



Walk 30 Gray Hill

Start Foresters' Oaks picnic site, Wentwood (ST 428939).

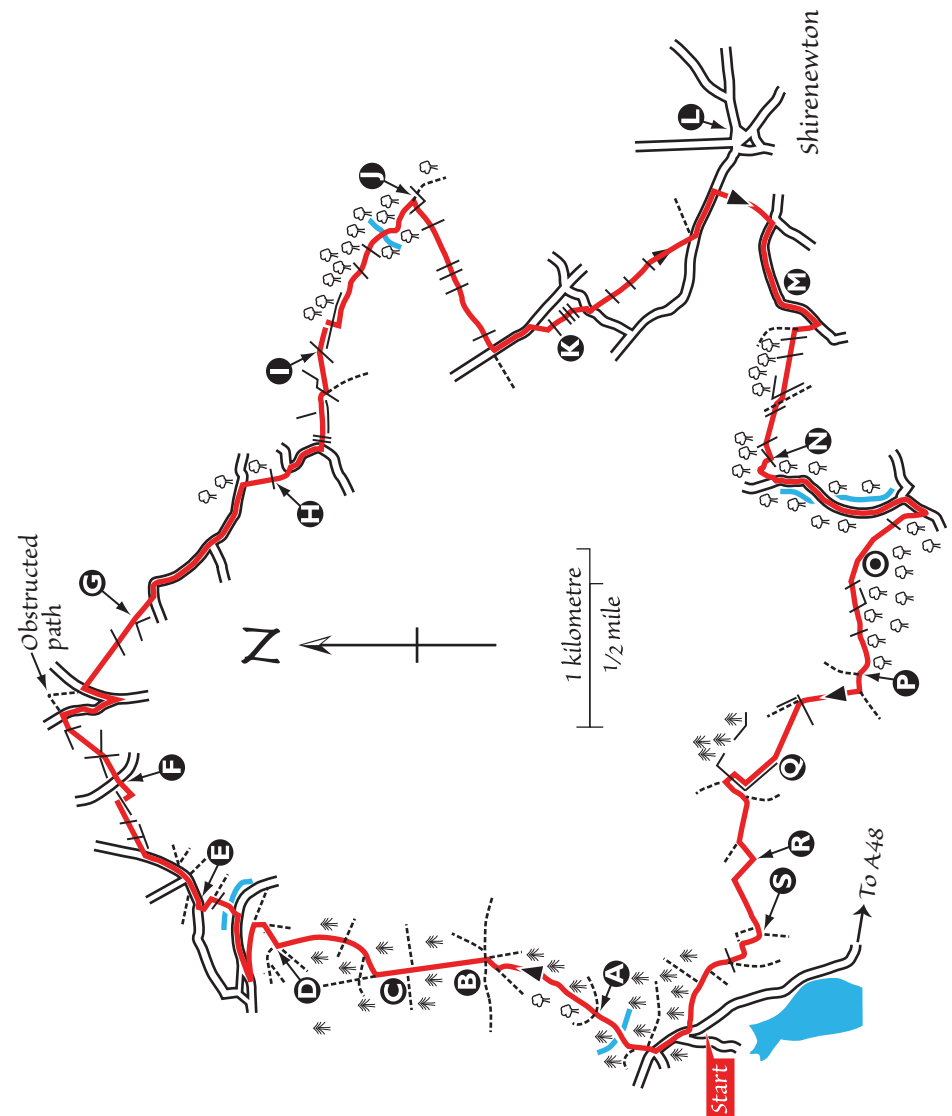
Distance 12 Miles / 19.2km.

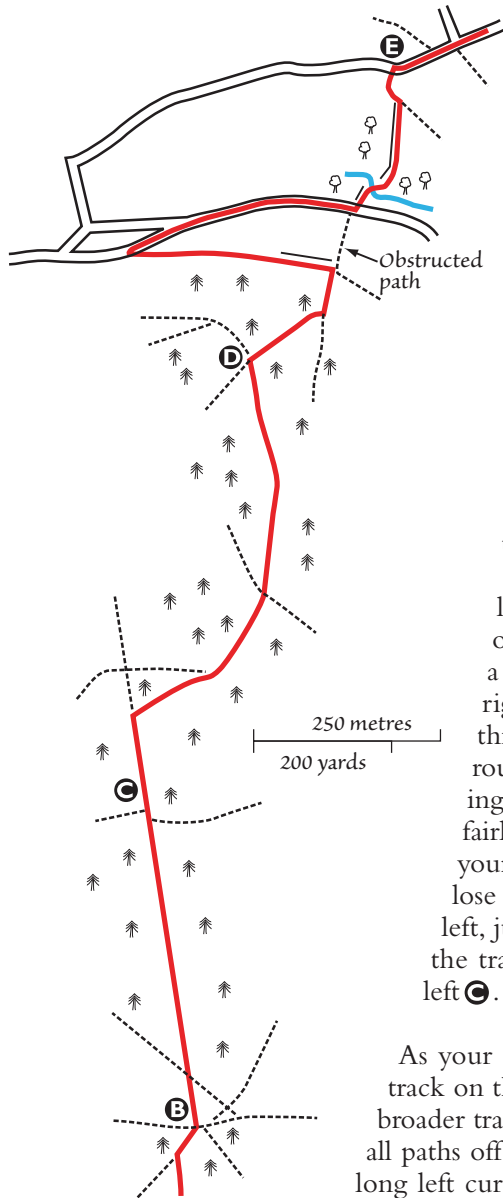
Refreshments Tredegar Arms, Shirenewton (just off route).

Getting there M48 junction 2 onto A466 signed Chepstow. Turn left onto the A48, passing over and under the motorway, then about 1.5 miles further, look for a road on the right, signed Llanvair Discoed and Wentwood. Take this, passing through Llanvair, then with Wentwood reservoir to your left. Now look for the (poorly) signed entrance to the car park on the left.

A fairly strenuous walk through lovely countryside – heath and woodland, plus farmland and country lanes. Several climbs, though none too steep, rewarded with fine views so a clear day should be chosen. Many of the paths in this area have been blocked for years and even those encountered on this walk have stiles that become heavily overgrown in mid-summer, when a walking pole and secateurs are advisable. Allow up to 6 hours, perhaps longer in summer. Please report any obstructions.

From the Foresters Oaks picnic site, turn left and follow the road as far as the second turning left where you take the track right, into Wentwood signed 'Earlswood 2.2k'.





The paths and tracks in this woodland can be deceptive and some paths are overgrown, so please follow directions with care.

Ignore a track joining immediately from the right, but as your track bears round to the left (to reach forestry workshops), fork right onto a narrower muddy track into the woodland. Continue, crossing two small streams (that frequently flood the path), to reach a path junction **A**. Cross-paths curve away right and left, but your route climbs straight ahead, with a conifer plantation on the right. Keep on upwards to eventually arrive at a major track junction, known as 'The Five Paths' **B**. Turn right initially, keeping the woodland on your right and passing a track loop on the left. The next part of the junction is a cross-track, with a path descending sharp right. There is also a track straight ahead and this is the one you must take, walking in roughly the same direction as before reaching the junction. This track runs between a fairly open area on your left and woodland on your right, and in a short distance begins to lose height. Pass a track on the right, then one left, just before you reach the lowest point of the track where there is a small pond to your left **C**.

As your track starts to gain height, take the first track on the right. In a short distance as this joins a broader track, keep on in the same direction. Ignore all paths off the broad track as you follow it round a long left curve. After about 400 yards it goes slightly right, then, just before it bends more sharply to the left, there is a cross path with blue waymarks pointing left and right **D**. Take the path to the right. (If you want to be certain you are at the right point, just continue on the broad track round the bend and you will see that it forks up to the left and down to the right.)

So, following this narrow path to the right, you reach a lower track where you go left, then in a few yards, you reach a junction with a house ahead. The obvious path goes right, alongside wooden railings, but you must turn left. (The path you really need goes ahead, down the side of the house, but the owners have blocked it!) Walk left with the boundary on the right, eventually passing behind a house on the right, from where you follow the driveway for a short distance to a road. Turn sharp right and follow the tarmac, passing a lane on the left, then a driveway to 'North Hill House' on the right. A short distance further, look for a stile on the left, often heavily overgrown, beside an electricity pole. (The blocked path from the forest reached the road here, on the right.)

The next stretch can be hard going in summer, as beyond this stile there is an unbridged stream (new bridge promised by Monmouth County Council in 2004), followed by a pathless route uphill through bracken. If you can't face this or if the stile here is impassable, you must retrace your steps, going right at the lane, right again at a junction, then follow the road to **E** a driveway signed 'Barn Farm'. Hopefully, you will choose to take the Right of Way over the stile.

Beyond the stile, make your way ahead with the remains of the boundary to your left, to reach the stream with derelict brick buildings visible left. With no obvious crossing point, go right a little until a house comes into view at the top of the hill beyond the stream. Crossing is not too difficult here as the water is shallow and there are stones on the streambed to aid you. Once over, head straight up the hill, keeping to the left boundary and the house up to your right, cursing the landowner all the while! In the top left corner of the meadow you will find a stile, climb over and drop down the banking to a driveway, then go left along the drive to the road **E**.

Turn right and follow the road for about 500 yards, passing a lane and house on the left and then two footpath signs, both of which should be ignored. Pass a brown wooden shed in the field on the right, then just before the second electricity pole from here, climb a stile on the right and follow the right boundary down the field to go through a metal field gate. Continue, crossing a ditch and onwards to a stile. Cross, and walk up the hill, looking for a stile in the right boundary. Climb it, then go left, walking in the same direction but with the boundary on your left (often very overgrown). At the top of this field, climb a further stile to access a road **F**. Cross to another stile, beyond which, walk ahead with the boundary to your left and go through a gate on the far side. In the next field, go half-left, aiming initially for the green barn in the distance, then when the field gate comes into view, head for that. Go through and continue to a stile and lane beyond.

Long-blocked paths ahead now force you to a little tarmac walking, so turn right and proceed to a road junction where you go sharp left, continuing to a footpath

sign on the right by a field gate. (The obstructed footpath should emerge from the field on the left, but at the time of writing, no exit has been made, nine years after the first complaint.) Enter the field, often cropped in summer, and cross it going a little to the left and aiming for a gate in the far hedge. In the following field, keep in the same direction passing the hedge corner on your right **G** from where you veer right, continuing to the far side of the field and going through a gate to a lane.

Turn left and walk for just over a half-mile, passing a lane then a farm on the right. You leave the tarmac at an old metal field gate on the right. (This is located just before the lane reaches woodland and bends round to the left, with metal railings visible on the right.) Go through the gate and follow the right boundary down the meadow to a small gate hidden in the bottom corner. Go through **H** and cross a wooden bridge over a stream. Beyond this, walk ahead over the grass to join a driveway with a house to the right. Climb the drive, go through a gate to a road and turn right to climb the hill. Near the top, as the road bears right, climb over/go through double field gates on the left and walk along the top of the field following the right boundary. Continue through the following field over difficult ground to climb a stile at the far side.

In this next meadow, with a farm visible ahead, walk downhill, half-left, aiming for a gate and stile beyond the line of bushes that mark the right boundary **I**. Climb over and walk with the boundary to your right until you approach woodland, then look for an old metal field gate in the fence on the right. Negotiate this, then continue in the same direction, boundary left and cropped fields right, to a stile and footbridge into a meadow. Go ahead to another stile then beyond, follow the path onward into woodland. Pass a stream running over the path and continue to where the path ends at a gate ahead **J**. Here, go over the stile on the right then climb the fields, keeping to the left. (If the stile is too overgrown, go ahead through the metal gate, turn right and immediately right again through another metal gate, then immediately left to climb the fields.) You go over a stile and pass through several gates before reaching a farm driveway, where you continue up to the road.

Cross over, turn left, and walk along this busy road with care, passing beneath power lines and continuing to a visible left bend. Just beyond here, go through a field gate on the right (opposite a gate on the left) and climb diagonally to the opposite top corner. Climb the gate here **K** and walk along the top of the field, boundary right, then go through another field gate followed by a small gate next to a barn. (Landowners may have blocked part of this route, so be creative!) Continue through a further field gate, then walk a short distance to reach a road. Turn right for a few yards, and just beyond a farm entrance on the left, climb a stile, often overgrown.

Now walk along the field edge following the left boundary, climbing a stile ahead, then on to another. Continue in the same direction, going through a small metal gate walking downhill, with fine views ahead to the Severn Estuary. At the bottom of the field, climb a stile to reach the road. Turn left and follow the tarmac towards Shirenewton. Immediately after 30mph speed limit signs, take the track on the right. (The Tredegar Arms is a 10-minute walk further if you want refreshment **L**.) Follow the track, boundary left, to a road junction where you go sharp right, along the narrow Red House Lane, eventually passing 'The Red House' on your left **M** then a farm on the right. Shortly after, you reach woodland on your right and here, take the path up to the right (probably overgrown and unsigned). Follow this narrow route to reach a double stile on the left and climb over to enter a field.

Walk ahead across this field with trees up to the right, crossing a further stile, then aiming for the centre of the line of trees on the far boundary where you will find a stile. Climb over to a track and turn right. Walk for about 20 yards to reach a double stile on the left (obscured in summer), climb this, then go over the field to a stile in the right end of the cross-fence. Beyond this, follow the right boundary down to the field corner, ignoring a stile on the right, but a short distance further, going through a second stile into woodland **N**.

Beyond the gate, go immediately left, then in a few yards left again on a barely discernable path. In a short distance you double-back to the right and from here, the path is much clearer as you descend through woodland. The path bends to the right, straightens out, and then turns sharp left by an old gatepost. Continue the descent to reach a lane. Turn left and follow the tarmac for a half-mile to a junction, where you turn right. Walk now until you pass a field gate on the left, then a few yards further on the right, look for a path into woodland that climbs back up to the right. You have a stiff ascent now, and at the top you climb a stile in the wire fence on the left, into a meadow.

Walk ahead now, aiming for the far end of the row of trees that mark the left boundary **O** then continue along the boundary to go through a small wooden gate. Walk ahead with woodland to your left, reaching a metal gate ahead. Beyond this, follow the left boundary again, passing through a metal field gate in the far boundary. Keep on in the same direction, boundary left, and when that turns left continue ahead, eventually reaching a driveway **P**. Follow it a short distance left to a stile on the right, noticing the limekilns in the woodland a little distance from the driveway.

Imperceptibly, your ascent of Gray Hill now begins. Climb the stile and walk up the meadow keeping right, to the top corner where you climb the fence by the water trough. Now go diagonally left for about 400 yards aiming for a thatched building **Q**.

This is one of a number of buildings used by the BBC for a 2005 television series 'Tales from the Green Valley' recreating farming in the 17th century. The farm was abandoned in the 19th century, but in 1987, work started to restore the entire 15 acre site to its late 16th early 17th century condition. A number of collapsed period buildings have been restored so far, from Long-houses to pig sties and much of the 3 miles of field boundaries have been reinstated along with ponds and wells. (You have to climb a gate to get into the site but it is rare that anyone is there.)

From this point head north up the hill with a wall on your left. As you approach the wall ahead, look for a memorial stone to the right in the wall with a stone stile behind it. Go over this and then left along a path with the wall on your left and the wood on your right for about 150 yards. Where the path turns left downhill, take the path uphill to the right and follow it until you reach a large flat stone in the middle of the path which is a bit like a step. At this point, there is a minor path to the left. Take this, which may be overgrown in summer and with brambles. Persevere for about 250 yards to reach a standing stone with a number of fallen stones round it. This is the Gray Hill stone circle ❸.

4000 years ago, Bronze Age people manhandled these extremely heavy stones up the slopes of Gray Hill, and embedded them in the ground to create a circle, 12 metres in diameter, with two



The stone circle, seen at its best in late winter when the bracken has died down

other stones standing a little way beyond. It is thought to have been a burial site, with the remains of many stone cairns and other structures scattered all around.

Look north towards the ridge and a short distance ahead you will see another standing stone (an outlier). Follow a good path towards it and then continue on through earthworks to reach the ridge and a main path. Turn left here and follow it, passing signs of quarrying on your left. Suddenly, you are on the top ❹. Superb views all round now, with Wentwood to the north.

There are several paths from the summit and the one you want is on the right, as you face the reservoir (there is another path right a little further back that could also be taken). Descend steeply, ignoring a path joining from the right, to reach a gate. Go through and follow the track ahead, passing a stile on the left, then a track to the right just before a house on the left. When you reach a tarmac driveway, continue on to arrive at a road. Turn right, returning to the car park a short distance on your left.