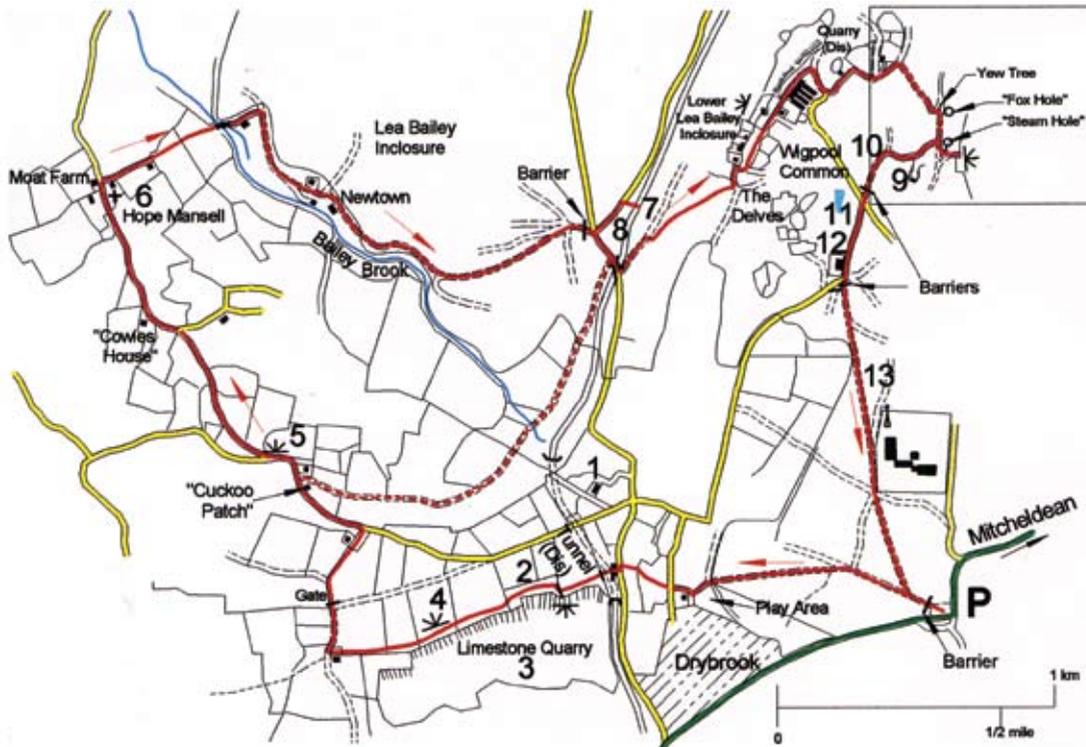


Hope Mansell, Lea Bailey, and Wigpool

A lovely secluded valley, a gold mine, Wigpool iron mine (including a WW2 'cinema'), and extensive views. A hilly walk on field paths, woodland tracks, and lanes; can be muddy; the section around Wigpool Common requires careful navigation; 9 stiles.

START at one of the parking areas on either side of the unclassified road between Drybrook and Mitcheldean, on the sharp bend a little under a mile from Drybrook and just over half a mile from Mitcheldean (the top of Stenders Hill): GR SO 656180. **Refreshments:** none on walk; pubs and shops in Mitcheldean and Drybrook. **Bus:** 24 (Gloucester–Joy's Green) to The Stenders.



TAKE THE WIDE DIRT TRACK beyond the barrier on your left as you face towards Mitcheldean (i.e., on the inside of the bend in the main road). Keep ahead past a track junction on the right and a mast on the left. About 40 yds after the mast you turn

left onto a footpath, then fork right after 20 yds and continue until you emerge from the woods. The path bears left and passes to the right of a childrens' play area. Turn right, passing a bungalow on your left, cross a tarmac lane, and climb the stile ahead.

The white house with its distinctive tower is Euroclydon (1). Continue to the far end of the field, where there is a gap and a stile. Follow the narrow path beyond down to a tarmac road. Turn left and then right in front of the first house ('Greystones'). The path heads uphill, initially between stone walls, to a gate. Keeping the hedge on your left, continue uphill through another gate. Beyond this there is a good view to the left of Drybrook and Ruardean Hill, with Cinderford beyond (2). Just below the path, also on the left, is Drybrook Quarry (3). Still keeping the hedge (and quarry) on your left, continue over two stiles and through two hedge gaps. There are excellent views of the Herefordshire Hills and Black Mountains (4) to the right (north and west) along this stretch.

Climb the next stile, near a house, then turn right down an enclosed grassy track. Where this bends right, keep ahead through a gate into a field. Follow the left-hand field edge (ignoring a stile over the fence) downhill to climb a stile near a converted barn. Keep ahead down to a tarmac road and turn left. After 300 yds a byway sign near 'Cuckoo Patch' points sharp right along a grassy track, a possible short cut. *This initially follows the edge of woodland, continues past a farm, enters some woods, and finally emerges onto a road by an old railway bridge. Turn right over this to continue the walk.* Otherwise stay on the road, with good views of the lovely secluded Hope Mansell valley on the right (5). Keep ahead at a junction (signed Hope Mansell) and head steadily downhill, past another junction on the right and the stone and timber-framed Cowles House (c. 1600) on the left, to Hope Mansell Church (6). Just past the church, opposite Moat Farm and Mill House, turn right up a lane (signed to village hall). At the top of this lane climb the steps and stile directly ahead and continue ahead across the field to a stile. Keeping in the same direction, go downhill to pass through a hedge gap, follow a stream on your left for a short

distance, and cross a footbridge and stile. Pass to the left of a house (Bailey Brook Cottage) onto a lane and follow this uphill to a junction. Turn right here to follow a gravel track just on the edge of a conifer plantation (Lea Bailey Inclosure), keeping left past a driveway. Bear right at a junction to go behind two houses (Newtown!), and keep left at another to go up a small valley to a junction of several tracks. Take the one that goes half right past a barrier to a tarmac road (about 100 yds away).

Cross this and take the road opposite towards Lea and Mitcheldean. After about 100 yds there is a metal barrier on the right. Go past this towards a metal hut visible a short distance beyond. This is the site of Lea Bailey Gold Mine (7)! The mine entrance is to the left, behind the shed. After looking around here, retrace your steps to the road, turn left, left again at the junction, and cross the bridge over the trackbed of the former Mitcheldean Road & Forest of Dean Junction Railway (8). *The track on the right just before the bridge is where the short cut comes in.* Just over the bridge turn left past a barrier onto a dirt track. Fork right after 100 yds onto a path, which climbs more steeply through woodland to the top of the hill, where you turn left onto a grass track. Follow this track as it bends right and then left past some cottages, but where it next turns right, keep ahead along a grass path between fences. There are chicken houses on the right and more views of the Herefordshire hills and Welsh mountains to the left. The path bends right after the chicken farm onto a dirt road, where you go right. Turn left at the next T-junction and follow this dirt road as it swings right and then left. At this point, take the grassy (and commonly muddy) track which forks right of the driveway to a house. *The next section can be a bit tricky, so please follow the directions carefully; see detailed map.*

Continue for about 100 yds, passing a driveway on the left, and then bear right at a fork. Approximately 250 yds

further on, at the top of a rise, you come to a triangular junction, marked by a prominent yew tree in its centre. A few yards beyond the yew, on the far side of the crossing track in a depression, is a gated entrance (Fox Hole) to Wigpool Iron Mine. Turn right at this junction. After about 120 yds, and about 10 yds before a fork where the more obvious path bends left, is a footpath (easily missed) on the right where the route continues. *However, there are two more points of interest which you can look at first. To see these continue to the fork, bear left and, after a few yards, turn sharp left along an indistinct path for a short distance to another grid-covered mine entrance, now used by cavers. This is Steam Hole, so named because moisture in warmer air rising from the mine on a cold day will sometimes condense. Return to the track and turn left down to a gate, where there is a good view of May Hill (see Walks 10 and 12) and the River Severn. Retrace your steps past the fork to the narrow footpath mentioned earlier.* About 80 yds

along this is a wire-fenced area about 20 yards to the left. This large rock-sided hole is the 'Yankee Cinema' (9). About 100 yds further on you come to a junction where you turn left along a somewhat wider path. The waste heaps on the right here are from Wigpool No. 2 Pit (10). The path widens into a track and soon leads out past a barrier onto a tarmac road. Cross this and follow the road directly ahead, first past Wig Pool (11) and then the former Wigpool No. 1 Pit engine house (now a residence, 12), both on the right. Just beyond this, where the road bends right, fork slightly left onto the first of two tracks with barriers. This grass track (often muddy) generally follows the line of the Wigpool Tramroad (13). Where the track reaches the far end of the fenced water works enclosure on the left, bear left off the more obvious track, and then right to regain the line of the old tramroad. Follow this through the woods (there is at least one stone tramroad block visible), until it joins a wide dirt track, where you bear left to return to the parking area.



Euroclydon House (1)

This large black and white building has a square five-storey tower on the south side, adorned with a wrought iron balcony. It was built in the 1860s by a mine-owner, T. B. Brain, who is said to have used the tower to keep a watchful eye on his workers. The Brain family were the long-term owners of Trafalgar Colliery (see Walk 5), about 3 miles to the southwest, although this cannot be seen from Euroclydon as Ruardean Hill is in the way. However, the family owned Pluckpenny Colliery, near Drybrook, in

the late 1800s. The house later became a hotel and has been a nursing home since about 1980. Incidentally, Euroclydon is the name of a cold stormy east or northeast wind in the Levant that is said to have caused Saint Paul's shipwreck on Malta.

Drybrook and Cinderford (2)

The view from here takes in Drybrook in the valley, Ruardean Hill to its right, Harrow Hill to the left, and Cinderford beyond. Drybrook is a typical Forest village, workaday rather than picturesque, and based to a large extent on coal mining and stone quarrying. It only really began to expand in the late 18th century with the expansion of the extractive industries in the area. As the community developed, a range of religious, musical (including a brass band), sporting, and other activities became established. The largest collieries were situated south of the village and all worked the Coleford High Delf Seam: Pluckpenny, Newbridge Engine, Speedwell Newbridge, and Harrow Hill. However, by the end of the 19th century most of these had either closed or were in decline and only Harrow Hill, which had taken over several other collieries, survived until about 1927. Many workers therefore had to travel further afield to find employment. The coming of the railway in 1907 helped to alleviate this problem, but the depression of the 1930s hit hard. Light industries provided work after World War 2, and improving transport enabled people to commute to places such as Gloucester. Today the village has a range of facilities, including the Hearts of Oak pub. South of Drybrook is the area known as Harrow Hill (or Harry Hill), where the first Anglican church (Holy Trinity) within the boundary of the Forest of Dean was built in 1817. A Congregational Chapel, later the United Reformed Church, was built in 1858 and enlarged in 1872. The village of Ruardean Hill overlooks Drybrook from the southwest. The summit of the hill is the highest point in Dean (951 ft, 290 m). There are two pubs, the Nelson Arms and the Rose in Hand, as well as a village shop.

Cinderford is a small town with a population of 8,116 people (2001 census). Like Coleford, it lies within the original area of the Royal hunting forest, but is of somewhat more recent origin. The first settlement was a small collection of houses which grew up in the early 19th century along the eastern edge of the forest boundary. The name is derived from the slag of early ironworks in the valley bottom near the place where the Littledean–Coleford road crossed the Cinderford (or Soudley) brook; a bridge had been built there by 1674 and the Bridge Inn (now closed) is close by. Industrial development in the early 19th century, particularly the revival of the Cinderford ironworks by Moses Teague and others in the late 1820s and the development of collieries, resulted in a substantial growth in population. A church (St John's) and school were built in the 1840s. In some respects, such as the rows of terrace houses, the town resembles the coal-mining towns and villages of the Welsh Valleys. Later in the century, Cinderford grew into a small town with many of its shops, inns, and other facilities being situated to the north near the Littledean–Nailbridge road, the present town centre (The Triangle). Cinderford Station opened in 1900 and the town continued to expand in the 20th century. Closure of the last deep coal mines in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in a depression, with much unemployment. Since then, however, significant industrial development has taken place, notably in the Forest Vale Industrial Estate. Cinderford was the home of the 'Forest poetess', Catherine Drew (1784–1867).

Drybrook Quarry (3)

There was a quarry here by 1914, when Drybrook Quarry was advertised for sale. It was being worked by Thomas Roberts for road metal from the Lower Limestone Shale and Lower Dolomite, part of the Carboniferous Limestone Series. The quarry was taken over by Drybrook Quarries Ltd in 1926, and a private siding was laid by the Great Western Railway from Drybrook Halt in 1928. Nevertheless, most of the stone went out by road, and the line was closed in 1952–3. It was still owned by Drybrook Quarries Ltd in about 1970, but was later considerably enlarged by the Amey Roadstone Corporation (ARC Ltd), 25 men being employed in 1989. ARC Ltd is now called Hanson Aggregates, who are the current owners. However, owing to the recent (2008) downturn in the building industry, the quarry is currently closed. It is over 500

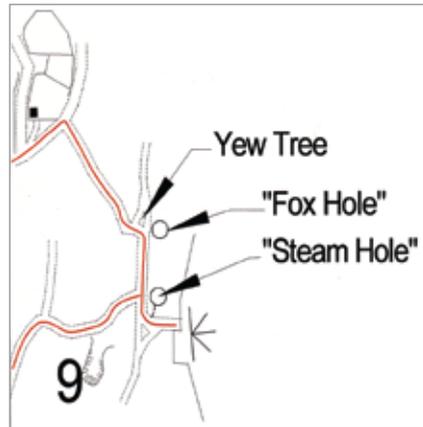
m across, and there have been plans to convert part of the site into a tourist attraction. As you walk up the path above the quarry you pass an outcrop of limestone, with the beds dipping at about 20° to the south, i.e., into the quarry. There was a landslide near here in the 1970s, when part of the face fell away taking trees and hedge with it. It is easy to imagine that a massive limestone layer, possibly resting on a shale bed in the Lower Limestone Shale, would have slid down the bedding plane and into the open quarry. Such movement may well have been caused by heavy rain lubricating the shale bed.

View of Black Mountains and Herefordshire Hills (4)

The extensive views from here (on a fine day at least) include the Black Mountains of Wales (part of the Brecon Beacons National Park) to the northwest. In the middle distance are the hills of south Wales and Herefordshire (from left to right: Graig Syfyrddin, Garway Hill, Orcop Hill, and Aconbury Hill, near Hereford). Further right, in the near distance, are the hills (Chase Hill and Penyard Park) above Ross-on-Wye (hidden below), and beyond are the hills of the Woolhope Dome (note the TV mast above Much Marcle). In the distance to the northeast is the distinctive range of the Malvern Hills. To the far right, behind Euroclydon, is the flat wooded top of Wigpool Common, which will be visited towards the end of the walk. Geologically, much of this area (including both the Black Mountains and Herefordshire lowlands) consists of Devonian Old Red Sandstone rocks. The main exceptions are the Woolhope Dome and the Malvern Hills. The Woolhope Dome consists of older (Silurian) rocks, mainly limestones and shales of the Ludlow, Wenlock, and Llandovery Series. The strata dip consistently outwards to form a dome-like structure (*see 5 below for further explanation*). The Malvern Hills consist of even older rocks (Malvernian) of Precambrian age: up to about 700 million years old and some of the oldest in Britain south of Scotland. Most of the rocks are of igneous origin (formed by crystallisation of molten rock or magma), although they have subsequently been metamorphosed by the effects of very high pressures and temperatures due to deep burial in the crust. They are mostly intrusive rocks, such as diorite and granite, but there are also volcanic rocks (basalt and rhyolite), which are somewhat younger (only about 560 million years old). To the west of the hills are Silurian sedimentary rocks (mainly shales and limestones), as well as a small area of Cambrian shales and sandstones. To the east are much younger Triassic marls and sandstones of the Worcester Basin. The Malvern Hills thus mark a major break between rocks of very different ages: they lie along the Malvern axis, a major fault line. This fault is a very ancient zone of crustal weakness that has undergone repeated reactivation, the last important one being the Permo–Triassic rifting which formed the Worcester Basin.

Hope Mansell Dome (5)

A dome is a geological structure in which the strata dip consistently outwards from a point, so that after erosion the oldest rocks are exposed in the centre, being surrounded by younger ones. This sort of structure is also known as an 'inlier'. The core of the Hope Mansell Dome lies east of the village near the bottom of the valley. This area consists of Brownstones,



part of the Devonian Old Red Sandstone. The Brownstones are overlain on three sides (Howle Hill to the west, Ruardean Hill to the south (behind you) and Wigpool Common to the east) by the Quartz Conglomerate and Tintern Sandstone (Upper Old Red Sandstone), the various units of the Carboniferous Limestone, and (but only to the south and east) the Pennant Group of the Coal Measures. Although these younger rocks form the high ground on three sides of the Hope Mansell valley, the rocks dip consistently outwards, so that the strata really do form the shape of a dome. They are thus analogous to, but in the opposite sense to, the Forest of Dean basin, in which the youngest rocks (Coal Measures) in the centre are surrounded by Carboniferous Limestone and then Old Red Sandstone, with the rock strata dipping consistently inwards. The northern (far) end of the Hope Mansell valley, though, consists of the Old Red Sandstone rocks of Penyard Park, above Ross-on-Wye. Any overlying Carboniferous rocks there have now been eroded away.

Hope Mansell (6)

Hope Mansell is set in a very secluded green valley, being sheltered by hills on three sides. The only access is by narrow winding lanes, and the village houses are spread out along these. The village of Hope is mentioned in the Domesday Book (hope being derived from an old English word meaning valley), with the Mansel (single l) part of the name added when the Malosiel family held the manor in the 14th century. The parish church of St Michael has been much added to and altered over the centuries. The oldest part is the north wall of the nave, which dates from the 12th century. The chancel and east window are 13th or early 14th century, the south doorway is 14th century, and the south porch was added in the 17th century. The sandstone font, a round bowl with moulded stem, is probably 13th century. The church was extensively restored in 1889,



and the stained glass chancel windows date from this time. There are several attractive old houses in the village. These include Ye Old Cottage at Street Farm, a late 17th century sandstone rubble house with some timber framing and a slate roof, and Sutton House opposite. They are a short distance beyond where the walk route turns right just past the church.



Lea Bailey Gold Mine (7)

Bailey Level was driven in 1906 by the Chastan Syndicate to work gold in the Quartz Conglomerate at the base of the Devonian Upper Old Red Sandstone. The theory was that the conglomerate resembled gold-bearing rocks of South Africa. It was reached about 300 ft from the entrance and was 25 ft thick. However, only about 6 grains of gold per ton were present, and the venture was an expensive failure, soon abandoned. Whether it was a case of wishful thinking or an outright scam is unclear. In

1921 the level was extended to more than 1800 ft by the Wigpool Coal and Iron Syndicate (later Co.) in order to exploit iron ore in the Crease Limestone. A narrow-gauge railway was laid along the trackbed of the Mitcheldean Road & Forest of Dean Junction Railway (*see 8*) to Mitcheldean Road Station on the GWR's Hereford, Ross & Gloucester line. However, this venture was also short lived; only 3000 tons of ore were won and operations had been abandoned by 1927. The narrow-gauge railway equipment lying around today was part of a more-recent scheme to re-open the level as a tourist attraction.

Mitcheldean Road & Forest of Dean Junction Railway (8)

The Mitcheldean Road & Forest of Dean Junction Railway Act of 1871 authorised the company to build a line from Mitcheldean Road station, on the Hereford, Ross and Gloucester Railway, to Whimsey on the Great Western Railway's Forest of Dean Branch. The new line was intended to carry South Wales traffic and stimulate iron-ore mining around Drybrook, and it had the support of the Crawshays and Alfred Goold, owner of the Lower Soudley ironworks. Construction began in 1874, but progress was slow, and the line was not completed until after it had been taken over by the Great Western Railway in 1880. However, the heavily-graded line, which included tunnels at Drybrook and Euroclydon, was never worked throughout, partly because of competition from the Severn and Wye Railway's line to Lydbrook which had opened in 1874. The southern section from Whimsey was opened as far as Speedwell Siding, near Nailbridge, for mineral traffic in 1885 and to Drybrook Halt for passengers (as an extension of services on the Forest of Dean Branch) in 1907. The track north of Drybrook was taken up in 1917, but was reinstated to Drybrook Quarry in 1928, and there have even been plans in recent years to relay the section from the quarry to connect with the Dean Forest Railway's line (*see Walk 2*) at Parkend. The only use the northern section ever got was in

the 1920s, when the Wigpool Coal and Iron Syndicate attempted to work Lea Bailey Level for iron (*see 7*). A narrow-gauge railway was laid along the old trackbed to Mitcheldean Road, but the venture was soon abandoned. Euroclydon Tunnel was used for storing ammunition during World War 2.

Yankee Cinema (9)

There was once an entrance to Wigpool Mine here, but the present excavation is an old quarry. American troops stationed here during World War 2 used it as a cinema, the screen being hung on the vertical wall at one end. The troops, an engineering battalion, left suddenly just before the D-day landings, leaving wooden seats and film cases (all long since rotted away) lying around. How many of these troops survived the war?



Wigpool Iron Mine (10, 12)

Iron has certainly been mined here for centuries, and may have supplied ore to the Roman iron-smelting settlement at Ariconium, which was only 2½ miles to the north. Wigpool Iron Mine comprised the Wigpool, Belt, Wigpool Belt, Injunction Belt, and Injunction Iron Mine gales. The first two of these were granted in 1846, and Injunction Iron Mine gale in 1850. By 1854 the gales were held by Messrs Allaway, who had interests in ironworks and tinsplate works in Lydney, Lydbrook and Cinderford. A shaft (No. 1 Pit) had been sunk by about 1858, when a 30-inch horizontal rotary engine was installed for both winding and pumping. Production of iron ore was sporadic in the 1860s, but had risen to 6815 tons by 1870. Financial problems resulted in the formation of a new company, the Lydney and Wigpool Iron Ore Co. Ltd, in 1871. Expansion of the mine soon took place, with the addition of the Wigpool Belt gale, and production reached 22106 tons in 1873. The No. 1 (or Deep) Pit was sunk to a depth of 530 ft in the Lower Dolomite (part of the Carboniferous Limestone Series), and the No. 2 Pit to 380 ft. Most ore was won from the Crease Limestone, but significant quantities also came from the underlying Lower



Dolomite. About 150 000 tons were produced between 1861 and 1883, much of it being dispatched down a tramroad which ran, via Westbury Brook Iron Mine, to Whimsey on the Great Western Railway's Forest of Dean Branch. By 1883 the company was again in financial difficulties and went into liquidation in 1886, the plant being auctioned off the following year. Several attempts were made to re-open the mine between 1911 and 1923. It was bought by a Mr Witfield for £4000 in 1915 and some ore was raised, but the project was abandoned in 1918. Some further work was done by the Wigpool Coal and Iron Syndicate (later Co.) in 1921–7 from the Bailey Level, but only 3000 tons of ore were won before the company went into receivership. Today only the stone engine house (now a dwelling) survives above ground. There are several mine entrances (e.g., Steam Hole and Fox Hole) on Wigpool Common, as well as areas of scowles (ancient near-surface workings), including 'The Delves'.

Wig Pool (11)

This is a remnant of the acidic bog and heathland which once covered much of Wigpool Common. The pool existed as long ago as 1282, but was drained during conifer planting in 1955. However the drainage ditches were blocked in 1970, and the pool allowed to refill. There is still a variety of acid marshland plants, such as marsh pennywort, lesser spearwort, marsh speedwell, common marsh-bedstraw, floating sweet-grass, and various sedges. Drier areas support purple moor-grass, common bent, tufted hair-grass, rushes, and bilberry. Mallard, common frogs, and palmate and smooth newts breed here. The pool is now a nature reserve belonging to the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, and there are plans to reinstate areas of heathland as the conifers are harvested.

Wigpool Tramroad (13)

This was an extension of the Westbury Brook tramroad, which connected the iron mine of that name (*see Walk 10*) to Whimsey and the Forest of Dean Railway's tramroad to Bullo Pill on the Severn. This opened in about 1842 and probably used part of the formation of the Bishop's tramroad which served Newbridge Engine Colliery at Nailbridge. The extension to Wigpool was authorised in 1854, by which time the (by then) Forest of Dean Branch of the South Wales Railway had been converted to a broad-gauge line, so that the Westbury Brook tramroad now terminated at a transhipment wharf at Whimsey. The Wigpool tramroad diverged from the Westbury Brook line near Fairplay Cottages (near which there was also a short branch to Fairplay Iron Mine, *see Walk 10*) and the distance to Wigpool No. 2 Pit was just over two miles. It is not clear when the tramroad opened, but the first recorded production of iron ore was not until 1865. Closure of the mine came in 1886, and the tramroad had been removed by the turn of the century. There was also a tramroad from Wigpool No. 2 Pit to Mitcheldean Road Station yard, on the Hereford, Ross and Gloucester Railway (opened 1855; amalgamated with the Great Western Railway in 1862). This descended Bailey Hill by a rope-worked incline.