

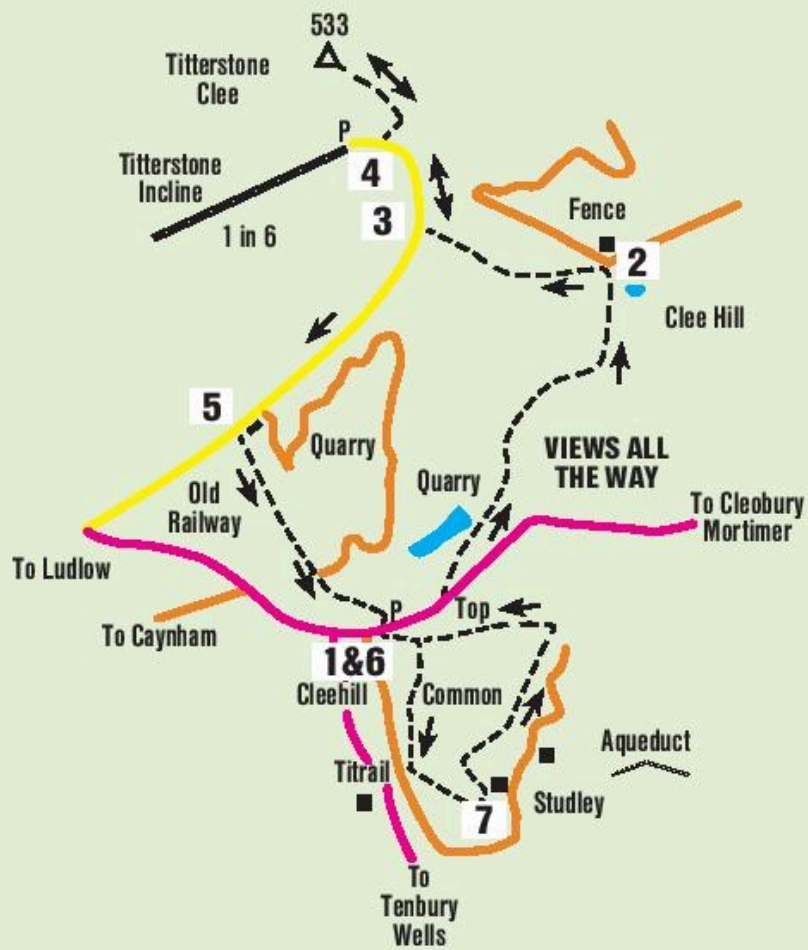
Herefordshire Railway Walks

Walk Thirteen - Cleehill village, Clee and Titterstone Hills and southern common

- 4.25 moderate ramble, or 5 miles to Titterstone trig. point. 6.75 miles if also exploring the common
- Mostly excellent terrain, but potentially uneven section between points 2 and 3. Boots essential
- Ordnance Survey map - Ludlow (Explorer 203)

The Route

1. Cleehill village. SY7 3QE. Picnic site, viewpoint and car park at Grid ref. 595573 on the A4117. With your back to the common, TR by cattle grid along near side of unfenced road. Cross at Craven Place and go left up the road/surfaced bridle path as if for Midland Quarry Products. Now follow this surface gently upwards for 1.25 miles with great views eastwards: keeping R for Random and Upper Random Farms beyond Clee Hill Quarry, until you reach the summit of Clee Hill just beyond a small lake over to the right.
2. Clee Hill 3-way path junction. Careful! With the apex of a fence in front of you and a house up to L, TL along stony path. It immediately becomes grassy, resembles a furrowed farm track and rises gently. You should soon see Titterstone Clee "golf ball" ahead on horizon. Keep straight, due west for about 550m, maintaining a position half way between the fence (R) and cairns up to L. Head slightly L of the point where the road ahead climbs up to (what is) a car park. For the second 550m, bear a little right and cross a stretch of tussocks to the road.
3. Shropshire Way Finger Post at roadside below Titterstone Clee. TR for a quarter of a mile up to car park and viewpoint.
4. Titterstone Clee. Below are the old quarry workings and the top of Titterstone Incline. Re-trace steps to car park entrance. (Go L up to the summit, if desired, following waymarkers 2/5ths of a mile and back to this point.) Now carry on down the road past earlier point 3 for 1.5 miles with great views south and west all the way down to
5. Rouse Boughton Terrace. TL along track at Hedgehog House. Just beyond outhouse, TR over rickety stile and now follow the old railway embankment for just about one mile to weighted gate. TR along track to start point.
6. (If continuing) With your back to the road, TL through gate to Toposcope, as signed. Mark position of pipe "monument" below you, on a line just left of May Hill, and Abberley Tower. Retrace three steps. Plunge down common towards houses, on right edge. Keep going to reach Titrail, carry on down past Fern Cottage and No. 4. After 25m, go half L further down, towards distant Abberley Tower. After 80m, take second L at cross paths back up common. After another 100m, TL up through gorse and bracken.
7. Studley Tunnel Monument. (Note Aqueduct in valley further east.) Carry on up, just L of tower, fork R at col, level with house below R. Keep R at next minor fork. At a slight hump, swing further R until you reach crosspath coming up from "1 o'clock". (Telegraph wires 140m further on.) T sharp L steadily back up below toposcope, to park.



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.