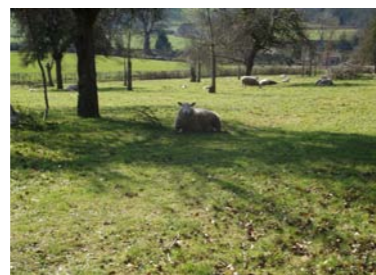


On the up

Above (1) Bredwardine bridge Below left (3) The ancient orchard by the church
Below right (4) Towards Old House Farm



Right (6) Arthur's Stone
Below (7) Approaching Merbach Hill

Greta Pennington of the Mortimer Group of the Ramblers leads an uphill walk visiting woods, dingles and ancient monuments around Bredwardine

The walk

(1) Walk down the road to the bridge over the River Wye, where you get very good views up and down stream, and over to the church. Cross the multi-arched bridge that was built in the 1770s up to the cottage on the right that is an old tollhouse (2). In 1963, when the river flooded, this building was nearly submerged. The next house along the road on the right is the 14th century Old Court. By crossing to the south of the river, you have now entered what is said to be the ancient, post Roman kingdom of Eryng. Opposite the tollhouse, go through the gate on your left, into the meadow, and walk over to the footbridge and then walk up between the old trees, towards the church (3). Cross the stile, and turn right to walk down the tree-lined drive to the road.

St Andrew's is part Norman. On the west side there is a blocked-up doorway that may possibly be Saxon in origin. It has a very interesting lintel, with much eroded carvings. It is thought that one of the figures is an exhibitionist or sheela na gig. It became known as the devil's door and has been defaced, possibly because the figure was displaying genitalia. Kilvert, of the famous diary, was vicar here and at Brobury on the north side of the river, in the 1870s. As you start down the drive, an old orchard has been opened up, on the left, for the public to walk round, under the DEFRA countryside stewardship scheme.

At the end of the drive, turn left on to the road and walk up towards the Red Lion (4). This is a 17th century coaching inn. Cross the B4352, take the lane on the left of the Red Lion,

and follow the track up to, and through the garden. Cross the stile and the next stile into the field and slant slightly left to the stile at the bottom of the slope. Having crossed this, slant quite steeply, up left to the stile in the hedge. Go across the next field to the hedge opposite and into the next field, and then round and up towards Oldhouse Farm (5) which you pass on your left. Then go along by the hedge to the gate into the field above. Go up this steep hill to the stile at the left hand edge of the wood. Having crossed, follow round the edge of the woodland to the next stile and walk up the gully to pass the ruins on your right.

Go up to the hedge above (do not cross at this point) and turn right to follow along for about 200 yards, with the wood below you on your right. Cross the stile on the left and then

walking straight ahead, and gradually rising, cross the next four fields, using the stiles, to come out, through the gate, on to the road, along the ridge.

Turn right and walk the few yards to Arthur's Stone (6). This is a Neolithic long barrow looked after by English Heritage. This striking cromlech stands on the ridge above the Golden Valley, an area rich in prehistoric archaeology. Arthur's Stone has nine stones and a huge capstone estimated as weighing 25 tonnes. The legends and the connection with Arthur date to the 13th century. This is a lovely place to linger, absorb the atmosphere, and admire the views.

Continue along the road for about 20 yards, go through the gate on the right, and walk down the track with the hedge on your right, to the gate. Slant diagonally left across the next field to the gate. Walk along the field edge,

with the hedge on your right, and at the end go right into the farm yard (7), and immediately left along the track to the road. Turn left and walk up the road for about 200 yards, to the bend and go through the gate on the right on to the approach to Merbach Hill. Go up the gently rising field keeping the hedge away to the left and contouring round with the highest parts away to the right. Go through the bridle gate on to Merbach Common. The top lies ahead, slightly to the right. The notice board gives a lot of information about the Common. Below on the eastern side are the remains of limestone burning kilns (8). Skylarks, meadow pipits and birds of prey, can be seen. In season, there are butterflies, particularly speckled wood, gatekeeper, meadow brown, comma and ringlets.

From the trig point (9), that marks

the height as 1043 feet, you look down the steep side of the hill to the impressive meanders of the River Wye. Further north, you can see Radnor Forest, while to the west lie the Black Mountains and beyond them, the Brecon Beacons. Now you walk to your right, eastwards, across the common being very careful not to lose much height. (To avoid doing this you can return to the bridle gate and then walk along the top of the common keeping the fence on your right and at the fence, go down left to the gates, just below.) The path winds down slightly, but does not lose too much height. Follow the track to the gate and bridle gate at OS 309446 that open out to a well marked, wide green lane and then to the road.

To the left, as you walk down the hill lie the remains of Crafta Webb (10). ▶

WALK



Above (9) Looking down to the Wye Valley and the River Wye

Left (8) Merbach Common

Below left (11) Erosion at Finestreet Dingle

Below right (4) Looking across to Caelees Wood



This was a squatter settlement that suddenly swelled the numbers of residents in Bredwardine to 400, following a bequest from a man called Jarvis, a former tramp who became very wealthy, after emigrating to America. He was very grateful to the villagers of Bredwardine who had treated him well when he was a tramp.

Carry straight down to the first building on the right. Turn right to pass the house and go through the bridle gate on the left into the field. This is Finestreet Dingle (11). The stream has eroded many deeply incised meanders.

Caelees Wood (12) rises above you on the left. Walk down the dingle with the stream on your left. At the bottom go through the bridle gate to walk down on the right hand side of the

garden, keeping the hedge on your right. Go straight over into the lane opposite. At the house at the end of the lane go left and then go through the gate on the right, and then left over the stile, to walk along the side of the field with the farmhouse (13) on the left. Go through the bridle gate and then left through the gate, and then, go right, down to the stile in the hedge just below. Go down this steep field and then over to the left to the stile at the bottom. Go down the next field towards the house and retrace your footsteps past the Red Lion (4) and the church and back to the starting point.

Take a diversion

At the church a path leads off to the right to the remains of the castle built by John de Bredwardine, after the

Getting there

Start OS Explorer 201 SO/337448.
Park in the lay-by opposite Brobury House

Distance 7 miles with about 600 feet ascent

Grade Moderate but with one short, quite steep ascent.

Stiles 15

Nearest town Hay-on-Wye

Refreshments Red Lion, Bredwardine (01981 500303).

Toilets None

Public transport Service 39 between Brecon, Hay-on-Wye and Hereford. Traveline (0871 2002233)

Bredwardine the plank settlement Bred means board (or plank) plus worthing, possibly a corruption of Eryng. It also means plan on slope of a steep ridge.

Norman Conquest. After 1374, it no longer existed as a castle and later, many of the stones were used to build a house at Mochas, two miles to the east. Along this path you can see the remains of the motte, look down on the Wye and visit the former fish pools that are now very attractive pools with rushes and birds. ■

The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and improve conditions for all walkers. In Herefordshire there are four groups: Hereford, Mortimer, Ross-on-Wye and Leadon Vale.



For more information contact Tom Fisher, tel: 01886 821544 or email: tom.fisher@virgin.net