

GSIA visit to the Bixlade area, Forest of Dean

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On the afternoon of Sunday 23 October, we had our last guided walk of the year – this one to explore the area around Cannop Ponds and Bixlade in the Forest of Dean. To say that we were lucky with the weather was an understatement! Much of the county had been treated to thunderstorms and torrential downpours during the night before and even during the morning of the walk, but the afternoon was pleasantly mild and dry – it couldn't have been better, albeit a bit muddy at times.

We numbered about 30. Our guide for the walk was our Hon. Secretary, Ray Wilson, who kicked off the afternoon on the dam at Cannop Ponds, built in 1825 to supply water for waterwheels at Parkend Ironworks 2 miles downstream, but now a picturesque and much-loved spot for nature lovers. We then moved on to nearby Cannop Wharf, where the Bixlade tramroad once connected to the Severn and Wye Railway Company's tramroad that ran between Lydbrook and Lydney.

We then saw and heard about the leat that carried water to the ironworks, Cannon Ponds current water control systems, and the fact that water was still being put to good use, driving a small water turbine supplying electricity to the nearby Forest of Dean Stone Firms Co works. Large blocks of Pennant sandstone, brought down from Bixhead quarries, were clearly visible at the works.

The party then moved on to the Bixlade Valley, following the line of the tramroad (started in 1812) that eventually ran the full length of the valley. The stone sleeper blocks that once supported the iron rails were clearly visible for much of the way. *En route* we stopped at Mine Train quarry, and the entrances to the Mushet Low Level and High Level coal mines. There is a remarkable amount of industrial heritage packed into this relatively small area, all explored in great detail in Society President Ian Standing's 1987 GSIA Journal article at:

<https://gsia.org.uk/sites/reprints/1987/gj198717.pdf>

Our last stop was at the FOD's last working free mine (Monument Mine), still producing coal.

Our walk took us about two thirds up the valley, and Ray is planning a second visit in the Spring to carry on upwards to visit modern quarry workings and the disused Spion Kop quarry. We were treated to an afternoon of interesting information and conversations, whilst surrounded by the glorious Autumn colours of the trees.

Many thanks to Ray for organising and leading, and also Ian Standing, for bringing his encyclopaedic knowledge and insight of the wider area.

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Cannop Ponds and the dam area



On our way up Bixslade Valley



One of the many tramroad sleeper blocks in situ



The entrance to Mushet's High Level mine



The monument to miners killed in 1902



The Forest's last working coal producer, Monument Mine