

Walking to the WORLD'S END

Hazel Alexander of the Hereford Group of The Ramblers takes her dog Ludo on a journey through sleeping orchards

1 Staunton-on-Wye is in fact over a mile north of the Wye. Its medieval name was Standon, meaning stony hill. My dog Mina who has appeared in previous walks, is now retired, only meeting up with our Rambler friends on the shortest of jaunts, so it is Ludo and I only who walk east from Staunton-on-Wye village hall. A little way before the New Inn a footpath on the left takes you between two cottages and over a stile. Then over a second into a plough or small field. Keeping Ludo on the lead we follow the hedge to another stile; crossing this you find yourself in close proximity to a shed on your right and the hedge on your left. The path is often muddy too. At the end of the shed you emerge into an open garden, cross this to the five-bar gate to the left of which is a stile. Cross into the unmade lane and turn right.

2 Past the few cottages where the lane turns right carry straight on over the stile into the orchard. From here the views

north to Shropshire and west to Hergest and Bradnor are stunning on a clear day. Ludo and I walk along the unmarked avenue through the trees, heading east still, to reach an unusual stepped, green metal stile that takes us down to a road. Follow this road left and then take the first turn right along the track, past a cottage, then through a gate and into another orchard. Turn right and walk, for a very short distance, then turn left along the obvious wide path. Cross the orchard to a gate and go through into the field. Here there is a wide field margin on which to walk. You may hear waterfowl as a pond lies down the slope to your left. Ludo, with his first taste of freedom from the lead since we began, speeds along the hedge, glancing up into the dormant cherry trees that we pass, hoping for a sight of a squirrel. At the far corner of the field follow the path left. Pass the abandoned farm, now claimed by ash and elder. Keep close to hedge on the right and continue to a gate, then along a path through the bushes to reach a track.

3 Turn left along this track. The preferable footpath marked on the map that runs alongside this track can no longer be found, so listen out for traffic as you walk. A merry little water course accompanies you along this way and Ludo is very keen to smell the scents left by those who frequented its banks. Follow this track until you reach a bridge on your right, if it is hopelessly overgrown, you may have to retrace your steps and instead take the next gate into the fields on your left, then walk back along the hedge to the bridge. Cross the field to the far right-hand corner of the wood that is, straight ahead if you have come over the bridge, or to your right if you have walked down from the gate. Pheasants are reared in this wood, so persuade your dogs past on a lead. Climb the stile in the corner

next to the oak, then turn left and cross to the next one. In this next field follow the footpath, if it is visible or a line that bears slightly left with the oak trees to your right. Ahead you will see a hedge that extends down to the left, which ends in a corner on the path line. Before reaching this you must turn right on the dissecting path coming from a point to the left where you see the wood ends and on the right your side of a double-legged wooden pylon. Turn right up the field heading for a point between two oak trees in the

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hedge line. Cross into the next field, bearing left then straight to where the marker post can be seen at the lane.

4 Turning left walk through Upper Norton, past the old brewery and over the disused railway line. At the T-junction, where Cross Farm can be seen to your right, turn left along the road then cross the footbridge on your right. Cross this field to the stile bridge, where Ludo in his enthusiasm to crack on, (elegant hurdler that he is) comes a cropper and ends in the ditch. Cut slightly left across this field until you are parallel to the hedge on your left. Continue until the stile on your left.

5 Here you have a choice, time and weather permitting. St Nicholas Church, Norton Canon, lies down the path to the right. Although this church has a 13th century tower, the rest was rebuilt in brick (which is unusual for Herefordshire) in the 18th century. This rebuild interestingly incorporated the plain 13th century windows.





Getting there

Start/parking: Staunton-on-Wye village hall. SO 364 451.

Maps: OS Explorer 201.

Distance: 6.6 miles.

Grade: Moderate.

Stiles: 20+.

Public transport: Bus 446 from Hereford. Contact Traveline 0871 2002233 for details.

Nearest town: Hereford.

Refreshments: The New Inn, 01981 500346.

Toilets: At the New Inn.

THE RAMBLERS

The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and improve conditions for all walkers. There are four groups in Herefordshire: Hereford, Mortimer, Ross-on-Wye and Leaddon Vale. For more information contact

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Above: Ludo leads the way

Head back through the gate over the fields to the previous point of choice. Cross the stile and keep straight on to the field corner ahead. Cross the stile, initially keeping the hedge close on your left, then continuing the same line past the oak tree to the next stile. Over the stile cross straight to the hedge, turn left at the corner, then bear right to the footpath marker visible ahead. Cross the stile and descend over two fields to a lane, whilst taking in the view of Hay Bluff and beyond. Then cross the stile and lane to another stile in the hedge opposite. To your right is the property named Darkley. Cross this field to the footbridge ahead. Once across, if there is not a path put in across the field, which should bear diagonally right, turn left to follow the field's edge clockwise to the track, turn right on to it and continue to a stile on your left, cross it into the field. In these next few fields the going is often wet and muddy. Traverse this field diagonally right to a footbridge. In the next field face slightly left and head obliquely to the oak tree to the right of the wide gap to the next field. Then continue through this field on the same line to a crossing through the hedge, into the next field. Continue to the gate in the left hand corner of the field. You have reached World's End, formerly a

fairly common name for dwellings on the edge of a parish or in remote areas.

⑥ Once through the rickety gate, turn right in front of the house along the track and then through the little gate beside the cattle grid ahead. Before the cottage, look left for a bridge taking you over a watercourse. Then follow this path alongside the garden on your left. Go through the gate into a field. Keeping the same line as the path you are on cross the field to a stile. Turn left and pass the gate on your left. Cross the bridge into the



Above: Norton Canon's brick church

orchard and turn immediately right, through the wide opening in the hedge into Lower House Orchard nature reserve. One of the many creatures this reserve now shelters is the medicinal leech. Here there are several paths to take, but Ludo and I not wishing to disturb the wildlife take the path that hugs the fields on our right. We follow this until we emerge once more into the orchard. Continue with the hedge on your right, the apple trees stretching far into the distance on your left. Ludo locates the stile, which can easily be overlooked, on our right in the hedge. It is high, difficult to climb and I close my eyes as Ludo, with a small whimper and valiant effort, reaches the other side. Continue straight across the field following the wide path to the gate onto the lane.

This area is known as Little London and must have been on or near a drover's route and so named by a returning drover. Turn left and walk up the lane passing a few houses until you reach a footpath sign on the left; turn sharp left down the side of the house then follow the path as it turns right. Proceed until you reach the stile on your right, at 2, which you came over near the beginning of the walk. Cross it again, squeeze past the shed to the stile and retrace your tracks to the starting point. ■