

Discover the Doward

a guided walk taking in King Arthur's Cave and Lord's Wood Quarry

created by *Nic Howes & Doug Lloyd*

Distance: 1 mile

Time: Approximately 40 minutes

Terrain: Some very steep inclines,
narrow paths and rough, uneven ground.
Can get fairly muddy in places.

Start point: The walk begins at the Biblins
Forestry Commission car park.

Directions: From Hereford travel south on
the A49, then A4137 then A40. Come off the
A40 at exit for Symonds Yat **West**, then
take the second exit at the roundabout
and follow signs for Doward Park/ Biblins.

Grid Reference: SO548157

OS Map: Explorer OL14

This short walk is a perfect introduction to the Doward. If you have more time to explore, our White Rocks, Leeping Stocks, Miner's Rest and Lord's Wood reserves are all within walking distance of this car park.



From the car park, walk back up the track, past the entrance to Doward Park campsite and join the surfaced road on a hairpin bend. Turn left down the road to a parking bay on the left (point 1 on map).



Double back to the left, off the surfaced road and walk down the track past the Trust's King Arthur's Cave interpretation board. Pass a building on the left that has been adapted from a quarry machinery house into a bat habitat.

A little further on the left are the remains of a crushing wheel for limestone from the nearby quarries. Local legend has it that a WWII tank provided the engine for this crushing wheel.

Point 2 is a quarry opened up during the 19th century in the Whitehead Limestone (Llanelly Formation). The quarry contains many whitebeams and is owned by the Forestry Commission.

The whitebeams on the Doward are of national significance and the Wye Valley gorge is the second most important area for these trees in the UK, with a total of 14 species identified. The quarry here and King Arthur's Cave nature reserve contain all five locally endemic species (not found anywhere else in the world). These are *Sorbus eminentiformis*, *S. greenii*, *S. herefordensis*, *S. evansii* and *S. saxicola*.



Keep to the right past the quarry and follow the path downhill with limestone cliffs on the left and a narrow strip of woodland separating the path from open fields on the right.

The limestone cliffs are cut into the Crease Limestone (Gully Oolite Formation). Some geomorphologists agree that the

cliffs show signs of erosion by running water and that they may once have been on the outside of a long-abandoned meander (bend) in the course of the river Wye more than a million years ago; the former valley of the Wye is thought to form a loop around Little Doward and may be discerned in the fields beyond the narrow strip of woodland. A similar limestone cliff exists near Cressbrook Mill in Miller's Dale in the Derbyshire Peak District and is washed in times of flood by, coincidentally, another River Wye.

Moving back to our River Wye the water eroded cliff, long since abandoned, has become host to a number of interesting yew, lime, beech and wild service trees which grow directly out of the rock face, and because of this will be incredibly slow growing and probably of some age.



Continue down the track to King Arthur's Cave on the left (point 3 on the map)



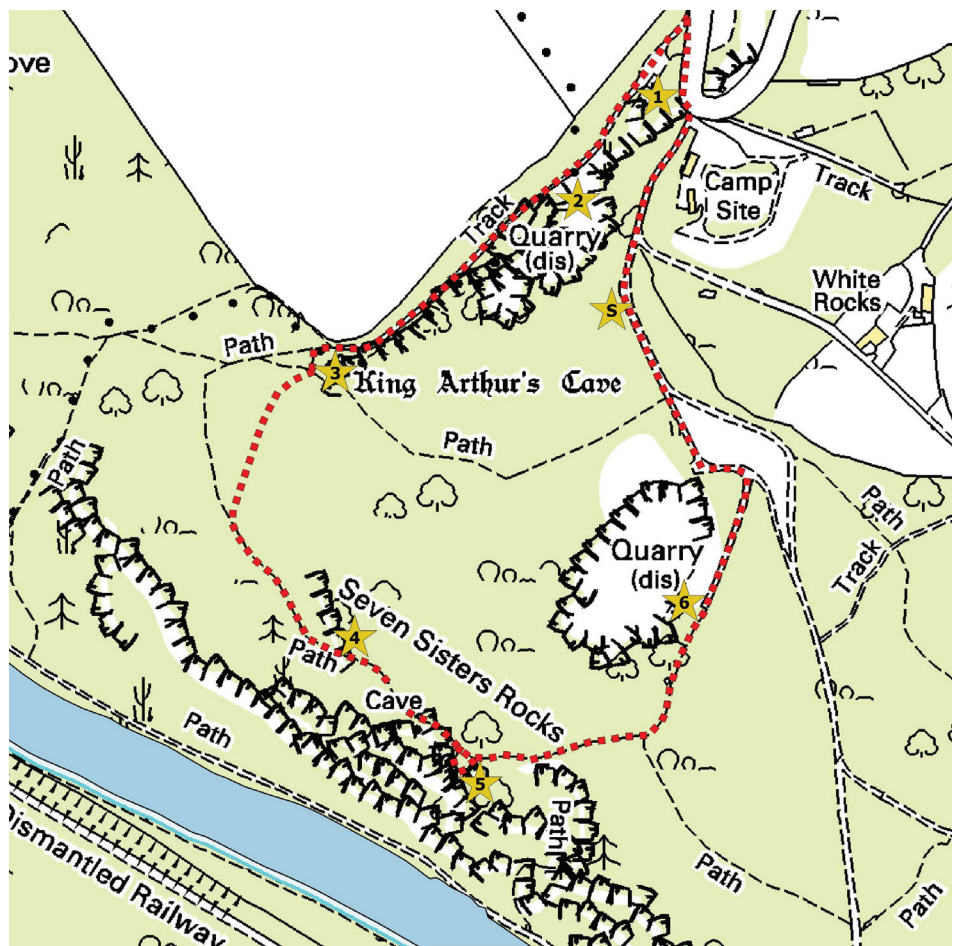
The cave is hollowed into Crease Limestone, which has been a source of iron ore for thousands of years; the ore is dug out from voids, pockets or "churns" within the limestone. The geological structure of the Crease Limestone and its long history of human use mean that outcrops of the rock are frequently riddled with caves and passages today. There is archaeological evidence that people inhabited King Arthur's Cave while hunting wild animals at the margins of the huge

Wye and Usk glaciers of the Devensian ice age, 50 000 to 10 000 years before the present. Human and animal bones were found when the floor of the cave was excavated in the 1920s. A fictional account of people living in the cave – named Mam Cala – appears in Raymond Williams' novel *People of the Black Mountains*. In more recent years Slippery Jem and his wife inhabited the cave; photographs and an account appear on the Overlooking the Wye interpretation board at the start of this walk.



Passing King Arthur's Cave, continue on the main path heading down hill, marked by an arrow, (ignoring both the right-hand fork which follows the woodland edge and the path which curves away to the left). This path continues to be marked by yellow arrows labelled 'forest footpath'.

This path is surrounded by woodland flora in spring, with ramsons and wood anemones being followed by bluebells. The path crosses the upper layers of the Lower Dolomite (Black Rock Limestone).



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A yellow arrow on a tree directs you up a steep section of path (point 4) that climbs a limestone outcrop. At the top, keep left on the main path.



About 100 metres along the path from point 4 there are two marker posts in close succession, just after the point where the ground drops away steeply to the right of the path. At the first of these posts it is possible to take a short detour off to the right (point 5).

On this path you will emerge on top of one of the Seven Sisters Rocks, huge towers of massive Lower Dolomite limestone. The view of the Wye Gorge is one of the best in the lower Wye Valley and epitomizes this landscape element with its high percentage cover of ancient semi-natural woodland. Extra care must be exercised by those who take this detour – especially if accompanied by young children – as there are unprotected long steep drops on the right.



Continue eastwards along the path beyond the detour for just over 100 metres until the path divides at a post. Take the left hand path which climbs a limestone outcrop. At the top of this short path proceed to reach a five bar gate.

Here there is a view into Lords Wood Quarry, a Trust reserve cut into Whitehead Limestone (point 6). Peregrine Falcons have been seen in the vicinity of this quarry in the recent past. The reserve is currently managed by simply allowing the process of natural succession with pioneering mosses, lichens and flowering plants gradually getting a foothold. Eventually limestone grassland and scrub will develop and this process is being monitored for rare and interesting species, with any undesirable species such as buddleia being removed when necessary.



Continue to the right up the old quarry access track, beneath tree cover with the quarry on your left. Ascend a steep left hand bend and then another to the right, pass between two large rocks and emerge on the forestry track to Biblins. You will see the barrier to the left up the track, with vehicles parked beyond it at your starting point (S).