

TRAMROAD REMAINS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN (PART TWO)

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Introduction

Since the first article on this subject (1), further work on Dean tramroads and tramways (2) has been accomplished following the reopening of the Forest after its prolonged closure in 2001 due to the foot and mouth epidemic. The emphasis is on areas to the north and west of the Forest of Dean Tramroad dealt with in the earlier article. As before, the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) staff of the Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service produced printouts of their maps. In addition they kindly provided copies of the relevant individual records of tramroads and associated sites, plus summary reports which include quotations from, and details of, the sources used. The project is based on these maps, records and summaries, which proved invaluable. Figures 1 and 2 have been compiled from plots supplied by the SMR, superimposed on Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 maps. Detailed references in the text, all to the same major source, would use a great deal of space; instead the SMR reference number for each tramroad is given, from which detailed records can be accessed if required by application to the SMR at Shire Hall, Gloucester (3). These reference numbers identify the routes shown in Figures 1 and 2. As before, the object of the project was to walk the routes where possible, noting and recording. This is necessary because an archaeological site does not necessarily imply something visible on the ground. As before, National Grid references were taken using a global positioning system unit (Magellan GPS 310 and Garmin GPS 12). The routes were followed using the SMR maps referred to and the O.S. 1:25,000 Outdoor Leisure No. 14.

Most of the Forest is open to the public, an obvious advantage for a project such as this. Where a route traverses enclosed or private land, this is noted in the text, and alternatives given where possible. Some routes are now paths, others have become tracks made for forestry vehicles or cycles and some are trackless. The best seasons for following the paths and trackless routes are winter (if reasonably dry) and spring. In summer and autumn, the traces of old trackbed often seen on the paths may be hidden by undergrowth, while the trackless routes are often invisible, and impassable, due to rampant scrub and head high nettles and brambles. Nevertheless, following the latter can, in the right season, be enjoyably challenging.

Brain's Tramway

SMR reference 12704, Figure 1. A tramway which used locomotive haulage, built in 1862 running from Trafalgar Colliery eastward to Laymoor Quay then southeast to Bilson sidings on the GWR. A branch built circa 1870 ran from Laymoor northwards to an iron ore mine near Drybrook.

Laymoor to Trafalgar Colliery SO 64001450 is the approximate grid reference of the site of Laymoor Quay. It can be reached from SO 64661451 on the new B4227 road near Bilson Green, from where an embankment on the old railway to Cinderford station, partly removed where it crossed the line of the new road, can be followed westward on a path to the site. From here, 5-600 metres east of the Drybrook Road Station site on the cycle way, a good path, clearly an engineered trackbed, runs west, parallel to the old rail track, then deviating slightly north of the station site but rejoining the rail track at SO 63341453. Where the rail track turns south-west, the tramroad trackbed diverges west-north-west then turns south-south-west to the colliery site at SO 64501484.

Laymoor to Bilson At SO 64081453, east of the Laymoor site and just south of the old Cinderford rail track, an embankment can be seen heading south-east. At SO 64471428 it splits into two parallel embankments running south-south-east. The western arm peters out at SO 64491428, the eastern arm ends at SO 64471428, adjacent to the cycle track/railway in the Linear Park.

Laymoor to Drybrook This was explored in two sections, (a) Dam Green to Laymoor, (b) Dam Green to Drybrook.

(a) From SO 64571520, just north-west of Winner's Cycle Hire (parking available), reached by a spur off the B4227 where it turns sharply east at Broadmoor, traces of a trackbed are seen heading south alongside a drainage ditch. At SO 64521493 it is joined by a haulage track from the left. A path diverges south-west from the track at SO 64521495, in approximately the right direction, and at SO 64371472 an embankment is seen heading west-south-west through the trees. At SO 64291468 it becomes a cutting on the same heading, and is traceable as a trackbed to the Laymoor site. It is not a path, and may not be negotiable in summer.

(b) From Dam Green the tramway ran north-east across Nofold Green to Steam Mills, crossing the A4151 at SO 64701579, but traces of trackbed could not be found. From Steam Mills it ran north-north-west to a tunnel under the Drybrook road. This section is mostly inaccessible, few traces apparently remaining, but at SO 64431673 on the Drybrook road the top of the north portal of the tramroad tunnel is visible from the road on the left, almost alongside and north of the abandoned rail tunnel portal. The route heads north through dense, inaccessible scrub then across open but enclosed fields, but by taking a path which passes to the north of Drybrook School into a field, at SO 64361731 traces of the trackbed can be seen approaching from the south, crossing the path and swinging north-north-west to pass under the abandoned railway embankment by an intact bridge. This bridge at SO 64241745 can be reached by a path running south-west from the junction of Quabbs Road and Morse Lane in Drybrook. From the bridge the route is visible as a line of hedgerow trees running north-west towards Morse Lane. No traces were found from here to the ironstone mine site just north of the lane.

Trafalgar Colliery to Strip-And-At-It Colliery

SMR reference 9985/6, Figure 1. This short tramway connected the two adjacent collieries via a tunnel through a ridge of high ground. The northern exit at Strip could not be found, but the southern portal can be seen at SO 62431448, in an old quarry adjacent to the Trafalgar site.

Strip-And-At-It to Churchway Branch

This tramroad branch SMR reference 9985/5, Figure 1, was superseded by the connection through the tunnel to Trafalgar Colliery which was served by Brain's Tramway (see above). At SO 62511470 an embankment emerges from later spoil heaps heading north-east. It reaches the cycle track at SO 62761482, by now on the level. The final short stretch to the junction with the Churchway branch of the Severn and Wye tramroad (see below) could not be traced.

Wigpool Ironstone Pit No. 1 to Edge Hill

SMR reference 5856/10, Figure 2. The tramroad from Wigpool made a junction with the Edge Hill tramroad near Fairplay Cottages, on the A4136 between Nailbridge and Plump Hill (parking nearby). At SO 65761672, opposite the cottages, a distinct embankment heads north (the start is not obvious from the road; it is adjacent to but not to be confused with the clear forest track heading east). The embankment line continues to SO 65761710 where it crosses a

track, becoming an indistinct path heading north-north-east on the approximate tram line to SO 65761737. At this point the tram route runs north as a distinct, but inaccessible field boundary hedgerow, marked on the O.S. map as Dismantled Tramway. However from here a path runs north-east then north around a field, the tramroad line clearly visible to the west, to reach an electricity sub-station at SO 65551776. Here, a path runs south-west by the field boundary, soon reaching the tramroad which crosses the path and plunges into thick woodland, in which traces of trackbed can be seen heading north-north-east. Returning to the sub-station and continuing north-west, a minor road is reached at SO 65551803. Just south of the road, traces of the trackbed can be seen in the trees.

Crossing the road, the line follows a forest track north-west for 100-150 metres, where a path forks north. After another 150 or so metres, two single hole stone sleeper blocks are seen. The path continues to the south-west corner of a water-works enclosure; continuing north-north-east past an old engine house then north-west to end in the trees of Wigpool Common among the spoil-heaps.

Wigpool Ironstone Pit No. 2 to Mitcheldean Road Station

SMR reference 5856/11, Figure 2. This tramway and inclined plane is followed from north to south. Mitcheldean Road station site is now built over, marked Stockholm Place on the O.S. map. Limited parking is available. About 150 metres south on the B4224, at SO 65852110 at the junction of a minor road, the abutments of a tramway bridge are seen. From an adjacent stile, a path heads south-south-west over a rising meadow, turning south round the slope of a hill, becoming rougher and steeper before crossing a track on the edge of a wood. In the wood, the route was lost among the many spoil heaps on the steep heavily wooded slopes. The SMR map indicates a tramway connection between the two Wigpool pits, but this could not be found.

Edge Hill to Whimsey

SMR reference 567016, Figure 1. This tramroad connected the Edge Hill iron ore mine to the Forest of Dean tramroad at Whimsey. Not many traces remain, but it is possible to follow the approximate route on forest tracks and paths, to where it passed under the short-lived Mitcheldean Road and Forest of Dean Junction Railway at Nailbridge. From Fairplay Cottages (see above) the track runs south-south-west. Soon, at SO 65591630 a track diverges right, heading south-west. At a kink in the track, old spoil heaps are seen on the right at SO 65291637. The track bends left just before reaching a T-junction at SO 65021651; turn right then left in a few metres, heading west-north-west then south-west. Take the left fork, in 4-5 metres regaining the tram track, which took a direct route from the above mentioned left hand bend to this point at SO 64861631. The tram route continues to SO 64731618 where it passes though the railway embankment; the bridge abutments remain. On the far side the route, a waymarked path, runs south to cross the corner of a garden and continues to the end of a rough lane, where it ends. The lane can be followed west to the A4151 near its junction with the A4136.

East Slade Colliery Tramway

SMR reference 10536, Figure 1. This tramway ran from the colliery at Ruardean Woodside south-east to Churchway (later Northern United). The Ruardean Woodside colliery site was not explored. The initial 800 metres of the tramway is overlaid by the Ruardean Woodside-Brierly road, but where this road turns sharply south at SO 63031615 a cutting can be seen continuing south-east through the trees (not the track heading east), becoming a low embankment crossing a clear-felled area (in 2002) to an old enclosure wall and ditch at SO 63351589. It continues ahead through a mature forest plantation, traceable mainly as a

shallow cutting, to the edge of the plantation at SO 63511586 by large spoil heaps. From here a cutting is seen running into the upper part of a fenced field. From the northern side of the A4136 at SO 63761569, opposite Northern United, a cutting can be seen heading north-west (not the old railway cutting running north-north-west) until it enters the field at its lower end, heading up hill straight for the above mentioned cutting at the upper end.

The Severn and Wye Tramroad

SMR reference 5701, Figure 1. Completed in 1812 or 1813 from Lydney on the Severn to Lydbrook on the Wye, with a number of branches. Much of the line was covered by the railway which replaced it, itself now a cycle track, but several interesting stretches remain.

Upper Lydbrook to Lydbrook Station There is a small but pleasantly situated car park by the Wye at Lower Lydbrook. Nearby a long flight of steps, the site of a rope worked incline, leads up to the terminus of the tramway at SO 59691678, by Incline Cottages. A path on the tramroad line runs south-south-west, joining the railway track converging from below, at SO 59871622. At SO 60111605, traces of the tramroad above on the east side are seen, continuing as a shelf in front of a cottage, until SO 60151605 near the short rail tunnel through a rock spur at Lydbrook; the tramroad skirted it to the west. Beyond the tunnel, the tramroad and railway are built over but the path continues to Church Road and Holy Jesus Church, SO 60381571. The railway and the tramroad passed to the north of the Church, a private drive occupying the line. The drive can be circumvented by climbing Church Hill to a hairpin, where a signposted cycle track spirals down to the site of Lydbrook station. At the northern end of the station site, where it is closed by a garden fence, nearby to the north at SO 60471562, a flight of a dozen steps leads to a path back up to Church Hill near the hairpin, some of the treads being re-used stone sleeper blocks. These steps provide a short cut, avoiding the longer cycle track, but unfortunately they are heavily overgrown in summer though possible in spring. There is a small car park at the recreation ground below the church; the gate was open when visited but there is a padlock.

Speculation Colliery to Lydbrook Station Speculation car park is signposted off the B4234 south of the junction with the A4136. Between the car park and the road, at SO 61271363, a path on the line of the tramroad runs north and south. Going north, at SO 61231397 the path turns east but continuing north through undergrowth, traces of a trackbed can be seen where it enters a ravine. Here was the Mirystock tramroad tunnel, 200 yards long; in 1865 it was in danger of collapse and was opened out into a cutting. Continuing, the ravine is soon partly blocked by spoil; one scrambles up and continues on the line which converges with the railtrack at a shallow angle, merging at SO 61341425 approximately. On the west side is a drystone, backward sloping retaining wall which looks like tramroad, rather than railway, work. This section is probably only negotiable in winter or spring.

Continuing, the railtrack is seen to diverge to the right, north-east, descending, to pass under Mirystock bridge and into the tunnel; emerging, it curved west to Lydbrook. The tramroad took a more circuitous route. At SO 61461455, adjacent to Mirystock bridge, the tramroad mainline, here a path, heads north-north-west a short distance to the A4136, about 100 metres east of the junction with the B4234 Lydbrook road. Crossing the road, the path runs south-west, parallel to the road for a few metres, then turns north-west, becoming an obviously engineered track. At SO 61141490 an incline is crossed; known as The Creeper, it linked the Arthur and Edwards pit below with the screens at Mirystock. The track continues north-west, contouring the slope. At SO 61051508 it swings east on a shelf cut from the steep hillside. At SO 61441514 it turns south-east to meet the railtrack from Mirystock tunnel, running parallel but dropping below it, at SO 61511508 turning sharply east under the railtrack. In a few

metres at a T-junction of tracks the route turns north-north-west, crosses the Greathough Brook by the tramroad embankment, to another T-junction at SO 61391529, where it turns south-west to pass below the railtrack, curving to the west. At SO 61331519 it meets a road coming in from the right just where it is bridged by the railtrack above. The tramroad ran ahead for a short distance before merging with the railway. The tramroad is built over, but by passing under the bridge the railtrack can be reached by a short steep path and followed to Lydbrook Station site. The walk from Mirystock to Lydbrook is very pleasant and interesting, on a good path.

Mirystock to Churchway Branch This is best followed from Churchway (now Northern United). At SO 63741578 on the south side of the A4136 between Nailbridge and Brierly, the Northern United site road is taken, past derelict buildings to the first track on the right, parking available. The track is followed heading west-south-west. At SO 63601536 the remains of a railway buffer stop are seen atop a mound on the left. Further on, at a pond on the left, move a few metres right to a parallel track recently bulldozed. This was once a pleasant path in woods on the tramroad line. A few metres further on, the wire fence on the right comes to an end at SO 63501528. The trambed is visible diverging to the right on a low embankment heading west. Soon, at SO 63471527, stone sleeper blocks can be seen, with more at intervals. The trambed turns south-west and crosses a north-south track. It joins the cycle track south-west of the dog-leg in the latter, leaving it in about 100 metres to head west-north-west on a low embankment. Stone sleeper blocks are seen in the following cutting at SO 62801492. An old shaft, stone lined is passed close to where the trambed rejoins the cycle track near Brierly. Much of the route is close to, and should not be confused with, an old enclosure boundary, nor with some old workings in the form of low linear spoil heaps. This trambed is not a path, and is probably only passable in winter or spring. Following it can be rewarding however.

The continuation to Mirystock and the main line of the Severn and Wye tramroad is possible by forest tracks, though the trambed is not visible. From the signpost at the junction of tracks just south of Brierly, take the one heading west-south-west. It turns sharply south at a new pylon (the tramroad went ahead). Just south of pylon no. 6263, at SO 61891465, take a path running west. It becomes a track, and when in sight of the road ahead, take a path to the left, west, passing a spoil heap on the right. On reaching another track, turn left to Mirystock bridge.

Acknowledgements

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References

1. Youles, Tony, GSIA Journal 2000 p.19.
2. The words "tramroads" and "tramways" were, and sometimes still are, used interchangeably. However most writers now distinguish them as follows:-
Tramroads used flangeless wagon wheels running on L-section rail. Tramways used flanged wheels running on edge rail.
3. Present Contact Tim Grubb at The Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service, Shire Hall, Gloucester. Tel: 01452 425705; email: tgrubb@gloscc.gov.uk

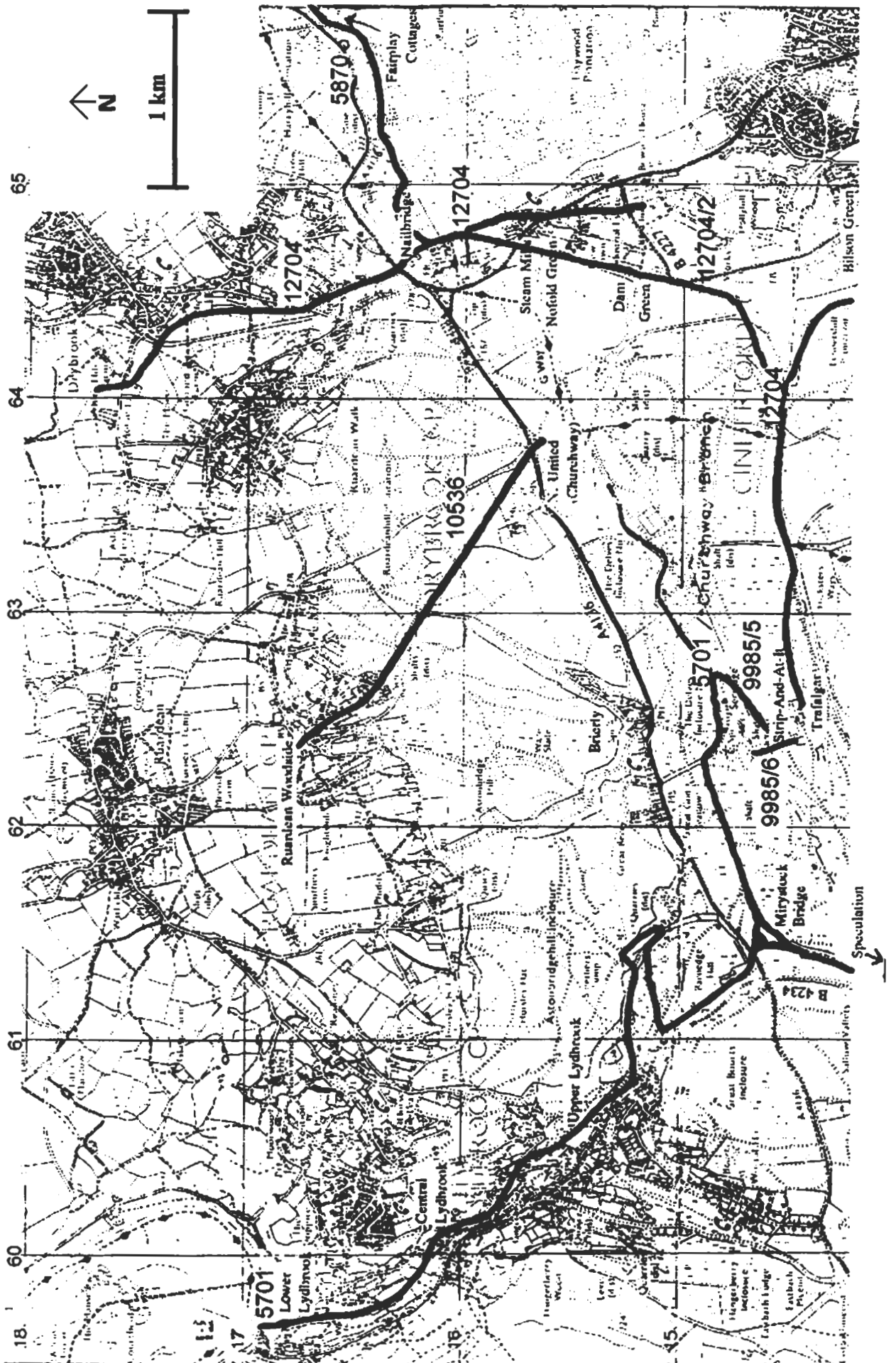


Figure 1. Map showing Routes Investigated in the Western Area (Lydbrook to Cinderford)
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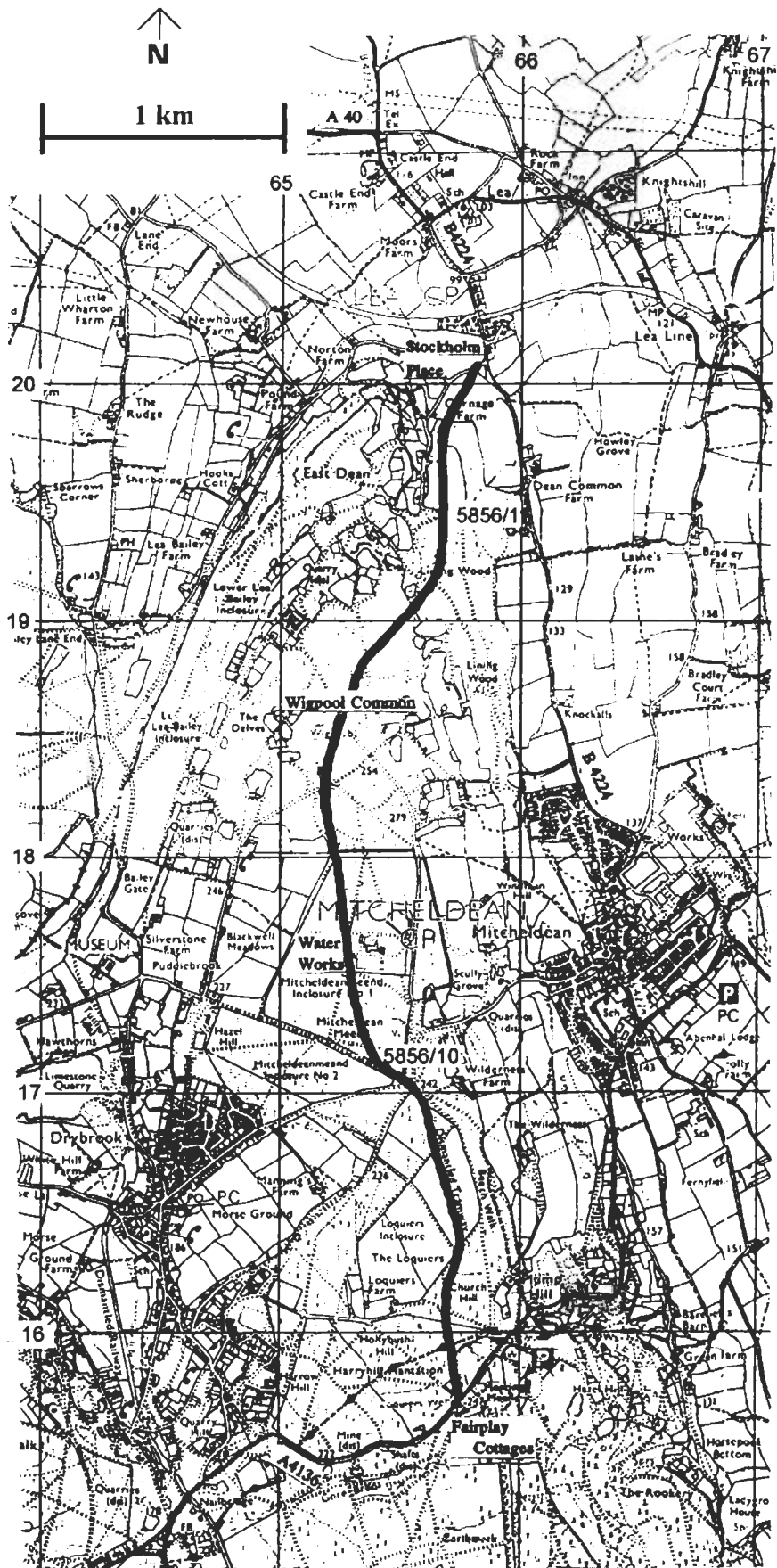


Figure 2. Map showing Routes Investigated in the Eastern Area (Mitcheldean)
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