplexed here until I spotted a stile hidden behind a few short trees to my left. Go over this to two stiles taking you across the drive of another house and into the next field. Keep the hedge on your left and cross to another stile. Then head diagonally for the track-way on the right. Making sure that all gates are left as you find them, follow this right hand hedge line up five fields, bearing right into the sixth and the top. The sheer volume of sheep we have passed visibly dazes Ludo and Mina, but I am rewarded with a glorious panorama before the descent.

Keep walking with the hedge on your right, in the top field, until you reach a stile. Turn left across to the hedge. With it on your left walk to its end, follow the marker left and through a gate, then immediately right through a second.



Ludo and Mina at the spring

Walk across the field with the hedge on your left and go through the gate. Keep to the right hand hedge as you descend. When the track becomes steeper follow it round to the left, then head across the field to the right again and the stile in the corner. Keep going straight, passing an abandoned vehicle and farm. Scramble down by the tree and over the stream to a stile. With the hedge on your left, cross the field into the next. By the cottage head straight on down the footpath, look out for the friendly collie. A difficult gate leads onto a deep cut track to the road. Cross to the path on the right of the cottage. As you reach the Monnow, look for the sacred spring. On the other bank, is Clodock Mill. In spring, its gardens are host to wild daffodils and buildings to lesser horseshoe bats.² Ludo is keen to paddle

and play, Mina to stoop for a quick sup before we head over the bridge to the Cornwall Arms for a Herefordshire cider. The 12th century Grade 1 church is well worth seeing. ■

¹ Monnow Valley Walk – Llwybr Dyffryn Mynwy. A 65.5km/40-mile pastoral route along the Monnow Valley between England and Wales between Monmouth and Hay Bluff, joining Offa's Dyke Path to Hay.

² Clodock Mill
<http://www.clodockmill.com/>

