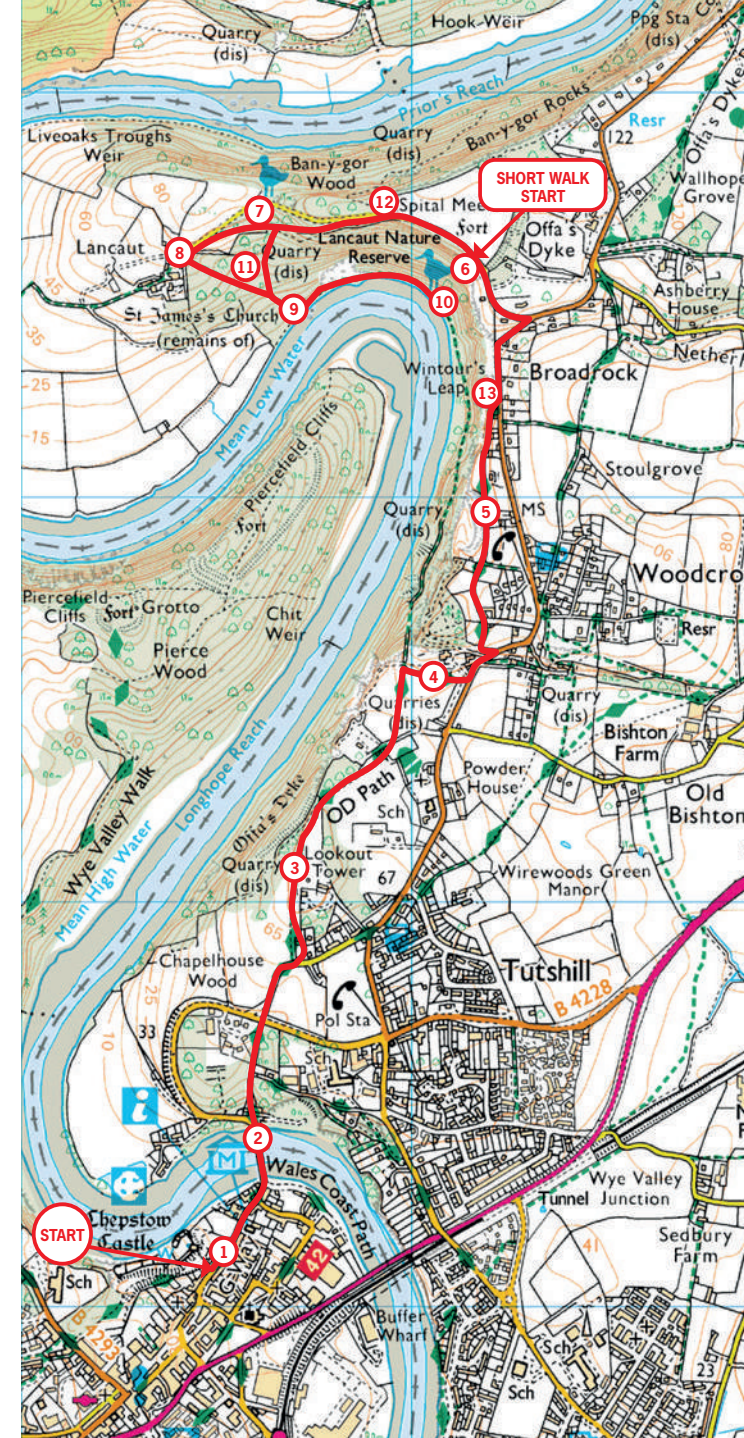


Discover the Lancaut Peninsular



The situation, on one of the crooks of the Wye, and just above the river is romantic in the extreme.
(Eleanor Ormerod, 19th century)



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We would like to thank Mark Evans for enabling access to Lancaut

Saving St James' Church

St James' was abandoned in 1865, but it wasn't until 1984, when the chancel collapsed, that interest in saving the church led to the establishment of the Lancaut Church Preservation Group who began a programme of repair. In 2013 the Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust bought the church for £1 from the Queen (the Crown Estate) to secure its future and undertake restoration and conservation work with grants from Heritage Lottery Fund, Gloucestershire Environmental Trust and English Heritage to rebuild the chancel arch. They now care for this very special place.

The Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust saves buildings at risk in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley and raises funds to conserve them. Projects include Whitecliff Ironworks and Gunns Mill. Find out more at: www.fodbpt.org



Images reproduced courtesy of Gloucester Cathedral, Monmouthshire Museums Service, Neil Parkhouse and Private Collection.

This leaflet has been produced by the Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust in partnership with the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit.



Stop at the metal gate on the left and look to the left to see the earth banks and ramparts of an Iron Age promontory hillfort.

This is a naturally strong defensive position, enclosed within a loop of the river. Recent excavations have found a Roman, possibly military, presence here in the 1st and 2nd centuries, suggesting this corner of the hillfort may have been annexed to build a signal station. This bank may be part of Offa's Dyke. In the 14th century the bank was widened and surfaced, with stones covering much of the area to the left. At least one marker stone was erected in the bank, suggesting there may have been a leper colony or infirmary close by at Spital Meend. Perhaps the bank was redefined to form a physical boundary, the marker and surfacing warning of diseased burials in this triangular area.

Continue back to the carpark where the short walk ends. Alternatively retrace your route back to Chepstow. Don't miss a last look at the view from Wintour's Leap (13).

Legend has it that during the Civil War the Royalist Sir John Wintour escaped capture by the Parliamentarians by leaping down these precipitous cliffs and crossing the Wye. Little has changed in the view since the engraving below was made some 200 years ago. Can you spot the church?

There's also an inscription to look out for on an archway a little further along the return route. See if you can spot 'Donkey Lane'.

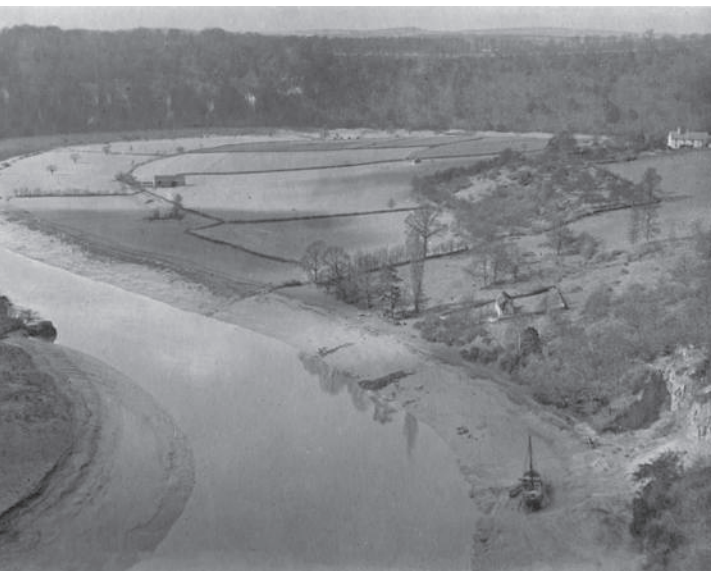


Leave the churchyard and walk down to the river passing the ruins of 'Fish House Cottage' on the left below the churchyard wall. Go through the gate and continue beside the river and up some steps. This 'mound' may have been used to load trows with quarried stone and remains of the quarrying industry litter this area. You can see it in the old photo below to the right of the trow. **You can continue along the path to a bench (10) where you can sit and enjoy the views stretching down the Wye towards Chepstow.** Look around for stonework and a chain here, more signs of the massive quarrying industry which employed many local men until the 1950s.

Fallen scree now makes the old fisherman's path back to Chepstow dangerous, **so retrace your route back to the church (9)**

As you follow the path uphill from the church look to the left to spot several flat terraced areas one above the other **(11)**. These levelled platforms are the remains of building plots and in a few places the line of a wall can be seen. This is the deserted medieval village of Lancaut, a place where people lived, farmed, fished and worshipped.

Continue uphill through a kissing gate and keep climbing. At a T-junction turn right passing old lime kilns and, just after them on the left, evidence of where the lime burnt in the kilns was quarried. Continue up to a road and turn right to reach (12).



Start:

at Chepstow Castle **(1)** (OS Grid Ref ST535941 OL14)

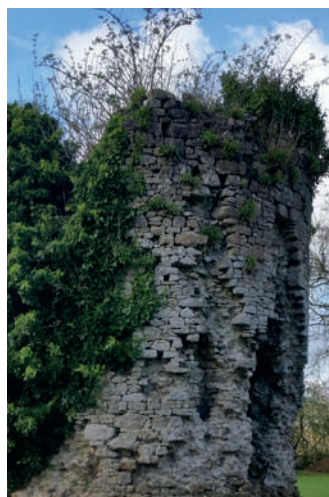
Length: approx 6 miles. Moderate climbs and descents.

Shorter walk starts at Lancaut Lane carpark by the falcon sculpture (point **6** on the map). This is ½mile north of Woodcroft off B4228. (OS Grid Ref ST541965)

Directions:

Turn left out of Chepstow Castle car park and walk down to and over the old bridge spanning the Wye (2).

Halfway across the bridge is the border between Wales and England but you won't need your passport today! The border has moved over the centuries and Lancaut and the Forest of Dean were part of the Welsh kingdom of Eryng in the early medieval period.



At the end of the bridge cross the road to join The Gloucestershire Way. Continue up this walled lane until you reach the road. Cross the road and follow the Offa's Dyke Path along the lane and then turn left through a kissing gate into a field signposted Offa's Dyke Path. Walking uphill, head towards the top right hand corner of the field.

You pass a ruined lookout tower or windmill **(3)** on your right, thought to have been converted into a folly in the early 19th century. Look out for evergreen oaks along this section of the walk.

In the far corner of the field is a metal kissing gate, which you go through keeping the stone wall to your left for about 150 m. Where the wall meets a higher wall is another kissing gate.

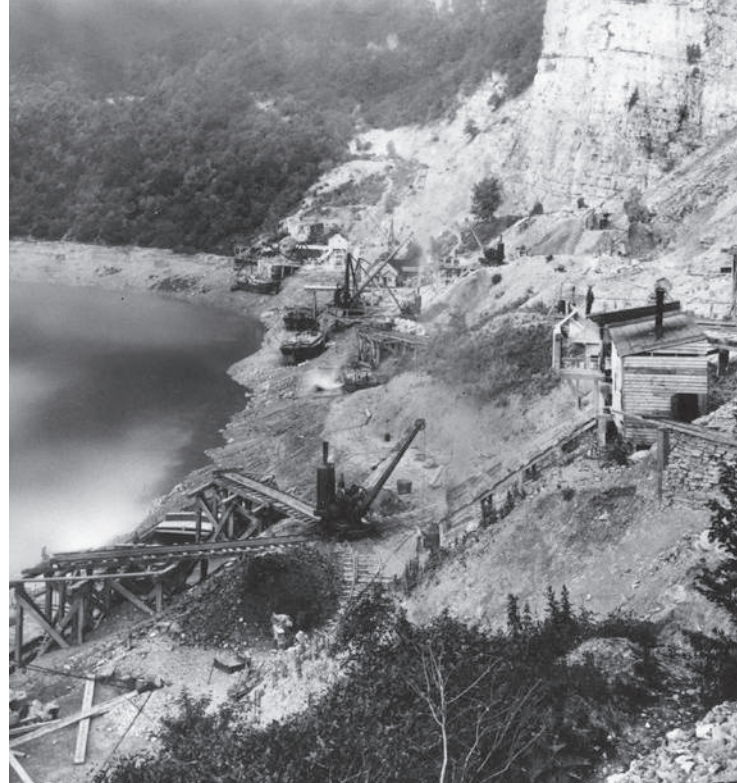
Go through, between a fence and a walled garden on your right. At the driveway turn sharp right along the wall and very soon left through a kissing gate.

Follow the grassy path straight across the fields towards the kissing gate opposite. (4)

To your right is a large Victorian mansion called 'Pen Moel', which was rebuilt in the 1890s.

Turn right at the kissing gate and continue to the road. Turn left to cross the road and walk uphill for a short distance. Cross the road again at the 'Offa's Dyke' sign (on the left) and follow Offa's Dyke Path uphill. Keep following Offa's Dyke Path signs at the junction, from where there are good views of the old Severn Bridge.

The path now runs along the top of quarried cliffs (5) and after a short distance the view opens out so that on a clear day you can see your destination - Lancaut Church. The cliffs below held valuable resources of limestone and have been extensively quarried. The quarried limestone was loaded onto flat-bottomed river boats, called trows, from massive timber platforms. In the 1870s huge quantities of limestone went to Bristol to build Avonmouth Docks. Many local men worked here and there is evidence of this hidden industry all around, although the area is now covered with woodland. Peregrines nest here and the area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest managed by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. The cliffs are also popular with climbers.



This old photo shows the quarry.

Keep straight on under the footbridge and through a kissing gate. At the road turn left and cross the road, walking along the roadside for a short distance. To avoid the road keep on the grass path and cut the corner off at Fox Hollies. Turn left at the 'Lancaut ¾' sign and continue along this road, passing 'Spital Meend' on your right and soon after the peregrine sculpture and car park on the left (6).

Start of Short Walk (6)

Walk downhill, ignoring sign for Lancaut church on left, passing Ban y gor Nature Reserve (7) on the right, where a Roman oil lamp from North Africa, dating from the 5th century was found.

Cross the cattle grid and at the junction (8) turn sharp left through the first gate into the field. Walk downhill diagonally to the right of the veteran oak tree where you can enjoy the lovely views of the cliffs surrounding the isolated Lancaut Peninsula. Continue in the same direction downhill to the far right hand corner of the field. There are some levelled patches and bumps in this field which are probably the remains of the lost medieval village of Lancaut. Go through the small wooden gate downhill to visit the ruined 12th century church (9).

Lancaut – a church and a deserted village

There has been a place of worship here since at least 625 AD, making it one of the earliest sites of Christian activity in the Wye Valley. The original church was dedicated to St Cewydd. He may have been a monk who helped spread Christianity inland along the Wye from the centre of religious learning at Llancarfon in the Vale of Glamorgan. Alternatively, Christianity may have expanded down the Wye from Archenfield (in Herefordshire), which had been a stronghold of Celtic Christianity since Roman times, led by St Dubricius. These churches were often built in isolated locations, beside water and a day's walk apart. Almost completely surrounded by the river, the Lancaut peninsula was an ideal location. Historical references suggest there may have been an early monastic community here, but recent archaeological investigations have raised more questions than answers, although numerous burials have been identified around the church.



The Wye provided an easy route inland for Viking raiders who, in 914, took the Bishop of Archenfield prisoner for a ransom of £400! The Vikings may have destroyed the original church here, as the one you see today was probably built by the Lord of Chepstow Castle around 1067 and given its dedication to St James at this time. The church became the focal point of the medieval village which grew up around it. It is difficult to know if the village was English or Welsh. Its name suggests it was Welsh as 'Llan' is the old Welsh word for a church or land consecrated for burials. However, it is on the wrong side of the river, which forms today's boundary between England and Wales.

We don't know why the village died, maybe Black Death took its toll. By 1750 there were only 2 inhabited houses left. Despite the declining number of villagers, church services continued because 'of the exceeding picturesqueness of the spot', as Eleanor Ormerod wrote in the 1840s. 'The wealth of yellow daffodils and white narcissus, which grew by the Wye, close to the little church of Lancaut, helped greatly towards the decoration' as the graves were dressed with flowers on Palm Sunday.

Medicinal plants such as Marjoram, Hellebore and Elecampane still grow in the churchyard around the stone base of the preaching cross, adding credence to the idea that there may have been a leper colony or infirmary close by, remembered in the name of nearby 'Spital Meend'. Only fragments of gravestones survive, some with an unusual heart decoration, recording burials between the 16th and 19th centuries.



In the 1840s a local antiquary, George Ormerod and his family, made drawings which show the church in the last decades of its use, furnished with box pews and a pulpit. The Vicar of Woolaston ordered the abandonment of Lancaut church in 1865 and the roof was dismantled and the internal furnishings removed. This 12th century lead font was removed and can now be seen in Gloucester Cathedral.