

Ludo and Mina take the Egg and Bacon Line

Hazel Alexander of the Hereford Group of the Ramblers and her faithful collie companions go on a January jaunt from the west of the city to Burghill

L Ludo, Mina and I generally like to avoid tarmac. But in the short days of January, the weather can be dismal, with difficulty driving or catching public transport. A walk out from Hereford seemed a good idea, as this is where the bulk of the county's population resides. The area I chose for the walk holds echoes of a life long gone, railway, Romans and more. So we headed to Three Elms Road, where, just to the right of Whitecross School, we leave the road and, Ludo in the lead, we follow the well worn track diagonally across the field to a gate. This is where the railway line, axed by Dr Beeching in 1963, ran from Hereford to Hay and Brecon. It was known as the egg and bacon line, because of the produce it transported to and from the city. I can imagine Ludos and Minas of the past snuffling the delicious smells of bread and beer and such, missed by us humans. Continue diagonally past a magnificent oak and across a footbridge over the Yazor Brook into another field that skirts Huntington Court and Church. Cross this lane and go through a gate, take the path to your left and keep the buildings on your left as you cross the field and after a little while meet the Yazor Brook, which provides refreshment for the dogs. Follow the footpath right, along its eastern bank. Ludo and Mina wait for me at the end of this path, by the stout gate beyond which is the highway called Roman Road.

2 To the west at the Romano-British town of Magna, now lamentably no more than fields, this road meets



Go west: Ludo and Mina lead the way into Hereford's countryside

“ The walk holds echoes of a life long gone, railway, Romans and more ”

another Roman road passing to the south east of Credenhill below its magnificent hill fort. Cross this Roman legacy to the lane opposite and carry on along it until it forks. Keep right and climb gently proceeding until you come to a cross road. On the opposite side a little to your right, is the greater part of the Hereford Lunatic Asylum (completed in 1871), latterly called St Mary's Hospital. It has been converted to dwellings as part of a luxury housing development. Contrary to common belief about such institutions, it appears to have given good asylum to those in need. The patients could join in twice

weekly dances or be escorted on walks in the surrounding area, very probably involving some of our paths, which shows that walking was considered as good for mental health then as now.

Cross to the lane opposite and walk along until you see the barn conversions at Little Burlton. The footpath goes off to the left through their car park where you will see a stile. There is notice of a bull but fortunately the dogs and I face only sheep and we proceed with no fuss to a stile in the corner of the hedge, to the right of the line of aged willows. Before us lies Burghill, here Ludo and Mina are released and herald the ►

way along the hedge line where their excitement leads me to believe, although unseen, that the hedge harbours potential animal interest. At the end of this hedge the path cuts slightly diagonally right where you can just make out a stile, an unusual one. When we climb the stile I notice its flat metal bars and enter the lane, where Ludo nips off to have a brief sociable encounter with a Welsh Border terrier.

Follow the lane to the end and turn left into Haymeadow Lane, then left again into this picturesque little village. Turn right up the side of the churchyard then turn nearly back on yourself up a footpath and through a gate on your left, to gain its entry (dogs on leads welcome). A church has occupied this position since the 11th century. Take time to peruse the graveyard. On the north side are the 2,000 burials from St Mary's Hospital, in the south gravestones of locals. Regard the preaching cross, and perhaps enter the Church of St Mary the Virgin. While Ludo and Mina remain in the porch, I explore, finding the interior restored in 1880, to be wide, mellow and welcoming. Leave by the yew avenue that descends to the road, turn right following round the bend to the left across the Tillington Road and past the entrance drive, on your right to Burghill Court.

3 Opposite the tall imposing Home Farm, we take the stile into a small field that is paddock to a few ponies, which ignore the dogs as we cross straight to another stile. An imposing oak lies ahead, keep this on your right and cut diagonally to a stile sited in the hedge before the collection of huts and a caravan. Cross the lane through a gate into a field. Keep straight ahead to the right of an oak, beyond which another gate, then straight up over fine parkland, and over a stile. Turn right here at Stretton Nursing Home, built originally as Stretton Isolation Hospital where, depending on the time of day, you may hear as we did the gentle tinkle of cutlery upon china. Continue to just past where the path meets their drive



Ludo and Mina perch on a tree stump at Stretton Sugwas

and take a footpath on your left that runs beside a hedge.

Follow this path, with its distant views of Hay Bluff, until the hedge ends. There are a series of vast oaks to be seen and admired here and also as you turn left onto the bridleway. Unimpressed, Ludo and Mina sniff for rabbits. This path soon opens into a wide grassy track between the hedgerows, this turns into muddy track for a stretch, then grass again before crossing over Yazor Brook. Turning right the dogs refresh paws and thirst at the accommodating riverbank. To the left of the footpath is the Priory

Hotel where a stone in the grounds states that 'Stretton Sugwas Church... [was] removed... from the place that you are standing'. Turn right into Priory Lane, at its end cross the Credenhill road carefully.

4 On the other side of the road a little way up the dead end, we go through the metal kissing gate into a meadow that is often grazed with cattle but not today and the dogs delight in a little play together, which is something Ludo tries hard to get Mina engaged in

THE WALK

Start/parking: Whitecross School, Three Elms Road

Maps: OS Explorer 202: ref.SO 490414

Length: Eight miles

Grade: Moderate

Stiles: Seven

Public transport: Bus 72 from Hereford. For more information see www.herefordshire.gov.uk/transport/public_transport

Nearest town: Hereford

Toilets: As refreshments

Refreshments: At Stretton Sugwas: Priory Hotel (01432 760264) or The Traveller's Rest, open Wednesday to Sunday and dog friendly. (01432 760268)

To view a larger version of this map visit www.herefordshire.greatbritishlife.co.uk



more often! Keep straight across to the kissing gate with Stretton Sugwas Church in view. Come onto the lane, the Roman road again, and turn left past the houses to the 'old road', where you turn right. Here, you can take refreshment at the Traveller's Rest. Carry on past the school and onto the 'new road' with footpath and just over where the railway line used to be is a gate on your right. Go through this and the next up ahead. Then turn left along the hedge to a sort of gate/stile. Much to Ludo's alarm the fat piggy-eye sheep in this field follow us closely. Ludo looks this way and that over his shoulder and has trouble going forward. (Mina, of course, is above this kind of foolish behaviour.) At the stile/gate struggle through and make sure it is closed and head straight to the Hay road.

Cross with care and turn left passing Swainshall, then turn right into Breinton Lane. Keep walking until you come to Green Lane on your left, the name indicates its age, and turn up here. To your right, the trees of Breinton Fruit Farm sport mistletoe pom-poms. Continue until the crossing of tracks at a little wood, Wye Vale nature reserve. Turning left and then

immediately right, we are summoned into it by the crepuscular calls of roosting rooks. Take either the left or middle path, listening, depending on the time of day, for a great variety of birds. Leave the wood at the far end through a metal gate that joins Green Lane again. Turn left pass the drovers pond and straight on past Drovers Wood. Looking left I can see roughly where we have rambled. Looking west, Badnage Wood and Credenhill; east, parts of the city and the Malverns and north on a clear day, Titterstone Clee in Shropshire. Go straight across the top of this field and in the next follow the path down the far side with the hedgerow on your right.

5 Continue to the Kings Acre Road and cross over into Huntingdon Lane, where after a while you cross a bridge over the former railway. Follow the lane, take care on the right and then left hand bends for there is not much room for traffic and pedestrians. We stop on the bridge over the Yazor Brook where it mingles with a duck pond. The ducks surge over in hunger and Ludo and Mina tug their leads, stomachs telling them we are nearing our start point. And they are quite right as round

The Ramblers

The Ramblers The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and improve conditions for all walkers. In Herefordshire there are four groups: Hereford, Mortimer, Ross-on-Wye and Leaddon Vale. **For more information contact Tom Fisher, tel: 01886 821544 or email: tomfisher@virgin.net**



the next bend next to the entrance to Huntingdon Church is the path we came up that will take us and you back to the start on Three Elms Road. ■

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