



The Ramblers, Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and to improve conditions for all walkers, has four groups in Herefordshire: Hereford, Mortimer, Ross-on-Wye and Leadon Vale. For more information contact Tom Fisher, 01886 821544 or email tom.fisher@virgin.net

Around Edvin Loach

Hazel Alexander of the Hereford Group of the Ramblers is taken on a splendid circular walk in north Herefordshire by her collies Ludo and Mina



Ludo and Mina take a break by the old motte and bailey

Start/parking: Beside St Mary's, Edvin Loach SO 662 584
Maps: OS Explorer 202 and 203

Distance: 6.5 miles
Grade: Moderate
Stiles: 15

Public transport: None
Nearest town: Bromyard
Refreshments: None
Toilets: None

I HAVE driven, many times, along the B4203 north from Bromyard wondering what might await me along the footpaths of this region. So, with Ludo and Mina in tow, I diverted early one summer morning and stepped from the car at the highest point in Edvin Loach.

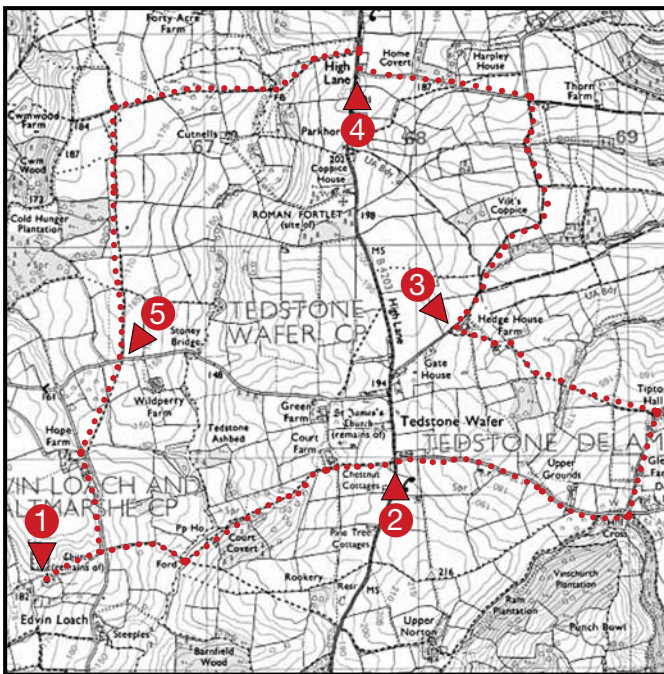
This is a fascinating location. Encompassed by the site of a Norman motte and bailey are the 19th century St Mary's church by Sir George Gilbert Scott and the 11th century remains of the previous church which was, until the reformation, dedicated to St Giles. The elevated position gives views in three directions. Look east, across the valley, over to the hill on which stands St James's church and you will see where this route is going. You may also sense that you are about to infiltrate a very lush green, quiet territory.

1. Ludo and Mina are ahead of me as we head away from the church, east to

the lane. Buzzards ignore us as they perch on the telegraph wires watching for that mere movement that might mean a meal. Look out for tractors as you cross to the stile that takes you down into a field. The grass was so lush when we crossed it made the way difficult and we had to lift two, or four legs high, as if wading a tide. Follow the field's edge until it turns left toward a wood, veer right and head for the footbridge, crossing this and the next stile. Turn left past a tumbledown structure on the right and carry on past to the gate at the edge of the covert. Once through the gate, which is in a very wet place, I see sheep ahead and Ludo and Mina are secured at my side on their leads, which is a pity as the path passes a very appealing pond on the right, which would be perfect for canine bathing! At the end of the pond follow as straight a line as possible, climbing up the pasture. Pause to look back at the mature trees of this grazing

land and across the valley to the church at Edvin Loach. Continue to a gate in the corner of the field. Follow the track right, beside the farm, with the accompanying braying, barking, quacking and hissing of some residents. Then pass the entrance to St James' church, now a bespoke dwelling. Continue to the road.

2. Continue east along the lane towards Tedstone Delamere for roughly half a mile. As the lane rises gently, the views from over the hedge to the south east are rewarding with glimpses of the Malverns. Understandably, Ludo and Mina find odd rustles and squeaks from in the hedge more exciting. When you reach the top of the hill look at the beautiful cottage garden on your right. Turn left down the lane signposted to Tipton Hall riding school. Pause to see the stunning views from the gate to a house that you pass on your right. Before you get to the stables, be wary of a band of over-zealous dogs which may



A summer's walk around Edwin Loach

alarm you. Carry on until the lane bends to the right to Tipton Hall. Take the gate on your left by the fuel tank into the field, where the horses made a bee-line for us, so the irate Ludo has to be separated from them by the hedge. Follow the right hand hedge. At the far corner take the right hand gate. Take a line diagonally north west to a strip of woodland. As I pause to let the dogs away, in this vacant field, I admire the sheep scattered fields and the rising hills toward Lower Sapey.

Cross the stile into the wood. The descending path, which may be rather overgrown, is very slightly to the left and passes on the right a holly tree then continues to a footbridge. Ascend to the stile and in the field head straight over to the right hand corner of the wood. Here turn right and continue to a stile in the left hand corner and cross it. Keep close to the left hand boundary. Just past the mature oak tree is the boundary fence of Ireland Cottage. Right before the top boundary take the stile left into the garden, this maybe unmarked and possibly overgrown. Walk up this right hand hedge to a stile on your right, cross this and the next one onto the drive. Turn right and head towards the gate to the left of Hedge House Farm, skirting the crop if necessary. What a struggle we had, the gate was firmly secured, no stile, no squeezable gaps for dogs. I had to woman-handle both over.

3. Keep the farm on your right and enter the lane. Turn right past the farm and go along the bridleway. At the two gates ahead take the right-hand one.

Follow the hedge on your left to another gate and turn right after it. Officially, the path crosses diagonally right and if there is no crop, do this. We had to tread the field's overgrown edge, which Ludo and Mina preferred, but was not easy for me on two legs. Leave by the gate on the eastern side and turn left along the hedge. Go into the next field and with the hedge on your right, continue to a gate to your right into a wood. Go down this path to a bridge, through another gate and up a sunken lane. Be careful as Mina and I found it difficult to tread the dense leaf mould. Emerge into a field, then through a gate onto the lane to Harpley. Turn sharp left along the lane and continue to the road.

4. Turn right and carefully walk the short distance up the road. At the end of the garden on your right, on the opposite side of the road you will see a stile. Climb this and keeping close to the hedge and head down the field. Turn left along the bottom, walking beside the wood on your right. Ludo, waiting well ahead, had located the path. This cuts right, through the trees, to a bridge over a stream, which I took; the dogs' choosing the wetter option. At the other side of the bridge you emerge into open fields. With the hedge to your left ascend the field in a straight line, keeping a straight line to the next boundary. Continue across the middle

of the next field then along the left hedge of the next field. Cross the little bridge, without falling off, as Mina did. You have now reached the top of the ridge. Turn left to walk along it, heading to the far right hand corner of the field. In the next field keep a straight line parallel to the woods as you head for an isolated oak tree and the stile beyond. Cross this to the next field and again keep straight ahead. In the next two fields keep the hedge close to your left as you continue to the lane.

5. Haul yourself up to the rather awkward stile opposite and cross to the far right-hand corner. Over the stile keep the same line across this field too. On reaching the lane turn left up it and admire, as you pass, the barns to be seen to the right. Soon we found ourselves at the top of the hill at the turning to St Mary's and the end of our walk. As we turned the corner, I was about to let the dogs free but then I espied a brown hare, about to cross from the field onto the lane ahead of us. As this little creature did so, he was alerted to our presence by a high pitched whine from Ludo, a hare's breath, then gone. Carry on into the graveyard (where sheep were gently grazing) take the time to pause on a bench, then explore the hushed interior of St Mary's with its most unusual herringbone brickwork and lintel stone, thought to be a sacred relic.

