

Tom Fisher, vice-chairman of the Herefordshire Ramblers' Association, takes a walk over two vast commons rich in wildlife, with panoramic views, going via an historic cider house which is now a lively pub, two tea rooms and two very different stately homes

1 From the car park by Brockhampton school, take the path opposite the school gates to the A44. Cross the road with care and take the stone path opposite, by the left turn sign. After 300 metres take a path on the left which leads to a stile. Cross this and go ahead to cross two further stiles. On reaching a hedge turn right and look for a path on your left at the side of an orchard. Go through the orchard, and continue to The Nuttage. Go through The Nuttage and over a stile into Bringsty Common.

2 Bringsty Common consists of 300 acres of common land which provides a diverse environment for a range of wildlife including the muntjac, the redwing and the merlin. The extensive bracken is home to the caterpillar of the rare high brown fritillary butterfly. As a common, it is designated as access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and you can walk anywhere except in private gardens.

3 Now go sharp left and follow the path round to the left before descending to a bridge. Cross the bridge and head up a muddy bank, looking ahead for the Worcestershire Way sign (don't worry, you are still in Herefordshire!) past Primrose Cottage to the Live & Let Live.

4 The Live & Let Live is one of the oldest buildings on the common and dates from c1700. It was originally a cider house. Between the wars, Bringsty Common and Bromyard Downs were favourite destinations for cyclists from Birmingham, and groups of up to 40 or 50 used to cycle down on a Sunday to picnic and visit the Live & Let Live. The pub was empty from 2002 – 2007 but has been wonderfully restored and is now a great place for walkers, families and indeed anyone who enjoys real ale and real fish-and-chips in a beautiful setting.

Having admired – and maybe tried out – the pub, return via Primrose Cottage but now turn right and head for the Jubilee, the high point of the common. Choose your own way to the top, then take a well-earned break and enjoy the panoramic views west to Bromyard Downs, north-east to Abberley, east along the Teme valley and south-east to the Malverns.

5 Now head off the top, past the trig point with the A44 on your left. Maintaining this direction, you reach the informative Bringsty Common display board before continuing the walk in the same direction. Pause to admire the magnificent Gospel Oak tree which marks the boundary between the parishes of Whitbourne and Linton, and where parts of the Bible used to be read during the traditional Rogationtide ceremony of "beating the bounds".

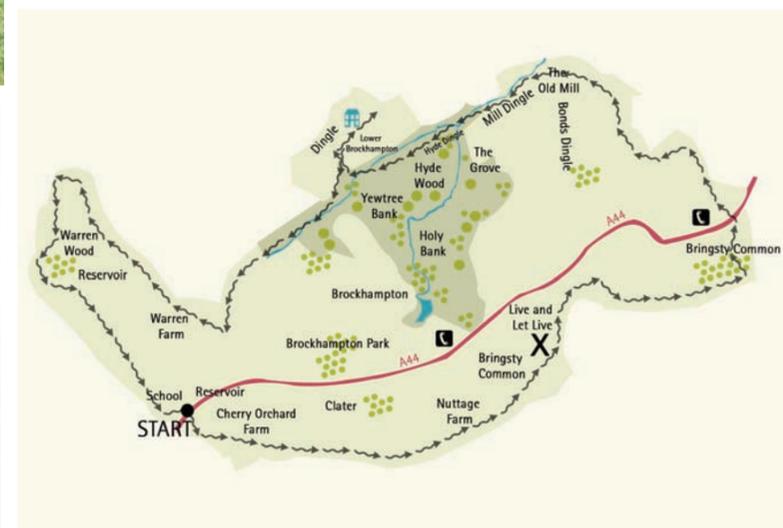
6 Keep on the highest part of the ridge and you will eventually reach a football pitch. Walk down the right-hand side, and keeping straight ahead you soon reach a stone track.



## The Bringsty and Bromyard spectacular



**Start/Parking:** opposite Brockhampton school at junction of A44 and Bromyard Downs road (GR: 667543)  
**Maps:** OS map; Outdoor Leisure 202,204.  
**Distance:** 7 miles.  
**Grade:** Moderate/energetic.  
**Stiles:** 7  
**Nearest Town:** Bromyard.  
**Refreshments:** Live & Let Live (tel: 01886 821462), Lower Brockhampton tea room (tel: 01885 488099), Warren Farm teashop (tel: 01885 482409).  
**Public Toilets:** At all the above.  
**Public Transport:** 420 bus that runs between Hereford and Worcester. Ring 0800 5877321 for details.



**Above left to right: The Malverns. Gospel Oak. Nuttage Orchard. Lower Brockhampton gatehouse. Bringsty sheep. Live & Let Live.**

Turn left down the stone track till you reach the A44.

7 Cross the road carefully and go over a stile opposite. Head down the path and then across a further stile to a small stream, where a plank suffices for a bridge. Now head half-left up the field to a gate into a lane. Look across to Whitbourne Hall, with its imposing Greek style façade, built by Edward Evans, a millionaire who had made his money in vinegar, in 1861. Later his huge estate – over 2,500 acres in 1876 – was split up and Whitbourne Hall itself is now divided into flats and run as a co-operative.

8 Turn right along the lane and past Brockhall and Home House farms. When you reach The Old Mill, turn left through a gate (look for the "walks around Bromyard" sign) and then cross a stream and turn right, keeping close to the trees on your right. At the far end of the field you enter the wood by a stile, part of the Brockhampton estate. Continue through the wood (carefully clambering round any fallen trees) until you join the main tarmac road to Lower Brockhampton. Here you can turn right and visit Lower Brockhampton, depending on the time of year (tel: 01885 482077 to check times).

9 Lower Brockhampton is a splendid timber-framed moated manor house and was built between 1380 and 1400. The gatehouse

was added about 1530. Now owned by the National Trust, the house is open to visitors from March – October whilst the estate is open all year round, and the tea room closed only in January. The estate is a great place to wander, with wildlife including dormice, buzzards and ravens, and interesting woodland.

10 Now re-trace your steps from the house and carry on uphill along the tarmac road. When you emerge from the wood, leave the road and bear straight ahead up the steep grass bank. Cross another tarmac road and then reach a rutted track which will take you right to Warren Farm, a working farm which also does teas and bed and breakfast. Continue along the ridge past Warren Farm, enjoying extensive views across Worcestershire.

11 The footpath along the ridge from Warren Farm to Shepherd's Cottage is a "permissive" path, which means that the landowner, in this case the National Trust, permits the public to use the path but there is no statutory right of way, so the permission can be withdrawn without notice. There is no official database of permissive paths but we know that they are an extensive and important part of the footpath network. Most canal towpaths for instance come into this category.

12 From Shepherd's Cottage, go through a gate onto Bromyard Downs, another of Herefordshire's wonderful commons. You are likely to meet no more than the odd dog-walker here now, yet in the Victorian era crowds of 7,000 people used to invade Bromyard Downs from Birmingham to attend the races – and you can still make out the outline of the old racecourse.

13 Bear left along the top of the Downs in front of the woods, and stay on the ridge until you descend gently back to Brockhampton school and the car park. ■

### THE RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION

The Ramblers' Association is the UK's largest walking charity. It promotes walking in the countryside, improves access to it, and protects the beauty of the countryside. In the UK the RA has over 130,000 members organised in 54 areas and 450 local groups. In the Herefordshire area we have four groups: Hereford, Ross, Mortimer and Leaddon Vale. We run a combined walks programme with about four walks every week. All are very welcome on our walks.

**For more information about Herefordshire Ramblers ring Tom Fisher on tel: 01886 821544 or email tom.fisher@virgin.net**