

Collies bound for Kilpeck

Hazel Alexander of the Hereford group of The Ramblers takes her two dogs on a glorious walk beginning at one of Herefordshire's most famous churches

1 The origin of the name Kilpeck is unclear. It could be formed from 'Kil Peddeg' meaning the cell of the Christian hermit Pedic or it could be Welsh 'cil', corner or nook, retreat, of/for the sinner Welsh: 'pechadur'. However it is clear that what is now a mere village has been a busy area for centuries. A church has been on the site since at least the seventh century. Although the paths I walk were never used for leisure they have been witness to much traffic. The village was abandoned after the Black Death of 1349, as were many villages in England at that time.

Ludo, Mina and I began the walk from the church, saving the delights it harbours for our return. This church makes the village famous. It is a simple Norman two-cell construction with a rounded apse, renowned for the wealth of ebullient carvings left by the 11th century masons; there are dozens of



Above left: Ludo and Mina. Above right: A carving around the door at Kilpeck church

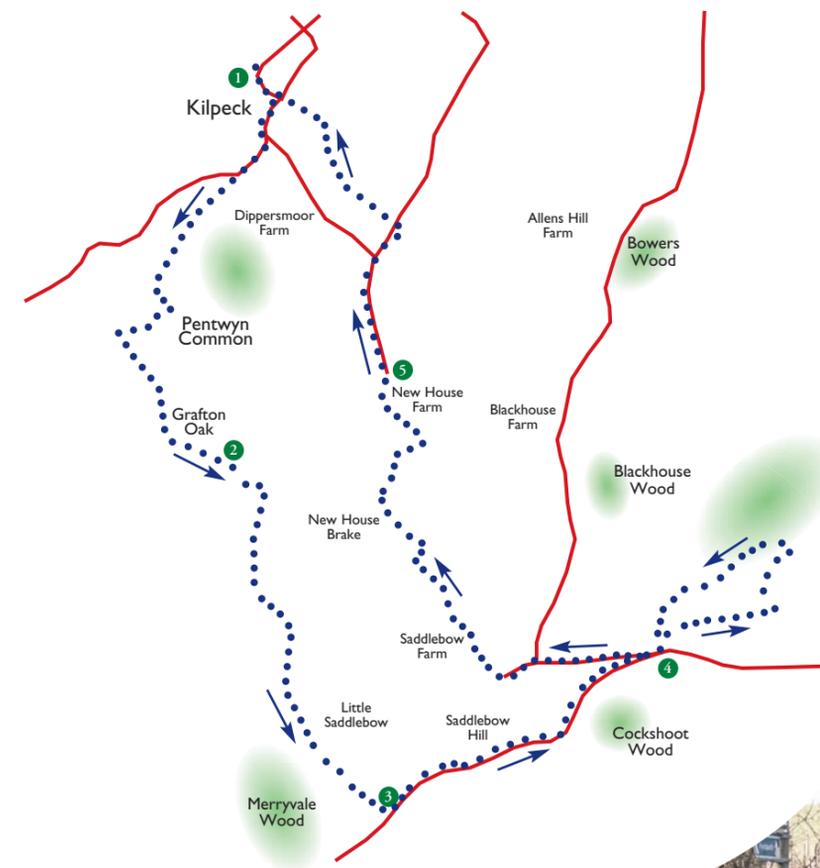


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amusing, grotesque, and intricate carvings around the doors, windows, and roof line of the church. It is reputed to be one of the finest small Norman churches in Britain.

Walk up to the oak tree on the green that was planted to commemorate Nelson's victory at Trafalgar more than 200 years ago. Turn right along the lane heading south west and follow the fork

around to the right. Take the second stile in the hedge on your left, just before the cottage, on to the Herefordshire Trail* and proceed along the field's edge beside this cottage and through to the next field, where there is often much water fed from the spring up hill. Follow the path along the field's edge towards the two visible houses at Pentwyn Common, cutting off the



A walk around Kilpeck

Start/parking: Kilpeck church

Maps: OS Explorer 189 ref. 305445

Distance: 6 miles

Grade: Moderate

Stiles: 10

Public transport: Regular bus service 440 from Hereford.

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

Nearest town: Hereford

Refreshments: None

Toilets: None

Below: The bridge to Lower Ridway Farm

corner when you see the stile to your left. The collies from both houses should now be competing in full voice and my dogs chose to tease them from the safety of the field, no hard feelings... just a bit of fun.

Turn left after the stile walking past the second house, towards a gate into a little wood. Follow the muddy path down, looking out for wild flowers. For us it was brimming with pregnant foliage of hazel, wood anemone and bluebell. Listen out for the abundant birdsong. Climb the stile into an open pasture where the cattle often graze, cross it to the lane. Here you see the bridge that leads to Lower Ridway Farm. Continue left up the track which begins to climb. Stop and admire the emerging views north west over to Hay Bluff and beyond. Continue until you reach Grafton Oak, a house on your left. The turn left is heralded by guinea fowl and splendidly coloured bantams, so cannot be easily missed. Go through the first and then second gate into a field.

2 In this field the Herefordshire Trail takes a right over the stile, do not follow



it, instead cut diagonally down to the bottom left and a stile. Sheep and their lambs were reluctant to move as we passed by, and as they usually populate the next three fields too, the dogs remained on the lead, much to their chagrin.

Keep straight on, following the path beside a deep cut brook that is in the trees on the left, at the end of the third field look out for a bridge that passes over it in to the field on the east side of

the valley. Here the path climbs steeply and diagonally right, to another stile. Pause again to revisit the view that you have liberated by your climb then turn towards the east where Coles Tump is now visible. Then follow the fence on the right, an open pond is visible ahead to your left, where Ludo startled an unsuspecting squirrel into speedy escape, and to the right a little wood through which the path passes before joining a track. Break to look west to ▶



The view towards Orcop

the empty farm called Griegs, then carry on up the track to the left. When you come to a holding pen on your right, leave the track and climb the stile into the field. Climb to the gate and across the next field, then over the stile to follow the path by the hedge, to a rather dodgy assembly of gates where the stile is obscured.

③ Here you take the road left as it climbs across Saddlebow Hill, with, if you are lucky, wide views across to the Malverns to the right. Coles Tump is obscured ahead, but continue along until the road forks down to the left where the dogs and I paused to admire the coltsfoot gleaming out from the scrubby ground.

④ Just after the house on the left is a turn onto a bridle way, the path to the tump. Go through the gate and a second, and then follow a steep track on the right, which was deeply pitted with horses hoof prints. The beech trees of the tump tower above you as you ascend to a gate. Go through this and head toward the second clump of trees which are fir. From here you will, to the east see a third clump of trees again beech and the triangulation point which Ludo had to visit before taking off in pursuit of the chuck, chuck, chuck of a pheasant in the wood

below us to the north, into which we followed him. This is a steep descent frequented by horses, but is then intercepted by a dry path which you take to the left and follow out of the wood past a cottage, through a gate and back to the gate where you entered from the road.

Turn right the way you came, but take the right hand fork instead straight to Saddlebow Farm. Pass beside the farm with it on your left to a very damp and lush lane that takes you down to a field across which you see Saddlebow Wood. Keep the wood on your left and turn right at the gate, following the fields-edge as it then turns left, then bears right following the hedges. Turn left through the gate when you see New House Farm at the other side of the field. Ludo meeting the lady of the house beside the pond caused a good half hour chat about the area its occupants and geography. There is a theory that Coles Tump was a volcano, founded on the scattering of big rocks and its black soil.

⑤ From here follow the lane straight on passing both the turn and the houses on the left. A finger-post directs you left down a field to a strip of wood, look for the marker slightly too your right. Climb down the bank to the stile, cross the field, climb another stile over the

The Ramblers

The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking



and to improve conditions for all walkers. The Ramblers is celebrating its 75th anniversary and has won many victories, the most recent being the new coastal access legislation. 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: tomfisher@virgin.net

footbridge and head towards the house marked as the Priory. Keeping the house on your right follow their drive out onto the road and the oak tree on the green again, now you have the pleasure of viewing both church and castle of Kilpeck. ■

*The Herefordshire Trail is a circular walk of about 154 miles, all within the county of Herefordshire, visiting all the market towns and some delightful villages. The route was devised by the Hereford Group of the Ramblers using public rights of way and, where possible, public transport links.

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