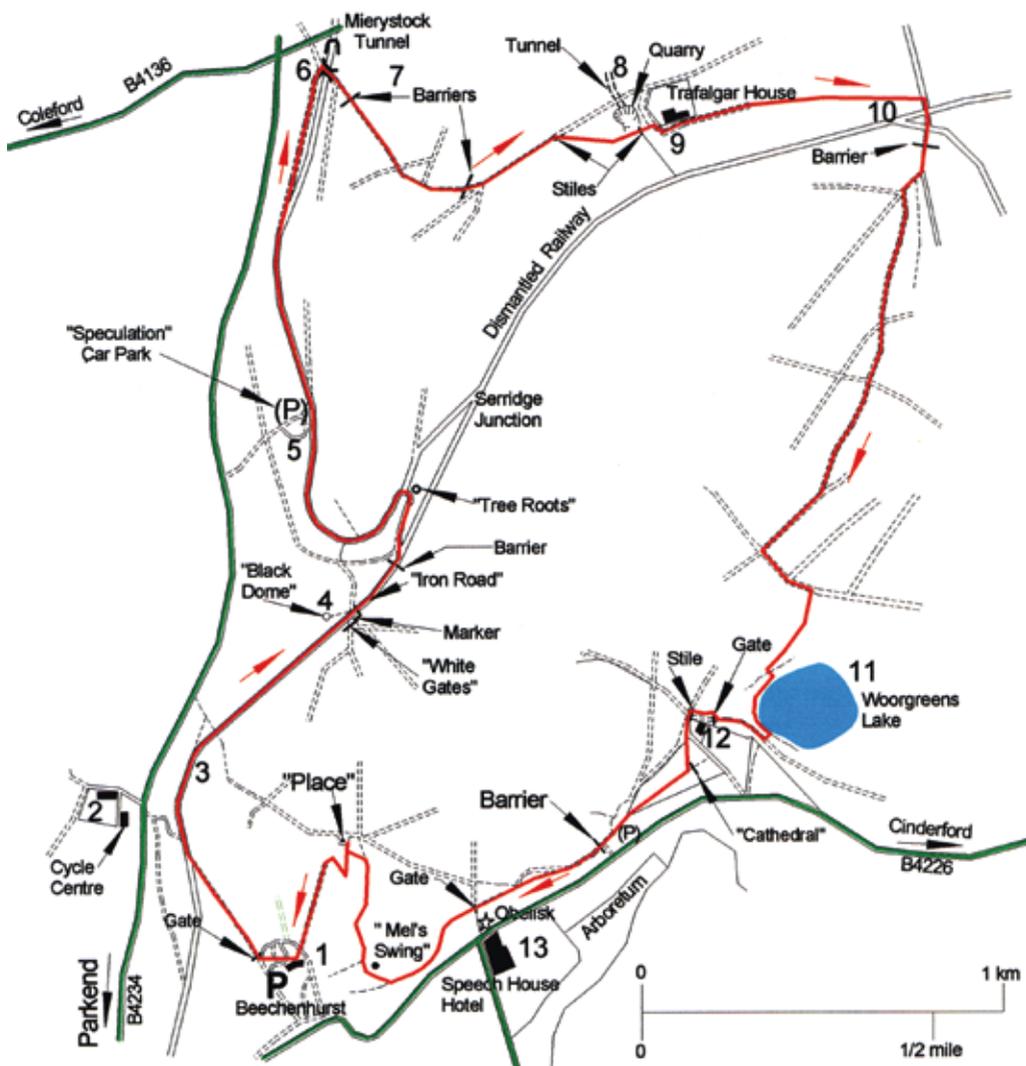


Beechenhurst, Trafalgar, and Speech House

Historic collieries, an attractive lake, the Speech House, and a sculpture trail. A relatively flat walk along forest tracks and paths and gravel cycle tracks, with just a couple of short ascents and descents; 3 stiles.

START at the Forestry Commission's Beechenhurst Lodge Car Park off the B4226 Coleford to Cinderford road (charge): GR SO 614121. **Refreshments:** Café at Beechenhurst, Speech House Hotel (upmarket). **Bus:** 30 (Gloucester–Coleford) to Speech House.



BEECHENHURST LODGE, where there are toilets, shop, café, and picnic area, was the site of Speech House Hill Colliery (1). The walk starts in the direction indicated by the "Cycle Track" sign on the large post just behind the lodge. Our route follows red marker posts diagonally across the car park and through an area of large trees. Go past several fenced-off depressions (possibly old shafts), across a tarmac road, and through a wooden gate onto a gravel cycle track. Bear right at a junction, signposted to Drybrook Road Station, and ignore the left turn to the Cycle Centre. Across the main road a short distance to the left is the site of Cannop Colliery (2), now housing a council depot as well as the Cycle Centre. You are now following the trackbed of the former Severn & Wye Railway from Lydney to Lydbrook (3). After about ½ mile a sign ("White Gates") is reached, with a metal "Beechenhurst Inclosure" marker of 1896 by a gate on the right. In the trees back to the left here is 'Black Dome', which is one of the many features of the Beechenhurst Sculpture Trail (4). We will see a few more of the sculptures on this walk, but the whole trail makes a worthwhile walk in its own right. Keep directly ahead past a barrier, ignoring the left fork to Drybrook Road, and continue past another sculpture: 'Iron Road'. At the next junction, just beyond another barrier, take the left-hand uphill gravel track ahead, signposted to Lydbrook. (Serridge Junction, where the railway line to Lydbrook diverged from that to Drybrook Road and Cinderford, was a short distance along the track which forks right here.) The gravel track bends sharp left, then curves right, with an open area and adjacent car park soon appearing down on your left. This was the site of Speculation Colliery (5).

Just after passing above the car park, bear left onto a grassy track (cycle track to Lydbrook), which continues along the old S&WR trackbed (the Lydbrook Branch). Follow this track, which later diverges left of the railway trackbed to follow the original tramroad route, for about ½ mile

to Mierystock Bridge (6). Turn right to cross the bridge over the former railway, noting the tunnel to the left. Follow a path uphill past a barrier, with the forested tip of Arthur & Edward (or Waterloo) Colliery (7) on the left. Keep straight ahead over a gravel track, continuing uphill under powerlines and past a track junction on the left, before passing a barrier onto a gravel road. Bear left on this (*joining the Wysys Way, see Walk 13*) for about 300 yds and cross over a stile on the right onto a narrow footpath, which heads downhill (note colliery tips on the right) to another stile. Just to the left of this second stile, in an overgrown quarry, is the tramroad tunnel between Strip-and-at-it (8) and Trafalgar (9) Collieries. Climb the stile and turn right on the gravel road. On the right are the sites of the two main shafts of Trafalgar, now marked by large stones. The road bends left past Trafalgar House, where teas can sometimes be obtained. Continue along the now grassy track (the line of the original Trafalgar Tramroad, later replaced by a standard-gauge connection) to a tarmac road.

Turn right on the road, which in a short distance crosses a grass track and then a gravel cycle track. This is the site of the S&WR's Drybrook Road Station (10), the platform having been on the grass crossing track, just to the right of the tarmac road. Keep ahead past a metal barrier, and, about 100 yds after this, bear right onto a gravel track, following a Gloucestershire Way (GW; see Walk 14) arrow. After another 100 yds, turn left onto a grass path, still following the GW. Continue ahead on a generally wider track over two crossing tracks and bearing right at a junction to emerge onto a broad gravel track at a bend. Turn left here (leaving the GW) and 50 yds after a left-hand track junction, take a narrow, rather muddy path on the right. This goes through pine forest to a path junction, where you keep ahead up a short bank to the edge of Woorgreens Lake (11). Turn right along the lake shore for about 150 yds to where there is a good open view of the lake, and turn

right here on a path for 20 yds. Turn right again onto a dirt track. This leads to a gate by some buildings, but keep right of the gate, following a path to a stile.

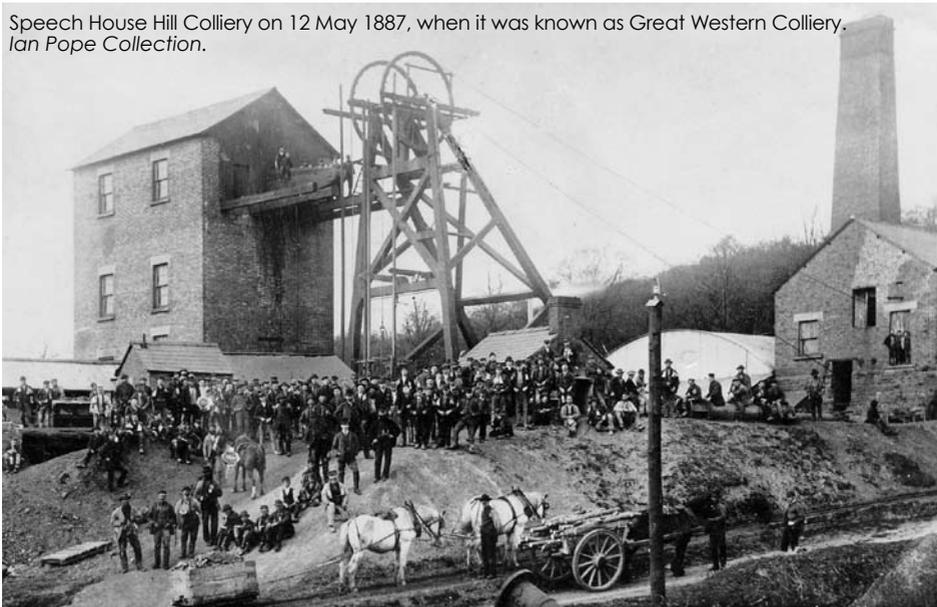
Turn left on the dirt road beyond, then bear half right opposite the house (*Kensley Lodge, 12*) onto a path into trees following blue waymark arrows. This leads to a surprise: a stained glass window ('Cathedral'), another part of the Sculpture Trail. Turn right near the window, still following blue arrows, along a path through the woods towards a parking area. Keep ahead onto a dirt track which passes just to the right of the car park. Bear slightly right

past a wooden barrier, then bear left at each of two forks (both with waymark arrows) to reach a wooden gate. To the left is Speech House (*13*), the most important of the original Forest Lodges. Beyond the gate we will again follow the blue arrow trail. This goes ahead at first, then swings right past two path junctions on the left (and 'Melissa's Swing' on the right), and eventually turns left and then right at junctions to reach a giant chair ('Place'). From here there are good views of the Cannop Valley and Nagshead Plantation beyond. Retrace your steps for 10 yds and turn right on a gravel path which zig-zags downhill to Beechenhurst Lodge.

Speech House Hill Colliery (1)

The first recorded working of the Royal Forester gale was in the 1830s and 40s by Richard James, but it was bought by the Brain brothers, who had the adjoining Rose-in-hand gale, in 1847. The Speech House Hill Colliery Co. had taken over by 1869, followed by the Great Western (Forest of Dean) Coal Consumers Co. Ltd (a Crawshay company) in 1873. A branch to the S&WR was constructed in 1874. 56976 tons of coal were produced in 1880. The winding shaft (eventually 420 ft deep) reached the Churchway High Delf Seam (3 ft 3 in. thick) at 393 ft. The colliery had a rather chequered history, passing through a succession of owners, until it was bought by Henry Crawshay & Co. Ltd, owners of the adjacent Lightmoor Colliery, in 1903. The barrier to the latter colliery was opened up and

Speech House Hill Colliery on 12 May 1887, when it was known as Great Western Colliery. Ian Pope Collection.



most of the surface works at Speech House Hill, no longer being required, were closed by 1906. However, the main shaft was maintained as an emergency exit for Lightmoor until the gale was surrendered in 1937. The area has now been landscaped and forms the Forestry Commission's Beechenhurst Lodge Picnic Site. A few fenced off depressions north of the lodge may be old shafts or collapses.

Cannop Colliery (2)

The Cannop Coal Co. Ltd was formed in June 1906, taking over the Union & Cannop and Prince Albert deep gales from Henry Crawshay & Co. Ltd. The aim was to work the Coleford High Delf Seam beneath the workings of the Speech House Hill Colliery. A drift mine (Cannop Drift) was driven a short distance up Wimberry Slade to work the Yorkley and High Delf Seams while two shafts were being sunk. The 4 ft 9 in thick High Delf was reached at a depth of 612 ft in no.1 pit by November 1909. Sidings and a connection with the Wimberry Branch of the Severn and Wye Railway were installed. Winding of coal from the deep pit began in 1912, output reaching 1000 tons/day by March 1915. Production peaked in 1937 (402784 tons), making it the largest colliery in Dean, and the workforce was about 1040 around this time. The colliery was an extremely wet one and was flooded on several occasions. Electric pumps were used and 1140 million gallons were pumped in 1928. The high cost of pumping was a major factor leading to closure in September 1960. There were 23 fatalities between 1908 and 1960. The license to work the Yorkley Seam was taken by Harvey Gwilliam, who opened a new drift (New Cannop Drift Mine) in Wimberry Slade, although the original Cannop Drift was retained as a second exit. This small mine is one of three still operating in the Forest, currently being licensed to Richard and Steven Harding. The Cannop Colliery buildings are now part of a Council depot, and a cycle hire centre occupies the mine offices. The overgrown tip and the brick-lined entrance (now gated) to the Cannop Drift mine survive. The nearby ponds were used for cooling water.

Severn and Wye Railway (3)

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 was eventually converted to a standard gauge railway. A mineral loop line from Tufts Junction, near Whitecroft, to Drybrook Road (*see 10*) was opened in 1872. The Lydbrook Branch ran from Serridge Junction, between Parkend and Cinderford, to Lydbrook Junction on the Ross and Monmouth Railway. The first passenger train ran from Lydney to Lydbrook on 23 September 1875, and an extension to Cinderford opened in 1900. Regular passenger services from Lydney to Lydbrook and Cinderford ended on 6 July 1929, and closure to goods trains came on 30 January 1956. (*See Walk 7 for more details of the S&WR.*)

Beechenhurst Sculpture Trail (4)

The Sculpture Trail, which opened in 1986, is a co-operative project between the Forest of Dean Sculpture Trust and the Forestry Commission. It now

'Cathedral'.



comprises nearly 20 sculptures inspired by various aspects of the Forest, from trees and wildlife to industrial history. The complete trail is 4.5 miles long, but there are shorter alternatives of 2.2 and 3 miles. An informative leaflet, produced by the Forestry Commission can be purchased at Beechenhurst, and the trail is well recommended.

Speculation Colliery (5)

Sinking of a shaft, by Corneleus Brain, was well underway by 1853 and the Churchway High Delf Seam was eventually reached at a depth of 308 ft. 18694 tons of coal were produced in 1880, and there was a siding connecting with the Severn and Wye Railway. The colliery was leased by the Wye Colliery Co. from about 1873 to the late 1880s, when it passed back to the Brain family and was then worked by the Trafalgar Colliery Co. Ltd. By this time the pumping engine may only have been used to help keep Trafalgar dry. When the latter colliery unexpectedly flooded in 1919 and was bought by the managements of Lightmoor and Foxes Bridge Collieries to protect their own workings, the Speculation gale was also transferred. It was surrendered after closure of Trafalgar in 1925. Only the levelled tip and a filled-in shaft remain to be seen.

Mierystock (6)

Mierystock (the spelling varies) was the junction of the 1½ mile long Churchway Branch tramroad of the Severn and Wye Railway. However, this was abandoned by 1877, by which time traffic had been diverted onto the Great Western Railway's Forest of Dean Branch to Cinderford and Bullo Pill Junction on the South Wales main line. In 1908 sidings were laid for use by the Lydney and Crump Meadow Colliery Co. Ltd, owners of the nearby Arthur & Edward Colliery. They were removed after the colliery closed in 1959. The most obvious features of the former S&WR are the beautifully-built stone bridge and the southern portal of the 242 yd-long Mierystock tunnel. There are plans to divert the cycle track to go through the tunnel, thus avoiding a major road crossing (*see also Walk 8*).



Arthur & Edward (Waterloo) Colliery (7)

Arthur & Edward Colliery dates from the mid-1830s, but only in 1908, when the new North-Western United deep gale was acquired by the Lydney and Crump Meadow Collieries Co. Ltd, did it become one of Dean's major producers (*see Walk 8*). Tub loads of coal were transported by means of an endless rope-hauled tramway or 'creeper' to screens at Mierystock across the Monmouth–Mitcheldean Road. The screens, which were near the pond to the right of the tip, were connected to a siding on the former S&WR. The colliery closed on 23 December 1959.

Strip-and-at-it Colliery (8)

The Strip-and-at-it gale was worked by John Harris from 1832. Two pumping engines were in use by 1841, and production was 11502 tons in 1856. The pit worked the Rocky and Churchway Seams through a 381 ft (in 1841) shaft, and was notorious for the thinness (20 ins) of its seams. Coal raising ceased in 1861 and the gale was surrendered to the Crown in 1864. It was then acquired by Corneleus and Francis Brain, owners of the nearby Trafalgar Colliery, who used the shaft for pumping (a 44-inch Cornish engine was working in 1880) and as an emergency exit. There was a spur to the S&WR's Churchward Branch by 1842, and this was connected by a short tunnel to Trafalgar Colliery in 1860, although the latter colliery soon had direct rail access to both the GWR's Forest of Dean Branch and the S&WR's main line. Strip-and-at-it closed, along with Trafalgar Colliery, in 1925.

Trafalgar Colliery (9)

The Trafalgar gale was granted to Corneleus Brain in 1842, but work on a pit does not appear to have begun until about 1860. There were two shafts, worked by the same winding engine, down to the Churchway High Delf Seam at a depth of 586 ft. A narrow-gauge tramway (Brain's Tramway) was soon built to the GWR's Forest of Dean Branch at Bilson, but after 1872 there was also a connection with the S&WR. The colliery was unique in Dean in being lit by gas, and



electric pumps were installed underground in 1882, the first recorded use of electric power in a mine. Trafalgar was one of the larger pits, employing 800 men and boys in 1870, and producing 88794 tons of coal in 1880 and about 500 tons/day in 1906. However, the main dip roadway was unexpectedly flooded in 1919, and the colliery was bought by the managements of Lightmoor and Foxes Bridge Collieries to protect their own workings. It closed in 1925. 29 fatalities are recorded between 1863 and 1922, an indication of the dangers inherent in coal mining. Trafalgar House (still a dwelling) was the home of Sir Francis Brain.

Drybrook Road Station (10)

Drybrook Road Station was where trains on the Severn and Wye Railway's main line between Lydney and Lydbrook (see 3 above) reversed. It was also the junction of the mineral loop line from Tufts Junction, near Whitecroft, which opened in 1872. The first passenger train from Lydney to Lydbrook ran on 23 September 1875, and an extension to Cinderford opened in July 1900. Although regular passenger services from Lydney to Cinderford and Lydbrook ceased on 6 July 1929, there were occasional excursion trains after that date. There was a single platform and a signal box on the down side. The original wooden station building was replaced by that from Cinderford old station in 1901. The grass crossing track is the former main line from Lydney via Serridge Junction to Cinderford, whereas the gravel cycle track follows the route of the mineral loop.

Woorgreens Lake (11)

The lake was created after open-cast coal mining activity (by Northern Strip Mining) ceased in 1981. Prior to that open-cast mining had been carried out near Steam Mills, north of Cinderford, where a small lake is now used by fishermen. Royalties received from licensing mining operations at Woorgreens were used by the Forestry Commission to construct the lakes at Mallard's Pike, now a popular picnic area. Woorgreens Lake and Marsh is now a nature reserve belonging to the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, and is one of Dean's best dragonfly sites, 17 species having been recorded. The reserve attracts heathland birds (including whinchat, stonechat, skylark, tree pipit, cuckoo, nightjar, kestrel, and sparrowhawk), waders (spotted redshank, greenshank, green sandpiper, and curlew) and other water birds (little grebe, moorhen, mallard, teal, and tufted duck). It is also an important habitat for butterflies and marsh plants.

Kensley Lodge (12)

After excessive timber felling by Sir John Wintour (or Wynter) in the mid-17th century, the Dean Forest (Reafforestation) Act of 1668 allowed the enclosure of 11 000 acres, divided into six Walks, each with a lodge, which housed a keeper (see below). However, further problems, including neglect, theft of timber, and illegal grazing of animals, continued throughout the 18th century. Admiral Nelson's visit to the Forest in 1802 and his report of 1803 thus led to a new Enclosure Act in 1808. This allowed construction of 24 new lodges, including Kensley Lodge (dated 1811).

Speech House (13)

In 1640 timber and mineral rights over 18000 acres of the Forest were granted to Sir John Wintour (Wynter) of Lydney by Charles I, with an obligation to supply timber to the Crown for ships and charcoal for the King's ironworks. However, his overzealous cutting of timber, as well as his enclosures of areas used by local people for grazing, etc., made him very unpopular, and he was deprived of his grant by Parliament in 1642. During the Civil War,

as a Royalist in a largely Parliamentary area, Wintour was forced to flee to France, after burning his residence at Whitecross Manor, near Lydney. It was at about this time that he made his famous escape from Parliamentary troops by riding his horse over the cliffs ('Wintour's Leap') above the Wye at Woodcroft, near Chepstow. Wintour was imprisoned in the Tower in 1649, but after the restoration of Charles II in 1660, he re-established control of much of the Forest. By 1667 he was again under investigation by Parliament for excessive tree clearance, and was forced to relinquish his rights in 1668. The resultant Dean Forest (Reafforestation) Act of 1668 allowed the enclosure (not without local opposition) of 11 000 acres, divided into six Walks, each to have a lodge, which housed a keeper. The first of these was King's Lodge or Speech House, built by 1676. The others were York, Danby, Worcester, Latimer, and Herbert.

Speech House was badly damaged by rioters in 1688 and had to be rebuilt. It has since had several extensions and is a handsome sandstone building, with deeply overhanging eaves. A Verderers' Courtroom, where the verderers meet to deal with offences (illegal cutting of trees, encroachment, poaching, etc.) and disputes involving the vert (trees) and venison of the Forest on behalf of the Crown, was opened in 1680. The Verderers' Court had been held at Kensley House, which stood in the centre of the Forest, from as early as 1338, and the court was sometimes held on Speeches Day.

The house continued to be used for the Court, increasingly called the Speech Court, into the early 17th century, and the site is where Speech House now stands. Similarly, the mining industry is controlled by gavellers, who grant 'gales' (mining licence areas) to 'Free Miners' to work for iron, coal, or stone (*Walk 7*). Speech House was leased as an inn in 1841, and is now a hotel. The Bledisloe Monument opposite is said to mark the centre of the Forest. The nearby Arboretum, which covers 15 acres, includes broadleaf trees and conifers planted from 1915 from the collection of Frank Wilson. It is named after Cyril Hart, the Senior Verderer of the Forest of Dean, who has served as a Verderer since 1952, when he was the youngest person in recent history to have been elected to that office. His knowledge of the Forest and its history is immense, and he is the author of the classic *The Industrial History of Dean*, among many others.

