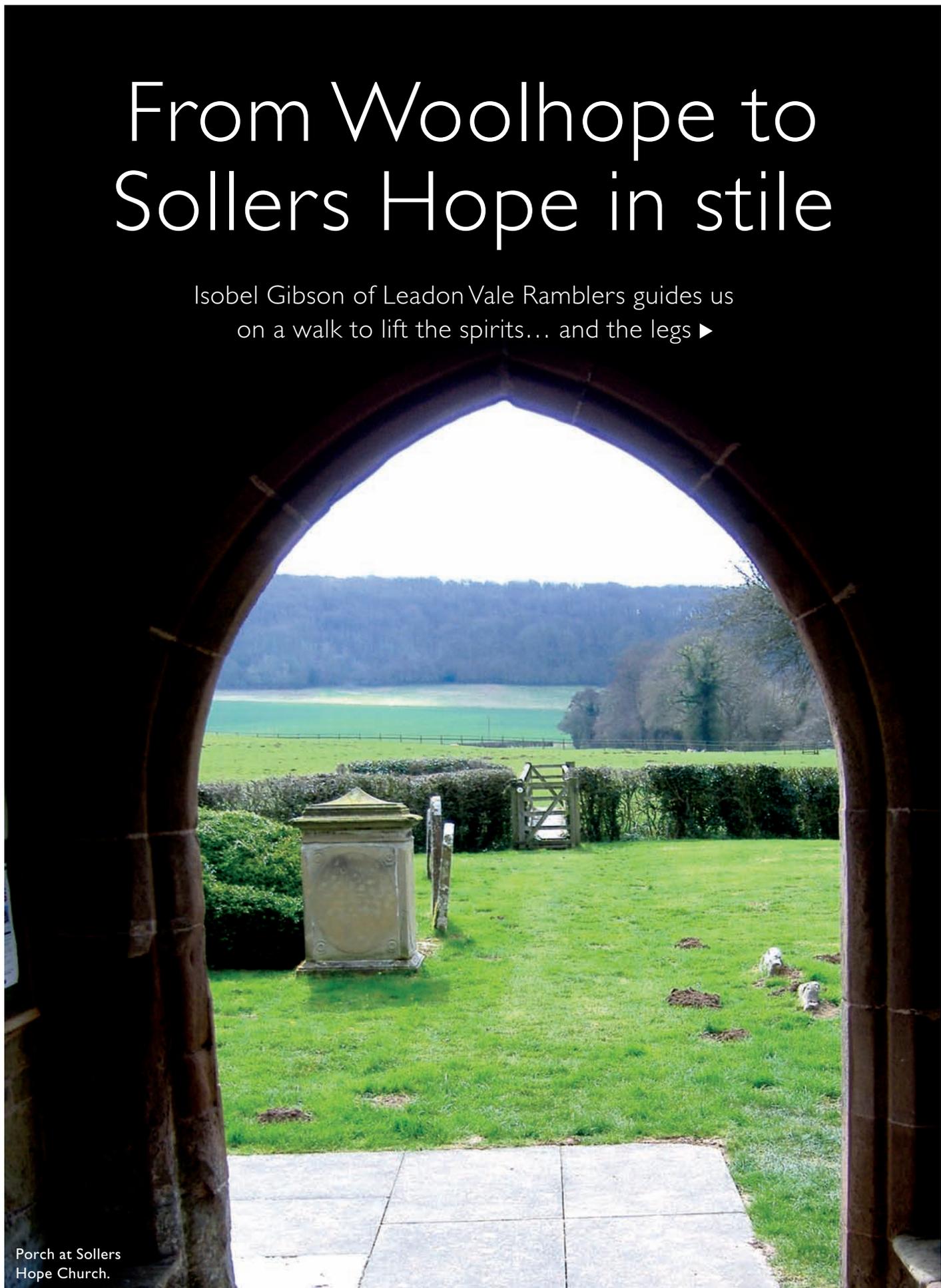


From Woolhope to Sollers Hope in stile

Isobel Gibson of Leadon Vale Ramblers guides us
on a walk to lift the spirits... and the legs ►



Porch at Sollers
Hope Church.

The stream near Sollers Hope flows through ponds and waterfalls.



The walk starts from The Crown Inn in Woolhope. The village is named after Wulviva who, together with her more famous sister, Lady Godiva, gave the manor of Wulviva's Hope (hope is an old word meaning valley) to the Cathedral at Hereford sometime before the Norman Conquest. The sisters are commemorated in a 20th century stained glass window in the parish church, situated immediately next to The Crown, and accessed through an interesting lych gate.

1 With The Crown behind you turn left and follow the road, signposted Ledbury. Just past the last building on the right, called The Stonebarn, cross the stile on the right into a field. Keeping the fence on the right, head towards a gap in the hedge. In the next field, walk towards the telegraph pole and the edge of a line of trees. From this point, head diagonally left downhill towards a stile in the corner of the field. Go over this stile and another immediately on your right to enter an orchard. Bear diagonally left through the trees and cross a stream. Then head uphill across a field, through a stand of eight or nine trees. The Marcle transmitter is visible on the ridge straight ahead of you. Following the same line, head towards a stile in the corner of the field. Cross and turn right into the lane.

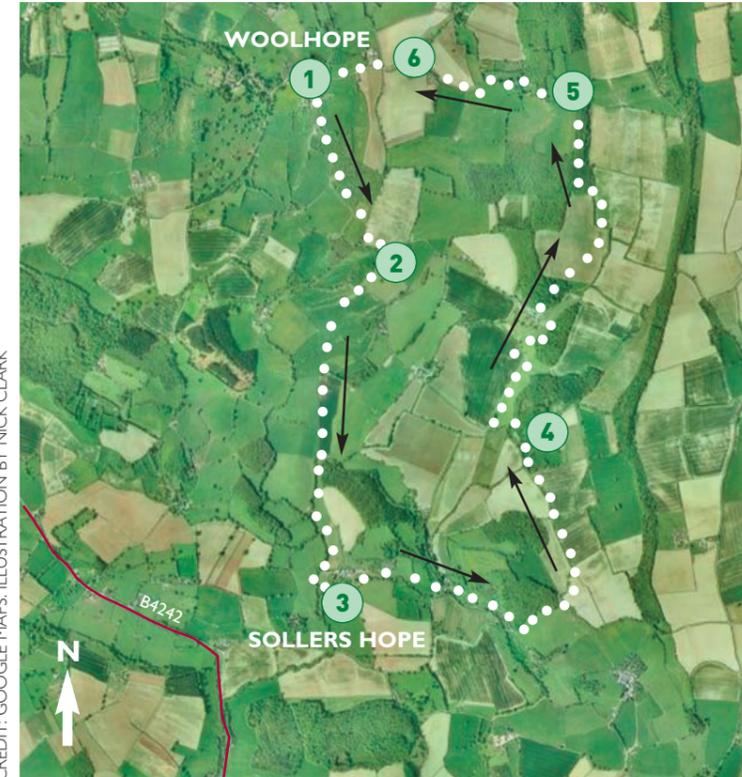
2 After a few yards turn left at the junction of the lanes. Wandering on you might be tempted to spend time looking over the fence gazing at the ducks on a large pond on the other side of the field. At the end of the metal fence on the right, cross a stile and head diagonally left across the field towards a line of trees marking a drainage ditch. With the ditch on your left walk along until you reach a little three plank footbridge (easily missed). Cross and head diagonally right across the field. Cross another stile and

head straight towards the brow of the hill. OS maps show the footpath as following a field boundary but this has been removed. Its former position is marked by a very slight elevation of the ground. From the brow of the hill head towards a corner of the fence and follow the fence downhill towards the wood. Cross the stile and find yourself in a delightful little dell with a bubbling stream on your right. Heading in the same direction as before, go through a gap in the bank and see the black and white Sollers Court in the distance. Follow the footpath over a couple of stiles. Older OS maps show the footpath heading towards Sollers Court but the path has been officially diverted along the bank of the stream. Cross two stiles in close proximity; there is a pets' cemetery in the meadow between them. Still keeping close to the stream go through a metal gate and then bear left through a wooden gate into the church yard of St Michael's Church, Woolhope.

3 The Sollers Hope (valley) belonged to the Whittington family from 1300 to 1546 and the 14th century church is believed to have been financed by Robert Whittington,

elder brother of Dick, thrice mayor of London. It is worth pausing to take a look inside. Behind the church is a tump, the remains of a single elliptical camp which marked the most southerly fortification in the wars between the Romans and the Britons. From the church door, turn left and follow the path through the gate. Walk past Sollers Court, cross the track and go through a gate into the grassy farmyard. Keeping the stream on your right follow the path to a stile and into an old orchard. Note the amount of mistletoe on the trees. Mistletoe may be a rarity in other parts of the country but it grows in abundance in the old orchards of Herefordshire. The stream goes off to the right but the footpath follows the line of a fence (on your right), across another stile and towards an old stone barn. By the barn, cross a stile into the lane and turn left. After a few yards, cross the lane, go through the gate and pick up a broad track running alongside the stream, now flowing through attractive ponds and waterfalls.

Head towards a gap in the hedge and uphill across the field to a stile. Once over the stile, turn left and follow the lane over



CREDIT: GOOGLE MAPS. ILLUSTRATION BY NICK CLARK



THE RAMBLERS

The Ramblers 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 Ramblers 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 Leadon 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, tel: 01886 821544 or email tom.fisher@virgin.net

the stream. Shortly after the stream the lane splits into two; go straight on following the sign to Greyhill Barn. The lane goes uphill and passes two limekilns on the left. Lime had many uses from medieval times; for sweetening the land, in building and in the leather-making industry for removing the hair from hides prior to tanning. These particular kilns are believed to have been in use between 1700 and 1845. Herefordshire Council has recently started a project to conserve a number of limekilns in the county. Just past Greyhill Barn, take the footpath on the left. Head towards the line of trees facing you, and follow the track to the left which takes you through fields, fords a stream and then goes uphill, including a sharp right turn, towards the pink buildings of Sapness House.

4 At the junction with the lane, turn sharp left and go over the hill. Just before a T-junction take the footpath on the right, crossing a cattle grid. The path follows a broad track towards Hyde Farm. At the farm, turn left through the farmyard and just before the barn on the right, turn very sharp right onto the steep path through Hyde Wood. When the path turns sharply to the left, carry straight on over a stile into a field. This is a large field, originally divided into three as evidenced by field boundaries shown on the OS maps. The exit is not visible at this point and if the footpath is not obvious on the ground it is best to follow the contour until you see a stile

HOW TO GET THERE

Start/Parking: In Woolhope village. There is some street parking by the wall of The Crown public house. The car park for patrons of The Crown is behind the pub. (GR: 612356)

Maps: OS map; Explorer 189, Hereford and Ross-on-Wye

Length: 5½ miles

Grade: Moderate/energetic

Stiles: 16 (more if some field gates can't be opened) plus one footbridge that requires a high step over at either end

Nearest town: Hereford

Refreshments: The Crown, Woolhope (01432 860468) www.crowninwoolhope.co.uk

Toilets: At The Crown

Public transport: 453 and 454 bus service runs between Hereford and Woolhope. There is a bus stop at The Crown Inn. Tel: 0871 2002233 for details or visit www.herefordshire.gov.uk/transport/public_transport/38731.asp

diagonally left in the field corner which leads you onto a broad track through Busland wood. This is the last of our 16 stiles on this walk.

5 Leave the wood through a metal gate onto open pasture. Follow the same course towards a short pole which marks a junction of footpaths. The view from this point back towards Woolhope is spectacular – on a clear day Hay Bluff should be visible.

6 Turn left at the pole. The footpath soon becomes a broad track. Follow the track down the hill, through a gate. Keep on this track until it meets the road. Turn left and proceed uphill (unfortunately!) back to The Crown – where you can award yourself some welcome refreshment. ■

STILES

Stiles are not particularly walker-friendly, and certainly make life difficult for dog-walkers and anyone with mobility difficulties. Herefordshire Council now has a policy to encourage the replacement of stiles with gates. It will provide new gates to replace stiles free of charge to landowners but will charge for replacement stiles. Tel: 01432 260572 for details.

