

## THE MALVERN HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

# Discovery Walk No 6



Old Country



Mathon Hop

## Hills and Hops at Mathon



### Points of Interest

**At the time of the Domesday survey, Mathon was the most significant parish in the area. The village gave its name to a prehistoric river and several types of hop. Hopyards and Orchards were everywhere in the parish. Like other dispersed parishes in Herefordshire, there are several distinct settlements. This walk visits three of them.**

- A** You will notice pieces of pale limestone in the fields and the walking is easy; Silurian limestone (430 million years old) is the earliest limestone and formed under a tropical sea. The tops of the hills are wooded because the shallow soils made agriculture unrealistic. There are fine views to the north-west and it is possible to see how close the churches of Mathon and Cradley are.
- B** The road follows the course of the stream, which originates with the Malvern Water springs in West Malvern. It flows into the Cradley/Cliffe brook. In the Domesday book, this was a sizeable settlement called Bageberge (Bagbarrow) and there was a mill on the stream.
- C** The landscape to the south of the path of wooded hill tops and grassy valleys is a managed landscape. Woodlands by themselves produce little income, but they do provide cover for game birds. The birds are driven by beaters, and take wing across the valleys in which guns wait. More skill is needed to hit these 'high birds', so the guns pay more for the privilege, and the woodlands are better managed.
- D** No commercial quarrying is allowed in the AONB, but local farmers use the stone for making tracks. It is possible to see fossil shells on some of the stones that are lying around. Do NOT approach the face of the quarry. These are brachiopods and are about 430 million years old and lived in shallow tropical seas.
- E** The Clifffes were ancient landowners with tombs in the church and a house at South Hyde. They are celebrated in the name of the local pub, the Cliffe Arms. It's cruck construction of two log beams forming the apex on its eastern gable betrays its age.
- F** Mathon church is a sandstone Norman hall church and its general shape would have been the same 900 years ago. There are Norman doorways, and the small Norman windows at the east end have escaped Victorian enlargement. The nave roof and the tower are both fourteenth century and the pulpit panels date from the seventeenth century. Many memorials are to the Cliffe family, one of the best being on the North side of the altar. By the church car park is the old school room; the growth of the parish resulted in the erection of the (old) school house across the road in 1862. There is now no school in Mathon, nor is there a shop and in 2006 the pub had been closed for over a year, thus affording weary walkers no refreshment.



Fossils



The Church,  
The School  
&  
The Old School

- G** From here you can see many of the features of the Malvern Hills AONB. To the left (east) is the main Malvern ridge and closer and slightly behind you are the three Silurian limestone hills of Mathon parish (from the left- Cockshot Hill, Rowburrow and Bagburrow). Ahead in the distance is the characteristic terraced and fortified shape of the Herefordshire Beacon (British Camp) and half right is Oyster hill, also made of Silurian limestone. (Discovery Walk No 2)

### Essential Information

Starting Point	Mathon Village Hall (SO 743454) Please contact 01684 567094 to ensure car park is available.
Distance	7.8 km (4.8 miles) or 10.8 km (6.7 miles)
Maps	OS Explorer 190 (1:25000)
Terrain	Mostly flat; there is one slight climb. Generally good underfoot with two short muddy sections. The longer route has a longer uphill section and a very steep downhill stretch.
Refreshments	The Cliffe Arms (SO 736458) is temporarily closed, but it is hoped that it will reopen and provide a further parking option. Occasional teas may be available at Old Country House (SO 727446).

*When out walking, please follow the COUNTRYSIDE CODE.*

*Use alternatives to your car whenever possible.*

*Keep to the public rights of way and designated areas of public access when crossing farmland.*

*Use appropriate gates and stiles to cross field boundaries.*

*Leave gates as you find them or follow signs.*

*Avoid damaging or disturbing wildlife, including plants and trees.*

*Keep dogs under close control and always clean up after them.*

*Guard against all risk of fire.*

*Take your litter home and dispose of it responsibly.*

This is one of a series of Discovery Walks which enable people to understand and appreciate the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). For further details please contact the AONB office: Tel: 01684 560616. [www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk](http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk).

Acknowledgements to: Mathon Parish Hall Committee. (The Hall may be hired by calling 01684 567094)  
Dr J Ferguson for compiling the guide.



*The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership exists to secure the conservation and enhancement of this special area.*

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- H** To your left are broad ditches; initially these defined boundaries between different landholdings, but they then developed into tracks since walking between the fields did not damage the crops. This field is known locally as the 'red' field, not because of its soil colour but because of the blood that was split there in a Civil War skirmish.
- I** The valley is surprisingly wide for a tiny stream; 100,000 years ago the west Midlands drained not along the River Severn, but along the Mathon river which then was broad and flowed to the south, rather than North as nowadays. Its course was changed by glaciers that blocked its route.
- J** The red-brown soil here is where the 300 million year old Devonian sandstone (the stone of much of the county of Hereford) was deposited on top of the 440 million year old Silurian rocks.
- K** Many of the place names here involve 'Moor', which was land above the old flood plain of the Mathon river. (Moorend Cross, Moorend Court and, in Colwall, Moorcroft Farm (Walk No 2)) Such land was particularly suited to the growing of fruit.
- L** Old Country Farm has two prominent hop kilns. Mathon was famous for its hops (Mathon whites; Mathon Greenings) but all of the many hopyards have now disappeared, though hops can still be seen growing in the hedges. It's fame was such that Royal Worcester Porcelain produced a celebratory design named Mathon Hop.
- M** This traditional nineteenth century orchard has its trees spaced more widely than in more modern orchards because the land also served as a sheep pasture. Mistletoe can be seen in many trees; in this area it is not confined to the fruit trees.
- N** There are several badger setts in this wood and badger gates can be seen in the fence; badgers can easily hole a fence if there is no easy way through.
- O** This large pond is the consequence of sand and gravel working in the twentieth century. During the ice ages, the flow of the Mathon river was blocked by the glaciers and a large lake formed around Mathon in which the sand was deposited. The pond is now home to swans, geese and several species of duck.
- P** These ponds (and others in the parish) are the result of much earlier sand extraction and are fine habitats for amphibians and an exceptional number of dragonfly species.
- Q** Instead of the massive Mathon river flowing south, a small brook (rising at various springs on the western side of the Malvern Hills) flows north. In Colwall and Cradley, this is known as the Cradley brook, but Cradley/Mathon rivalry meant that in Mathon it is called the Cliffe brook, after the prominent local family.
- R** South End was of much greater importance in the past; note the old half-timbered buildings, the eighteenth century farm, the tannery and Chapel Cottage. Those who worked the sand and gravel industries and the orchards lived here.
- S** South Hyde has associations with the Cliffe family and also with the poet Elizabeth Barrett who lived at Hope End, Colwall ( See Discovery Walk No 2)
- T** The land here was set aside from agriculture some years ago. One can appreciate how quickly it is being reclaimed by nature without any grazing.
- U** In addition to settlements around the church and at South End, there is another one here around the large house, Mathon Court.



Cruck Framed Cliffe Arms