

# A railway ramble through time

By Tom Fisher of Leadon Vale Ramblers

This walk explores some of the remoter parts of Herefordshire, known to geographers as the Bromyard plateau. An added bonus is the chance to re-discover one of Herefordshire's lost railways.

1 From Edwyn Ralph village hall walk back to the main road and turn right towards Bromyard. Walk through the village and when you come to the de-restriction sign take a stile on your left. Walk across the field to a stile and then on to a gate into a lane. Turn right along the lane. At a T-junction turn left and follow the lane to St Michael's church, Edwyn Ralph.

The Domesday Book records an area by Bromyard, belonging to Osbern Fitz Richard called "Gedeven". This land passed to two families, the Ralphs and the De Loges, giving the names "Gedeven Ralf" and "Gedeven Loges" which have over time become Edwyn Ralph and Edvin Loach. Local legend tells of two noblemen, one from each parish, fighting a duel over a local beauty. Hearing of a duel, she rushed to separate the pair, only to be killed by the duelists who then fought to the death. All three are reputed to be buried at Edwyn Ralph.

Go through the lych-gate and cross a stile on the right. Turn left and go straight across the field. At the end of the field you come to a footbridge. Cross it and turn sharp right along the field edge. At the corner turn left along the hedge and find a double stile on the right corner. Now carry straight on across the field, maintaining your height (not going down into the dip), join the hedge on your right and reach a



Looking towards Bromyard Downs

stile/gate and then straight ahead to a gate onto the road at Tack Farm (Winslow Grange). Turn left and then take the Rowden turn on your right.

2 Walk along the lane for a mile or so, past Rowden Abbey and Rowden Mill. Soon after Rowden Mill, you cross the old Bromyard-Leominster railway.

This is the focal point of our walk. The Railway Act to provide a railway between Worcester and Leominster via Bromyard was passed in 1861 but the railway was not fully completed until 1897. The line always struggled economically but, socially, it provided an excellent method of getting produce to market. The Bromyard-Leominster section closed in 1952, although there

was one last nostalgic journey in 1958 before the track was pulled up. The Worcester-Bromyard section closed in 1964. At Bromyard there is a narrow gauge track along the first mile towards Worcester. It is not open to the public. At the next station, Rowden Mill, which we will soon pass, the station has been lovingly restored, complete with section of track and rolling stock. At Fencote, the next station, the owner Mr Matthews, has also done a wonderful restoration job. He welcomes visitors but you must ring beforehand on 01885 482390.

3 Now turn immediately right along a narrow lane, passing Rowden station. Soon you reach Great Wacton. Go



Lovingly-restored Fencote Station

WALK

## Walk information

**Start/parking:** Park by Edwyn Ralph village hall, off B4214 Bromyard to Tenbury Road GR 643583

**Maps:** Explorer 202

**Length:** Seven miles

**Grade:** Moderate/energetic

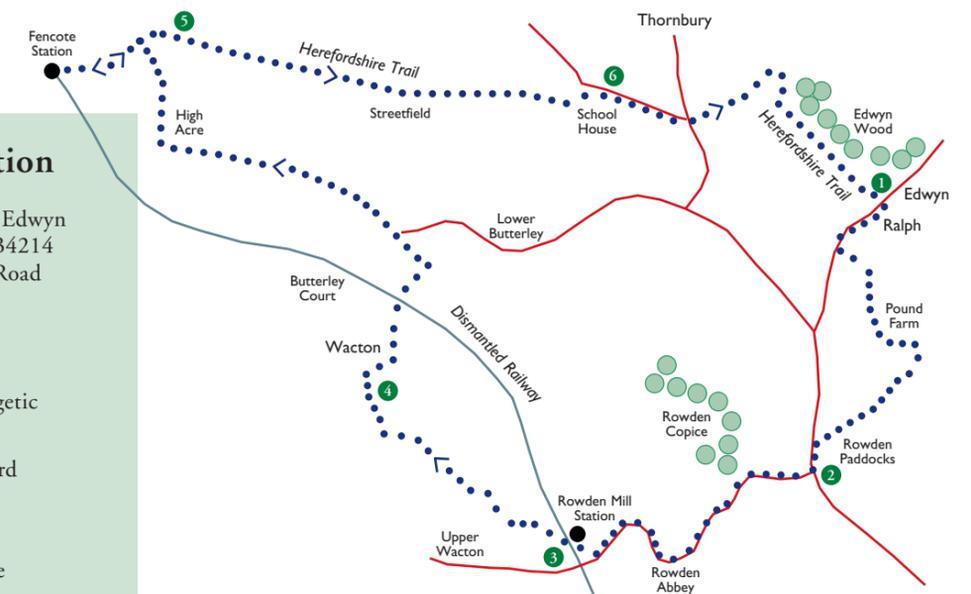
**Stiles:** Nine

**Nearest town:** Bromyard

**Refreshments:** None

**Toilets:** None

**Public transport:** None



through the farm and take the left-hand of two footpaths, climbing the gate if necessary. Go diagonally across the large field to reach the opposite corner by a stream and go through what can be a very muddy gateway. Carry on straight ahead and look out for a footbridge and stile in the trees on the right hand side.

Go up the field and through a gate, then up the field again to reach Wacton Grange.

4 When you reach a lane turn right and the lane then becomes just a track. Go through a gate and on reaching the bridleway, bear half-left down a large

open field. Admire the fine old railway embankment ahead and Wall Hills Iron Age fort beyond. There is no right of way along the old track but it would make a wonderful walking or cycle route. Find a gate in the trees at the bottom and cross under the railway line and continue along the bridleway. ▶

## WALK



Above: Rowden Station  
Right: Mistletoe on fruit tree  
Below: Wall Hills Iron Age Fort  
Bottom: Edwyn Ralph Church



At Butterly Brook, cross the lane and continue along the bridleway. Enjoy the open country as you bowl along the bridleway, which, after a mile, bears right and, after 400 yards, turns into a lane and begins to climb.

5 At the top of the hill, you meet the Herefordshire Trail.

If you are visiting Fencote station, and have an appointment, turn left along a footpath just 50 yards before the Herefordshire Trail. In a few minutes you will reach the station. Otherwise turn right along the Herefordshire Trail.

The Herefordshire Trail is a circular walk of about 154 miles, all within the County of Herefordshire, visiting all the market towns and some delightful villages. The route was devised by the Hereford Group of the Ramblers, using public rights of way and, where possible, public transport links. Copies of the Trail book can be purchased locally in Tourist Information Centres, bookshops or ring 01432 264374.

First you go through five fields, enjoying then good views in front of you towards Bromyard Downs and the Malvern Hills beyond. The ramparts of the Wall Hills Iron Age Fort stand out impressively on your left. The route is easy to find and you feel on top of the world as the cottages and farms of Thornbury appear ahead. Pause to

admire the mistletoe, and reflect that we are only a few miles from Tenbury, the centre of the UK mistletoe industry. At a lane crossing, carry on down a hedge-enclosed footpath. When it emerges into the field, go to the left of the hedge in front of you and continue down this field with the hedge on your right. At the bottom, you will cross the Frome, which rises just to the north of us. The geology of the Frome has been well described in the Frome Valley Discovery Guide available from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust on 01905 855184. Go through the gateway on the right and then follow the track round to the left. As the track bears left, follow the hedge on your right, up to the corner of the field, to a stile leading out into the lane. You are now in Thornbury. If you have time, turn left along the lane, and visit the lovely St Anna's church.

6 Otherwise, turn right and follow the lane to the next road junction, where the bridleway leaves the lane opposite. Take the bridleway straight up the field, passing close to the dog-leg in the hedge on your right and then continue into the next field with the fence on your right. Continue down the field but do not go through the gate in front of you but enter the wood on your right and then go through a small

wooden gate. Follow the bridleway through the wood to the next gate. Turn left and follow this track back to Edwyn Ralph. ■

**\* There is a chance to do this walk with Leadon Vale Ramblers on Saturday February 6, 10am start, including a visit to Fencote station. All are welcome. Please ring Tom Fisher on 01886 821544.**

### The Ramblers

The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and to improve conditions for all walkers. The Ramblers is celebrating its 75th anniversary and has won many victories, the most recent being the new coastal access legislation. In Herefordshire there are four local groups, Hereford, Mortimer, Ross on Wye and Leadon Vale.

**For more information contact Tom Fisher, tel: 01886 821544 or email: tomfisher@virgin.net**



FOR MORE WALKS

