

# LEAF PEEPERS WELCOME

## FOREST OF DEAN & WYE VALLEY

### Recommended Leaf Peeping Walk for Autumn

#### No.3 - Welsh Bicknor

by Paul Rutter, Chief Leaf Peeper and Tree Specialist

**Distance:** Approx. 3 miles

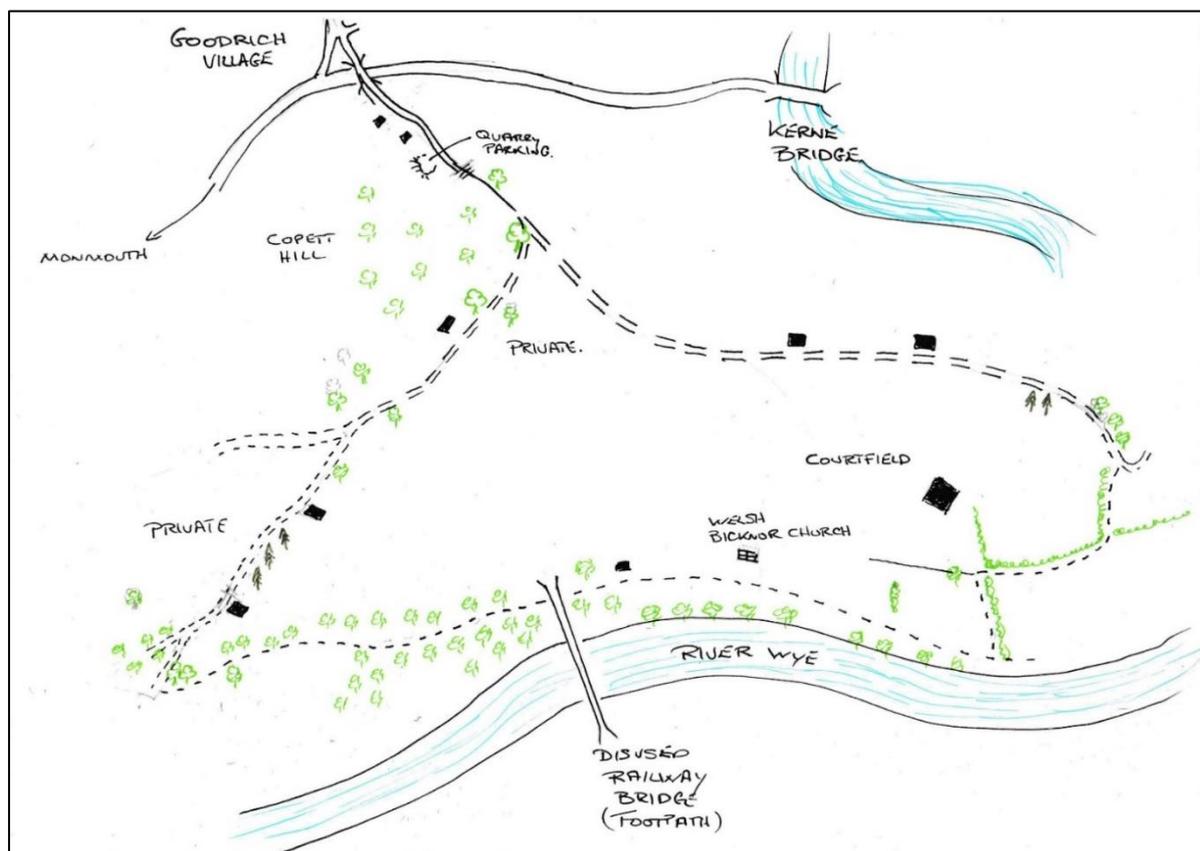
**Parking:** There is a layby halfway up Coppett Hill before the cattle grid or you can stop in the unused quarry to the right of the layby.

#### Walk Summary:

This walk leads through a varied landscape that begins halfway up Coppett Hill. The open grassland here is home to rare small-leaved limes that turn a rich yellow in autumn. Along this route there are also oak plantations and panoramic views over the Wye Valley, as it changes from a deep green to a variety of autumnal reds, golds, oranges and yellows.

The circular route offers plenty of variety. Look out for yellow tulip trees, horse chestnuts, elms and limes whilst strolling through open fields and down winding country tracks, stopping off en-route to admire the view and marvel at the sweeping autumn colours.

#### Route of Walk:



This walk takes you through a varied landscape overlooking the River Wye and Forest of Dean.

Follow the road signs into Goodrich village, as you enter the village take a tight right hand turn just opposite the school and continue up the hill towards the YHA Welsh Bicknor and Courtfields.

There's no parking at the top of the hill so it's best to stop halfway up. Just before the cattle grid in front of you, there is a lay-by to park in. Or you could park in the small unused quarry on the right.

This walk is around three miles long with some slopes following yellow way-marked footpaths and concrete and tarmac road surfaces.

### **Walk Directions:**

Walk to the top of the hill, over a cattle grid, passing a large small-leaved lime tree on the left. This tree is quite rare nationally but is commonly found along the Wye Valley. The leaves turn yellow in autumn and the branches become redder. Bees and other insects thrive on the honeydew that the tree produces in spring.

Continue along the single-track road, seeing open grassland on both sides planted with young oak trees. This is described as a pasture woodland habitat. As the oak trees age, they become valuable for many species of plants and wildlife who use them as their home.



As you approach the next fork in the road, you will begin to see a fine view across the Wye Valley towards the Forest of Dean and spot the changing colours of trees. Take the right fork by a Horse Chestnut tree (now turning yellow and showing the large conker nuts that it grows each autumn). Unlike the Sweet chestnut, these nuts are inedible.



Looking to your left, there are some recently planted Tulip trees that have distinctive leaf shape. These trees grow large and after several years produce tulip shaped flowers.

A little further along, on your right, a large old ash tree is growing near a lime kiln. These ancient trees offer cavities and habitats for birds and insects including rare beetles.



The ash is now under threat from a disease called ash die back. It is hoped that at least some trees can survive the disease and continue to be an important feature in our British landscape. Usually it will be the last tree to come into leaf during the spring, and is known to lose all its leaves overnight should a hard frost descend. It also has black buds that help identify it in winter.

Continuing along the road, passing a cottage on your right, you take the left fork along the tarmac track down hill, passing more estate cottages. At the fork looking right through a gateway you will see two maturing oak trees turning to rich gold.

**Please keep dogs on leads as sheep and cattle may be free roaming in these fields.**

Ahead of you is a fine view the valley towards Symonds Yat, an outcrop of limestone and home to the peregrine falcon.



In the fields along the valley, you will see a range of tree species including walnut, sycamore, lime, ash, larch, oak and horse chestnut. Trees that grow in the open often develop very wide canopies, enabling them to live a lot longer than trees planted close together in plantations. Standing, dead, and decaying trees still offer a valuable habitat for woodpeckers and other insects, so should all be left to naturally decay over many years.



After another cattle grid, take the left fork onto the gravel track, passing a line of small leaf lime trees.



At the bottom of the field, just past the walnut and horse chestnut trees, turn left through the pedestrian gate and follow the track down towards woodland.

Above you on the left you will pass field maple and hazel. As you follow this track downhill, stay quiet, as this is a good place to see birds, late flying butterflies and perhaps a deer. Continue on through the grassy field and into a woodland, continuing down the hill.

Wych elm trees are among the trees still growing in this woodland. These young elm trees were once being killed off by Dutch elm disease but there are now positive signs that the wych elm is slowly resisting the impact of the disease and growing in our woodlands again. It has a large leaf, very coarse to touch and turns a bright yellow in autumn before falling to the ground.

Notice that how much thinner the tree trunks are in the woodland to find light by growing up tall and slim, in fast competition with other trees. This contrasts with the large open grown trees you saw earlier.

The Wye Valley is a vital corridor enabling wildlife to move freely across many miles of landscape.

Continuing through the woodland with the river on your right, passing under an old railway bridge now used as a footbridge. Along this narrow path you begin to pass crack willow trees hanging across the river. A little further along you come to Welsh Bicknor church.

Walk along the riverbank, through a campsite, and continue to the end of the field before taking a left turn to follow the footpath uphill and through a gate in the hedge, adjacent to an old park wall on your left.

An old pear tree is still surviving here in a gap in the wall.



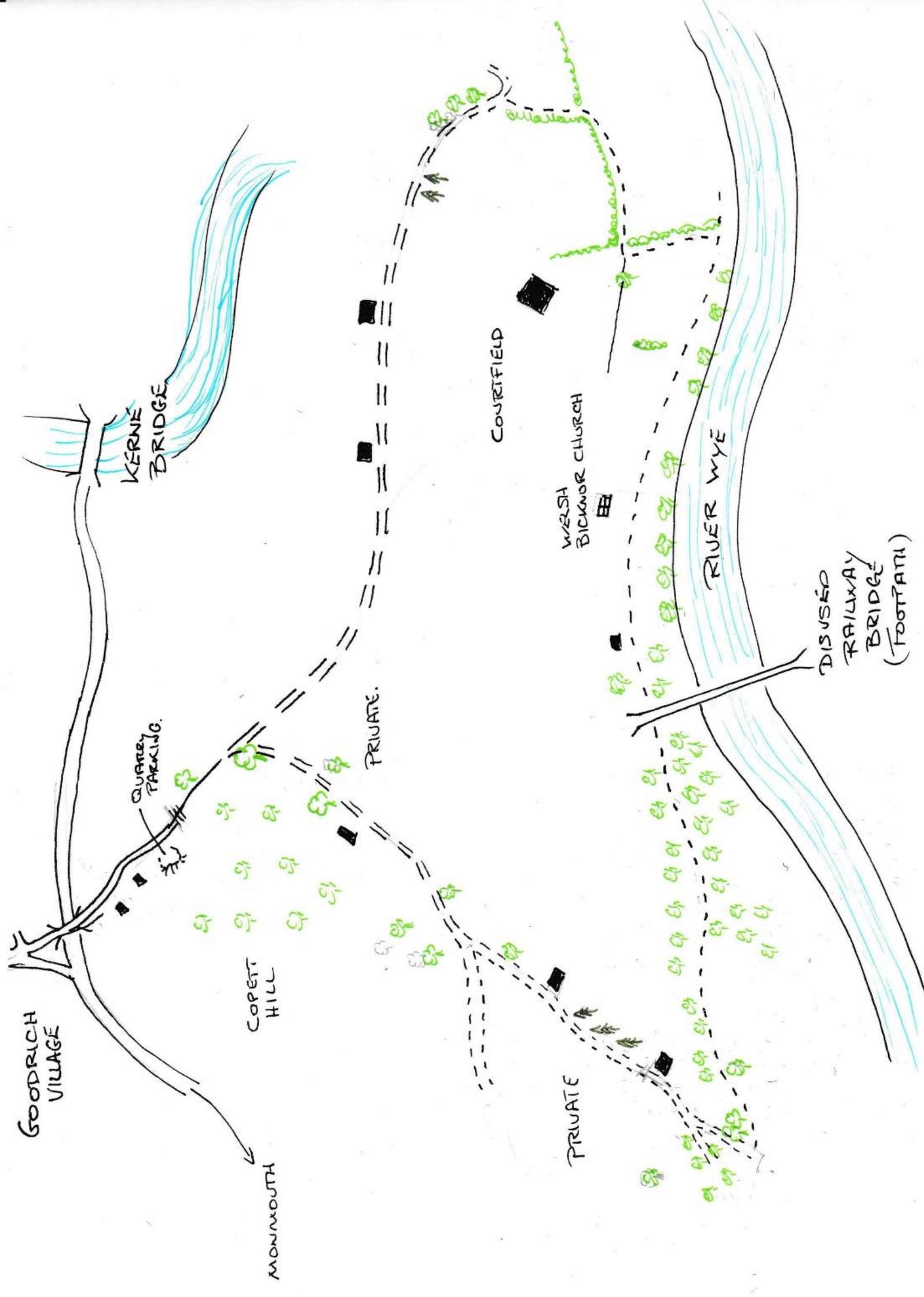
This is the boundary of an old deer park and is part of the private Courtfield Estate. The gate takes you into a field which is another flower rich meadow in summer

As you enter the field, follow the hedge towards the next gate and then continue upwards, keeping the hedge on your left. These thick hedges are mature with berries in autumn and include guilder rose, blackberry, dog rose and dogwood with red stems. These hedges and grasslands are vital food and shelter for birds and mammals as part of their natural habitat.



As you reach the top of the field go through a gate in the post and rail fence. Follow the track uphill along a concrete road passing a line of hornbeam trees which are very upright in the way they grow; here you pass the private Courtfield house.

After passing an old walled garden with views down to the Wye valley, follow the track to take you back to your starting point; passing plantations of beech and larch en-route. You then return to the open oak pasture near to where you started the walk.



GOODRICH VILLAGE

MONMOUTH

KERNE BRIDGE

QUARRY PARKING

COPPET HILL

PRIVATE

COURTFIELD

WELSH BICKNOR CHURCH

RIVER WYE

DISUSED RAILWAY BRIDGE (FOOTPATH)

PRIVATE