

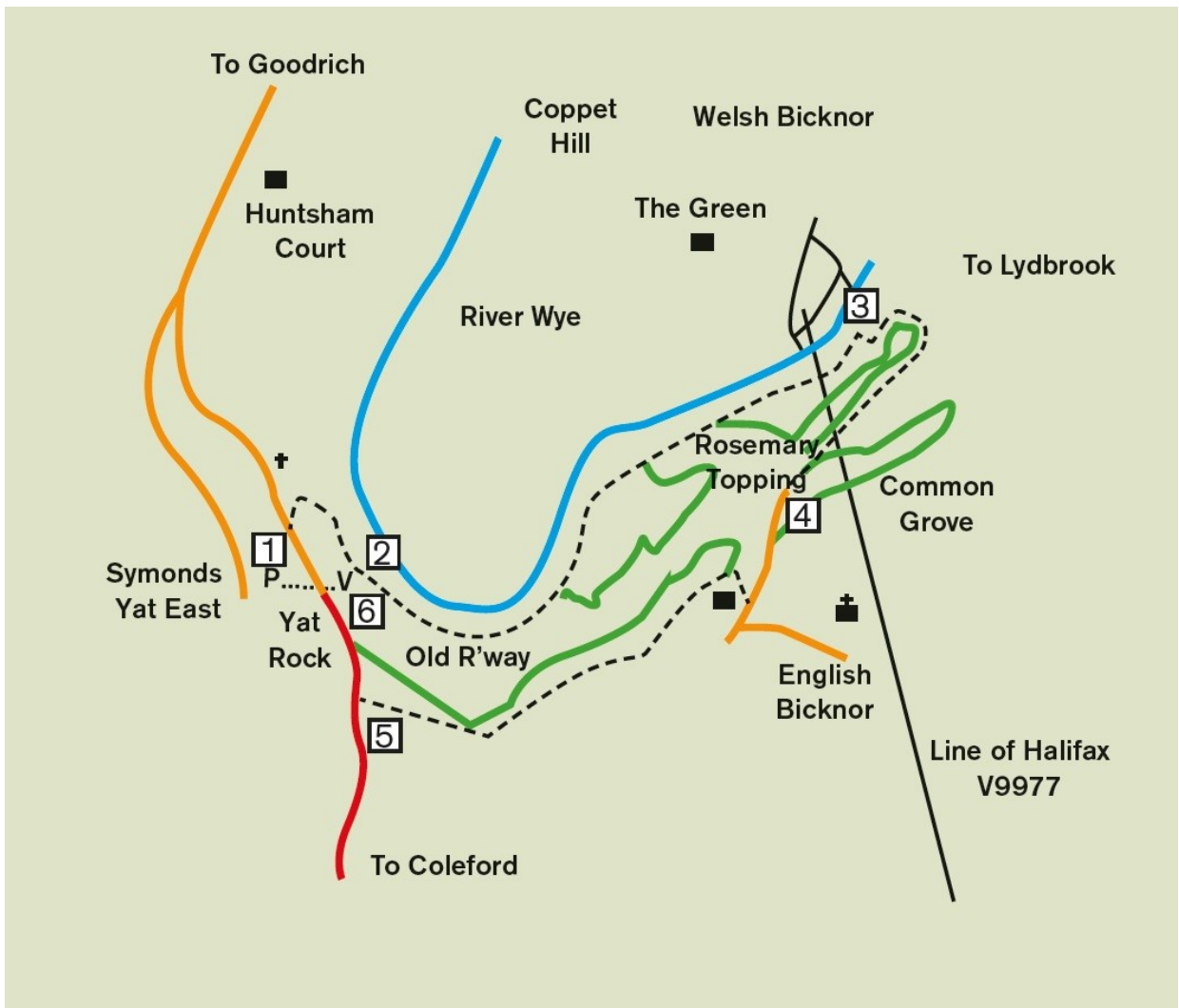
# Herefordshire Railway Walks

## Walk Seven - Symond's Yat Rock and the left bank of the Wye

- 4 mile moderate ramble. One steep descent, flat river stroll, two short sharp banks to climb
- Iconic views and the Halifax V9977 tale
- Ordnance Survey map - Wye Valley and Forest of Dean (OL 14)

### The Route

1. Symonds Yat Rock, car park, disabled bay and toilets area. Amid birdsong, head gently up the surfaced path signed towards (but not to) the (main) viewpoint. Immediately behind Forestry Commission log cabin, TL down to balcony for view to Symonds Yat. Come back up and take steps down to left on Highmeadow Trail. After a couple of flights, TR to the road. Descend past the Old School House and, by Cliffe Cottage, bear R as if for "Welsh Bicknor 2½". Zig-zag past Wren's Nest quite steeply down to reach the old Ross-Monmouth Railway track bed, next to the Wye.
2. Old Railway/Wye Valley Walk. TL, 75m, for a view of the old tunnel which took a 433 yard course under Yat Rock to Symonds Yat. Return and follow the wonderful path, by k-gate and conifer edge, between grass banks, through gate, for 1.5 miles.
3. Fishermen's hut. 60m beyond gate, go down 11 steps (L), through gate, by hut. (Here, you are very close to the line of Halifax V9977, on 7th June, 1942. The starboard wing detached over the river and the main body crashed on Tent Bank, opposite, below the prominent oak tree. On the bank opposite, you should be able to see the Forest of Dean memorial stone unveiled on 9th June, 2019.) When ready, go back up steps to resume your original direction NE. At gate/stile, TR steeply up bank. Follow field perimeter R, L, R past waymarked tree, to obvious farm track. TR, over stile, up lower R edge of two long narrow pastures. At end, R of corrugated sheds, go through Heritage Trail gate.
4. Rosemary Topping. Now strike up the lane past the English Bicknor Parish Council board. Careful: 40m before road junction, look out for footpath sign and turn sharp R up into trees. Climb up the L edge of the grove and go through 3 gates to the right of Bicknor Court farm. Go straight up the track beyond. Bear R at end of paddock, through gate, and under fine trees. Swing R up track, favouring R edge of big pasture, then stiffly over brow to L edge. Cross stile to road.
5. Wood Lea. TR past cottages to Symonds Yat Rock. Follow pavement to point just before f/bridge crossing your road. Go up path to Main Viewpoint at Raptors notice board. (The crash site is one mile away, half right, north east.) Return and TR over f/bridge to start point.



## 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.