

Great Archaeological Sites in Torfaen



6. ABERSYCHAN LIMESTONE RAILWAY



Transport was always important in the ironworking areas of South Wales. Once quarried, ironstone had to get to the ironworks where it was smelted in the furnaces. And after it had been smelted, the iron and anything manufactured out of it had to reach a wider market. For longer distances, a network of canals was developed from the second half of the 18th century, superseded in the 19th century by the railways. But minerals still had to get from the mines and quarries, either directly to the ironworks or to the canal or railway that would take them on to there, and tramways were constructed to cover these relatively short distances.

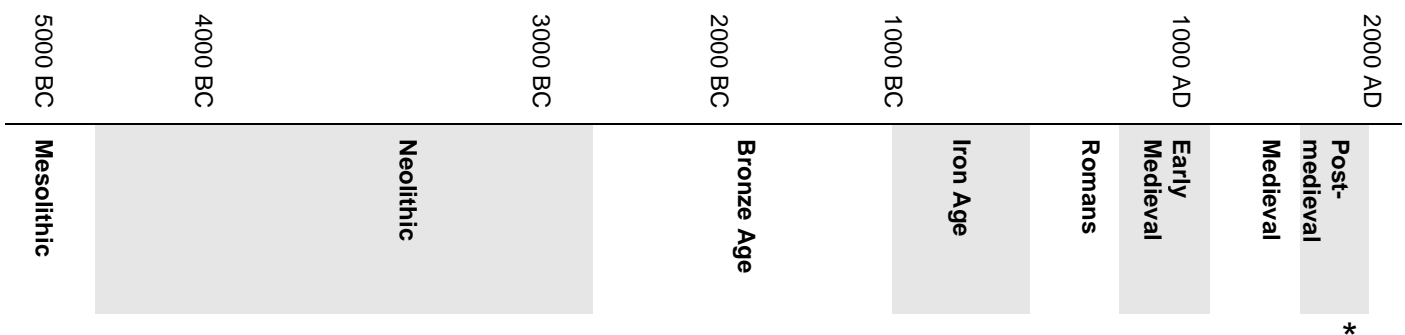
A tramway consisted of a carefully surveyed and graded strip of land laid with grooved plates or rails onto which fitted the iron wheels attached to small wagons, known as drams, in which the minerals were carried. A horse was harnessed to one dram, and others drams were coupled on behind, one after the other. Because there was much less friction between the wheels and the permanent way than there would have been if the wheels had been running along a road or trackway (which at the time would have been surfaced with relatively loose stones at best) a horse could pull much heavier loads with much less effort. Eventually the horses were replaced by light steam engines and the permanent way strengthened to correspond, so that these mineral tramways mutated into light railways.

The Abersychan Limestone Railway was constructed c1830 to carry limestone westwards from Cwm Lascarn quarry to the British Ironworks (SO 28199 04626 – SO 26061 03469), and is thought to have been abandoned by 1876. Approximately 55% of the tramroad still survives, although its condition varies from place to place along its route. Surviving features include a stone revetment and some of the blocks to which the rails were fixed. These were fish-belly rails made from wrought iron, so called because the underside each individual short length of rail had a convex shape to counteract the extra stresses that developed between the supporting blocks.



The course of the railway can be followed along Lodge Road, Foundry Road, Union Street, Broad Street and Station Street to Ffrwd Road and along a footpath through Lascarn Woods on the hillside east of the Afon Lwyd at Abersychan. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 152.

Timeline (the asterisk indicates the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Abersychan Limestone Railway has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 07226g. You can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. You can find more about the South Wales iron industry via the industrial pages of our timeline <http://www.ggat.org.uk/timeline/timeline.html>.