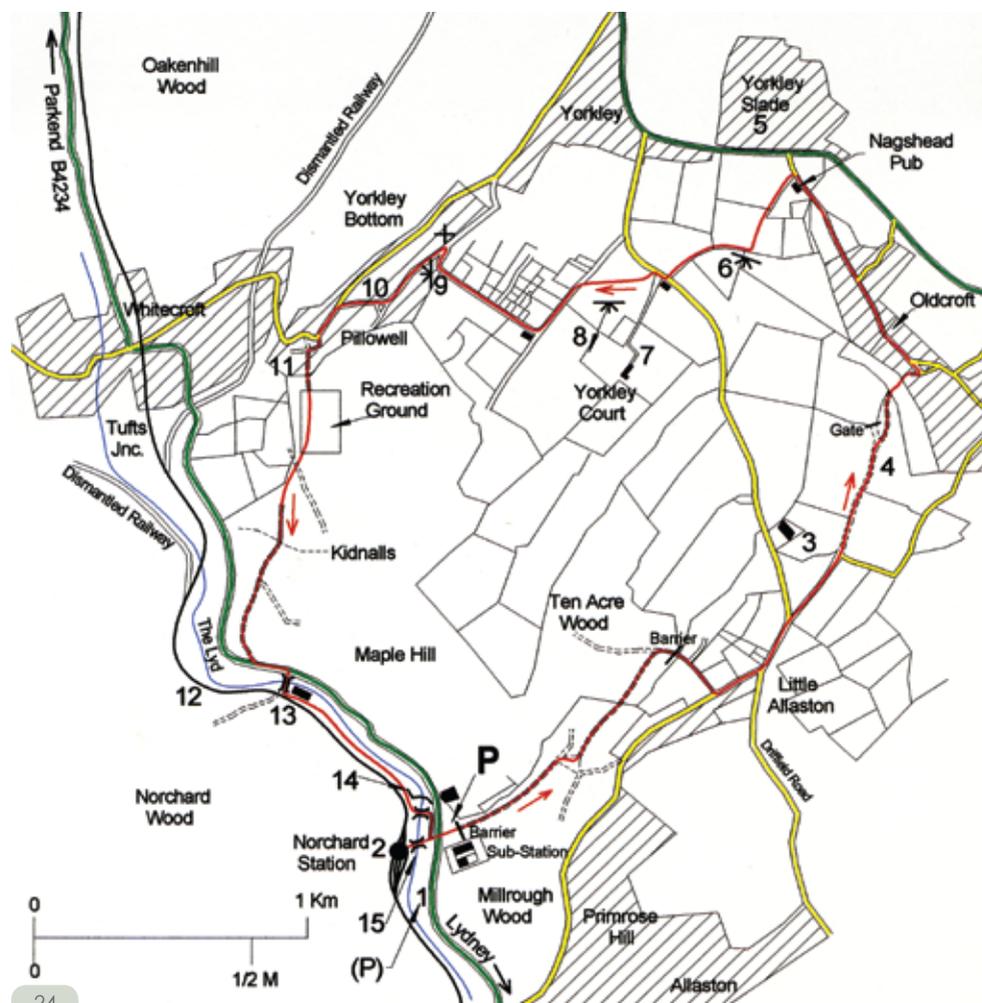


Norchard, Oldcroft, and Pillowell

A Roman road, extensive views, old mill sites, and a working steam railway. Mostly on lanes and forest paths or tracks, this walk is initially uphill, but then levels out with good views to the Cotswolds; 7 stiles.

Refreshments: Nag's Head pub, Yorkley Slade; Dean Forest Railway café (open on operating days); other pubs in Yorkley, Pillowell, and Whitecroft. Limited parking is available at the beginning of a track off the B4234 road between Lydney and Parkend, just opposite the main entrance to the Dean Forest Railway (not the entrance to DFR car park): GR SO 630044. Please do not obstruct access to the house. If using the DFR car park, please check in their shop first to ensure you will be back before it is locked. **Bus:** 727 (Lydney–Parkend) to Norchard or Yorkley Slade.



THE DEAN FOREST RAILWAY car park site was originally occupied by the waste tips of Norchard Colliery (1), and, from 1923, by Lydney Power Station. The colliery was situated just across the River Lyd, on land which is now the headquarters of the Dean Forest Railway (2). A visit to the latter, which has a cafeteria (open on operating days), shop and museum (both open most days), is a must, and combining this walk with a train ride to Lydney and/or Parkend would make a good day out (but do check the train times first). The walk starts from the parking area (just across the main road from the DRF main entrance) by going past a barrier and along the track to the left of a substation. The track, which for a short distance narrows to a footpath, goes steadily uphill to the right of a stream. It then bears right at a junction for a few yards to emerge onto a small clearing. Bear left onto a wide gravel track and continue to a T-junction, where you turn right. Pass a wooden barrier, keeping ahead onto a tarmac lane at the first junction, but turning left at the T-junction onto the main road in Little Allaston.

Follow this road (which can be quite busy, so take care) around a left-hand bend and, after another 200 yds, fork right onto a tarmac lane. The large house across the field to the left is Soilwell (3). Keep ahead where the lane turns sharp right, and then go through a gate onto a stony track. Note the kerbstones at intervals: this was once a Roman road (4). At a fork, about 50 yds before the main track reaches a gate into a field, bear slightly right down a sunken path which descends between hedges. Backtrack if you miss this and reach the gate. At the end of this path, go through a kissing gate, over a small stream, and up the middle of the field beyond to a stile near some pylons. Turn right on a tarmac road, take the next sharp left and then bear left onto the road through Oldcroft. Pass Cut And Fry Road (!), the former Bethesda Chapel (1876), and the Nag's Head pub

at Yorkley Slade (5). Just past the latter, turn left over a stile. Follow the hedge on your left to a stile, then continue in the same direction across the next field to another stile in the far fence. Do not cross this, but turn right and follow the fence and then a hedge to yet another stile. There are good views of the Severn Vale and Cotswolds from here (6). Follow the left-hand side of the next field to a stile leading onto a road.

Turn right for a few yards, passing a driveway, and cross a stile on the left just beyond it. Bear right across the field. To the left is Yorkley Court (7), and the Severn Road Bridges (8) can be seen on a clear day. Climb a stile a little way to the left of a house, and turn left to follow the tarmac road as it bends right after 200 yds and goes downhill. When you come to a T-junction, stop and admire the view of the Forest, with Bream and Whitecroft across to the left, and Sling, Ellwood, and Coalway on the skyline ahead (9). Turn right down to another junction, and then sharp left just before the Primitive Methodist Church (1885). Follow the road through Pillowell (10), noting the array of models in the garden of Glenoak just before the road bears right downhill. Continue down to a main road, turn left for 200 yds, and then left again into Corner Road where the main road bends right. After 150 yds, opposite Underwood Cottage, turn left onto a gravel track. Near this point, but hidden on private land, is Pillowell Level (11).

The track leads past a barrier onto playing fields, with a seat which would make a pleasant picnic spot. Keep right of the playing fields to enter the woods in the far right-hand corner. Bear right on a footpath leading downhill and after 50 yards cross a muddy forest track. The footpath (which may be indistinct) bears left just inside the woodland and soon becomes a broader track, which then bears slightly left away from the fence-line. Keep right on reaching a gravel track at a sharp bend, and follow this down to a main road. Cross with care,

turn left and walk along the verge for about 60 yds to a footpath (which may be rather overgrown in summer) on your right. Cross a bridge over the River Lyd and turn left down some steps just before reaching a metal gate beside the railway line, part of the former Severn and Wye Railway (12). The ruined buildings were part of Upper Forge (13). The path follows the railway

line for a while and passes a large stone 'abutment' of unknown purpose before bending left to recross the river near the site of New Mills (14). Follow the gravel drive past a house to the DFR entrance gate. Norchard Drain (15), which empties into the Lyd, can be seen on the left as you enter the DFR facilities. The parking area is just across the main road.

Norchard Colliery (1)

Coal has been worked in this area since at least 1282, and a level existed in 1810, when it formed part of an ironworks complex leased by the Pidocks. By 1842 coal was probably being worked through the nearby Norchard Pit. The colliery was unique in Dean as it was situated under the Lydney Park Estate, rather than Crown land. It worked coal seams in the Pennant and Trenchard Groups, the Trenchard Seam averaging 4 ft 6 in. thick. Sidings connected to the Severn and Wye Railway were constructed in 1873 and 1879, and a loop and screens were added in 1906. The West Gloucestershire Power Company built a power station alongside the colliery in 1923, coal being supplied direct by overhead conveyer belt. The Park Colliery Co., formed in 1912, owned several other gales, including Pillowwell United, and coal from the latter area was being worked through Norchard by 1924. However, pump failures in this area led to water bursting into Princess Royal Colliery in 1925, and in 1930, after a lengthy legal battle, a controlling interest was obtained in Norchard by the Princess Royal Co. By 1936 most coal production was concentrated in the Pillowwell section, and a new slanting heading (New Norchard) was therefore opened to the surface at Pillowwell the following year. New sidings and screens were built there and coal taken to Norchard via the S&WR's mineral loop. At its peak the colliery produced 1800–2000 tons of coal per week, but up to 38 tons of water had to be pumped for each ton of coal won. By 1957 the workings east of Norchard had reached thin coals and the decision was taken to close the

GWR 0-6-0PT leaving Lydney Junction Station.



pit. The power station closed in 1968, but there is still a substation on the site.

Dean Forest Railway (2)

The Dean Forest Railway Society, which acts as a support organisation for the railway, was formed in 1970 to preserve the former Severn and Wye Railway's Lydney to Parkend line (see 12). Operations at that time were centred on Parkend as British Rail had not set a date for closure. The first steam open day took place in October 1971, with Peckett locomotive Uskmouth hauling brake van rides over 200 feet of siding, earning the Society

the reputation of running the "World's Shortest Passenger Railway!" Restricted space at Parkend led to the acquisition in 1974 of the former Norchard Colliery site, together with land vacated by West Gloucestershire Power Station. The first open day at Norchard was staged in 1978, when there was 150 yds of running line. British Rail finally announced closure of the line to traffic in the early 1980s and this decision enabled DFR to complete the purchase of most of the track and land in 1985. It later bought part of the redundant Lydney Junction site, situated adjacent to the station on the main Gloucester–South Wales line. Train services finally crossed the A48 road in 1991 to terminate at St. Mary's Halt (then known as Lydney Lakeside). Lydney Junction Station was opened to DFR trains in 1995, Lydney Town Station in 2001, and in 2006 Parkend Station was re-opened to the first regular passenger trains since 1929; the DFR had returned to its birthplace. Today it is possible to sample travel behind genuine Great Western Railway tank locomotives, as well as industrial, visiting, and diesel locomotives.

Soilwell (3)

Soilwell Farmhouse (or Manor) dates from 1661. It has two storeys, a basement, and an attic, and there are 3 brick chimney stacks. Although much modified, Soilwell is one of the most historic buildings in the parish. Nearby Driffield Farm, near Little Allaston, is another 17th-century farmhouse, which was altered in the 19th century.



Roman Road (4)

The route here follows the line of an important Roman road (known locally as the "Dean Road") between Ariconium and the Severn at Lydney. Ariconium, east of Ross, was an important Roman iron-working centre from about 50 AD, when it was taken over, until the early third century. Indeed, by the second century, the Dean area was possibly the most important iron-producing region in Britain. Considerable remains of kerbstones and paving survive on this stretch of road near Soilwell. Another exposed length can be seen by Blackpool Bridge, near the Wenchford Picnic Area on the Blakeney–Parkend Road, although the actual surface here is probably Medieval.



Yorkley (5)

Yorkley is a large Forest village, which comprises Yorkley Slade, Yorkley proper, and Yorkley Bottom, the latter down the hill towards Pillowell. The Nag's Head dates from the late 18th century, but was extended in the mid-19th. Cut and Fry Green, incidentally, is the name given to the old sports field, now a cricket pitch. The name may have originated because the wind was said to cut across the green in winter, whilst the sun fried you in summer. Another suggestion is that in a nearby inn called The Loyal Forester they used to cut and fry bacon for the miners. In nearby Cockshoot Wood is Danby Lodge, one of the original six Forest lodges authorised by the Dean Forest (Reafforestation) Act of 1668, which allowed the enclosure of 11 000 acres of woodland, divided into six walks. The lodges were built to house the keepers who would protect each of these walks. The Gloucestershire poet F. W (Will) Harvey (1888–1957) was living in Yorkley at the time of his death, and a lane near the Bailey Inn is named after him. Born in Hartpury, he served in France during the First World War, and many of his early poems were written in German prisoner-of-war camps after he was captured. His *In Pillowell Woods* was published in 1926.

View of Severn Vale and Cotswolds (6)

The view takes in the River Severn, with the Vale of Berkeley and Cotswold Escarpment beyond. Prominent just across the river are the warehouses of Sharpness Docks, at the entrance to the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, and a short way downstream (to the right) the large angular buildings of the now-closed Berkeley Nuclear Power Station (*Walk 4*). Between these two is the town of Berkeley, famous for its medieval castle and birthplace of Edward Jenner, the originator of vaccination. To the left of Sharpness is Slimbridge (note the church spire), home of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. On the hill (Knibley Knoll) directly beyond Sharpness Docks is the 111ft-high Tyndale Monument, erected in 1866 to commemorate William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536), who translated the Bible into the English of his day. Below the escarpment just to the north (left) of the monument are the towns of Dursley and Cam, with Stonehouse and Stroud a few miles further north.

Yorkley Court (7)

Yorkley Court dates from the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The older section is partly domestic and partly agricultural, with a raised doorway which may have been for a granary. It is now a farmhouse.

Severn Road Bridge (8)

The first Severn Bridge was built in 1961–6 by Freeman Fox and Partners in association with Mott, Hay & Anderson to carry the new M4 (now M48) motorway; the consulting architect was Sir Percy Thomas. It replaced a ferry service from Aust Cliff to Beachley Peninsula, and was opened by HM the Queen on the 8th September 1966. The bridge has steel cables, deck, and towers, with concrete substructures and foundations (cable anchorages and piers for the towers), and was the first bridge in the world to use the revolutionary concept of a streamlined deck and inclined hangers. The suspension bridge spans are 1000ft, 3240ft, and 1000ft, making it by far the longest span in England when it was built. The bridge was strengthened and refurbished in 1985–91 and has been repainted white to reduce thermal stress. It is currently (2008) again undergoing repairs. The crossing from England to Wales actually comprises five bridges: Aust Viaduct (514ft long; three spans consisting of two steel box girders with a concrete deck slab), Severn Bridge, Beachley Viaduct (2024 ft long; 10 spans; streamlined all-welded steel deck

supported on concrete piers), Wye Bridge (1340 ft cable-stayed bridge; steel deck, pylons, and cables; concrete piers and foundations; two pylons in central reservation with two (originally one) cables on each side of each pylon), and Chepstow Viaduct (420 ft; two spans). For comparison, the second Severn Crossing (built 1992–6) is 3.19 miles long, with a central suspension span of 1496 ft. One of the original ferries, the 'Severn Princess', has been recovered from Ireland and is being restored.

View of Bream, etc. (9)

The view encompasses Bream, up the hill to the left, with Whitecroft in the valley below; Sling and Ellwood can be seen ahead on the skyline, beyond the woods of Parkend Walk, with Coalway a little to the right, beyond Nagshead Plantation (*Walk 7*). Bream is said to be the largest village in Gloucestershire, and possibly even in England, with an estimated population of 3060 in 2006. The oldest part of the village is near the junction between the High Street and the Lydney to Coleford road. The former New Inn here has a 1637 date, and nearby Bream Court Farmhouse is also early 17th century. However, St James Church is relatively modern, dating from 1823, although it was rebuilt to a design by William White in 1860–1. The main areas of employment were iron and coal mining, farming, and forestry, but closure of the mines has meant that most people need to commute to work. However, the engine house of Flour Mill Colliery (closed 1928) is still used for repair and restoration of steam locomotives. Unlike many smaller villages, Bream is large enough to support a good range of shops and other services, including two pubs. It has a Male Voice Choir, a Silver Band, and several sports teams.

Whitecroft was the location of Princess Royal Colliery, one of six deep mines taken over by the National Coal Board on 1 January 1947. The Princess Royal Colliery Co. Ltd was formed in 1891 to work both Princess Royal (Park Gutter) and Flour Mill, although raising of coal did not begin until 1897. Under the Forest of Dean (Mines) Act of 1904 several gales were amalgamated to be worked by the company. In 1914–15 the Park Gutter shaft was deepened to allow working of the Coleford High Delf Seam (reached at 617 ft). An underground connection was made to Flour Mill in 1916, although coal continued to be wound there until 1928.

In 1925 water from Norchard burst into Princess Royal and in 1930, after a lengthy legal battle, a controlling interest was obtained in that colliery. In 1938 the steam winding engine was replaced by an electric one, and the electric pumps were removing about 2700 gallons water per minute. Annual output of coal in the 1930s was around 300000 tons, with a peak employment of 1300 men. Underground developments in the 1950s were not successful, and the colliery closed on 30 March 1962. The brick colliery

Princess Royal Colliery baths.



buildings, including the baths, can be seen from here. Their future is uncertain, but it is hoped that they will be preserved. The S&WR opened a mineral loop line from Tufts Junction, near Whitecroft, to Drybrook Road in 1872 (*see 12 below*), and there was also a short branch to Princess Royal. Sling was an important centre for iron mining, but this rapidly declined after the late 19th century. Sling Pit, near the Miners Arms, was one of the last to operate, until the 1920s. However, the British Colour & Mining Co. was formed in 1927 to extract ochre from mines in the nearby Clearwell–Milkwall area, and survived until about 1975. Ellwood Lodge is one of the many Forest lodges used by keepers to control the woods. It was built in several stages, from the late 16th to the 19th century, although most dates from the 17th century.

Pillowell (10)

Settlement at Pillowell began before 1742, most dwellings being at the lower end, near the well which gave the village its name. However, the village only began to expand significantly in the mid-19th century as coal miners located themselves as near to the pits as possible. Most houses were built between then and the early 20th century. Quarrying and forestry also provided employment, but collieries were by far the most important. Norchard (*see 1 above*) was a major employer, but, until the New Norchard heading was opened in 1937, involved a walk of 2 miles from Pillowell to the shaft and another 2 miles to the face below Yorkley! Like much of the Forest, the area was badly hit when the last mines closed down. Now there is only one pub, the Swan.

Pillowell Level (11)

Pillowell Level was in existence by 1832, and was being worked by James and Robert Morrell in 1841. It exploited coal seams in the Pennant Group, including the Yorkley, Whittington and Coleford High Delf, the latter being worked by means of cross levels. It also acted as a drainage adit and access point for collieries in nearby gales. A tramroad connection with the Severn and Wye Railway was built in 1856, replaced by a broad-gauge line in 1869, and the colliery was served by sidings when the standard-gauge S&WR mineral loop opened in 1872. The remains of a viaduct on the latter can still be seen in the valley down towards Whitecroft. In June 1898 the colliery and its equipment was put up for auction, and it was in the hands of the Wallsend Colliery Co. by 1907. In 1937 Norchard Colliery (*see 1 above*) opened a new slanting heading to the surface at Pillowell, and this closed in 1957. The playing fields were constructed on the site of the waste tip.

Severn and Wye Railway (12)

The Severn and Wye Railway and Canal Co. opened a 3 ft 6 in. gauge horse tramroad from Lydney to Lydbrook via Serridge Junction in 1810. The main line, together with a number of branches, was built to serve collieries and stone quarries in the area. The southern part of the main tramroad was converted to broad gauge in 1869, and steam locomotives were introduced. A mineral loop line from Tufts Junction, near Whitecroft, to Drybrook Road (*see Walk 5*) was opened in 1872. The broad-gauge lines were soon converted to standard gauge, and the first passenger train ran from Lydney to Lydbrook on 23 September 1875; a branch from Parkend to Coleford opened to passengers soon after. An extension to Cinderford opened in 1900. Regular passenger services north of Lydney ceased on 6 July 1929, but the service from Berkeley Road to Lydney Town was only terminated in 1960 by the collapse of the Severn Bridge. Goods services lasted longer: stone from Whitecliff Quarry was transported over the Coleford Branch until 1967, and the final Parkend to Lydney section closed in 1976. (For more details of the S&WR see Walk 7)



Ruins of Upper Forge, beside the former S&WR's main line.

Upper Forge (13)

Middle and Upper Forges were built in the early 1600s by Sir Edward Wynter to make and work iron. By 1640 Upper Forge was in use as a slitting mill, making flat bars for use in sail making, but by 1673 it was being used as a forge again. The works were sold to Benjamin Bathurst in 1719, and the family then leased it to various people: by 1800 it was held by the Pidcocks, who had built a 1.5 mile canal from Middle Forge (between Norchard and Lydney) to Lydney Pill on the River Severn in about 1779. John James took over the lease in 1814 and sidings off the S&WR's tramroad were laid. In 1866, about 1000 boxes of tinsplate were being produced each week. The lease was transferred to R. Thomas & Co. in 1875, but the works were dismantled in 1890.

New Mills (14)

New Mills was built in 1824 to produce flat sheet for tinsplate manufacture. It was part of the complex which also included Upper, Middle, and Lower Forges, and a tramroad connection was retained even after the S&WR's main line had been converted to standard gauge. New Mills was dismantled in 1891.

Norchard Drain (15)

This drains around 5000 gallons of water per minute from the old colliery workings between Norchard and Pillowell.