

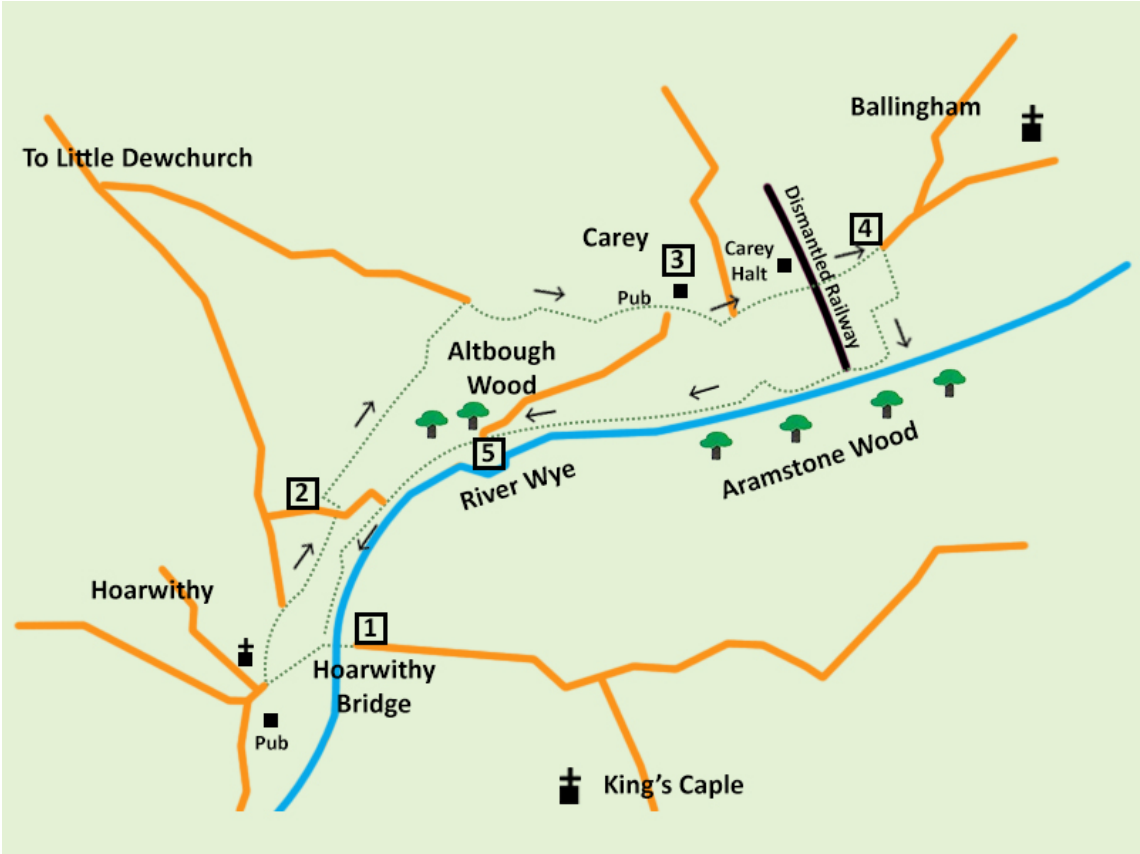
Herefordshire Railway Walks

Walk One - Hoarwithy and Carey

- A four-mile easy / moderate walk
- OS Map - Leominster and Bromyard (Explorer 202)

The Route

1. Start: Lay-by just east of Hoarwithy Bridge. Walk west over bridge past Old Toll House on left, ignore road to Carey, reach Hoarwithy sign on left and Turn Right (TR) uphill marked Little Dewchurch and Hereford. Visit church, Climb easily to end of speed restriction and pause just above 'Mount Pleasant'. TR opposite Church Cottage along unsigned diagonal path and follow green lane half a mile to "Cleveland". Turn left (TL) Slightly uphill past 'Stoneyways' and reach Stoney bridle path to your right.
2. Bridle path, TR and follow bridle path ascending very gradually and pause intermittently for views to the receding river valley below to your right. The path emerges onto the lane linking Little Dewchurch to Carey. TR and follow the weeds in the middle of the quiet lane down to the junction and TL to the area by the post box outside 'Pear Tree Farm' in front of The Cottage of Content. Pause by the two public benches over the little bridge and stream.
3. Carey, The Cottage of Content, resume gently uphill towards Ballingham, Holme Lacy and Hereford past Gaer House on the right. Ignore left to Bolstone and look out for the Traveller's Joy in the hedgerows before the bridge over the dismantled railway line. Look left over the parapet for the railway station, now converted to domestic use.
4. Public footpath sign. After bridge, TR at fifth telegraph pole, follow green lane gently down to gate where looking left you will see the top of St Dubricius Church spire at Ballingham and the tower on top of Marcle Ridge. In front is Aramstone Wood above the opposite river bank. TR in front of gate to stile where TL to river bank. TR and pass the five pillars of the old viaduct, through gate to a footbridge and through gate. The Bridge bears a hopefully unnecessary disclaimer. Go through four more gates, with Although Wood up to the right and the gallops which nurtured 2009 Grand National winner Mon Mome over to the left. Fork left to the river, then right to the road via gate or stile.
5. Hoarwithy Road. TL follow not unpleasant road for one third of a mile with views across to the left. By a small hut and private parking bay TL down four steps to the river again with the top of King's Cagle spire directly in front of you. TR and follow bank through two gates, over footbridge, gate, up 21 steps and TL onto Hoarwithy Bridge in front of Toll House.



Origin of the theory of Leys

Alfred Watkins conceived the idea of Ley Lines “while riding across the hills near Bredwardine”. You’d be surprised how many scholars have told us that a blinding flash came to the sixty-five-year-old up on Merbach Hill. Indeed, the cromlech known as Arthur’s Stone lends a satisfying mystique and intrigue to that area; after all, Watkins did decide that two ancient trackways ran straight through it. The reality is a little more prosaic, however: Watkins was sitting in his car at Blackwardine crossroads.

Blackwardine is a former Roman settlement on high ground between Stoke Prior and Humber, about three miles south-east of Leominster. Sadly, there’s no bewitching cromlech - but there is a cattery. And apart from the aptly named dwelling called “Fairview” that’s about all, really. Yet the fairly uninspiring crossroads which we arrive at on this walk is where it all happened, when the venerable Herefordian, ordnance survey map in hand, gazed across Luston to the ridge of Croft Ambrey.

We are in the centenary of that 30th June 1921 revelation.

“Suddenly”, his son Allen would recount, “the scales fell from Watkins’ eyes and his mind was flooded with a rush of images forming one coherent plan. The realisation came to him that over many long years of prehistory all trackways had been marked out in straight lines by experts on a sighting system”.

The ley ran, he suggested, from an initial point on top of Croft Ambrey, down Croft lane, through the Broad, a hamlet south of Luston, up to this point at Blackwardine crossroads, over Risbury Camp all the way to the old Roman station on the high ground of Homend Bank at Stretton Grandison. So, the The Blackwardine Ley was the first one ever proposed. (It was only ever a “ley” to Alfred and not a “ley line.”)

As for the Iron Age Risbury hill-fort, or Camp, even though the walk takes us directly below the bank and ditch on its western approach, it’s remarkable for its ordinariness. It has a tree-clad nature in a low-lying position beneath more imposing heights. If it wasn’t marked on the map, you wouldn’t notice it was there. As you walk from the camp to Blackwardine cross and try to keep aware of the camp’s position behind you, you’re likely to lose track of it. If you stand on the bank at Blackwardine cross by the “Give Way” sign, and look through the gap in the hedge, Lo! the ley north-west to Croft Ambrey can be observed. But if you nip back to the post on the other side and stand on the bank (don’t try this at home), you probably can’t see Risbury Camp.

So, on the ground - at this seminal vantage point, it’s clear that Alfred was placing a heavy reliance on his map. It’s also true that if you are looking south from Croft Ambrey itself, you’ll get a better perspective of the sighting points along the 20 miles to Stretton Grandison - towards Ledbury.

Our five-mile investigation of this unheralded area takes us across rolling countryside. Some of the arable field paths are quite testing during the growing season, but none of the gradients which also skirt the Humber and Holly brooks are particularly demanding. Whatever we make of ley lines, placing Alfred Watkins at Blackwardine, rather than Bredwardine, gives that modest settlement a unique claim to fame in the wayfinding firmament. So, it is here that we find the seat of the conception of “The Old Straight Track” theory.