

Walks - Lancaut Loop

Sheer limestone cliffs, dramatic views, ruins and a scramble across boulders and along narrow ledges by a river drop. Not for the faint hearted or weak kneed.

Bus Service: Various to Chepstow including 73; 74; X10; XII; X14

Bus Stop: Chepstow Bus Station
Length: 9 km
Time: 3 hours plus
Refreshments: In Chepstow or Rising Sun, Woodcroft.



Watch Tower

(1) Starting at the bus station, turn left heading downhill passing through the old town gate and down the High Street. At traffic lights cross into pedestrianised Mary Street to the right of a shop called 'Artists Corner'. At the bottom, turn left, then almost immediately right heading downhill. To your left is Chepstow Castle and the Tourist Information Centre. Continue ahead, crossing the old Wye Bridge (2) over the river. To your left, Chepstow Castle, to your right the old railway bridge designed by Brunel and half-way across you leave Wales to enter England. Continue along the left hand side pavement as the road sweeps to the left and uphill (Ignore a 'Gloucester Way' signpost on the other side of the road). Continue up past a road called 'Elmdale' and a house called 'Elm Villa' (3). Go left just after the house, squeezing through a very narrow 'squeeze' stile or over the metal gate. Follow track with hedge to the right, past derelict cowsheds, until the track ends in a gate.

The fields here are all 'open access' under special agreement as part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Climb gate and head diagonally uphill. A white house will come into view, head towards it, veering slightly towards a metal gate to the

left by some trees. Go through the gap between two trees, continuing uphill, skirting the edge of some trees around a hollow and continuing towards the house. Just before the house turn left on a path (Offa's Dyke Path) passing a stone ruin (4) thought to have been a look-out tower or windmill. In the corner of the field is a metal kissing gate, go through, keeping stone wall to your left for 150 metres. Where the wall meets a higher wall is a kissing gate (5). Go through between a fence and the wall. At the driveway, turn sharp right for 35 metres, then through a black kissing gate on the left.

Follow grassy path diagonally across the field towards a kissing gate in the corner. The green-painted mansion to your right is called 'Pen Moel'. At the kissing gate (6) ignore the right-hand turning waymarked 'Offa's Dyke' and turn ahead left ducking under a low wooden bridge marked 'Lancaut Nature Reserve'. Drop steeply down through woodland with 300ft limestone cliffs rising to your right and the River Wye to your left. Continue along the path, which is narrow and

precipitous in places, for approx 250m. The path goes through some overhanging bushes (you need to stoop) to emerge on a boulder-strewn scree slope (7).

The boulders come from Woodcroft Quarry in the cliffs above. Limestone was loaded onto boats from massive timber platforms built at the bottom of the scree slope.

Cross the boulders following the yellow marks to a narrow path which rises, drops sharply and then rises again (Be warned, the path is steep and precipitous, with a river drop to one side). At the top at a T-junction of paths, turn left following a path through woodland and under the cliffs for about 500 metres.

The cliffs above form Wintour's Leap, a popular haunt of climbers and among the highest inland cliffs in England or Wales. The leap is named after Sir John Wintour, a prominent but unpopular landowner and iron master from nearby Lydney. A royalist during the civil war when most of Gloucester was parliamentarian, he is said to have escaped pursuing Roundheads by leaping on horseback down the cliffs.

The path veers left and heads down to the banks of the river. Follow the clear path through woods by the river to a small clearing. The path then splits – one route (very muddy at times) going straight ahead, the other up steps beside an old quarry face. Both routes meet in another clearing and continue to a metal stile. Climb over and walk between brambles to an old tree. Turn right uphill by marker post (8).

Detour right over stone stile into 11th Century St James's Church. Lancaut - from 'Llan' meaning 'church' and 'Cewydd', a Welsh saint. There has been a settlement on Lancaut since Norman times. It is believed the peninsula was at one time a leper colony.

Climb hill (steep and slippery when wet) with church to right, to reach a bench with views down the river and across to the cliffs. Veer right uphill to second metal stile.

Cross, enter woods and continue uphill keeping to the right. At a T-junction of paths turn right passing two derelict lime kilns and up to a road (9). Turn right on road for about 500m passing a house called 'Spital Meend' on your left. Continue to a junction (10). Cross the road (taking care) and go right for 30m to small green. Cross green to the same road and walk along road for

60m. Just before the first house on the right, turn right up Offa's Dyke Path (11). Walk along the top of the cliffs, through a kissing gate, and along the edge of a quarry with views to the Severn Estuary on your left. At a rough lane (12), go left to detour to The Rising Sun, otherwise straight ahead past Old School House. Continue through two kissing gates to a third taking you to a road (13). Cross and turn right downhill for 70m looking for Offa's Dyke fingerpost by green kissing gate on the opposite side of the road. Go through, under low bridge, and continue with wall to the right. You are now walking under Pen Moel House. At the kissing gate (6), go left, retracing your route back to Chepstow.

