

Golden Valley Walks

Michaelchurch Escley

on your left and into the field through a small gate on the right. Walk down the field to the bottom left hand corner, through the gate and diagonally left to the far corner.

Go through gate and straight down with the hedge on your left, through a field gate, past the wonderful Old House on your left and down the track. Take first stile on left and go diagonally left across field. Cross stone stile, brook and stile. Cross stile and go straight across field to stile in hedge, cross it and turn left onto road. Walk along the road and go through the field gate on the right with a fingerpost, across a small field and over a footbridge back to the Inn.

•••••

HISTORY AND FABLES

Michaelchurch

The church contains a large wall painting depicting Christ of the Trades. The gridiron and frying pan are discernible.

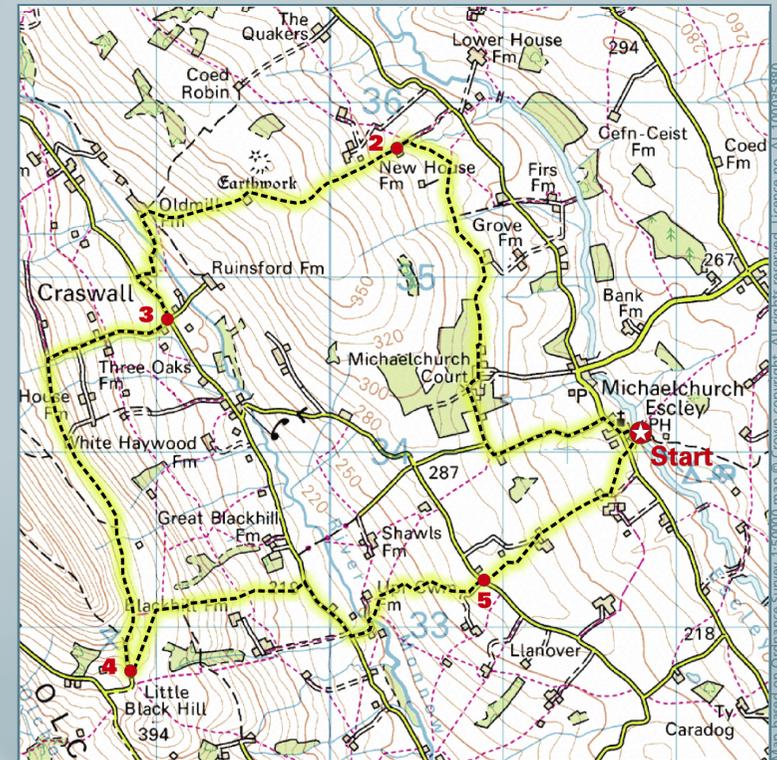
Michaelchurch Court

This house, which is Elizabethan and half timbered with gables in various patterns, is a possible site of the fictional Chalet School in the books by Elinor Brent Dyer. She told how the school was evacuated to the Golden Valley during the Second World War. The author was herself the headmistress of a preparatory school in Hereford. She wrote another children's novel, *The Lost Staircase*, which is also set in the Golden Valley.

Black Hill (also known locally as 'Cat's Back')

Bruce Chatwin used the name for the title of his book *'On the Black Hill'* (1982). This reflective novel about the pastoral lives of twin hill farmers born at the beginning of the C20th captured much of the essence of the remote life of the Welsh border country. More recently local people fought off a proposal to erect a wind farm on the side of the hill.

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



This walk is highly scenic, passing from Cefn Ridge over the Black Hill car park and picnic site and back to Michaelchurch. There are some steepish gradients but it is well worth the effort.

OS Map no: Explorer OL13
Distance: 11 km (7 miles)



Park at the Bridge Inn, Michaelchurch, with permission, or on the left just up Craswall Road opposite the church.

From The Bridge Inn walk up to the main road and turn right (*after taking 5 minutes to explore the church*). Take first left signposted Craswall. After New Barns Farm and right hand bend go straight, where the road turns to the left, along the track with fingerpost to Michaelchurch Court. Keep right at fork behind the house. *The old stone wall on the right is cool, shady and damp, perfect for the mosses, liverworts and ferns that cover it. Black spleenwort, polypody and the straplike fronds of hart's tongue fern are the most distinctive.* Keep straight on with the new green barn on your right and Holly Wood on your left.

At the end of the wood cross the stile and bear right down across the field through the waymarked gap in the hedge line and across the field to the large oak in the bottom corner. After the metal gate by the farm take the first metal gate on the left and follow the track by the hedge. After next metal gate continue straight again following the farm track to field gate. Continue along the track with the hedge on the left. Before the next field boundary bear right down to the bottom of the hedge in front of you, cross stile in the fence and go straight ahead to a small bridge, another small field with Holt Barn on your left, and join the farm track.

2. Turn left behind the farm and then right on track though field gate and over a brook. Go directly up the field keeping roughly parallel with the hedge on the right, and aiming to the right of the line of trees that comes half way down the field. Cross stile at top left hand corner, then the next field, arriving at Cefn Road, *an old green lane or drovers road. These were mostly used for moving animals and they were often sunken and hedged to keep the animals under control.*

Cross the lane and bear right over the hill in the next field. *On a clear day you will be rewarded with beautiful views over The Offa's Dyke ridge, and the Black Hill (or the Cat's Back) where you are heading. This kind of landscape is a rare sight these days, a patchwork of small irregular fields, bounded by thick hedges which link small copses and larger woods. Above the fence line is the open moorland of Black Hill.*

Go through the waymarked gap in the tree line just above the ruined buildings (Trelan Farm), cross the stile behind the first building and bear down left to the metal gate. Go straight across the field, keeping the gate on your right, to the stile in the fence below the field gate. *Note the lovely veteran ash tree.* Cross and go down to stile in middle of hedge below.

Cross stile and go diagonally down to the right to the field gate. Cross the next field to the stile in the hedge above the gate, down the steps and another stile into the farmyard. Go sharp left in front of the house onto track, over the River Monnow on wooden footbridge and to the road and turn left.

3. Take the first right, 'no through road', up a long steep lane; *take your time and enjoy the cool shade of the overgrown hazel hedges, and botanise along the verges.* At the top take the bridleway to the left along a beautiful green lane *again lined by hazel hedges on hedge banks*, onto Black Hill.

Black Hill is a registered Common, and has 45 registered Commoners who have rights to graze the hill with sheep, cattle and ponies. It is a small part of the Black Mountains which straddles the border into Wales, and is covered in acidic grassland and shrub heath.

Follow the distinct track along the flank of the hill until you reach the picnic area and car park. *A good place for a sit and to drink in the views and some tea!*

4. Walk down the lane and take the first stile over the fence on your left. Bear left over the hill down to the stile, turn right through field gate, and a short way down go through gate on left. Head downhill keeping the field boundary on your right, following bridleway waymarks and gates to the road and turn right.

Just after Blackhill Farm sign on the right turn left down the track to Upper Cwm Farm. Bear left on track, right over footbridge and left uphill to the stile in the hedge. Cross and follow fence and hedge on your right. Go right through field gate and diagonally right up to the top corner of field and cross stile into a small wood. Go diagonally left to stile in far top corner and left through gate and along the lane to the road.

5. Turn right and immediately left over stile and follow field edge round to far right hand corner, cross stile and go directly across next field through the field gate and aim for the barn.

The owners of The Glebe would ask you not to follow the right of way through their garden but to go through the field gate and then directly down with the barns on your right and the house

