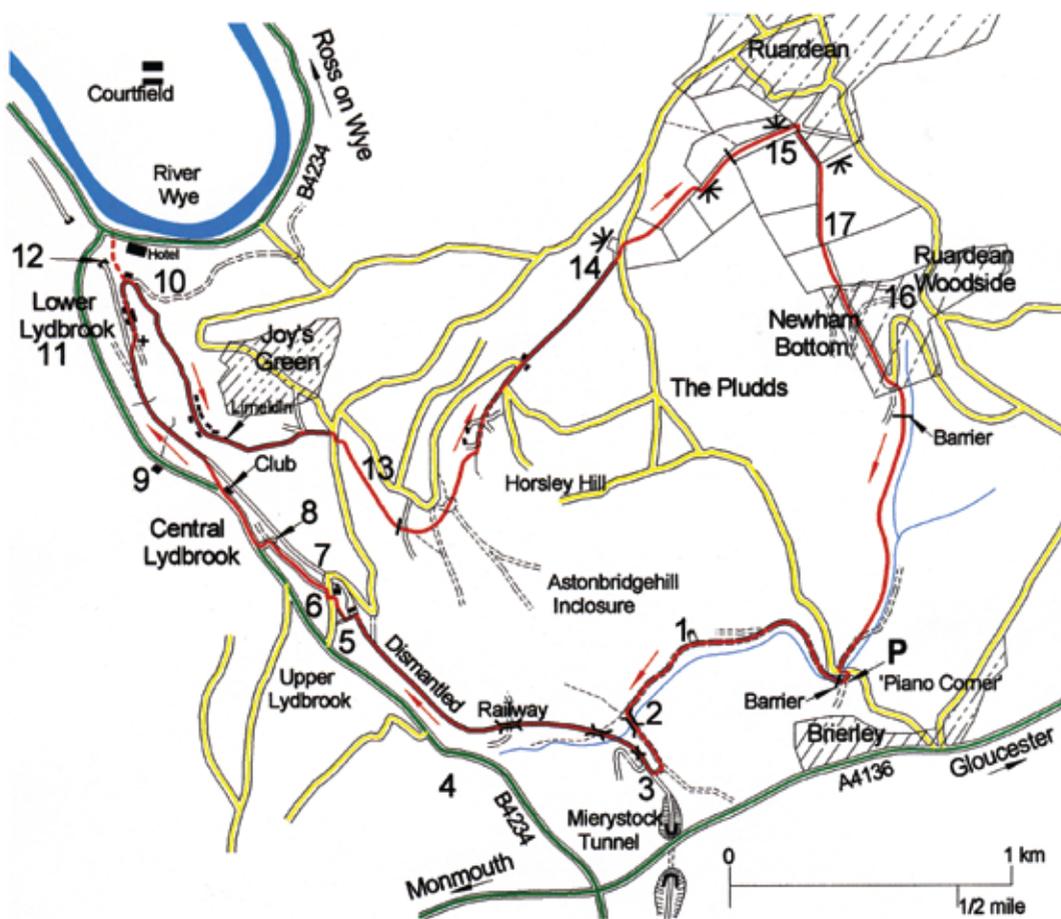


Lydbrook, Joy's Green, and Ruardean

Railway and colliery remains, a Tudor house, and lovely views of Wales and Herefordshire. The walk is mainly on woodland tracks and an old railway trackbed (now a cycle track), with some field paths and lanes; one steady climb; 8 stiles.

START at 'Piano Corner' on minor road (Pludds Road) between Brierley and The Pludds (about 500 yds from junction with A4136 Monmouth–Mitcheldean road): GR SO 621154. Park on gravel area by metal barrier on left-hand side of road when travelling away from Brierley and the A4136. The name is said to have originated when a piano fell off a truck here! **Refreshments:** pubs in Lower Lydbrook. **Bus:** 24 (Gloucester–Joy's Green) to Joy's Green; 31 (Gloucester–Coleford/Berry Hill) to The Swan at Brierley.



GO PAST THE BARRIER and follow the dirt track down the valley to the right of the stream (i.e., do not cross road). Keep left at a fork, still following the stream (Greathough Brook). An outcrop of Pennant Sandstone (part of the Coal Measures) is seen on the right, after about 250 yds. Just after this, opposite a small open area, is a small cutting with a pipe protruding from the blocked-up adit of Favourite Free Mine (1). Note the small rock carving, now badly weathered, on the left of the cutting. At the next junction, after another 300 yds, turn left to cross the brook over what was originally a tramroad bridge (2). Turn right onto a gravel cycle-track at a T-junction, and then right again after a few yards. This is the track bed of the former Severn & Wye Railway (3), with the recently unearthed portal of Mierystock Tunnel (Walk 5) just behind you. Cross three bridges, of which only the stone abutments are original, after which views of the Lydbrook Valley can be seen on the left. The site of Waterloo Colliery (4) is on the opposite side of the valley. Pass a massive retaining wall, near which 'Quarry Siding', used by Lydbrook Colliery (5), was situated. Keep straight ahead at a junction where the cycleway goes right uphill, with views of Upper Lydbrook (nameboard) on the left. After 150 yds, turn left in front of a house to go through a gate onto a footpath. Turn right over a stile and cross the churchyard to a gate just below the church (6). Turn right up the road.

After 50 yds, just opposite the church, take the sign-posted public footpath to the left, beside a fence. This soon emerges, via steps, onto a gravel track at a bend. Keep left along this track, going downhill; the site of Upper Lydbrook Station (7) is up to the right. Bear left at the bottom, noting the Iron Mine Level (8) in the bank on the right. Turn right along the main road past terrace houses. After about 200 yds, just past the Social Club, bear right across a car park to a public footpath sign. Follow the path uphill to emerge onto the old railway track bed again, where you turn left. The ancient half-timbered Sarah Siddon's House (9) can

soon be seen in the valley below. Continue on the level track, ignoring a fork downhill to the left, but soon bear right uphill by a fence (with a former chapel up to the right) onto a grass track between houses (part of the former Severn and Wye's tramroad which preceded the railway). This comes out at the end of a tarmac lane. To the right, a dirt track follows the route of the Bishopswood Tramroad (10), and there was an incline down to the Wye here. Ahead, to the left of 'Wye Crest' are steps which lead steeply down to the River Wye at Lower Lydbrook (11), where refreshments may be obtained at the Forge Hammer or Courtfield Arms. To the left of the steps can be seen one of the abutments of Lydbrook railway viaduct (12). Return up the steps if you make this detour.

Follow the tarmac lane uphill for nearly half a mile to 'Limekilns', just past which, on the left, are the sparse remains of an old lime kiln (note the fused rocks). Continue uphill, bearing right at a junction just before a playground to reach a T-junction in Joy's Green. Cross the road here with care, and after a few yards go up a bank onto a footpath into the woods. After 200 yds, some stonework and steel girders on the left are all that remain of Lydbrook Deep Level Free Mine (13). After a further 200 yds, pass a metal barrier, cross a tarmac lane, and continue on the path ahead. Follow this straight ahead, passing a rather overgrown path on the right and continuing over a crossing track to reach a gravel clearing (parking area). We now join a path which heads uphill from the far left-hand corner of the clearing. Follow the path uphill under power lines, bearing slightly right out of the trees and then bearing left alongside a hedge onto a gravel road.

Continue past houses on your left, keeping ahead on a grass track where the gravel one goes right. Lovely views of the Wye Valley begin to open up to the left. The track comes out onto a tarmac road, where you bear left. Follow this for about 150 yds to a sharp bend, but take the public bridleway straight ahead between buildings. Follow this green lane to come out at

another road, where there is a viewpoint and seat on the left. The view of the Wye Valley from here (14), weather permitting, is superb. Cross the road behind the viewpoint and take the signed footpath over a stile, bearing half left across the field (where orchids flower in May–June) to another stile. Keep the hedge on your right until you reach a stile in the far right-hand corner. Cross this and turn left, now keeping the hedge on your left to arrive at a stile (there are good views of Ruardean Woodside and Dean from here). Follow a track between hedges, which leads to another lovely viewpoint over Ruardean (15). Turn right onto a narrow footpath to the right of houses, between a wall and hedge. Cross a stone stile into a field, where there are good views of Ruardean Woodside, with several old colliery waste tips visible (16), and Newham Bottom. Follow a wire

fence, and then a hedge, to a stile in the bottom right-hand corner of the field (*behind an old tip of True Blue Colliery, 17*). Now bear slightly left to another stile in the far left-hand corner of the next field, which takes you down onto a road. Follow the road downhill for about ¼ mile to where the road turns sharply left, but keep ahead here onto a downhill path. This goes past a barrier and continues down the valley to the right of the stream, through attractive woodland between conifer plantations (Astonbridgehill Inclosure), with good displays of bluebells in spring. The path joins a gravel road, which will soon return you to the parking area across the road. Brierley is only ¼ mile to the left. The village was the birthplace in 1914 of Winifred Foley, author of *A Child in the Forest*, and other books on the area.



Photo by Dave Morris.

Favourite Free Mine (1)

In 1842 the Favourite gale was granted to William Court in order to sink a pit about 200 yds south of Brierley to get coal between the Coleford High Delf and Churchway High Delf seams. By 1873 the pit was owned by Messrs Holden and Illingworth, major shareholders in the New Bowson Coal Co. It was idle by 1900. In more recent years, Favourite Free Mine was worked by Eric Morris to exploit coal seams in the Pennant Group via a drift above Greathough Brook. It is distinguished by a small carving of St Piran, patron saint of Cornish miners, which was produced in 1976 by Vanilla Beer. The carving is on the rock face to the left of the former drift entrance, but is now badly weathered.

Severn & Wye Tramroad (2)

The Severn and Wye Railway and Canal Co. opened a 3 ft 6 in. gauge horse tramroad from Lydney to Lydbrook in 1810. Together with a number of branches, it was built to serve collieries and stone quarries in the area. The tramroad was connected to a wharf on the River Wye at Lower Lydbrook by an incline, but this was out of use by the mid-1850s as goods traffic on the tramroad was by then going via Lydney.

Severn & Wye Railway (3)

The Severn and Wye's tramroad was eventually converted to a standard-gauge railway. This section was part of the Lydbrook Branch, which ran from Serridge Junction, between Parkend and Cinderford, to Lydbrook Junction, where there was a station, on the Ross and Monmouth

Railway. The first passenger train ran from Lydney to Lydbrook on 23 September 1875. In 1900 there were five passenger services each way between Lydbrook Junction and Lydney Town, most of which worked to or from Berkeley Road over the Severn Bridge. Regular passenger services from Lydney to Cinderford and Lydbrook ceased on 6 July 1929, and final closure to goods trains came on 30 January 1956, although there had been little or no traffic for over three years. At the time of writing, the northern portal of Mierystock Tunnel had been cleared of spoil which had been dumped in the cutting, with a view to re-routing the cycle track through the tunnel. (*See Walk 7 for more details of the S&WR.*)

Arthur & Edward (Waterloo) Colliery (4)

The Arthur & Edward gale was worked by Benjamin Gwilliam and Thomas Butler from the mid-1830s, two shafts being sunk to work the Coleford High Delf Seam. 12857 tons of coal were produced in 1856, when the pit was being worked by the Arthur & Edward and Mierystock Colliery Co., but the company was wound up in 1859. There appears to have been little subsequent production until the new North-Western United deep gale was acquired by the Lydney and Crump Meadow Collieries Co. Ltd in 1908. The Coleford High Delf was reached at a depth of 273 ft in No. 1 Shaft, and was followed by dipples down to about 1050 ft. There were two winding engines (18 in. and 16 in.) and a pumping engine. 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 (*see Walk 5*), the screens being connected to a siding adjacent to the former Severn and Wye Railway. In 1928 the colliery was completely electrified and mechanical coal cutters and conveyor belts were installed. At its peak the colliery was producing over 4000 tons of steam coal per week (1921/2 tons in 1938, but down to 147254 tons in 1946). On 30 June 1949 the pit was flooded when a breach was made into the water-filled workings of East Slade Colliery. 177 men escaped by means of the cage up the shaft, and 5 missing men were eventually contacted and rescued via the old Pluds' Colliery shaft, which had recently been re-opened for ventilation purposes. Unfortunately, others were not so lucky, as there were 18 fatalities between 1919 and 1953, the last when a misfire exploded as two men tried to make the explosives safe, killing Harold Ward. Closure of the pit came on 23 December 1959.

Lydbrook Colliery (5)

Lydbrook Colliery comprised three gales (Lydbrook Deep Level, Birchen Grove, and Pluds'), the history of which are complex. Theophilus Creswick began work on Scotts and Lydbrook Deep Levels in 1862, and the Lydbrook Deep Level Collieries Co. Ltd, incorporating all three gales, was formed in 1866. The colliery exploited the Yorkley and Coleford High Delf Seams. A siding on the Severn and Wye Railway's Lydbrook branch had been laid by 1877, and a bridge to carry coal tubs from the Deep Level over the railway to a loading point on the siding was constructed in 1885. A new shaft, Pluds', was sunk in 1892–3 and reached the Coleford High Delf Seam (4 ft thick) at a depth of 394 ft, but it still proved difficult to make the colliery pay. It had a number of owners and lessees between 1866 and 1912, finally being closed by the British Red Ash Collieries Co. Ltd in 1917. Little evidence remains on the site today, and part has been built over. In 1934 a recreation ground was constructed on the site of the large spoil heap (the 'Blue Mound').

Lydbrook Church (6)

Holy Jesus Church was designed in 14th century decorative style by Henry Woodyer, and was completed in 1851. The tower has a saddle-back roof. Bath stone was used for the interior and local sandstone for the exterior. The church was restored in 1903.

Upper Lydbrook Station (7)

The station opened on the first day of passenger services, 23 September 1875. It had a crossing loop and two platforms, with the wooden station building on the up side and a small wooden shelter on the down. There were signal cabins at each end of the loop, and Lydbrook Colliery Sidings were nearby. Regular passenger services ended on 6 July 1929, but there were occasional summer seaside excursions after that date, even though the station building had by then become a private dwelling.

Iron Mine Level (8)

Variously reported as Bay Head and Lydbrook Iron Mine Level, this was an exploratory level for iron ore. Although the Carboniferous Crease Limestone, the main host of iron-ore deposits in the Forest, in this area shows traces of mineralisation, it seems that no economic deposits were found. The presence of a small pool in a cavern cut by the level gave rise to rumours of an “underground lake”. The level was apparently used as an air-raid shelter during the war.

Sarah Siddon's House (9)

This timber-framed house on a stone base dates from the early 16th century, but was extended in 1718. Originally a yeoman's house, it was owned for many years by the theatrical Kemble family, whose daughter Sarah (1755–1831) became Britain's leading dramatic actress. On Hangerberry Hill, across the valley, is an ancient beech wood, now a nature reserve. The route of the first tramroad in the Forest ran along the hillside here. This was built by James Teague (a free miner) to carry coal from his pits in the Mile End area to the Wye at



Lower Lydbrook. It was finally completed in about 1803, amidst considerable opposition from the authorities, and closed in 1815 when the pits were abandoned. Opposite Sarah Siddon's House is the Anchor Inn, which may date from the 17th century. It was bought in 1856 by William Russell, a Bishopswood ironmaster, whose family owned mills and forges in Lydbrook, including the adjacent wire works. Just to the north were tinsplate works, the horses from which were stabled at the Anchor. Closure of many of the works by 1930 eventually resulted in most of Lydbrook's pubs also closing. The Anchor went in 1954, but re-opened in 1980.

Bishopswood Tramroad (10)

The Severn & Wye Railway's mile-long branch tramroad to serve Bishopswood Ironworks and wharves upstream on the Wye was authorised in 1810, but not completed for several years. Unfortunately, the ironworks, which were operating by 1602, closed soon after (in about 1817). Nevertheless, some coal was still being carried to Bishopswood in 1858, after

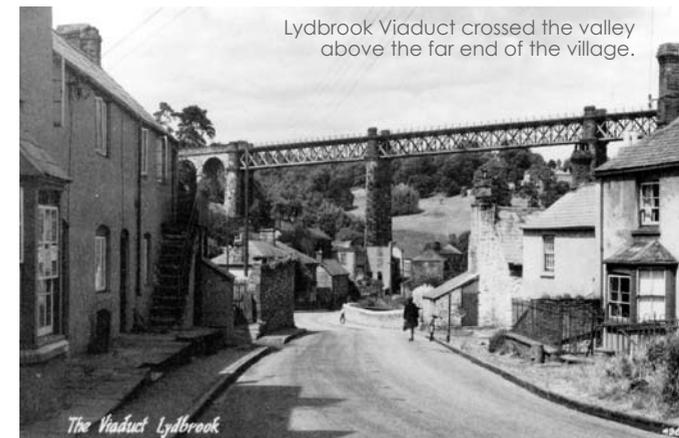
the incline at Lower Lydbrook had closed. Traffic had ceased by 1869. Another short-lived tramroad, Scott's Tramroad (1820–3), which linked Millway Moorwood Level to the Wye, crossed the Bishopswood Branch just east of Lydbrook.

Lydbrook (11)

Lydbrook nestles in the long valley of the Lyd Brook, which has provided power for water mills since at least the 13th century. Seven iron-making sites, including forges (charcoal blast furnaces), wireworks, and ironworks have been recorded, the first of which opened in 1590. In 1770 there was a large wharf on the River Wye “where coals were shipped for Hereford and other places”. Lower (c.1610, situated near the present Forge Hammer Inn) and Middle (c.1590) Forges were eventually incorporated into the Lydbrook Tinsplate Works, which were started in 1806 by Thomas Allaway. In 1817 he leased Lower and Middle Forges from John Partridge and his son, also John. The works then consisted of three forges, rolling and bar mills, and a tin house. Richard Thomas leased the works in 1871 and later acquired them. They finally closed in 1925 after a somewhat chequered history. The expansion of industry in the first half of the 19th century was accompanied by building of many workers' houses, as well as more palatial accommodation for the bosses, such as Lydbrook House (c.1827) in Lower Lydbrook, which was bought by ironmaster William Allaway in about 1840. At one time, there were more than 30 shops, and Lower Lydbrook alone had seven pubs, of which only the Courtfield Arms (formerly the Waterside Inn) and Forge Hammer survive (together with the Anchor a little way up the valley). A small Baptist Chapel was built in 1823, but was replaced in 1864, the original becoming a public reading room. A Primitive Methodist Chapel of 1828 was rebuilt in 1852, and replaced by a larger one in 1913. Another major employer in the area was the Lydbrook Cable Works, about ½ mile below Lower Lydbrook, near Lydbrook Junction Station. The works opened in 1912, and employed over 1200 people at its peak. It closed in 1965, by then being owned by the AEI Group. Reed Corrugated Cases (later part of the SCA Group) took over the premises in 1966, but the factory finally closed in 2002.

Lydbrook Viaduct (12)

Lydbrook viaduct, on the Lydbrook branch of the Severn and Wye Railway (see 3), was designed by George W. Keeling.



It was begun on 9 November 1872, and completed and ready for goods traffic on 26 August 1874. The masonry work (three arches at the southeastern end, two arches at the northwestern end, and two intermediate 90-foot piers) was carried out by contractor J.E. Billups. Three girder spans (120, 150, and 120 feet in length) were manufactured by the Crumlin Viaduct Works Co. Lower Lydbrook Station was near the southeastern end of the viaduct. It had a single platform, a loop, and two sidings which served the nearby wire works and tinplate works. Poor passenger traffic resulted in closure of the station in April 1903. The branch was finally closed to goods traffic on 30 January 1956, but the viaduct was not demolished until 1965. Viaduct Cottage and Viaduct House were originally almost beneath the viaduct.

Lydbrook Deep Level Free Mine (13)

The original Lydbrook Deep Level was part of Lydbrook Colliery, but a free mine of this name was worked by Mervyn Bradley, who moved to Monument Mine in Bixslade in 2000 (*see Walk 7*). An inclined drift probably worked the Coleford High Delf Seam.

View of Wye Valley (14)

There is an excellent view of the meandering the River Wye cutting through the hills (*see Walks 1 and 6*). To the left is Joy's Green, above Lydbrook, with Coldwell Rocks (haunt of Peregrine Falcons) and Symonds Yat Rock beyond. Ahead is Coppet Hill, with Goodrich Castle to the right and Welsh Bicknor church and Courtfield House, a former religious foundation, across the river in the foreground. The latter may be near the site of a church founded by St Dubricius in the 5th or 6th century. Ross-on-Wye is just behind the hills to the right. In the distance can be seen the rounded summits of Graig Syfyrddin and Garway Hill, with the Black Mountains beyond. Almost the whole of this area is underlain by rocks of the Devonian Old Red Sandstone, which gives the fields of large areas of Herefordshire their distinctive reddish colour, similar to that in large parts of Devon, from which, of course, the name Devonian was derived.

Ruardean, with the Malvern Hills in the distance.



south aisle dates from the 13th century, the tower is late 14th, the chancel was rebuilt in the 15th, and much of the exterior was renewed in 1890. The village developed along an ancient road from Mitcheldean to Monmouth, but the population increased significantly in the 19th

century, with the expansion of mining and other industries. Two pubs survive, the Angel and the Malt Shovel. Both are at least as early as the 18th century, but it is claimed that the latter is much older, possibly even 12th century and “the oldest pub in England”! James Teague (1750–1818), who, together with his brothers and sons (notably Moses, 1792–1840, born at Whitecliff near Coleford), became one of the most important industrialists in Dean, was born in Ruardean. James and William Horlick, who developed the famous malted milk drink, lived here, although whether this work was carried out in the local malt house, as some claim, is uncertain. Below the church are the scanty remains of an ancient manor house, said to have been destroyed during the Civil War. The view beyond takes in the Wye Valley, the hills above Ross-on-Wye (Chase Hill and Penyard Park), and, in the right distance, the Woolhope Dome (with the TV mast above Much Marcle) and Malvern Hills. The hills of the Woolhope Dome consists of Silurian rocks, which underlie the Old Red Sandstone, and the Malvern Hills are much older still, being Precambrian in age (*see Walk 11*).



Ruardean Woodside, with old colliery tips visible.

Woodside Colliery (16)

Although the gales were not granted at that time, work on Woodside Colliery, by Giles Griffiths and others, was begun in 1832. The Woodside gale was worked in conjunction with East Slade gale, and there were two shafts of about 180 ft which exploited the Coleford High Delf Seam. However, the colliery was not working in 1841 and the gale may have been sold off soon afterwards. By 1852 it was being worked by the Woodside Colliery Co., but seems to have closed in the mid-1860s. There was a tramroad from the colliery to Churchway by 1850, and sidings were provided on the South Wales Railway's (later Great Western Railway's) Churchway Branch in 1854. The Woodside gale was later worked as part of East Slade Colliery, about ½ mile to the southeast.

True Blue Colliery (17)

This is only one of at least a dozen pits in the area to the southwest, south, and southeast of Ruardean Church named ‘True Blue’ on Thomas Sopwith's 1835 map. A True Blue Pit had been in production since at least 1788. True Blue and Newham Bottom were leased to a group of shareholders (from a Free Miner) in 1841 to work the ‘Hill Delf’ (presumably Coleford High Delf) Seam in land drained by True Blue and Newham Bottom Levels. In 1859 the Gloucestershire Coal Mining Co. Ltd was formed to acquire True Blue, Newham Bottom, Woodside, and Birchen Grove Collieries, but this was soon wound up. In 1884 True Blue and Newham Bottom were galed to Moses Hale, and the pits were being worked by T.B. Brain by 1899, but were abandoned in about 1910. They were acquired by the Forest Syndicate Co. Ltd, which, in 1919, formed the Premier Briquette Co. to produce compressed coal briquettes. This company was liquidated in 1923, by which time True Blue Colliery included five gales. The colliery was conveyed to the Wigpool Coal and Iron Co. Ltd, owners of Harrow Hill, in 1925. It was producing 100–150 tons of coal per week in 1927 and finally closed in the 1950s.