

Hereford Times – Talking Point: Andy Link, chef/patron
The Riverside Inn, Aymestrey

Get your walking boots on – winter walking is wonderful

At the Riverside, winter is our favourite time of year, and it seems that we are not the only ones to appreciate the cooler months - more and more people are visiting the area for winter walks, bringing their dogs, and relaxing by our roaring log fire with a glass of mulled cider.

Herefordshire and the surrounding area is starting to become known for its landscapes, history and walks. We have everything on our doorstep, from dramatic scenery in the Wye Valley, and the stunning views from Symonds Yat, to the Malvern Hills, Hay Bluff and Mortimer Country with its lovely Mortimer Trail, to all the beautiful black and white villages, hidden valleys and woodland.

Walking is always viewed as a spring or summer activity, but at this time of year walking is beautiful with autumn colours still blazing, and glorious views in the crystal-clear light. What's more, there are fewer people about - plus what's better than a local ale at a pub at the end of a long walk in the fresh air?

Many pubs/inns will know local walks and can give you ideas on where to go. We have circular walks ranging from 3 to 15 miles, including National Trust property, Croft Castle and Croft Ambrey, Iron Age hill forts and a glacial gorge. Everyone loves a good ghost story, so I'm glad to say we have a haunted wood, Pokehouse Wood. The word 'poke' originates from Puck, one of the many old English words for fairy.

So notorious was Pokehouse Wood in days gone by - for the spirits led travellers astray - that a local man donated a parcel of land to finance a stipend to pay a man to ring the bell at Aymestrey Church for an hour at sunset in order to guide travellers down the hill and across the river to safety. In Aymestrey you can still see the hole in the bell tower fashioned, especially to allow the bell ropes to be pulled from the church's porch. Whether you believe the folklore or are a sceptic, it's a great story, and myths and legends add so much to our experience of the landscape.

Another local woodland called Slaughterhouse Covert, commemorates the massacre of the Lancastrian forces defeated at The Battle of Mortimer's Cross, (1461). After fleeing the battlefield along the Covenhope Valley, they were caught by Yorkists and locals with a strong dislike for the Welsh descended Lancastrians.

With all this heritage and history in the county, it's definitely worth having an adventure on home ground this winter, and maybe a pint or a pub lunch to reward you for your efforts!

