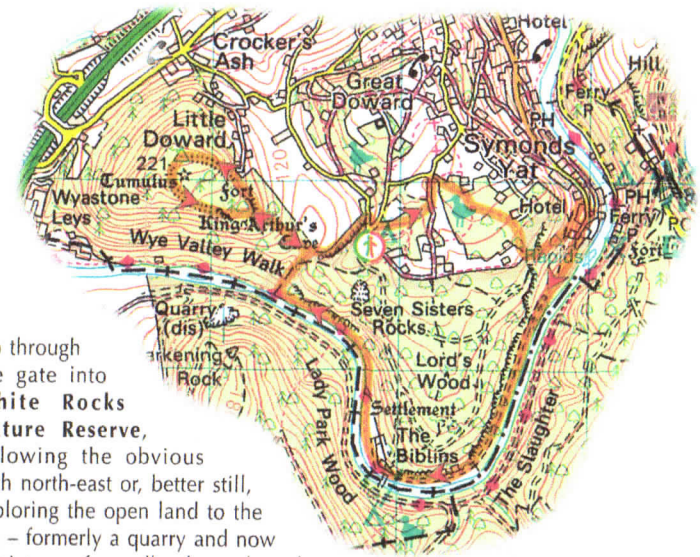


WALK 7

King Arthur's Cave and the Seven Sisters

Start/Finish	Entrance to White Rocks Nature Reserve (SO 548 157)
Distance	7km (4½ miles)
Ascent	220m (720ft)
Time	2–3hrs
Map	Outdoor Leisure 14
Public transport	Crocker's Ash, 1.5km from White Rocks, has a bus every two hours on route 34 from Ross-on-Wye to Monmouth
Parking	Limited parking at and around the entrance to the reserve

This is a hugely varied walk, with delightful nature reserves, the riverside bustle of Symonds Yat, an enormous hillfort with panoramic views, and a celebrated cave that once provided shelter for exotic prehistoric animals.



Go through the gate into **White Rocks Nature Reserve**, following the obvious path north-east or, better still, exploring the open land to the left – formerly a quarry and now a mixture of woodland, scrub and

The bramble thickets are home to several species of butterfly – notably marbled whites and ringlets – while common spotted orchids are abundant and there are also bee and pyramidal orchids in places.

The field is dotted with yellow ant mounds and supports a diverse calcareous plantlife, ranging from cowslips, early purple and greater butterfly orchids and harebells to devil's bit scabious, marjoram, pignut and autumn crocus.

grassland. ◀ When the path forks by a wayside seat take the left-hand option, passing through tall bracken that often conceals fallow deer. At the edge of the reserve turn left along May Bush Lane, a beaten-earth track, and when this reaches a tarmac road the route lies immediately right, along Horse Pool Lane.

After only 150m turn right again to follow a clear path through the **Miners Rest Nature Reserve**, taking the right-hand option and curving round to the left to reach a lane by an information board. The reserve now consists of broad-leaved woodland, but the ruined limestone walls of field boundaries can still be seen. Go slightly to the left across the lane and through a gate in the deer fence into a third nature reserve – Woodside – following a narrow path through scrub and woodland and then cutting through an old arable field that reverted to pasture some decades ago. ◀

Turn left on another beaten-earth track on the eastern edge of Woodside, and at a complex junction after 150m turn sharply right onto a good path descending gradually through the Woodland Trust's Symonds Yat Woods – a classic semi-natural ancient beech woodland. Curve right, then turn sharply left opposite some disused shafts, with even better examples of the entrances to old ironstone workings slightly further downhill at the base of a cliff. The descent steepens on an excellent track through mature woodland, with a precipitous drop to the right, before a left turn leads past an even more impressive limestone cliff and down a narrowing path to reach the road at **Symonds Yat West**.

A path to the left leads to the river and the ancient hand ferry giving access to the pubs and other facilities of Symonds Yat East, but the main route ignores this and instead keeps straight on when the road turns left. There is a choice between a sometimes narrow riverside path with good views of the rapids – scenic and popular with canoeists – and the main track, until the path climbs up to merge with the track just beyond the scanty remains of the New Weir Forge.



The ironworks at **New Weir Forge**, powered by water diverted from the river, were in operation by 1570 and included a slitting mill, which produced nails, and a rolling mill driven by water-wheels. Workers' cottages lay on the hillside above the forge, and the owner's garden and orchard lay alongside the upper path. The works were disused by the late 18th century and the remains are now widely scattered in the woodland.

The stony track continues straight ahead for some distance, eventually swinging right to pass through the grassy **Biblins campsite**, with the tufa-encrusted limestone cliff below the Dropping Well to the right under the slopes of Lord's Wood, with its caves and rock shelters, and the swaying suspension footbridge – constructed by the Forestry Commission in 1957 – straight ahead. Go straight past the footbridge on a dusty track, eventually slanting left across a riverside pasture to reach the river again in the company of an excellent woodland path below the limestone rock towers of the **Seven Sisters**. ►

Turn right just before a metal gate, now going steeply uphill on a tough but rewarding path through the woods. The slope eases and the path nears the edge of the trees, with a field ahead, but turn left here on a path that enters

Biblins Bridge, a suspension footbridge over the Wye

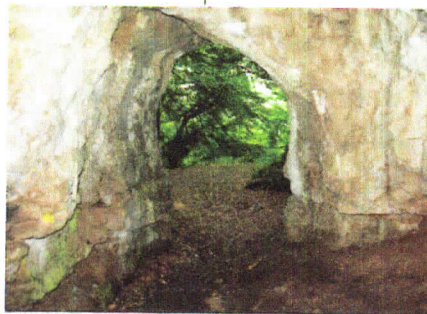
Extensively quarried in the past, the Seven Sisters dominate the surrounding landscape and constitute an important habitat for rare plant species requiring lime-rich grassland.

the Little Doward woodland and climbs steadily to reach a ladder stile in front of a little cliff. The way lies to the right here on a wide green path, which reaches a junction of pedestrian ways at the edge of the **Little Doward hillfort**.

The massive **hillfort** at Little Doward is defended by steep cliffs and a single rampart and ditch. The 19th-century ironmaster Richard Blakemore, regarded as 'entirely unacquainted with the antiquarian interest' here, created a picturesque landscape with follies and viewpoints, driving carriage roads right through the ramparts. Recently the trees have been removed and white cattle now control the vegetation.

Turn right at the path junction, taking a route that runs round the northern boundary of the fort, with good views in places of the rampart and deep ditch. This is one of Blakemore's carriage drives, eventually sweeping round to the left. Turn left to walk through a gap in the rampart, with a seat to the right and an **OS trig point** away to the left, and walk down through the hillfort to return to the junction of paths. Go right here, then left on a narrow path below another limestone cliff before walking through a rock cutting to return to the ladder stile.

Retrace the outward route to the woodland edge, this time going slightly left along the field boundary to reach **King Arthur's Cave**. ◀ Keep to the left of the cave, walking along a lane below cliffs riddled with yet more cavities and passing the foundations of a limestone crusher for the nearby quarry, to return to the tarmac road just around the corner from the start of the walk at the entrance to **White Rocks Nature Reserve**.



Looking out from the main chamber of King Arthur's cave

The dramatic cave, which has a double entrance and two main chambers, provided a refuge for mammoths, hyenas, rhinoceros and cave lions in prehistoric times, and was occupied by man in the Palaeolithic era.