

Exploring the landscape around

Birches Farm & Holywell Dingle

with Nic Howes

Distance: Just over 9 miles

Terrain: Challenging - footpaths in this area can quickly become overgrown and muddy. There are also numerous stiles to negotiate. The route is obscure in places and good map reading skills are necessary.

Start point: The Tram Inn, Eardisley

OS Map: OS Explorer 201

Start (S) Opposite the Tram Inn in Eardisley, take the lane signposted to Almeley. After the last house on the left cross a stile by a metal farm gate on the left (**point 1**) and follow the field boundary on your right. Just before a solitary oak tree in the field bear left across the field as a waymark directs you. In the field boundary opposite you will find a stile and gate into the next field north. Pass through the stile and gate and walk uphill ahead, with the top of the wooded slope of Holywell Dingle on your right and a line of ailing ash trees on your left. Views across the Wye valley begin to open up behind you. After passing the last ash tree look out for a gate on your right (**point 2**) through which you should access Holywell Dingle.

Descend the indistinct path to reach and cross a plank bridge across the stream, after which you should bear left along the climbing woodland path. You will reach a level path that may be a relic of the 'Picturesque' landscaping of the Dingle; you should bear left along this path. Proceed with a steep bank on your left as far as the point where you descend slightly to join a large, well-used path coming up from behind and to your left; bear right on this path and climb to level ground, looking out for a waymarked stile on your right by a farm gate (**point 3**).

Cross the stile and head across the open field on a diagonal to reach a stile in its opposite corner; cross the stile and footbridge and turn left onto a path that becomes a farm track that you follow to New House (**point 4**). Cross the surfaced lane and follow the finger post through metal gates to cross a dam with views across a lake to Nieupoort House to the left. At the far end of the dam look right for a waymarked gate and pass through it to follow the waymark diagonally across a field; ahead there are good views of Yazor Wood on the Foxley Estate.

Cross a stile onto the surfaced drive (**point 5**) and turn right down to the surfaced lane, along which you should turn left. Ignore the right turn to Eardisley and continue ahead through the disused railway embankment with the former site of Almeley station on your

right*. As you approach Almeley village, look to your right to see the castle tump. After passing the church turn left at the T-junction and proceed to The Bells. Retrace your steps from The Bells as far back as the drive to Batch Cottage on your right (**point 6**), shortly before the railway embankment.

If you do not wish to visit Almeley, you should turn left along the drive to Batch Cottage (point 6**), about 100 metres beyond the disused railway embankment.*

Ignore the first branch off the drive to its right and take the second one by a garage. Pass through a gate and onto a footbridge; walk upstream with the stream on your right, crossing a footbridge over a tributary. Join a vehicle track and pass a cottage on your left; ignore the footbridge on your right and carry on along the track, passing another cottage on your left. Take the footpath uphill on your left (**point 7**), just before another cottage (the third seen so far on the track). Cross a stile and keep ahead with a field boundary on your left; you soon cross to the other side of this boundary via a stile. Aim for another stile in front of a black and white house; cross the stile and turn left along a surfaced lane and then left again at the fork (**point 8**).

Descend the lane and track to the disused railway line and cross it; go through the waymarked gate, cross the bridge over the stream on your right and keep the boundary of the field ahead close on your right. Pass through a metal farm gate and aim for the next one ahead. Turn right at the fingerpost through the gate (**point 9**) and through a wooden farm gate. You soon reach Highmoor Wood on your left; at the far end of the Wood boundary go through a metal farm gate and bear slightly left to a fence corner and then keep the field boundary on your right. Pass over a stile with a horse jump to its left and then continue northwest uphill through a series of farm gates, with the field boundary to your right, for about 1km to reach Upper Spond and the tarmac lane ahead beyond this farm (**point 10**).

Go straight ahead at the crossroads, as directed by the waymark. You will enter

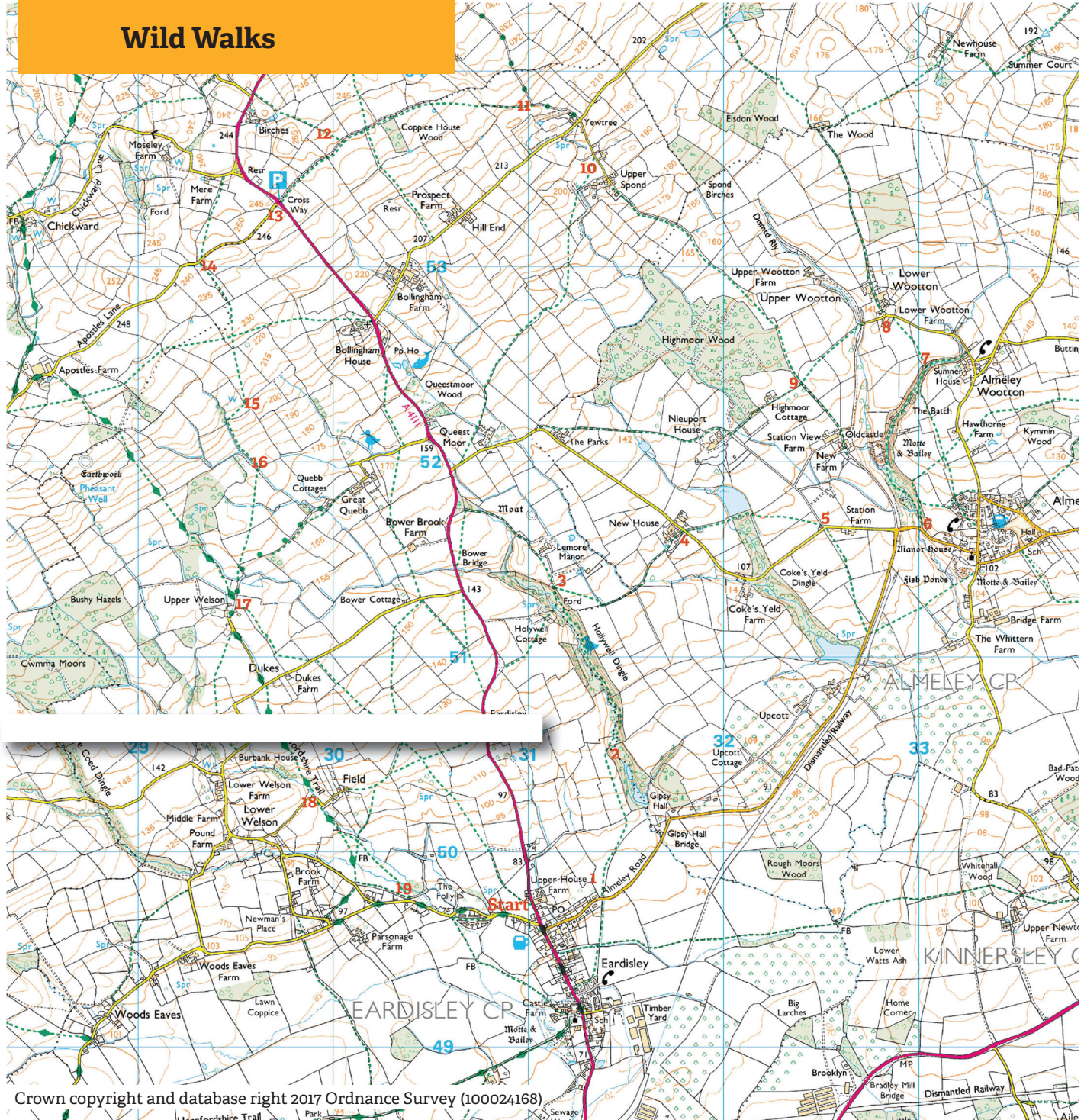
a deep holloway that leads to a metal farm gate; keep straight ahead through this, ignoring a branch path to your right (**point 11**). Go through another metal farm gate and follow the waymark arrow towards another one in the far corner, with a stile to its left; good views open up to the south. Cross the stile and keep the hedge and ancient Coppice Lane on your right; after about 500 metres there is a footpath on the right from Coppice Lane giving access to the northeast boundary of Birches Farm (**point 12**).

Coppice Lane leads you to an interpretation board beside a large parking layby at Crossway on the A4111 (**point 13**); carefully cross the busy main road and enter Apostles Lane opposite. Walk along the lane and follow a waymark through a metal farm gate on the left after about 600 metres (**point 14**). Keep on to the lower right hand corner of each of the next three fields, transferring between them via stiles with footbridges. At the bottom right hand corner of the third field (**point 15**) turn right angle right through a metal farm gate and keep straight ahead to a line of trees, ignoring the clear farm track that branches off towards new farm buildings below on your left (they are not marked on OS 1:25000 map).

At the line of trees turn right angle left and follow their line down to a metal farm gate (**point 16**) that overlooks the right hand corner of the new farm buildings. After passing through this gate the line of your right of way takes you half right towards a gap in the next but one field boundary, on the way you will need to negotiate a tricky crossing of the first field boundary and its associated ditch. Once through the gap in the second field boundary, you should aim for the bottom right hand corner of the next field. Follow the holloway ahead to a metal farm gate with a waymark; once through the gate keep close to the boundary of the copse of trees on your right and approach Upper Welson buildings via a metal farm gate beside a stile.

At this point it is possible for the energetic enthusiast to take a short spur walk to the Trust's reserve at Upper Welson; the route instructions do not

Wild Walks



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include such a spur and continue towards Eardisley.

Follow the Herefordshire Trail through a wooden farm gate to a concrete drive and then through the buildings (**point 17**) on to another wooden farm gate to access a tarmac lane and turn left on this. Continue straight ahead at the T-junction, along the Herefordshire Trail; aim for the bottom right hand corner of the field ahead. Cross a stile and planks and follow the waymark to the gap in the hedge ahead. Once through this, aim for the buildings ahead and below you; a stile should come into view to the left of a cottage, giving access to a surfaced lane (**point 18**). Turn left along the lane and when it soon bends left, turn right on the Herefordshire Trail through a gate and over a footbridge.

Cross the footbridge and turn left to follow the Herefordshire Trail along the right bank of a stream. Cross a stile and continue along the right bank of the stream, heading for a stile by a metal farm gate (**point 19**). Once through the gate, ignore the surfaced lane immediately on your left and walk straight ahead from the gate to meet a T-junction with another surfaced lane and turn left along it. After crossing a bridge over a stream turn right off the lane through a gate and follow the short cut along a short street of houses to rejoin the lane. Keep ahead, following the pavement on your right and passing the village pump before meeting the A4111 through Eardisley at the point where you started.

