

THE ANGEL HOTEL

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The Skirrid Fawr

*a walk up Abergavenny's Holy Mountain
with wonderful views of Abergavenny and the Usk valley*



The Skirrid Fawr, just outside Abergavenny, is the long ridge in the centre of this photograph

Length & duration (shortest route): approx. 3 miles (5 km), 292m of ascent, 2 – 2 ½ hours

Access: Moderate walk but can be very muddy in parts after rainfall. Sensible footwear essential and wet weather clothing recommended as the weather on top of the Skirrid can change very quickly.

Map: Walks are naturally taken at your own risk and you may wish to use an Ordnance Survey Explorer map (OL13 - Brecon Beacons National Park East). This may be purchased from Abergavenny Bookshop, higher up Cross Street, on the corner by the Market Hall. Starting point OS Grid Reference Explorer Map OL13 SO 330165.

Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

Getting there by car

The start of this route is at a layby on the B4521 about 2½ miles from the hotel. From the hotel car park turn right, then left at the crossroads onto Merthyr Road. At the roundabout take the second exit. At the next roundabout, take the second exit (A40). Follow this road around the town centre until you come to a T-junction with a petrol station in front of you. At this junction turn left onto Hereford Road (B4521). After approx. 500 yards, immediately after crossing an old railway bridge, turn right (it is still the B4521), signposted to Skenfrith. Continue on the B4521 past Maiddiff Court Hospital (Rudolph Hess was held here after his capture during World War II and often walked the Skirrid Fawr) and Wern Ddu Golf Club on the right. The layby is less than a mile beyond the golf course, on the left at the crest of the hill. Park here.

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Directions

Take the path at the western end of the layby and walk between the fields to the start of Caer Wood. The path winds up through the woodland and is the most strenuous part of the walk. At the top of the wood you'll reach a gate in the stone wall. Go through the gate and turn right. After about 300 metres turn left and follow the track upwards. The 'staircase' path consists of wooden steps and a stone 'pavement' to help combat erosion. When you reach the top of this path you will be rewarded with a lovely view. To the left is a hillock which is well worth climbing up to explore yet another vista before continuing up on to the main ridge.

The route to the ridge is on the right, and within a very short distance you will be at the start of the mile-long ridge. The ridge, which is narrow in places and has some small rocky outcrops, offers wonderful views. As you walk towards the summit the Sugarloaf and the Black Mountains are on your left (to the west) and the Malvern Hills on your right (to the east). To the south is the Blorenge and, on a clear day, you may also be able to spot the city of Newport some twenty miles away.

The walk from here to the summit is longer than it first seems. Almost every time you see a peak in front of you that looks like it's the top, there's another one beyond it! Shortly before you arrive at the summit you will pass a large chunk of rock with names and initials carved on it sometimes referred to as Cist Arthur (Arthur's Chest). Immediately in front of the trig point (486 metres/1595 feet) are two stones and a hollow. This is all that remains of the doorway to St Michael's Chapel. Little is known about this ancient chapel but records show that Catholics met for Mass on this mountain in the 16th and 17th centuries. The summit is also ringed by an incomplete fortification ditch of an Iron Age fort.

You can return to the lay-by via the same route. Alternatively, to lengthen your route, after returning some 200 metres from the summit, take the descending path to your left. After a fairly steep descent, a footpath (which contours round the entire mountain) crosses over your path. You have a choice. The shorter route is to turn right and follow this path back to the gate in the stone wall near Caer Wood. Alternatively turn left follow the path right around the north side of the Skirrid Fawr and through the gap left by an ancient landslide and back to the gate in the stone wall near Caer Wood. The Welsh name for this mountain, Ysgryd Fawr, describes the hill's shape, signifying something which has been shattered. As you pass through the ravine you can look up and see a toadstool-shaped rock known as the Devil's Table. It is said that here that the Devil sat having tea when a local giant Jack o'Kent leapt across the valley from the Sugarloaf to leave his huge heel-print on the side of the Skirrid Fawr. There is a rich mythology attached to the mountain. Part of the mountain is said to have been broken off at the moment of Jesus' crucifixion. Another story claims that the notch on its west side was caused by the underside of Noah's ark. Locally it is known as the Holy Mountain and there was a tradition that earth from the Skirrid Fawr was holy. In times past it was taken away to be scattered on fields, in stables and pigsties, on coffins and in the foundations of churches.

Whichever route you use for your return journey, you'll arrive at the gate in the stone wall at the top of Caer Wood, and can retrace your steps down through the woodland and back to the layby.
