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CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | WILD WYE VALLEY



SEE & DO

● It's a daredevil driver who would enter the Wye Valley by the Capel-y-ffin mountain road, but compared to arriving via the tedious dual carriageways from South Wales (as many do), **this is a sensationally scenic stretch. Don't miss the majestic ruins of Llanthony Priory**, a secret version of famous Tintern to the south.

● Continuing over Gospel Pass, the thin tarmac ribbon takes you down into Hay-on-Wye. Once just another Welsh border sheep-farming town, it was transformed by local eccentric Richard Booth into a **hub of bookshops, and the Hay Festival of Literature & Arts has now put it on the world map.** Richard Booth's Bookshop (boothbooks.co.uk) is still the finest of many in town and includes a small cinema and an excellent cafe.

● Since this trip is all about a river valley, ditch the car — from a canoe the view of the Wye is like no other. **The river is also easily accessible and meandering from Glasbury**, with grade II rapids at Symonds Yat for the more daring. Wye Valley Canoes (wyevalleycanoes.co.uk; £25pp, half-day) departs from the lovely River Cafe at Glasbury.

● While canoeing downstream from Glasbury, you'll soon sail under the ancient, wooden Whitney Toll Bridge (whitneybridge.co.uk; £1 to cross by car), one of the lesser-spotted bridges of the Wye. Further on, there's

ACTIVITY FOR THE DAY

Under and around Bredwardine Bridge is excellent fishing territory. You'll need your licence — day permits can be bought from the Red Lion Hotel (five minutes' walk from the bridge) for £12

Bredwardine's redbrick span, the Sellack and Foy suspension footbridges that put old ferry boatmen out of business, and **the precarious, disused rail bridge linking Redbrook to the Boat Inn** (theboatpenallt.co.uk). Bridge boffin bliss.

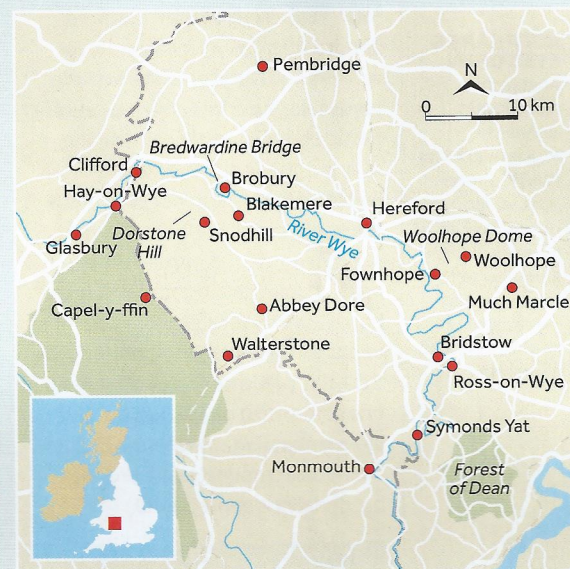
● The ancient woodlands of Woolhope Dome make for excellent walking country. Hidden in its flanks are Haugh Wood, Joan's Hill Farm, Paget's Wood and Common Hill, with 600 rare species of butterflies and moths, untiled meadows full of orchids, Dyer's greenweed and columbine, and **woodland haunts for barn owls, roe deer and badgers.**

● Lost in the twisting lanes of Woolhope Dome, Canwood Gallery (canwoodgallery.com; free; check opening hours) must be the best concealed contemporary art gallery in the country — and it's well worth the effort. **This beautifully converted farm has meadows dotted with sculptures;** the tale of how the owner's battle with leukaemia brought it into being is as compelling as the place itself.

● Much Marcle village is the epicentre of the Wye Valley's cider country, home to Westons Cider (westons-cider.co.uk; open daily). But **for an insider's glimpse of more of the small-scale cider producers that make this county shine**, seek out the single-variety cider and perry (made with pears) of nearby Gregg's Pit (greggs-pit.co.uk; entry and tastings by prior arrangement). There's also Dunkertons of Pembridge (dunkertons cider.co.uk; only open Fridays and Saturdays, ring the bell for access) and Gwatkin in Abbey Dore (gwatkin cider.co.uk; open daily).

● South of Ross-on-Wye, the river squeezes itself into a deep gorge at Symonds Yat, after which it is fringed by a lost world of small ex-coalmining settlements in the Forest of Dean. **The narrow-gauge railway that once transported the coal has been transformed into the family-friendly Cannop Valley circular cycling trail** (pedalbikeaway.co.uk; 17km), with the somewhat tougher mountain-bike Verderers' and Freeminer cross-country trails nearby. ➤

How green is this valley: view over the Wye at Brecon Beacons National Park; below, the charming centre of Hay-on-Wye; inside Richard Booth's Bookshop



CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | WILD WYE VALLEY



EAT

● **Olde-world tearooms**
YE OLDE STEPPES (Scones about £5)

Because: This former village sweetshop has metamorphosed into a bells-and-whistles tearoom. Expect chocolate-box decor and outrageously good cream teas. **Travel's tip:** If it's warm, slip into the courtyard garden hidden at the back. *High St, Pembridge.*

● **Rare burgers**

THE BEEFY BOYS (Burgers about £8)

Because: Hereford has seen a food revolution in the past decade, and appropriately for the town that gave us Hereford beef, the focus is burgers, with the Beefy Boys offering the pick of the bunch. **Travel's tip:** If there's a big group of you, you'll find a spacious booth downstairs at the back of the diner. *Old Market, Hereford; 01432 359209, thebeefyboys.com.*

● **Classic pub grub**

THE OSTRICH INN (Mains about £13)

Because: The bar menu beats the à la carte offering, with local Forest of Dean wild-boar sausages and steak-and-cask-ale pie. **Travel's tip:** With eight regular and 12 guest choices, pair your meal with fine ales instead of wine. *Newland, Forest of Dean; 01594 833260, theostrichinn.com.*

● **All the trimmings**

THE BOOKSHOP AT A RULE OF TUM

(Mains about £15)

Because: If you're staying in Hereford and need a good brunch — anything from North African spicy *shakshuka* to ham-hock hash — or fancy a proper grass-fed steak for dinner, this is a great bet. **Travel's tip:** The Sunday lunch is rightly acclaimed — stop by at the weekend. *33 Aubrey St, Hereford; 01432 343443, aruleoftum.com.*

● **Secluded spot**

OFF GRID GOURMET (Menus from £40 for meat eaters, £35 for veggies)

Because: This unique food experience is like a Wye Valley safari banquet made from local fare by Hugh Sawyer on his organic, off-grid farm and served in a tent by candlelight. **Travel's tip:** It's cash only and BYO drinks. Remember to wear suitable footwear to get you across the field. *Walkers Cottage, Parks Rd, Clifford; 07538 037770, offgridgourmet.net.*

STYLISH SOUVENIRS

There are locally crafted items you can only buy here. Look out for the beechwood 'mouse' door stops and homemade bath oils with rosebuds



DRINK & SHOP

● **Perfect pint**

THE CROWN INN WOOLHOPE

Because: Set in the heart of Woolhope Dome, the Crown Inn is a pub with a fine landlord, relaxed drinking and good food. **Travel's tip:** It makes its own ciders and a perry that is the pick of the bunch on a warm day. *Woolhope; crowninnwoolhope.co.uk.*

● **Treasure trove**

BAILEYS HOME

Because: In the rolling countryside north of Ross-on-Wye, this rustic design store feels halfway between a retro reclamation yard and a Provençal farmhouse. **Travel's tip:** Pop by the stylish 'hut' tearoom for homemade cakes (only open at the weekend). *Bridstow; www.baileyshome.com.*

● **Welsh gelato**

GREEN & JENKS

Because: This fifth-generation family dairy business has given Welsh milk the Italian treatment — try the *fior di latte* (soft cheese) flavour. **Travel's tip:** Look out for the seasonal choices on the menu. *11 Agincourt Square, Monmouth; greenandjenks.com.*



ASK THE LOCAL

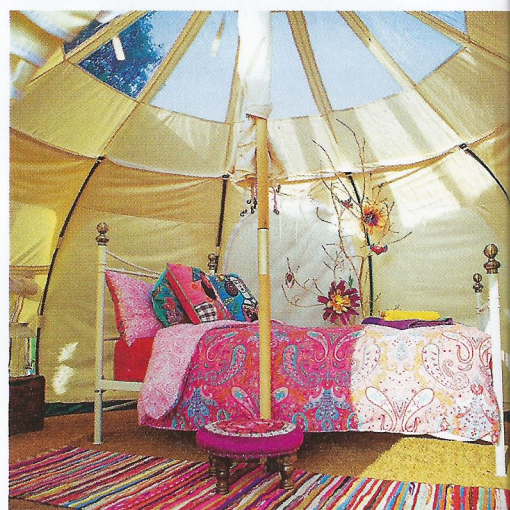
Ian Doody is Hereford born and bred and knows his way around the wilder corners of the Wye Valley



I grew up in Staunton-on-Wye, which makes me about as local as you can get. I love walking and **Herefordshire's gentle landscape is perfect ambling country.** Some of the wilder places near the river include English Heritage's **Neolithic burial chamber of Arthur's Stone on Dorstone Hill** (free); **wild swimming at Bredwardine Bridge** (it's usually slow-flowing here in summer, but check with locals before you venture in); **a beautiful walk along the Scar cliff by the river at Brobury**; and one of the most **undiscovered, hidden Norman castles** anywhere in England — **Snodhill** (snodhillcastle.org; free, but donations appreciated).

KEEP EARS & EYES OPEN

Another fine restaurant in Hereford is **Madam and Adam** (Bridge Street) — currently closed because of winter flooding. Keep your eye on Facebook to stay informed of its much-anticipated reopening



STAY

● **Serious glamping**

THE MOON AND I (Doubles from

£75, room only)

Because: Every place seems to have a shepherd's hut or bell tent these days, but the ones here offer an immersive theatrical experience, with stargazing, too (best from the tent's see-through roof). Indulge in bathing under a canopy of trees. **Travel's tip:** You don't have to schlep to use the facilities — the hut has its own wood-fired hot tub and the tent has an excellent compost loo. *The Plough, Blakemere, Herefordshire; themoonandi.uk.*

● **Country comfort**

THE GREENMAN (Doubles from

£80, B&B)

Because: You could happily pad about in your slippers at this comfortable rural inn, but this is hunting country, so you're likely to brush toes with a parade of muddy men in shooting garb in the wood-panelled bar. **Travel's tip:** This is a cut above your average Herefordshire pub with rooms — but



anticipate snooty staff as a result. Fownhope; thegreenman.co.

● Border charm

ALLT COTTAGES (Cottages sleeping up to six from £104, three-night min stay)

Because: In the grounds of an ancient manor, these three stone cottages are filled with beautiful found objects — branches for bookshelves and river-pebble inlaid shower rooms.

Travel's tip: Ask for the route up onto nearby Red Daren, part of the Black Mountain range, for spectacular views of the border country. *The Vineyard*, *Walterstone*; alltcottages.com.

● Countryside without mud

THE BRIDGE HOUSE (Doubles from £120, room only)

Because: This charming nine-bedroom Georgian house sits right on the banks of the River Wye near Ross. You've access to waterfront gardens, walking and fishing, without even getting your boots dirty. **Travel's tip:** Dogs are welcome. *Wilton, Ross-on-Wye*; bridgehouseross-on-wye.co.uk.

Living the dream: clockwise from top left, the rustic-chic Baileys Home store; Plas Bach hut in its stunning garden setting; city elegance in Hereford's Castle House Hotel; gastro fare at the Crown Inn Woolhope; out-of-the-ordinary accommodation at the Moon and I, Blakemere

JUST A STEP AWAY

The hotel gardens are so huge there's space for a hot-air balloon launch site; the Bridge House can arrange flights across the area and over Wilton Castle, next door

● Meditative spot

PLAS BACH (Hut sleeping two from £137, three-night min stay)

Because: This is not so much a hut in the woods as a hut in a stunningly planted valley garden. The lifetime's work of the Daw family, it's the perfect spot to get away from it all and indulge in a little contemplation. **Travel's tip:** Leave the garden by the back and you'll find a footpath that leads right up onto Hay Bluff for spectacular panoramic views. *Lower House, Cusop Dingle, Hay-on-Wye*; lowerhousegardenhay.co.uk.

● City elegance

CASTLEHOUSE HOTEL (Doubles from £155, B&B)

Because: The cathedral city of Hereford is the logical urban base for exploring the Wye Valley, and this hotel, straddling the Castle Pool (a remnant of the Norman moat), is the best place to stay. **Travel's tip:** Rooms in the hotel are traditional in style, whereas those in the nearby townhouse are more contemporary. *Castle Street, Hereford*; castlehse.co.uk.

GET ME THERE GO INDEPENDENT

Hereford is at the centre of the Wye Valley and is served by two rail lines, one between South Wales and Manchester, the other from London Paddington. The lower Wye Valley is easy to access from the M4 or M50.

GO PACKAGED

Grand UK Holidays (grandukholidays.com) has a Wye Valley & Forest of Dean five-day coach tour, staying in a three-star hotel in Coleford each night, from £399pp, half board. **Contours Walking Holidays** (contours.co.uk) has a 220km hike over 11-14 days from £960pp, B&B, with luggage transfers.

GET AROUND

Traveline (travelinemidlands.co.uk) offers an (infrequent) bus service across the area. **Enterprise** (enterprise.co.uk) rents cars from Hereford train station, from £134 a week.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See visitherefordshire.co.uk. ■