
1 Christianbury Crag

Theme: Rivers, seas and life

Location

1 Christianbury Crag — Carboniferous sandstone crag. There's a car park near Cuddyshall Bridge and it is a 16 kilometre rough roundtrip hike east to the Crag [NY 578 823].

Description

In the remote far north corner of Cumbria, surrounded by miles of Sitka spruce trees, stands a lofty crag. The views into Scotland and across Cumbria are expansive.

The landscape looks the same as the extensive sandstone uplands of Northumberland which lie only a few hundred metres to the east. As you might expect, Christianbury Crag shares the same geological history as its Northumberland cousins. It is also Carboniferous and around 340 million years old. Back then, as the grains and sloping layers in the rocks show, they were sand in a fast-flowing river draining to a southern sea. Burial under thousands more metres of sediment and uplift into mountains followed and only after millions of years of erosion did the crags we see now appear. Their disjointedness and rugged profile today owe much to the attrition and melting of ice sheets only 20,000 years ago and their pot-holed surface to weathering since. The crags are a small example of a 'rock city' with sandstone blocks separated by corridors.

Before the mass planting of conifers began here in the 1920's (a post-war move to secure a timber supply for the nation), Christianbury Crag was a prominent landmark. The 'Famous Christenbury Craigs' featured in a 1754 edition of "*The Gentleman's Magazine*" with a full-page engraving and was compared in stature to the manmade edifice of Stonehenge. It was described in Victorian travelogues as 'rising grimly from the heathery waste, a haunt of foxes'. Walter Scott's fictional characters frequented these rocks, as did real life murderers and their gamekeeper victim, Thomas Davidson, strangled in 1849. Today the crag is defended by thick forest and set in a superb blanket bog dominated by sphagnum mosses, heathers, cotton grass and deergrass. There are ring ousel, wheatear and whinchat around the rocks and breeding red grouse, dunlin and golden plover on the moor. Reaching the crags is a challenging uphill hike along forestry tracks and boggy footpaths. If you're seriously fit you might also want to take in Glendhu Hill, a candidate for England's most remote hill and pay your respects at Davidson's monument on the way back.

Photographs

(Photo 01-1) 1 View northwest over the eroded sandstone escarpment of Christianbury Crag.

(Photo 01-2) 1 Christianbury Crag.



(Photo 01-1) View northwest over the eroded sandstone escarpment of Christianbury Crag



(Photo 01-2) Christianbury Crag.