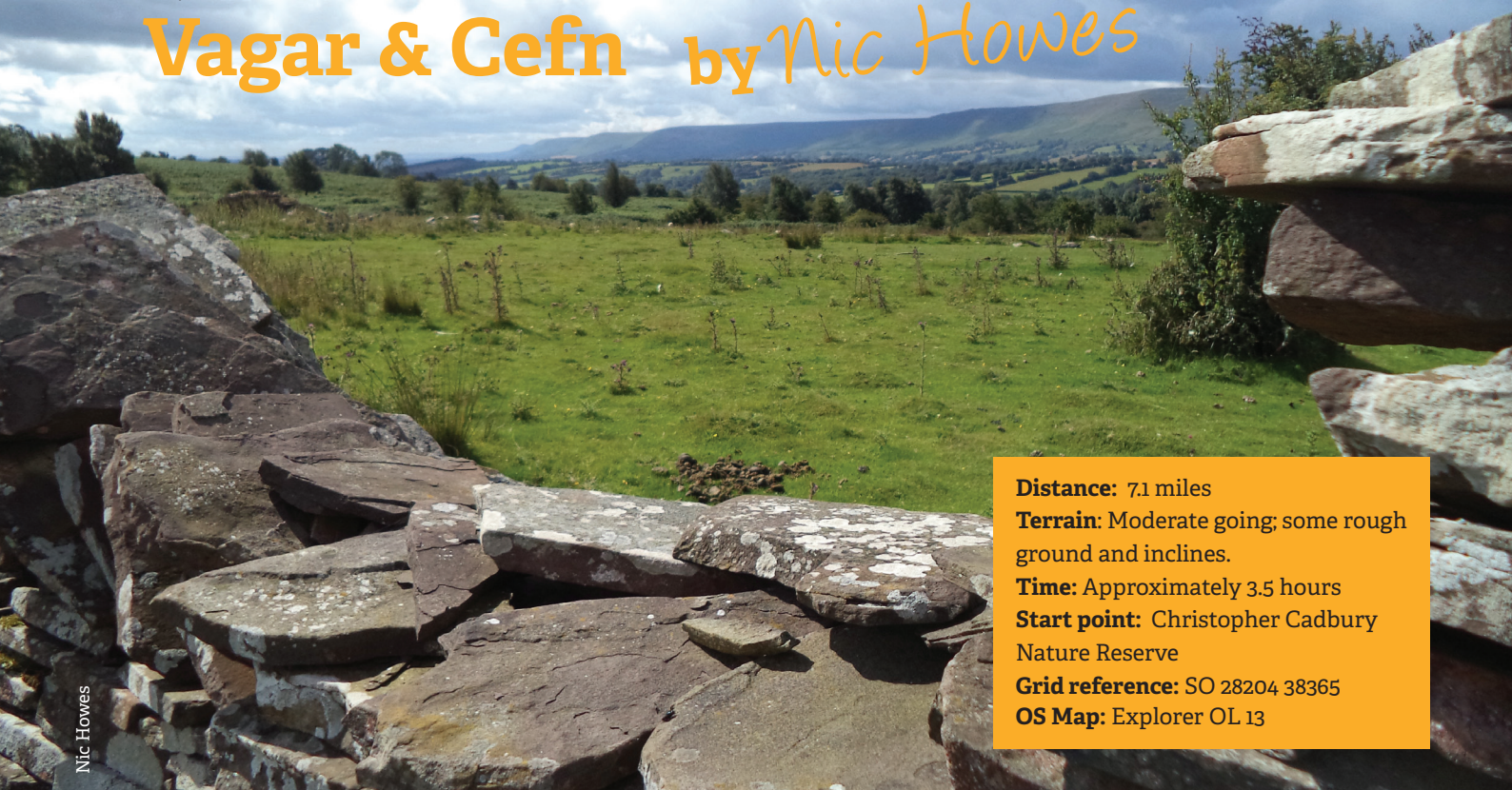


# Exploring the landscape of **Vagar & Cefn** by Nic Howes



Nic Howes

**Distance:** 7.1 miles  
**Terrain:** Moderate going; some rough ground and inclines.  
**Time:** Approximately 3.5 hours  
**Start point:** Christopher Cadbury Nature Reserve  
**Grid reference:** SO 28204 38365  
**OS Map:** Explorer OL 13

Park in gateway to reserve (shown as parking on the reserve guide) or drive a little further towards Hay and park beneath trees in shallow layby on right, just before right hand bend.

Enter the reserve at a small metal gate and fingerpost (s) and walk straight ahead down to the Escley Brook with the hedge on your left. On the way you may notice two small breaks in slope marking the eastern ends of two old leats (water collection ditches) that cross the reserve. Pass to the right of a house and garden wall and cross the Escley Brook on a footbridge into Glibes Wood (point 1).

The footpaths and way marks may be confusing in the wood for a few hundred metres but aim left towards the fence at the western edge of the wood. When you reach the fence turn right uphill until you discover an obscured stile. Cross this into the field and turn half right to climb towards a distant metal gate among trees; views of the Black Mountains begin to open to your left. Walk across a sandstone outcrop to access the gate and pass through it into a field that you cross to pass a way marked post beside a telegraph pole.

Continue to a footbridge and gate at the corner of Blaenau (point 2).

Pass to the left of the house along the garden boundary. Continue along the garden boundary until you reach a gate on the right to give you access to the yard at the bottom of the house's drive. Follow the drive uphill, out of the yard and on to the abandoned buildings of Glibes Farm (point 3).

Not much further on the drive bends right and here you should pass through the metal gate on the left to keep straight ahead through rough grazing, with the hedge line on your left. Keep on this line for about 150 metres, at which point go through a gap into the second field on the left since you left the gate. Head through rushes towards the bottom right corner of this field ahead, where a stile lies hidden. Cross this stile into the next field and head for the farm track ahead.

Follow this farm track and pass through a metal gate borne on 'H' section metal girders; ignore the boggy, collapsed, way marked stile on the left at this point. Follow the farm track towards the buildings of Maerdy Farm (point 4) and keep ahead with the

buildings on your left; as they begin to peel away uphill, continue on the level across the field towards a distant stile.

Cross the stile and continue on your line until you see the buildings of Pucha farm, which you should aim for; pass through a gate immediately to the right of the house and beyond it turn left to access the surfaced lane via a wide gateway. Walk left up the lane, which begins to level out after the conifer plantation at Cae Mawr, at the same point that the landscape opens out (point 5).

There are now great views of the Black Mountains' Hatterall Ridge and Black Hill on your left. Shortly after reaching the rough grazing of Vagar Hill common land, look for a small gate and signed bridleway on your right. Pass through this and head across the common land in the direction indicated by the signpost until you meet a clearly defined footpath coming up from Birches Farm below on your left. Turn right up this for a short distance and then fork left up the less steep of two grassy paths (note that this is not following the line of the bridleway as shown on the map). Just before the ridge crest you will pass a distinct



# Wild Walks

spring on your left, one of several that feed the headwaters of the Escley Brook.

At the crest of the ridge (**point 6**) panoramic views open up from north, clockwise round to west. Head left (northwest) along the ridge crest and try to pick out the thin needle of the Black Mixen mast on the summit of Radnor Forest away to the north. As you continue this walk it is possible to identify other distinctive hills in this panorama, including Stiperstones, Longmynd, Caer Caradoc, Titterstone Clee, Brown Clee, Malverns, Aconbury, Saddlebow, Orcop, Forest of Dean, Garway, Graig Sefeddryn, Skirrid, Black Mountains, Brecon Beacons and the far silhouette of the Black Mountain (Carmarthen Fan).

You will notice hummocky ground on the ridge crest to your left, which may be the remains of stone quarries. Pass the walls of abandoned Glis Farm. Just after a gate to the Vagar Hill mast on the right, go straight ahead through a gate into an ancient green lane – possibly a drovers' road – continuing along the ridge crest. Pass through

a metal gate after passing the back of Wern Agavenny. Look out for the prehistoric standing stone which you will pass on your left. Pass through another metal gate and across the surfaced lane (from Michaelchurch Escley to Hay) to reach another gate beside an interpretation board for Cefn Hill Common (**point 7**). The board refers to The Trust's Community Commons Project and mentions previous sightings of curlew, snipe, skylark and meadow pipit, as well as colourful waxcap fungi.

Pass through this gate and follow the grass path, keeping the edge of the conifer plantation on your right. After nearly 1 km you reach the crest of the ridge, where there is an inlet into the forestry with a wooden gate at its apex; ignore this gate and instead turn left along the crest of Cefn Hill Common (southeast). At the highest point of this walk (just over 480 metres, among more quarry hummocks, point 8) it is worth pausing to take in the panorama. Continuing along the ridge the enclosed land to left and right closes in so that you are walking the centre line of a ribbon of common land. On

the right horizon is a solitary small tree that is situated near the point where the "thumb" of the Black Hill/Cat's Back breaks away from the "forefinger" of Offa's Dyke Path/ Hatterall Hill ridge.

As you draw level with a rusty barn in the fields on your left, look out for a stile and waymark on your right; use this as your cue to turn left off the ridge crest to find a way marked stile by a gate to take you into enclosed land (**point 9**). If you overshoot this stile you will notice a marked narrowing of the strip of common land and the inhabited Caetomkin house on your left – time to retrace your steps.

Once over the stile you should gently descend the field ahead with the hedgerow on your left. At the bottom end of this field go left through a gate and then immediately right, now keeping the hedgerow on your right. Go through another gate and continue ahead and down to a redeveloped chapel. Note the active stone quarry straight ahead. At the chapel you will meet the surfaced road and should turn right to walk back just over 1 km to the start.

