

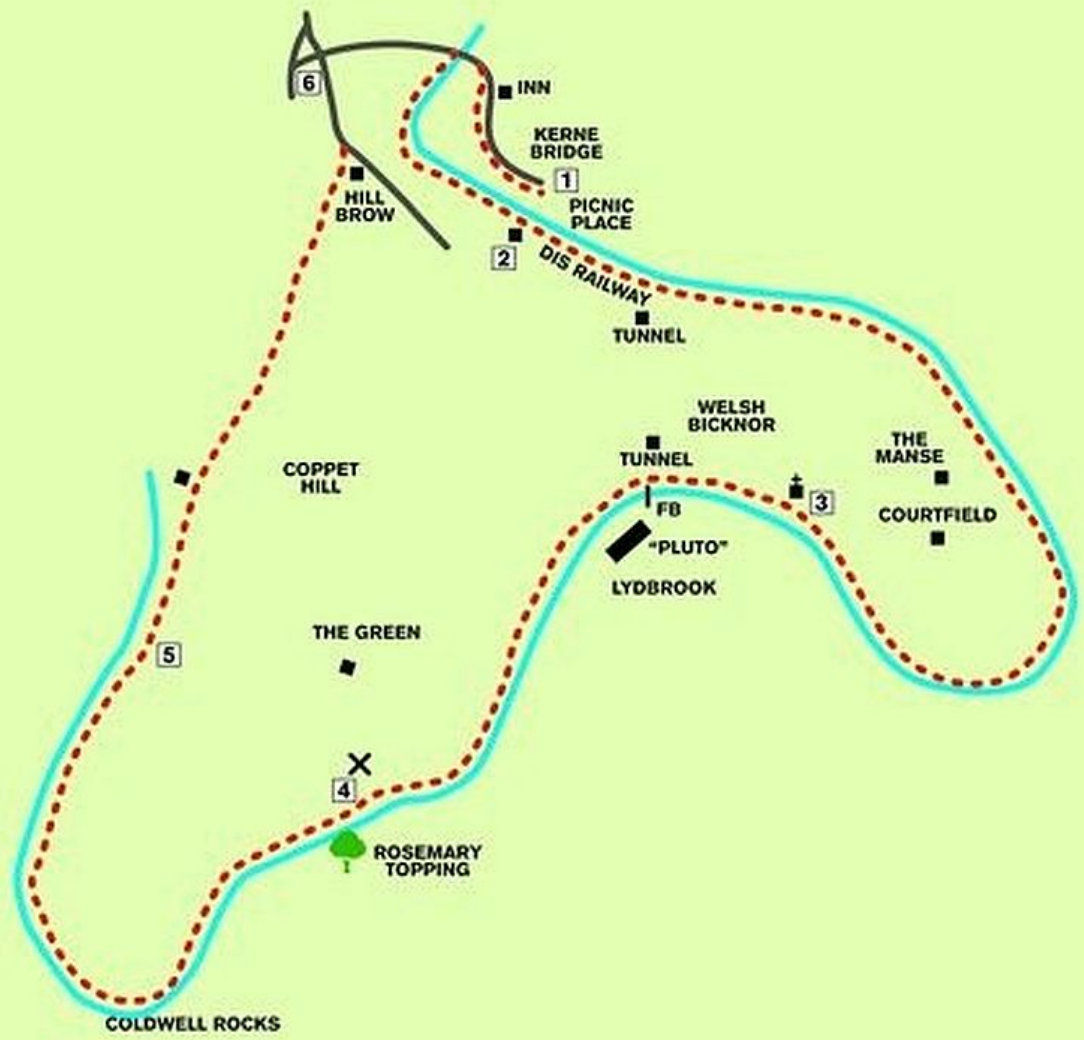
Herefordshire Railway Walks

Walk Six - Kerne Bridge and Welsh Bicknor

- 8.5 mile moderate walk. 6.25 miles along riverbank
- No steep climbs. Mostly flat. River and woodland edge
- Ordnance Survey map - Wye Valley and Forest of Dean (OL 14)

The Route

1. Kerne Bridge Picnic Place. Off B4234, 3 miles south of Ross-on-Wye. To start walk, take footpath signed to Kerne Bridge, R of old railway station. TL across bridge (with view to Goodrich Castle ahead). Immediately over bridge, TL down steps on Wye Valley Walk. Follow riverbank through gate, up steps, then back down to riverbank past a footpath sign for Goodrich. Reach a cottage. The wall just beyond marks the point at which the old railway bridge crossed the Wye.
2. Cottage/canoe launch/old bridge area. Go through gate, keeping along bank, (caravan park over on left bank). Cross stile/gate with The Manse above right. Bend R along bank beyond marker post and ahead. (Courtfield Arms, Lower Lydbrook on left bank). Cross stile to church.
3. St Margaret's Church, Welsh Bicknor. If not visiting, fork L still along WVV riverbank. Go beyond marker post and underneath the old railway bridge which carried the "Monmouth Bullet" across to Lydbrook station and PLUTO factory. Keep L of four marker posts, cross stile, and footbridge. In front of you, on left bank is the conical wooded Rosemary Topping at English Bicknor.
4. Crash Site Area from 7 June, 1942. Memorial stone on riverbank. When you reach a point between Rosemary Topping and The Green (large farm buildings) up to your right, you have reached the flight path of the ill-fated Halifax Bomber. The point of impact was about 100 feet up the bank towards the farm. Please do not, however, leave the riverside path! Keep ahead along the bank over a stile for Coldwell Rocks. Cross stile and pass memorial to John Whitehead Warre. Keep ahead through gate, staying on bank (not into trees). Carry on beyond Yat Rock parapet on other, left bank. Keep below L of two stone buildings and beyond cottage painted white on left bank. Follow wide pasture which tapers ahead to a gate.
5. Woodland Edge Gate. Go through and follow firmer surface ahead through next gate. Keep ahead to stile 80m in front of Mainoaks. Cross into Coppet Hill Common Nature Reserve area and follow L edge fence/wall, climbing a little to find Rockland Cottage. Keep ahead up drive and along tarmac past The Thatch. Fork L down beyond Hill Brow, 400m to bridge over road.
6. Goodrich bridge. TR just in front over slab, down steps for Kerne Bridge. Follow pavement back over bridge. TR back to picnic place.



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.