

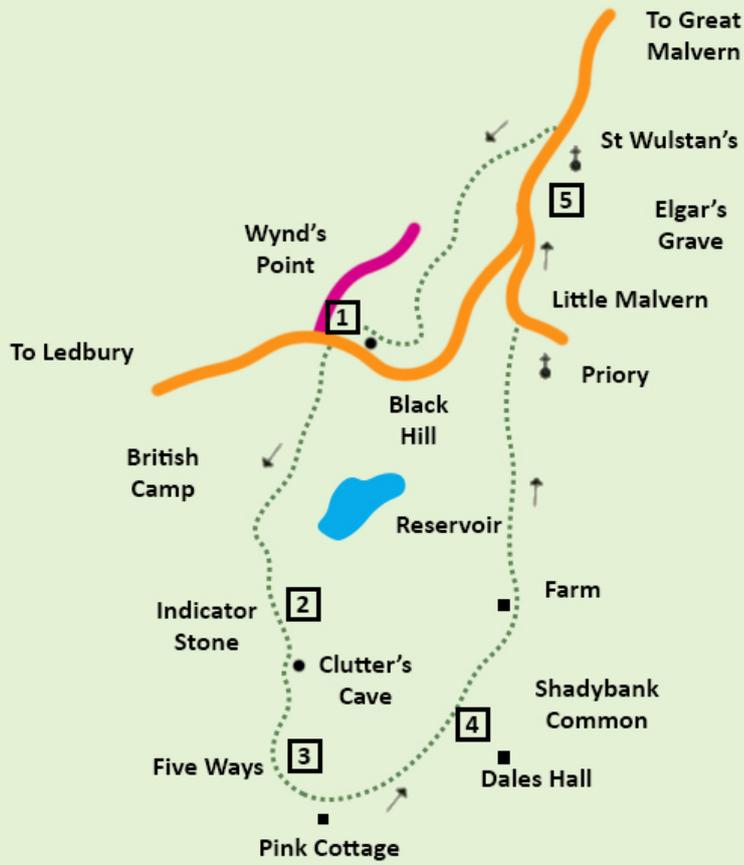
Walking with Alfred Watkins

Walk Four - Little Malvern, Shadybank Common

- Moderate/strenuous 4 mile ramble with spectacular views
- Hill paths and field edges
- No stiles. Good terrain
- OS Map - Malvern Hills (Explorer 190)

The Route

1. British Camp Pay and Display Car Park, Wynds Point. WR13 6DW. Walk away from the Malvern Hills Hotel, half way down the park, TR through wooden gate with "Broad Down and British Camp" inscribed on wall. Head up the wide aggregate path, ignoring turns. Just past the first bench, spectacular views open out over British Camp Reservoir to the left across the Severn Plain. Wind along the great path until it ends at a slight crest and kink over 20m to the right through a gap.
2. Round Indicator Stone. Find your direction marker on the ground to the left, and follow the lower path ahead, slightly R of your original direction, for "Giants Cave and Pink Cottage". (Views now to the west). Follow the path to Clutter's Cave and the "sacrificial stone." Pass beneath Hangman's Hill, down through trees beyond a turning (L) to Broad Down, still descending for further 60m to find a five way path intersection.
3. Five Ways. TL for "Castlemorton and Pink Cottage", along grassy path. Pass down to the L of Pink Cottage up slope beyond it along the tree-lined path. After 160m, take the rocky, uneven path, to the L down through the trees. Initially gloomy, it becomes level and grassy, emerging from the trees, with Dales Hall at the end of a farm track, below to R.
4. Shadybank Common. At rutted track below telegraph line, TL to follow the T-line through a shaded bridle gate. Keep ahead along top L edge/hedge. Drop down through gate (L), follow farm track to R of Underhill Farm and up drive on other side. Pass the topiaried, tantalising Little Malvern Court. TL at road up to T-junction. TR as if for Malvern to St Wulstan's Church.
5. Elgar's Grave. Visit the family graves and return to road to resume same direction. 50m past turn for Upper Welland, cross to Holywell Road. After 30 paces, T sharp L up wide path. Ignore turns and climb stiffly, past bench in memory of Leslie James Guest all the way up to crest. Level with bench in memory of William David Dunn, take first left on to Black Hill for fabulous 360 degree views. Keep ahead over two small peaks down and up gravel path under trees past to the immediate right of a line of benches and the memorial to Barry Vincent Jackson. (Jenny Lind's old home at Wynds Point is up to L behind a fence). Descend steeply to reach road and TL past hotel to Start Point.



Enigma Variations

Walking up from Wynds Point to Clutter's Cave and back through Little Malvern brings us into the arena of not just Alfred Watkins but another couple of local favourites. One of them, Edward Elgar, loved the Malvern Hills; his cantata *Caractacus* tells the story of a British chieftain who fought the Roman invaders. Succumbing in the musical version at British Camp, *Caractacus* was taken to Rome for trial but so impressed Emperor Claudius that he gained a pardon. The spectacular Iron Age hill fort, just above our route, may well have housed the British leader at some point and a settlement of two thousand altogether, but the history written by Tacitus suggests a different place for his last stand. Coxhall Knoll, near Leintwardine in north Herefordshire, is perhaps a more likely venue.

There are sensational views from the Malverns over the Severn Plain one way and the undulations of Herefordshire the other. Legend has it that the fugitive Prince of Wales, Owain Glyndwr hid away up here from the forces of Henry V. The suggested site, just a little south of British Camp is Clutter's Cave (pictured). It takes quite a leap of faith back to those early 15th century days, because solitude is a bit less tangible these days; in the summer months you could be forgiven for thinking there are still two thousand people up on the ridge.

Alfred Watkins, famous as the discoverer of ley lines, who lived almost completely concurrently with Elgar and in the same street from 1904 to 1911, had his own rather more tangible theories about Clutter's Cave. He cites it as the beginning of an ancient trackway stretching all the way to Aconbury Camp, six miles south of Hereford. Along its course, it takes in a stone, three churches, at Woolhope, Holme Lacy and Aconbury, a Gospel Oak, and about eight small fragments of old roads; the buildings of two of the churches are oriented exactly to its alignment.

Just for good measure, he suggests that the stone, which is just below Clutter's Cave was a sacrificial one. As proof, he famously photographed his uncomplaining assistant, Mr McKaig lying on its smooth face, in such a way as to present his head for execution. Watkins reminds us that a local tale tells how the large rough igneous stone "is the door of the Giant's Cave thrown down. The cave itself is always called that locally, but marked on the map as Clutter's Cave."

In a new introduction to Watkins's seminal work, *The Old Straight Track*, writer Robert MacFarlane acknowledges our debt: "Herefordshire was, for Watkins, a deep-time landscape in which legends easily mustered themselves, and in which ancient history was thickly layered. To many of his readers the ley vision - with its mixture of mysticism, archaeology and sleuthing - re-enchanted the English landscape, investing it with fresh depth and detail, prompting new ways of looking and new reasons to walk. To read *The Old Straight Track* now is to be summoned back to a fascinating crossroads in landscape history."

After passing the area of Little Malvern Priory, whose one-time errant monk placed a curse on Raggedstone Hill at the south end of the Malverns, we come to St Wulstan's Church. Here are the graves of Sir Edward, wife Ann and daughter Carice Elgar Blake.

Finally, a stiff climb up to Black Hill visits the environs of the "Swedish Nightingale", Jenny Lind. The opera singer was a close friend of Felix Mendelssohn, Lewis Carroll and Hans Christian Anderson. She lived here for four years in the 1880s, when Elgar was organist at St George's in Worcester and embarking on his composing, and Alfred Watkins was photographing the Herefordshire countryside. Below her old home is a memorial plaque to Sir Barry Jackson, friend of the Dymock Poets and founder of Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

Overall, the hilly walk offers great views and enough variations on the enigma of Owain Glyndwr's hidey-holes and *Caractacus's* last stand to capture our imagination. As for Watkins, he certainly had an eye for the theatrical and when we reach the cave we can see the stone where his long-suffering assistant played his part. The cave is the start point of one of his most extravagant ley lines.