

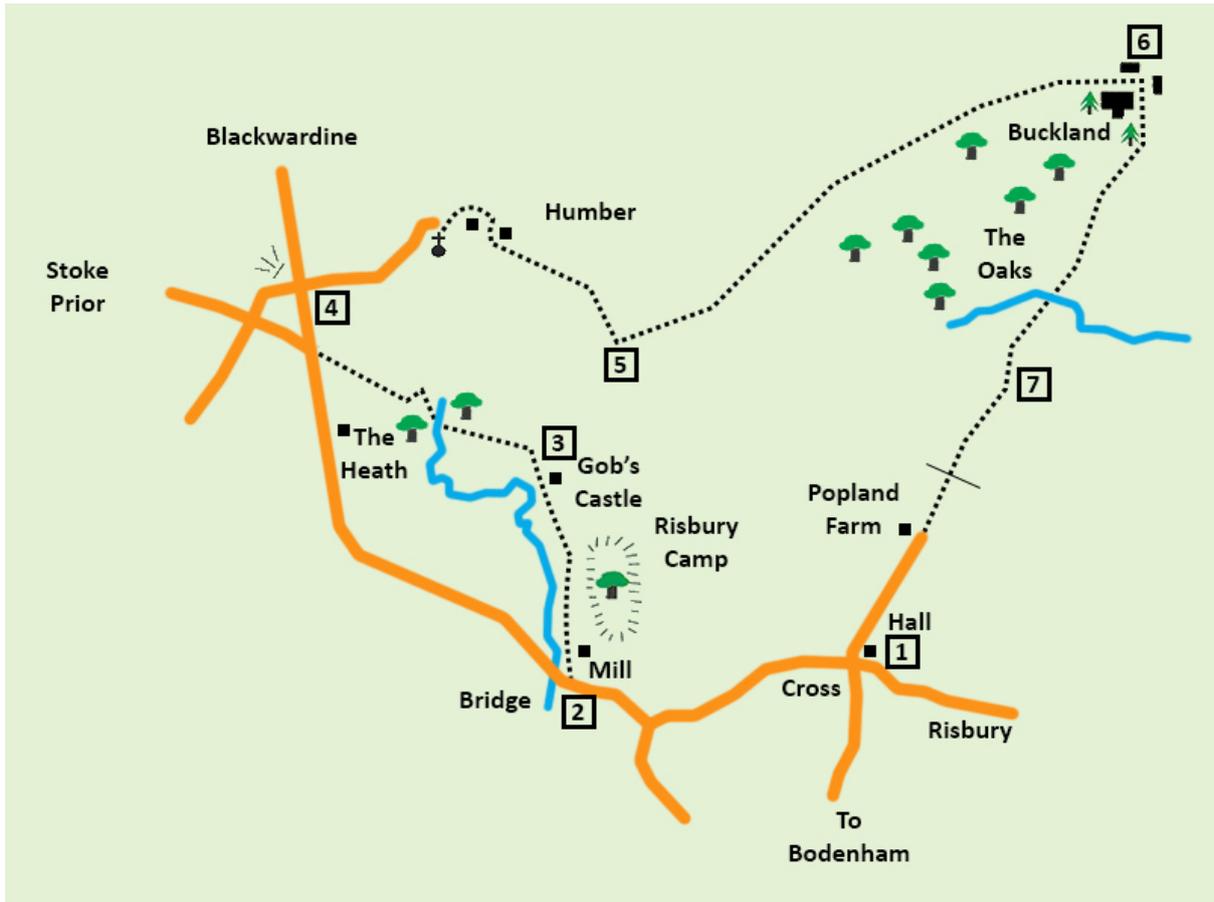
# Walking with Alfred Watkins

## Walk One - Risbury, Blackwardine and Humber

- A beautiful, varied, five-mile moderate ramble
- Country lanes, brooks and field paths
- OS Map - Leominster and Bromyard (Explorer 202)

### The Route

1. Risbury Village Hall. HR6 0NQ. Park tidily by hall and with it to your R, go straight ahead over crossroads westwards. Drop down along tree-canopied road. Pass "Gate House", bend R, up to junction, TR and descend to pond just beyond old mill house.
2. Risbury Bridge. Immediately after bridge, TR into orchard and follow marker posts 120m to walkers' bridge over brook. Cross and TL. Go through wooden gate ahead, with tree-clad Risbury Camp up to your R. Stay to R of Humber Brook through paddock, over stile, through (possibly nettled) copse, and out via stiled footbridge to follow hedge in front of you up to R between it and the building called Gob's Castle.
3. Gob's Castle. 100m beyond building TL through waymarked gate. Now go half R over crest of large crop field down to far R corner and cross brook (in trees) via stiled footbridge. TL, through trees for 20m. TR through gate. Follow narrow path through trees. Bear L to exit trees via gated footbridge. Bear R, then bear L up bank, pass marker post, keep to R edge of field beyond stile on R. After 60m, TR through small gate into next arable field. Go half L, on to road via stile. Keep on same line across road junction towards Stoke Prior, between Ashcroft and Glencroft. At Stoke Prior sign, TR for school. Bend to R.
4. Blackwardine Crossroads. This is where Alfred Watkins "discovered" leys. With "Fairview" 75m to your L (ignore), instead go straight ahead along "No Through Road" all the way to Humber Church. Opposite church lych-gate TL along path signed towards Humber Court Farm. Keep bending R, then TR for 30m and TL to pass through a gate just beyond a barn. Go slightly L up long pasture to far L corner and through waymarked gate. Follow L edge/hedge of next field down to cross gated footbridge in bottom L corner.
5. Bridle Path. TL along L edge of large field, through gate in L corner, next L edge and go through gate at end, 30m in from L corner. Go straight ahead across furrow in next field, ahead through next gate, L edge, through next gate, L edge, further bridle-marked gate, up bank, through gate (L of buildings) and ahead along lane, still ahead on permissive path into Buckland farm buildings forecourt. Go ahead.
6. Buckland. 50m beyond a weather-vane on roof to your R, TR (unsigned) between barns and into canopy of trees. Bear R through gate into open field, passing just to R of a corner sticking out at you, and pick up L edge/hedge, and go slightly L to find gate in L corner. Go through and descend quite sharply just to R of tree in field below you. Cross Holly brook via low bridge and gate, climb L edge of huge crop field to find stile up to your L after about 250m, before hut.
7. "High" Stile. Cross stile and TR on your original line up along old drovers' lane. Just beyond stile on R (ignore) go through farm gate, bear R by a grid (L) down a track past Gilhorn Cottage, up beyond "Rail Meadow" and Poplands to join surfaced track back to Risbury Cross.



## 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.