



Main First glimpse of the Wye from Upper Castleton

Inset Mina takes a break

Doglegs all the way

Collies Ludo and Mina and their owner Hazel Alexander of the Hereford Group of The Ramblers are back to lead an undulating walk to the Wye and back, beginning at Hardwicke in the parish of Clifford

1. Ludo, Mina and I begin our walk from the small parking area at Hardwicke. We turn right past the bus stop, towards the Hay road, and then take the footpath which crosses the field diagonally to a stile in the hedge. Ahead lies a vacant expanse, on this occasion of green grazing land, good for canine speed-letting. Keep the hedge near you on the left and proceed across the field until you spot a stile at the corner. Go over this and you see ahead a startling line of hawthorns clinging to the contours. Turn immediately right heading for the next stile to the left of a cottage, where you emerge onto a substantial track. Turn left and continue until tracks meet in front of the entrance to Windle Park. Down their drive can be seen a fine view looking over to Little Mountain, then carry on to the Hay road.

2. Taking great care, cross over the road and go left. After a short distance a green track on the right leads off to a stile from which views of the other side of the Wye Valley appear, with its

“ Half hidden by the trees is a bridge over a stream, in which Mina stops briefly for a splash bathe ”

diverse patterns and colours of the fields and woodlands. As the dogs and I climb the stile and turn right a couple of young ponies kick up their heels and thunder down the field. Inquisitive sheep amble over; they seem keen to be

worked by the dogs, a reciprocated wish, following us as they do to the next stile (which needs a bit of attention). The path crosses this field diagonally to the bottom far right hand corner where half hidden by the trees is a bridge over a stream, in which Mina stops briefly for a splash bathe.

Clamber over the uphill stile, scramble up through the overgrowth ahead and you are soon rewarded with a flat field. On our walk no path was laid in. Turning right we walked the field's edge with Ludo bounding ahead where he awaited us at the turning right into a little wood. There was a sense that a track had once run across which, consulting the map, was seen to be the course of the now extinct Golden Valley Railway that once snaked its way from Pontrilas to Hay. Conquering three stiles we alighted into another ►

HOW TO GET THERE

Start/Parking: Hardwicke, three miles from Hay-on-Wye on the B4348 to Dorstone

Maps: OS Explorer 201 Ref. SO 264438

Distance: Six miles

Grade: Moderate

Stiles: 20 plus. Some being a bridge with stile at both

Public transport: Bus 39 (Mon-Sat) 39a (Sun) from Hereford.

For more information see www.herefordshire.gov.uk/transport/public_transport

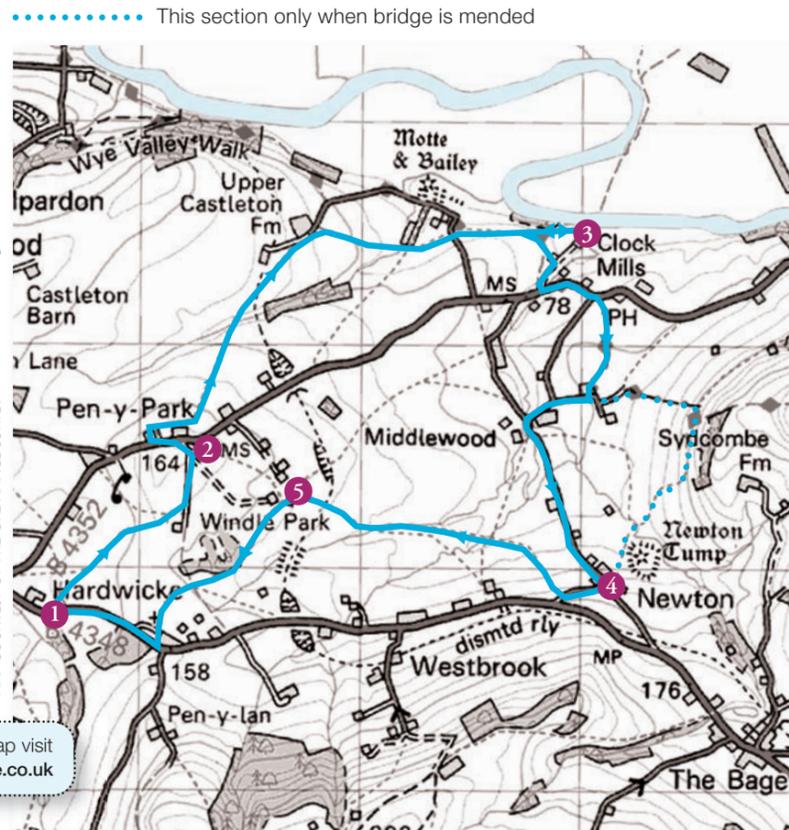
Nearest town: Hay-on-Wye

Refreshments: Bromyard has a wide variety of pubs, bars, cafés and restaurants

Toilets: Pub only



MAP COURTESY OF THE ORDNANCE SURVEY



To view a larger version of this map visit www.herefordshire.greatbritishlife.co.uk

field, this time turning left to walk the field's edge. As we proceed right at the corner of the field, I catch my first glimpse of the Wye, wide here, as it meanders its way west. Heading to the buildings that are named as Lower Castleton Farm, there were some great beasts in the field beside it, but the structure would now appear to be converted to superior residences. I admired a peach tree basking on a sunny southerly wall.

The track now turns into a tarmac road and includes both the Herefordshire Trail and Wye Valley Walk¹. To your left spreads the Wye, dotted with a picturesque armada of canoes and kayaks as its waters are generally too shallow for other craft. Keep on this road sampling the various sightings of the river as you progress. Opposite the drive to a splendid house on the right at Old Castleton, take the footpath away from the road, and continue straight along this to a stile. Over this carry straight on along the boundary of Clock Mills where the path descends and soon ends, but you are rewarded with the Wye in close

proximity. Stand a while and you may be delighted, as I was, by the startling blue of a passing kingfisher.

3. Retrace your tracks and turn left as you reach the path which borders the beautiful formal gardens of Clock Mills. Reaching the road turn left, take great care because of the traffic, but keeping an eye out for the post-box. Carry on to just past the way-marked Trail/Walk sign on the right, until you reach the Castlefield Inn, where the dogs and I took a welcome break and some good refreshment. Then return to the trail and turn left up it and continue until it meets a lane. Here we hit a problem in the shape of a dangerous bridge at Newton. This is one of a number of pedestrian bridges in Herefordshire which have been closed by the council which also has a considerable backlog of other footpath problems and badly needs more resources. It is important to report any problems you find to Amey Herefordshire at 01432 261800. If the bridge near Newton has been mended (which can be checked on the Herefordshire Ramblers website

The Ramblers

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 Leaddon Vale.

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



www.herefordshireramblers.org.uk) then follow the Herefordshire Trail and Wye Valley Way track up towards Merbach Hill, turning right on reaching the woods and following the path through to Newton Farm. If not, turn right past Middlewood House, continuing along the lane to the left as it climbs up past Newton farm with their abundant fowl collection. Turn right into the lane, opposite where the alternative route would emerge.

4. Before you reach the B road take the

stile on your right and head down the pasture, bearing slightly left at the gate, heading for the mature alders that mark the course of the West Brook. The dogs, having gone on ahead, are patient as I climb the bridge-stiles and stand looking at me in the right hand field on the north bank of the brook. Rounding the trees to the left, as we head across to the stile near the bottom right corner, we are as startled as they are by a mixed flock of sheep. Some have comically long upright ears, which a shepherdess friend later identifies as Border Leicesters. Traverse the next field obliquely, to the next stile where the bridge over the brook can be seen on the right. Ascend this pasture to the top left corner; go through the gate to the stile, keeping the hedge on your right.

5. The embankment you ascend is part of Golden Valley Railway again. I pause to imagine the sounds and the smells of the past and admire the view west. Carry straight on over the embankment to a stile ahead and up an old track to a pretty cottage, where you pass right by the door. Turn left past the building along the drive. Before reaching the gate bear left for a stile at the end of a dilapidated fence on your right. Cross this and keep to the edge of the field where the views of the hills are glorious. Again cross a stile, turning left to wend your way amongst a plantation of young trees in the meadow. Continue through a gate to a wood, where Ludo startles a pheasant and I am startled by the eerie sight of abandoned tyres swinging silently swinging from trees. I leave the wood and a stile is visible in a fence before me. Climb this stile and pass over the track to the next stile in the hedge, keeping straight on. Cross the next two small fields to a new stile leading onto an open meadow to the left of Hardwicke church.

If the gate to your right is open ignore



the stile ahead.

Head for or past the church, it is up to you. (If you venture into this Victorian edifice one of the rewards will be from the riot of colour from each and every window.) Then follow the drive to the road and turn right down it, being mindful of traffic, and continue along to a stile beside a gate on your right. Keep the house ahead to your left, as you ascend slightly to the next stile and you are back in the very first field that yielded to your footfalls. Ludo and Mina are not deceived; crossing to the centre of the field, where the paths intersect, they turn right returning to the start of the walk.

NB This is the second choice of route due to the forlorn state of a footpath that we encountered on my first route of choice. This walk too is shortened due to an unsafe bridge at Newton. If it is replaced, then follow the Herefordshire Trail and Wye Valley Way track up towards Merbach Hill, turning right on reaching the woods and following the path through to Newton Farm.



In the lead: Ludo and Mina and below an inquisitive face along the way

The Herefordshire Trail and Wye Valley Walk¹ are both long distance paths.

The Herefordshire Trail is a circular walk of about 154 miles, all within the County of Herefordshire. The route was devised by the Hereford Group of The Ramblers, using public rights of way and, where possible, public transport links.

The Wye Valley Walk was brought about by the partnership of three authorities Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Powys and Gloucestershire together with the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty who formed the Wye Valley Walk Partnership. This now operates to publicise the walk and to produce the official guide and passport. The maintenance of the walk is undertaken by individual Rights of Way officers in each county. ■

