



## Walks at Croft Castle and Parkland

Croft is an ancient and secluded estate set amidst rolling hills in the Welsh Marches. The locality has been occupied for at least 4,500 years. First by Iron Age farmers living on the Croft Ambrey hillfort, and then by some 30 generations of the Croft family spanning almost a thousand years. Today, the estate is enjoyed for its tranquility, sweeping views, and ancient oak and sweet chestnut trees.

### Terrain

All of our walks are natural pathways with mixed terrain and can be muddy and slippery, so please wear appropriate footwear. Some sections are steep too.

Croft Castle, Yarpole, near Leominster, HR6 0BL.  
Telephone: 01568 780246  
Email: [croftcastle@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:croftcastle@nationaltrust.org.uk)

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## Highlights of the walks

Here are some of the features to look for as you walk around the estate. The numbers relate to those on the map overleaf:

### Croft Ambrey Walk

- ① **Main southwest gate** – Excavations in the 1960s revealed that this was a heavily fortified entrance with timber gates and guardrooms.
- ② **Storehouses** – Beneath the turf are the remains of many rectangular raised granaries or storehouses. **Ramparts**, in their heyday these defences were higher and steeper still, topped by a formidable palisade.
- ③ **East gate** – This too had wooden gates and guard chambers and beyond a hollow way led down to a spring which was the hillfort's water supply.
- ④ **Romano-British shrine** – Excavations here uncovered evidence of repeated fire ceremonies, animal sacrifices and feasting.
- ⑤ **Carriage drive** – The grassy track ahead is an old carriage drive created to carry the Crofts through their 'Picturesque' Fishpool Valley. Also an area rich with wildflowers particularly bluebell.

### Fishpool Valley Walk

- ① **Lime kiln** – Limestone quarried on the estate was burned in these wood-fired kilns to produce quicklime which was used as a fertiliser on the farmland.
- ② **Grotto** – Built into the far slope is a drystone grotto dating from the 1790s.
- ③ **Douglas Fir** – These majestic trees are 35–40 metres tall and close to 4 meters in girth.
- ④ **'Gothic' Pumphouse** – This used to pump piped spring water up to the castle.
- ⑤ **Spring fed pools** – These pools provide habitat for brown trout, dragonflies, bats, freshwater shrimps and rare native white-clawed crayfish.
- ⑥ **Icehouse** – Once this igloo shaped cellar would have been filled with winter ice from the ponds and used to cool drinks in the summer months.

### Ancient Tree Walk

- ① **Chestnuts** – Looking to your left and right you can see 400 - 500 year old chestnut trees and also newly planted ones grown their seeds.
- ② **Oak trees** – There are hundreds of ancient or veteran oak trees on the Croft estate, some over eight metres in girth. These are home to a host of species including many unique to old oaks.

- ③ **Hawthorns** – A little mystery; these very old Hawthorns are planted as though within an orchard. One explanation is they were the rootstock plants for a medlar tree orchard and when they died the rootstock took over.
- ④ **Chestnut avenue** – This was the original formal approach to the castle. A story says sweet chestnuts were taken from captured Spanish vessels and planted at Croft between 1580 and 1680 to represent the formal battle plan of the ships at the Armada.
- ⑤ **Quarry Oak** – Thought to be the most ancient at Croft and up to 1,000 year old with a girth of between 11–12 metres.

### Pokehouse Wood Walk

- ① **Bluebell wood** – Area rich with wildflowers associated with ancient woodland particularly bluebells.
- ② **Wood restoration** – This area was a PAWS (Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site) and we restored the woodland in 2009 by felling the conifers and replanting with native broadleaves mainly ash and oak.
- ③ **Riverside Inn pub** – Why not take a short detour through the gate following the public footpath turn left when you reach the road where you will find the Riverside Inn.
- ④ **SSSI River Lugg** – Part of the woodland falls into the River Lugg floodplain and so has SSSI status.
- ⑤ **Lime kilns** – Limestone quarried on the estate was burned in these wood-fired kilns to produce quicklime which was used as a fertiliser on the farmland.
- ⑥ **Old bridge** – The remains of the bridge was once part of the original formal approach to the castle.
- ⑦ **Oak wood pasture** – This area of woodpasture remains in the field but was once part of a much larger area extending up to the Croft Ambrey hillfort. We hope to restore this in partnership with the Forestry Commission in the near future.

### History from Castle to Mansion

Recent archaeological research has revealed that the present Croft Castle is only the latest in a series of buildings on the site. The earliest was a simple earth and timber castle, later rebuilt in stone. Described in 1535 as "somewhat rocky, dychid and wallullyd castle like", medieval Croft was probably a stone walled manorial complex similar to nearby Stokesay Castle, in Shropshire. But when Sir James Croft was reimbursed for his Calais Embassy in 1586, he promptly adapted the castle to include a small but elaborate, brick-built mansion framed by formal terraced gardens.