

The Watkins Way



Celebrating Alfred Watkins' Discovery of Ley Lines

A 106 mile scenic route through
Herefordshire's wild, ancient landscapes.
Touring lost castles, remote churches, early hillforts
and sacred pre-historic stones.

HEREFORDSHIRE



The Watkins' Way

SCENIC DRIVING & CYCLING ROUTE - 106.25 MILES

- 1 Woolhope Church, HR1 4QR
- 2 Dinedor Hill, HR2 6PD - 7.95 miles
- 3 Kilpeck Church & Castle, HR2 9DN - 9.63 miles
- 4 Dore Abbey, HR2 0AA - 5.08 miles
- 5 Clodock Church, HR2 OPD - 5.13 miles
- 6 Longtown Castle, HR2 0LE - 1.17 miles
- 7 Michaelchurch Escley Church, HR2 0JS - 5.1 miles
- 8 Snodhill Castle, HR3 6BG - 6.89 miles
- 9 Moccas Hill Wood, HR3 6AX - 2.19 miles
- 10 Arthur's Stone, HR3 6AX - 0.72 miles
- 11 Bredwardine Church & Castle Mound, HR3 6BT - 2.11 miles
- 12 Eardisley Church & Castle Mound, HR3 6NL - 4.31 miles
- 13 Pembridge Church & Old Market House, HR6 9HH - 11.12 miles
- 14 Shobdon Church & Arches, HR6 9LZ - 4.67 miles
- 15 Wigmore Castle & Church, HR6 9UB - 5.97 miles
- 16 Richards Castle Church & Castle, SY8 4ET - 6.58 miles
- 17 National Trust Croft Castle & Croft Ambrey Hillfort, HR6 9PW - 5.77 miles
- 18 Blackwardine, HR6 ONE - 10.37 miles
- 19 Hereford via Sutton St Nicholas - 11.8 miles



On June 30 1921 Alfred Watkins had an extraordinary revelation. As he stood on a Herefordshire hillside, it came to him that straight tracks criss-crossed the landscape, connecting ancient and spiritual sites.

He christened them ley lines and regarded them as we might imagine a Neolithic Sat Nav — straight tracks enabling our ancestors to situate themselves in the landscape and navigate through it. We know our forebears travelled for trade, rituals and celebrations, perhaps these alignments unveiled how such a feat had been made possible.

The Watkins Way is a brand new route for drivers and cyclists, launched to celebrate the centenary of this significant discovery.

Wind along quiet country lanes and through wild green landscapes to reveal the county's ley line highlights: secluded churches, crumbling castles, ancient hillforts, standing stones and a Neolithic burial mound. The trail meanders through the aptly named Golden Valley and takes in the picture-perfect black and white villages in the north of the county.

Naturally, as this is Herefordshire, the route is peppered with outstanding country pubs, craft cider makers and open gardens.

Take a journey from the modern day to the ancient past, climbing hilltops to marvel at the views and gaze out across the county that sparked Watkins' revelation.

A Herefordshire Story

An enthusiastic antiquarian, talented inventor and pioneer photographer, Alfred Watkins was a born and bred Herefordian who knew the county's lanes and byways like the back of his hand.

He was born in Hereford on 27 January 1855 in the Imperial Inn, a pub on Widemarsh Street which still stands today. His father was a classic Victorian entrepreneur who expanded the 'Imperial Empire', establishing a brewery and flour mill. Meanwhile, Alfred travelled the length and breadth of Herefordshire, taking orders for the family business.

The local landscape ignited something in him. He was passionate about documenting rural life and a sense of place through photography. And he fought for the preservation of various heritage buildings. He was also a lifelong member of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club which studied local geology, natural history and antiquities.

Pulling together his geographical and historical knowledge, he went on to expound his ley lines theory in *The Old Straight Track*, published in 1925. Still in print, his book and the concept of ley lines continue to intrigue.

Planning Your Trip

Follow the route as a leisurely drive over three to four days, depending on how long you linger at each stop, or tackle the backroads and decent climbs on two wheels. Cyclists can devote a week to soaking up the history and landscapes on offer, or select a favourite section.

For places to stay en route, explore the accommodation options on the interactive map at www.visitherefordshire.co.uk/watkins-way. Alternatively, Hereford sits at the heart of the county and makes an excellent base. Favourite country pubs and restaurants are highlighted in this guide and even more can be found on our website.

Bring binoculars to make the most of the views and to help visualise the ley lines running between key points, such as hilltops. Please note that the roads to our remote places tend to be narrow country lanes, so take your time and enjoy the journey.

1 Woolhope Church, HR1 4QR

The Watkins Way starts in the tiny village of Woolhope. It's a special place for Watkins, he was a lifelong member, and later president, of the esteemed Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club. And it was with this group that he first shared his theories about ley lines. Woolhope Church itself lies on the Malvern Hill alignment which runs from the Herefordshire Beacon (British Camp in the Malvern Hills) through the church and on to the highest point of Aconbury Camp. Stand at the top of the churchyard and look out in both directions to see if you can observe this ley. The village and valley of Woolhope is named after Wulviva who, with her more famous sister Godiva, gave the land to the Dean and Chapter of Hereford.

In the area: The Crown Inn next door serves over 30 local ciders and perries.

2 Dinedor Hill, HR2 6PD - 7.95 miles

Travelling west for Dinedor there is a sprinkling of villages with pretty churches on the leys, including Fownhope and Mordiford. Make for the B4399 through Holme Lacy, turning for Dinedor and on to Dinedor Cross where you turn right and go to the top of Dinedor Camp which has a small car park.

Take a wander around this former Iron Age hillfort which dates back to around 350BC. Gaze out across Hereford - Watkins identified an alignment between the highest corner of the mound with the spire of All Saints Church in Hereford and the tower of the Cathedral. Nowadays, the best view of the two buildings is from the path.

In the area: Aconbury Camp is a nearby hillfort which aligns with the Herefordshire Beacon - on the A49, turn for Kingsthorpe, park in the village and walk up Warren's Lane to reach the hill.

The mystery of mounds

Mounds, such as Dinedor Hill, were significant to Watkins as they are elevations, either manmade or natural, which can be seen from a distance. They date from pre-Roman times but their original purpose remains unknown. Watkins considered them as 'terminal points' on ley lines, along with early Iron Age camps and original motte and baileys.



Kilpeck Church

3 Kilpeck Church & Castle, HR2 9DN - 9.63 miles

Return to Dinedor Cross, taking in the magnificent views of the Black Mountains before descending the hill, turning right and then turning for Ridgehill. Turn left onto the A49 and then take the A466 for Wormelow. In the village, make for the B4348 towards Hay. Pass Much Dewchurch's timeless stone cottages before turning left for Kilpeck.

Famed for its stunning carvings — the work of the Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture - Kilpeck Church is a medieval gem. Revel in the red sandstone carvings, which range from the amusing and grotesque through to the rather rude! Inside, admire the wonderfully carved chancel arch and the semi-circular apse. The church sits on a ley line with Kilpeck Castle on the left-hand side. This utterly bucolic spot was once the heart of a thriving walled town. The castle was ruined during the English Civil War to prevent re-use and there is a pervading sense of history beneath your feet.

In the area: The church is opposite The Kilpeck Inn, an excellent country pub which focuses on local provenance.

4 Dore Abbey, HR2 0AA - 5.08 miles

Follow the road round from the church, turning left at the next two T-junctions to arrive on the A465. In Wormbridge, take the right-hand turn for Dore Abbey, continuing along tranquil green lanes, turning left at two further junctions. Pull over by the village hall and access the Abbey on foot via Tan House Farm.

Soak up the serenity at Dore Abbey. These days, sheep graze in the fields surrounding the secluded parish church but, in its prime, it was one of the great medieval Cistercian monasteries of England. As such, it takes its place as a terminal on the Canterbury ley line which runs from the Abbey to Canterbury Cathedral via Gloucester Cathedral, Downing Street, Greenwich and Rochester Cathedral. Make time to contemplate the wall paintings, original stone altar and wooden carved screen, the work of celebrated 17th-century craftsman John Abel.

In the area: Taste hand-crafted tipples at Gwatkin Cider shop and café in the village, open every day.



Dore Abbey



Garway Hill

Take a detour....

Drive to Garway Hill (HR2 8RU), another ley line point, for superlative 360-degree views across the Malvern Hills, Black Mountains and the Bristol Channel into Wales. It's a 20-minute leg stretch from the car park to the summit. Keep an eye out for the beautiful, wild mountain ponies.

5 Clodock Church, HR2 0PD - 5.13 miles

Turn right out of the Abbey and take the next left, heading up the hill. Bear right at the top and then turn left opposite Battlelands Paintball. Enjoy the awesome panorama before meandering down the steep incline. Splash through the ford and turn right. Continue along until the T-junction in Longtown where you bear left and make for Clodock.

Clodock is a magical early and wholly unrestored church, built on the tomb of a 500AD King, with a superb three-decker pulpit. It's a sublime setting in the shadow of the Black Mountains with the sparkling River Monnow running alongside. Picnic on the flat stones and treat your toes to a paddle.

In the area: Go back in time next door at the Cornwall Arms, a fabulously traditional old pub, or sample the divine flavours at Rowlestone Court Farm's ice-cream parlour.

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A Visit Herefordshire Scenic Route, 2021
www.visitherefordshire.co.uk/watkins-way



6 Longtown Castle, HR2 0LE - 1.17 miles

Turn right in front of Clodock Church for Longtown. Keeping to the left, head up through the village to find the castle on the left-hand side of the road.

The epicentre of leys awaits! With its powerful cylindrical keep, Longtown Castle was strategically located in the lovely Olchon Valley. Close to the Black Mountains, it is built on a mound - with treasure buried within, according to local legend. The castle would have helped guard the English border from the invading Welsh. In an earlier life, it was a Roman fort, established to fight a tribe who were resisting Roman rule.

Of course, Watkins believed the mound had its origins much further back, in Neolithic times. He determined that numerous ley lines featured Longtown Castle, illustrating its historical significance. Scale the keep to scan the landscape - Watkins worked out alignments with Arthur's Stone and also with Llanthony Priory over the Welsh border. Other leys include one between the castle, Longtown Church and the Cat's Back Ridge in the Black Mountains, whilst another connects with nearby Ponthendre, a 30ft high motte which is believed to be the early predecessor of Longtown Castle.

In the area: Pick up an al fresco feast of regional produce at Hopes of Longtown.



7 Michaelchurch Escley Church, HR2 0JS - 5.1 miles

Carry on up the hill, tracing the route of the River Monnow by bearing to the right. Turn right at the T-junction for the village of Michaelchurch Escley.

Michaelchurch Escley is another sleeping beauty, set on the banks of the enchanting Escley Brook. Its simple church features a Roman altar, the remains of 13th-century wall paintings and some fine woodwork. If you are staying nearby then make time to trek through the fields to find the Wern Derys standing stone. At 7ft9, it's the tallest standing stone in the county and it captivated Watkins.

In the area: Enjoy lunch and a local cider by the river at the award-winning Bridge Inn.

Take a detour...

Nearby you'll find Vowchurch Church (HR2 0RB), set delightfully on the banks of the Dore. Spot the famed Adam and Eve carvings, the green man and the display dedicated to Lewis Carroll's brother who was vicar here. St Margaret's Church (HR2 0QW) is also close by, praised by John Betjeman for its secluded location and delicately carved screen and loft. Dating from 1520, the extraordinary screen survived the post reformation order that all such works would be destroyed.

8 Snodhill Castle, HR3 6BG - 6.89 miles

Continue through the village of Michaelchurch Escley, turning right at the crossroads and then left at the next crossroads, heading for Urishay. Continue on towards Peterchurch, turning left by the high school. Carry on along this road, turning left onto 'The Castle' road. Park on the right-hand side, opposite the entrance gate.

Deep in the rolling hills of the Golden Valley you'll find Snodhill Castle. One of the largest and oldest Norman castles in Britain, it was very nearly the great lost castle of the Marches. Scout the substantial remains of the unique 12-sided High Keep with its twin-turreted entrance. The castle is believed to have had unusually elaborate defences as well as high-status accommodation. The hilltop commands an excellent view across a lush green patchwork of fields, something no doubt exploited by generations long before the Normans. Watkins believed that the castle was aligned with Arthur's Stone and Skirrid Fawr in Wales, and was also on a ley with Eardisley Castle Moat and Arthur's Stone.

In the area: Eat out at the Food for Thought Bistro in Peterchurch.

9 Moccas Hill Wood, HR3 6AX - 2.19 miles

Continue on the road with Snodhill Castle on your left and turn right at the crossroads for Dorstone. Then turn left for Hay-on-Wye, and take the next right for Hereford and then the next right out of Dorstone. Follow the road up Pentre Lane, Moccas Hill Wood is on the right.

Feel like lord of all you survey at Moccas Hill Wood, part of the Moccas Park National Nature Reserve. It's a tale of two valleys - on one side of the ridge, view the Golden Valley, then cross to the other side to contemplate the spectacular Wye Valley. Amongst the ancient trees, a ley line runs to the Holy Well in Malvern and a Bronze Age barrow has also been discovered on the site. It's a 15-minute or so walk to the ridge from the car park.

In the area: Peep into Moccas' St Michael and All Angels, a Grade I, Norman Church with its effigy of a knight and wonderfully decorated organ.



10 Arthur's Stone, HR3 6AX - 0.72 miles

From Pentre Lane, drive only a short way and then follow the brown sign up to the left. You can park next to Arthur's Stone.

There's no questioning the ancient importance of Arthur's Stone. This atmospheric Neolithic burial chamber looks out across the Black Mountains and, according to legend, it was here that King Arthur slew a giant who left the impression of his elbows on one of the stones as he fell. C.S. Lewis adored the Golden Valley and the stone table on which Aslan is sacrificed in The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe is said to be inspired by Arthur's Stone.

According to Watkins, it is approached by ley lines from three directions. It aligns with Snodhill Castle, Urishay Castle, Longtown Castle and Skirrid Fawr, also known as the Holy Mountain. The preponderance of 'gold' place names led Watkins to wonder whether one ley was originally an old gold traders' track going from Brewardine Castle to Arthur's Stone, The Golden Well and Dorstone (possibly derived from 'd'or', French for gold, but more likely from the Welsh 'dŵr' meaning water). He later decided that the gold place names were due to a ley on the exact angle of sunrise on Midsummer's Day, creating the Midsummer Ley.

In the area: Drink in the history at The Pandey Inn, Dorstone, the oldest pub in Herefordshire.

11 Bredwardine Church & Castle Mound, HR3 6BT - 2.11 miles

Return to the main road and travel on to Bredwardine. Turn left at the bottom of the hill onto the B4352 and then right on the crossroads at The Red Lion. The church is up on the right.

Set peacefully above the River Wye, Bredwardine Church was once the parish of Reverend Francis Kilvert, the Victorian clergyman known for his country diaries. He died aged 38 and his tomb stands in the churchyard. Other interesting finds are the carved lintel and the tombs of two medieval knights. Next, follow the track in front of the church. Walk alongside the River Wye, passing through two gates to find medieval fish ponds, bounded by bulrushes and frequented by swans. The remains of Bredwardine Castle, a motte and bailey, lie beyond. Watkins identified that the castle was on the Midsummer Sunrise Ley.

In the area: Relax in the fabulous gardens at Brobury House where water is a recurring theme or look down on the River Wye from the heights of Brobury Scar, a red sandstone cliff at the edge of Tin Hill wood.

12 Eardisley Church & Castle Mound, HR3 6NL - 4.31 miles

Continue along the road, over the River Wye and turn left up Brobury Lane. At the junction with the A438, turn left and carry on this road which turns into the A4111. On reaching Eardisley, the church is found on the left, opposite the school.

With traditional timber-framed houses lining both sides of the road, it's easy to see why Eardisley is a favourite stop on the Black and White Villages Trail. The church is celebrated for its elaborately carved Norman font, another example of the Herefordshire School. Only the motte remains of the castle which for 600 years was the seat of the Baskerville family, one of the powerful Marcher lords. Watkins believed an alignment ran between the former castle moat and Snodhill Castle.

In the area: Book a cider tasting at the Orgasmic Cider Company and stock up at the award-winning Bells Inn pub, shop and deli in Almeley.

13 Pembridge Church & Old Market House, HR6 9HH - 11.12 miles

Follow the A4111 to a roundabout on the edge of Kington, where you take the third exit for the A44 to Pembridge. There's a car park in the centre of the village, on the left-hand side.

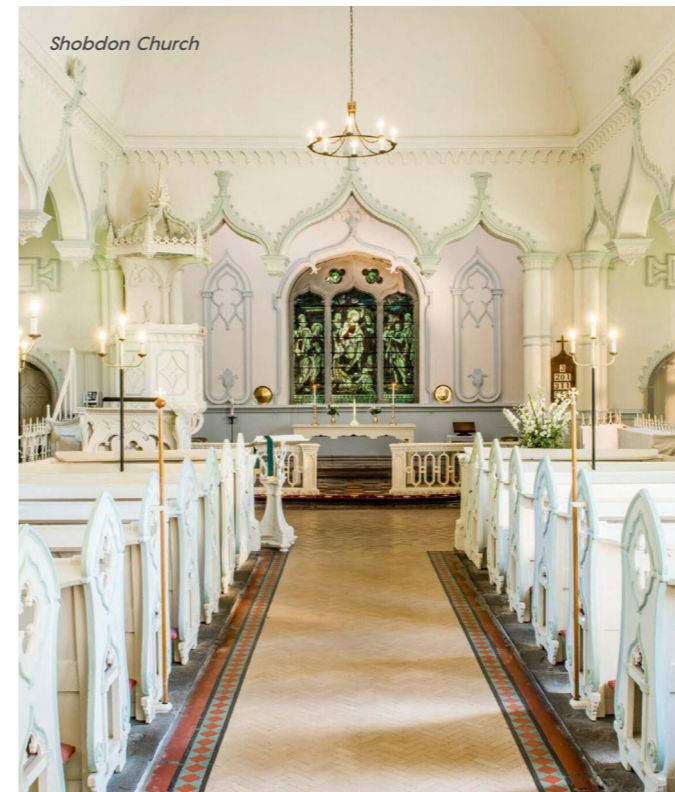
Pembridge is another inviting black and white village, quintessentially English and particular to the north of the county. Climb the steps by Ye Olde Steppes village shop and tea room to explore the church which boasts an extraordinary detached belfry, reminiscent of a pagoda. Then, examine the pillars of the timber Old Market Hall. The socket stone supporting the pillar in the north east corner is actually the base of an old market cross, which further back in time would have been a mark stone. There was a tradition of trading at such stones so we know that markets have been a regular occurrence at this spot for generations upon generations.

In the area: Peruse contemporary art and craft at the Old Chapel Gallery, dine at the New Inn or drive a few minutes to The Cider Barn. Alternatively, take a tour of Westonbury Mill Water Gardens.



Communicating with fire

Many hilltops and mountain summits are known as beacons – such as Herefordshire Beacon in the Malvern Hills and Aconbury Camp. Not only were they superb vantage points for scoping out the landscape beyond, they were also used by our ancestors to send fire signals to other settlements. Watkins believed that ley lines often ran from beacon to beacon.



14 Shobdon Church & Arches, HR6 9LZ - 4.67 miles

From the car park, turn right onto the street and then right again onto Bridge Street. At the crossroads turn right onto the B4362, passing through Shobdon village and then turn left by The Beeches campsite. At the small crossroads, turn left for Shobdon Court. The church is along the drive on the left.

Fall under the spell of Shobdon Church, often called the 'wedding cake church' courtesy of its delicate white and blue painted interior, ornamental arches, lavish pulpit and Rococo ornamentation. This Grade I Listed Strawberry Hill Gothic parish church was built in 1756 on the site of the original church by Sir James Bateman, Lord Mayor of London and Governor of the Bank of England, who bought Shobdon Court estate in 1705. Follow the tree-lined footpath, up the sloping hill opposite, to see the arches of its predecessor. Installed as a folly by Bateman, the carvings are the work of the Herefordshire School. The church aligns with a mound, also found in the grounds.

In the area: Choose from the delicious selection of local cheeses at Monkland Dairy and eat at The Bateman Arms, once the place where the estate workers would collect their pay.

15 Wigmore Castle & Church, HR6 9UB - 5.97 miles

Return to the little crossroads, go over it and go left at the T-junction onto the B4362. At Mortimer's Cross, turn left onto the A4110, through Aymestrey and into Wigmore. Turn right by The Oak and find the small car park on the right-hand side. It's a short walk to the church.

The drive from Shobdon to Wigmore takes you through Mortimer's Cross, site of a major battle in the Wars of the Roses, and then along a ley line, now known as the Roman Road. Above the village of Wigmore, situated on a naturally defensive spur, is the former stronghold of the Mortimer family, Wigmore Castle. Walk through the churchyard of Wigmore Church and take the trail to the rather romantic, overgrown ruins. This medieval fortress was at the heart of turbulence and drama for 500 years. Many walls are now buried several metres deep but it's easy to imagine the castle's grand past.

In the area: Refuel at the picturesque Riverside Inn in Aymestrey, and pop into Aymestrey Church to see its fine rood screen.



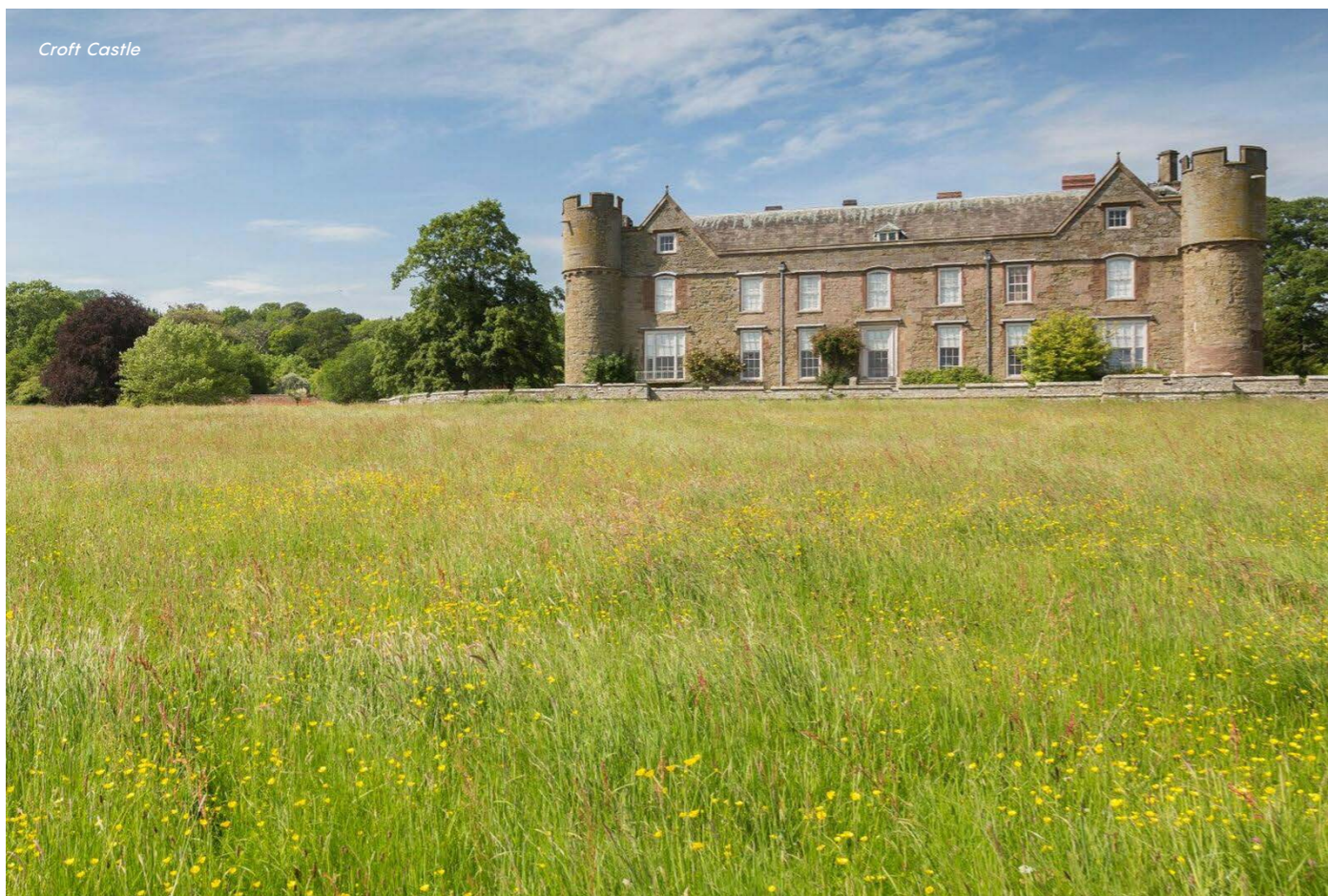
16 Richards Castle Church & Castle, SY8 4ET - 6.58 miles

Carry on along Wigmore Road, turning right at the junction with Killhorse Lane, following the twisting road to Richards Castle. Turn left in the village for the historic church and go up the hill where it lies on the left.

Welcome to another peaceful spot, brimming with atmosphere. Wander through the churchyard, where butterflies flit through the wild flowers, and past the detached bell tower which was likely once part of the castle defences. Walk through the gate in the graveyard to enjoy a ramble around the castle ruins. Climb to the top of the rare octagonal keep - once two storeys higher - for magnificent views and don't miss to say hello to the resident goats!

This is one of the earliest Norman castles built in England and Watkins believed the centre of the mound aligned with the church. He also drew a ley between this church and Wigmore church.

In the area: If you're in the mood for a walk, roam around Mortimer Forest.



Croft Castle

17 National Trust Croft Castle & Croft Ambrey Hillfort, HR6 9PW - 5.77 miles

Go back down the hill and follow the road to the junction with the B4361, turning right. Pass through Orleton, later turning right onto the B4362, turning right at the crossroads for Croft Castle.

The National Trust's Croft Castle is the starting point for a walk up to Croft Ambrey, a large Iron Age hillfort, later occupied by the Mortimers. Follow the blue trail to take the 3-mile circular route, returning through a section of Fishpool Valley. The delightful Fishpool Ponds also warrant a detour. Croft Ambrey is the starting point for the Blackwardine ley.

In the area: Pop for a pint or dinner at The Bell at Yarpole, a community-owned pub run by two keen gardeners.

18 Blackwardine, HR6 ONE - 10.37 miles

From Croft Castle, return to the B4362, turning right onto the B4361, travelling through Luston and then taking the first exit on the small roundabout on the edge of Leominster. Head for Hereford at the next roundabout. And at the next roundabout, take the 1st exit for Worcester Road (A44) and then turn right for Blackwardine.

The very first ley line discovered was The Blackwardine Ley and a commemorative standing stone has been erected by The Society of Ley Hunters. It was on this very spot that Watkins had his revelation about ley lines. It is not an especially remarkable location which perhaps makes his revelation even more extraordinary. The ley here runs from Croft Ambrey, on to Blackwardine and then to Risbury Camp to the high ground at Stretton Grandison, near Ledbury.

In the area: While away an afternoon in the mesmerising gardens at Hampton Court Castle.

19 Hereford via Sutton St Nicholas - 11.8 miles

Continue along the same road, then turn left at the T-junction onto the A417 and take the first right to Sutton St Nicholas, before continuing on the A465 into Hereford.

On your way to the city, take a minor detour to Sutton St Nicholas to spy The Wergin's Stone. This pre-historic standing stone is on private land but can be viewed from the road. In 1641, locals referred to it as 'Ye Devils Stone' after it mysteriously moved 240 paces and had to be returned to its original location. The village's Iron Age hillfort - Sutton Walls - can be explored on foot, follow the heritage walking trail map available from the Golden Cross Pub. Once in Hereford, seek out the Cathedral and All Saints Church (at the end of Broad Street). Worthy of visits in their own right, they are also key ley line landmarks visible from Dinedor Hill. Around the corner from Cathedral Green is Watkins' final residence: a blue plaque marks his home at 5 Harley Court, which he shared with his wife Marion until his death in 15 April 1935, aged 80.

In the area: Finish your adventure by biting into Hereford's exciting restaurant scene - a fresh generation of chefs, all passionate about local produce, are serving up fabulous food.



Hereford Cathedral

Seek out the Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture

The county is famed for a particular style of carvings produced from around 1134 to 1155. It is extremely high quality work, bold and lively both in terms of subject matter and execution. Possibly trained initially at Hereford Cathedral, the group of sculptors blended Saxon, Celtic and Romanesque motifs. Feast your eyes on their work across the county, including the churches at Kilpeck, Shobdon Arches and Eardisley, which are visited on this route.

Your Watkins Way

We would love to see your favourite experiences on the Watkins Way, share your highlights with us on social media, tag @VisitHerefordshire and use #WatkinsWay.



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