

WALK 4

Tintern and the Angidy Valley

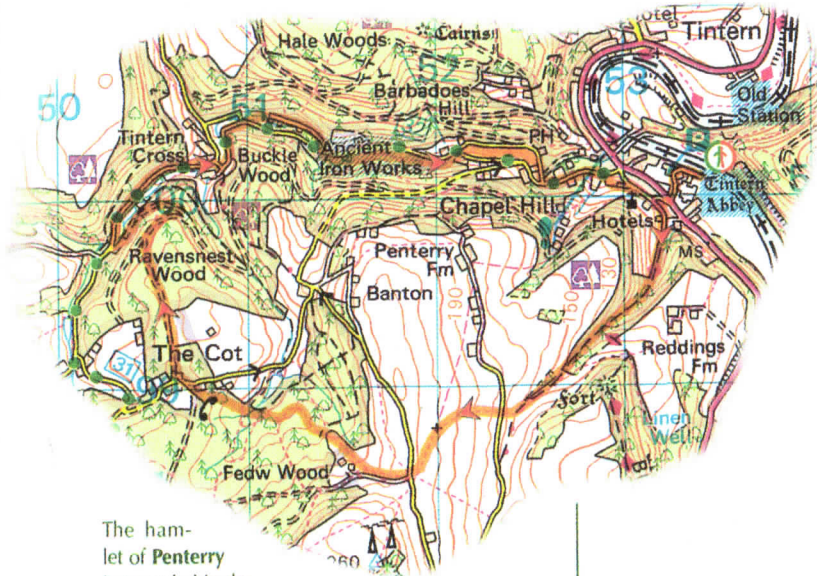
Start/Finish	Tintern Abbey (SO 533 002)
Distance	11km (7 miles)
Ascent	290m (950ft)
Time	3–5hrs
Map	Outdoor Leisure 14
Public transport	Service 69 between Chepstow and Monmouth runs at least once every two hours and calls at Tintern (four buses on Sundays)
Parking	Several car parks (some free, some pay-and-display) in Tintern

An ancient cobbled road, a deserted village, a ruined parish church and the historic industrial sites of the Angidy Valley provide the context for this walk in the quiet hills west of Tintern, with sumptuous views of Tintern Abbey as the final highlight of the walk.

This is the medieval cobbled road known by 1451 as 'the Stony Way', which the monks of Tintern used to reach their outlying grange farms to the south-west, including Porthcasseg.

From the **car park** walk past the west front of the abbey and cross the main road, taking the narrow lane uphill (signposted Wye Valley Walk) but quickly turning left along a road that crosses a cattle grid and peters out into a long, winding and stony track. This climbs steadily through woodland with a stream alongside and the constant sound of woodland birds, including the drumming of great spotted woodpeckers in spring. ◀

The track is worn to the bedrock higher up, but eventually the gradient eases, the Wye Valley Walk leaves to the left, and the way ahead lies along a holloway, badly eroded in places, running between fields and fringed with wild garlic. Go over a stile to the right, climbing up a field to cross a concrete road, and take the path signposted to Penterry Church, crossing two arable fields (the way can be muddy after rain; an alternative is to keep to the old road almost as far as Porthcasseg, then cut back to the church).



The hamlet of **Penterry** is recorded in the 10th century and may be even older, but by the late 14th century, ravaged by famine and the Black Death, it was all but deserted. The remains of streets and house platforms can just be discerned in the field next to the church, while

The isolated hilltop church at Penterry



Formerly the Roman road between Chepstow and the minor fort of Blestium near Monmouth, this was later superseded by the road through Devauden to the west, and then by the turnpike road through Tintern in the 19th century.

a hazel grove in a corner of the field conceals a plague burial pit. The church fabric is largely 19th century, although there are medieval fragments and the base of a churchyard cross.

Go through the gate at the far end of the church field to cut across another field, with buzzards overhead and fine views to the Wye woodlands, to reach a narrow lane. ◀

A path leads west from the Roman road to join the access lane to The Tout, but leave this immediately through a metal gate on the right to find a path veering left and descending gently through a big meadow, eventually running to the right of The Tout and crossing a stile to enter woodland. Go straight ahead across a forest road, taking the left-hand of two footpaths, then curve left and then right and drop down to the pleasant Fair oak Ponds, now a trout fishery fed by spring water but also home to waterbirds such as mallard and little grebe.

Head uphill on a clear track through young trees (with an understorey of bluebells in spring) then turn right on a bridleway and immediately left on a lane through **The Cot** – originally a collection of smallholdings won from the surrounding woodlands. Turn right at a red telephone box on a path signposted to Tintern Cross; this is a real highlight of the walk, through the open mature woodland of **Ravensnest Wood** on an excellent track and then through younger trees including some coppice stools.

As the descent begins, take a waymarked path to the left, but when this reaches a forest road ignore the path straight ahead (this is the direct route but sadly the path peters out after a while) and instead go left on the forest road until it reaches the metalled road some distance upstream from the hamlet of Tintern Cross. Go right along the road, passing more fishing lakes, to reach **Tintern Cross** and cross the bridge over the river – frequented by robins and grey wagtails here – to follow a lane curving round to the highest of the major industrial ponds of the steep-sided Angidy Valley – the storage pond for



the Upper Wireworks, its stone retaining walls just to the right of the route.

Immediately beyond the dam take the permitted path running alongside the stream (signposted as the Tewdrig Trail after a sixth-century king of Gwent who later became a hermit in Tintern), passing some attractive cottages on its way to the substantial remains of the Abbey Furnace. ▶

The Angidy Valley's speciality was **iron wire making**, and by the early 17th century the wireworks here was the largest industrial enterprise in Wales, with a series of sites stretching 3km (2 miles) up the valley and some 20 waterwheels in operation. Iron ore was imported from the Forest of Dean and further afield, arriving at the river port at Abbey Mill and then being carried by packhorses to the furnaces, while pack-horse trains also carried in local charcoal, which was burnt in the furnaces and forges.

The trail now winds through Glyn Wood, passing an attractive pond that supplied water and hence power

The storage pond for the Upper Wireworks

This was built in 1672 to supply cast iron to the forge at Pont-y-saeson higher up the valley, where it was transformed into osmond iron, which could be repeatedly heated and hammered to make it into wire.

The mill took iron bars from the furnaces and cut them into long rods, which were gradually hammered and lengthened into coarse iron wire.

The churchyard contains a number of significant monuments, including the tombs of ironmasters such as Robert Thompson, who built the Upper Wireworks.

to the tilt hammer mill, the scanty remains of which can be seen lower down by the stream. ◀ Keep close to the stream, with dippers and more grey wagtails in evidence, and cross a sturdy footbridge to climb up to the valley road as it approaches Tintern.

Take the higher road at a junction but then go immediately left onto a footpath alongside an old leat that runs between houses and passes the site of the Middle Wireworks near Crown Cottages, then the Bible Christian chapel, and finally the celebrated but now disused Cherry Tree Inn. Cross the valley road again to walk through the site of the Lower Wireworks – established in 1566 with four waterwheels and four hammers but now represented only by the long wall on the right.

Turn right on the main road for a few paces, then go up the lane on the right to find the former Church of St Mary's, redundant since 1972 and now a forlorn ruin, but with a spectacular view of Tintern Abbey in the valley below. ◀ A paved way leads down from the church; leave this where it bends sharply left to descend to the lane heading for the abbey ruins and the car park.



The impressive remains of Abbey Furnace ironworks