

# Herefordshire Railway Walks

## Walk Eleven - Almeley

- 4.25 easy walk with very few gradients. Five stiles
- Village, country lane, pasture and parkland
- Ordnance Survey map - Knighton and Presteigne (Explorer 201)

### The Route

1. Almeley Village Hall. With your back to the cricket ground where your correspondent played once and ended up in hospital, TR along the road, past the school. At the junction, cross road into St Mary's churchyard, with view of old castle to L. Go clockwise, half way around the church. Exit via gate. TL along road. Pass Almeley Manor and go down under the old Kington and Eardisley Railway bridge (with the old station up to L.) Keep ahead for Nieuport, passing Station Farm.
2. Nieuport House Lodge. TR a few paces up the drive, then TL across stile into field. Go half R across, possibly clumpy, field. In the far corner diagonal from the Lodge, find steps down bank and go through gate. TL along greensward, with Nieuport lake to your R. Take stile into pasture, R edge/hedge, and go through three gates ahead to the road at Cherry Tree Farm. TR. Follow the country lane, straight ahead, for half a mile.
3. The Parks. Pass the house (R) to the apex of the L bend. TR, enter field, go through gate and follow R edge, soon joining an obvious track which leads to the back of Nieuport House. Follow the pines to the drive, behind and to L of the property, to a surfaced junction just beyond the main environs of the House. TL, signed for Highmoor Cottage past walled garden (R). Go through two gates at cottage and head along R edge/hedge of pasture, through gate on other side.
4. Cross paths. TR along the inviting grassy track. Go ahead through the gate and farmyard. Keep ahead on the narrow lane (exactly parallel with the old Kington and Eardisley Railway line.) Reach junction. TL (now with station up to R.) Follow road for 100m to right bend.
5. "Batch Cottage sign". TL along wide footpath for 70m. Fork R off main path up narrower path. After 110m, turn sharp R up Vaughan's Way and enter field via stile and steps. Bear R of telegraph line to other side of field. Exit via k-gate and head past bungalows from Oaklee. At No.1, go L, crossing Wyche Way stile into field. TR along near edge to reach road via stile next to no. 21. TR a few paces to junction.
6. Woonton turn. TL as if for Woonton and Hereford. Keep ahead to Hall, L of cricket ground.



## 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.