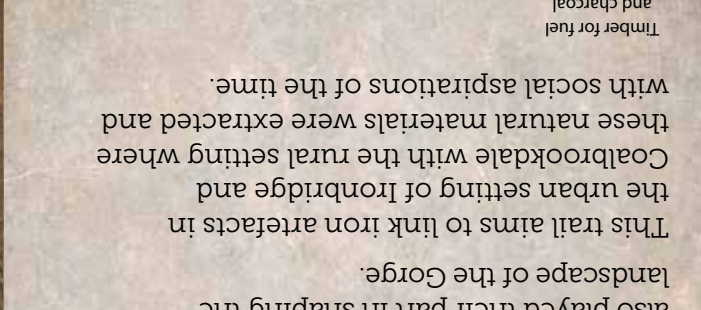
Welcome to the Iron Trail

The Iron Trail is an enjoyable three and a half mile circular stroll through the stunning landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site up to a famous historic viewpoint at the Rotunda and back to the Iron Bridge.

During the 18th century, the landscape you see from the Iron Bridge was the focus of immense industrial activity. Open seams of coal, limestone, clay, iron ore and streams for water for the smelting process were all easily available in the Gorge. The streams of Coalbrookdale were dammed to produce small reservoirs, and furnaces were built at intervals down the valley. The 'Ironmasters' also played their part in shaping the landscape of the Gorge.

This trail aims to link iron artefacts in the urban setting of Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale with the rural setting where these natural materials were extracted and with social aspirations of the time.



Iron Recipe

600 kg coke
600 kg ironstone
250 kg limestone

Resulting in 250 kg iron

Thanks To Barrie Williams, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, John Powell, Heather Williamson, Craig Baker, Peter Loat, Laurie Chetwood, and the staff and volunteers of SGCT.
Illustrations by Lynne Morgan and MA Creative. Photos by Mike Ashton. Archive pictures courtesy of IGMT.
Designed by MA Creative Limited

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The Iron Trail
Ironbridge Gorge

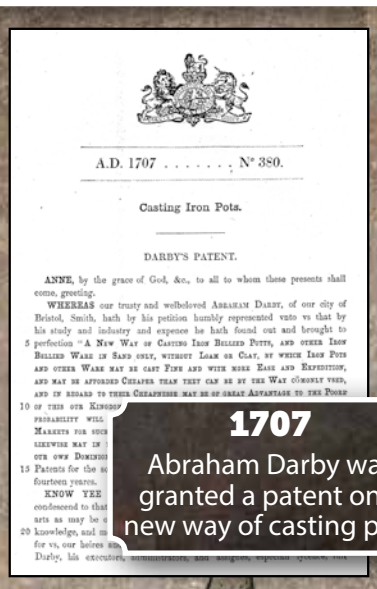
Nearest parking: Ironbridge Central Car Park
Access: Pavements and woodland paths
How long: 4km, 1 1/2 hours
How easy: Some hills, steep steps and kissing gates
Pushchair friendly: No
Toilets: The Square, Ironbridge
Crossing roads: Beware of traffic

unesco World Heritage Site | Ironbridge Gorge

Iron Processing Timeline

How Coalbrookdale and Ironbridge helped change the world

1000BC
Wrought iron made in bloomeries, basic clay lined brick furnaces



A.D. 1707 . . . . . N° 380.

Casting Iron Pots.

DARBY'S PATENT.

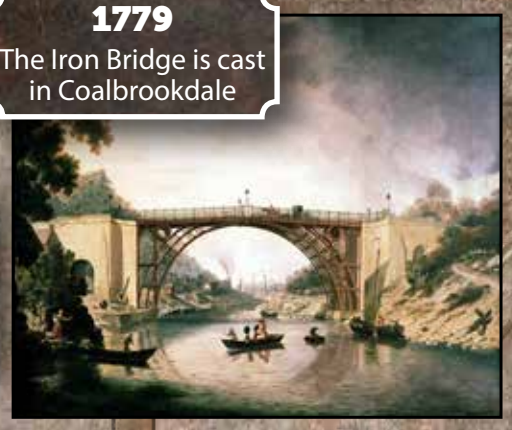
ANNE, by the grace of God, &c., to all to whom these presents shall come, greeting.

WHEREAS our trusty and welbeloved ABRAHAM DARBY, of our city of Bristol, Smith, hath by his petition humbly represented unto us that by his study and industry and expence he hath found out and brought to perfection "A NEW WAY OF CASTING IRON BILLIED POTTS, AND OTHER IRON BILLIED WARE IN SAND ONLY, WITHOUT LOAM OR CLAY, BY WHICH IRON POTS AND OTHER WARE MAY BE CAST FINE AND WITH MORE EASE AND EXPEDITION, AND MAY BE AFFORDED CHEAPER THAN THEY CAN BE BY THE WAY COMONLY USED, AND IN REGARD TO THEIR CHEAPNESS MAY BE OF GREAT ADVANTAGE TO THE POORE OF THIS OUR KINGDOM PROBABILITY WILL MARKETS FOR SUCH LIKEWISE MAY IN OUR OWN DOMINIO Patents for the s fourteen yeares.

KNOW YEE condescend to that arts as may be knowledge, and m for us, our heires Darby, his executors

1707
Abraham Darby was granted a patent on a new way of casting pots

1722
Coalbrookdale Company cast steam engine cylinders

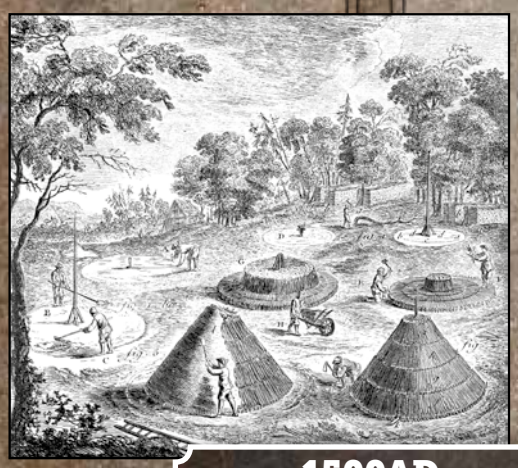


1779
The Iron Bridge is cast in Coalbrookdale

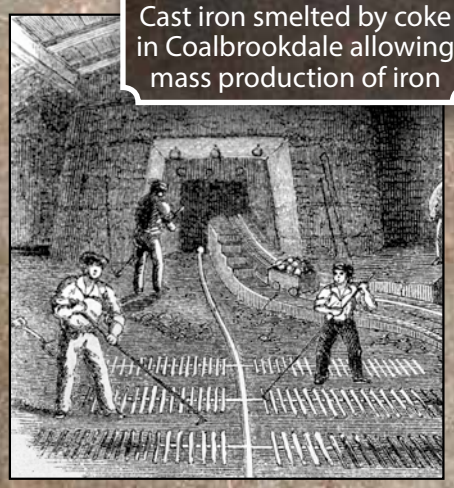
1834
Blists Hill furnaces built

1851
The great exhibition at Crystal Palace

1855
Steel made from liquid iron using the Bessemer process



1500AD
Cast iron smelted by charcoal made in cone shaped clamps covered in earth



1709
Cast iron smelted by coke in Coalbrookdale allowing mass production of iron

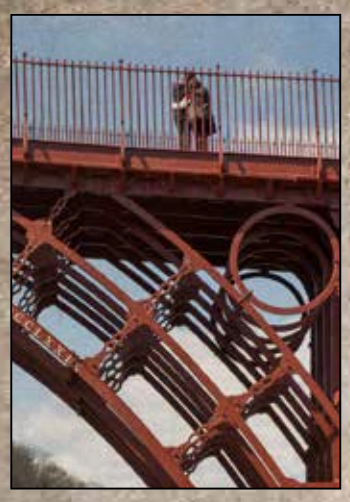
1729
First flanged railway wheels cast in Coalbrookdale

1782
The Sabbath Walks laid out

1843
Isambard Kingdom Brunel uses Coalbrookdale iron in building the ss Great Britain

1970
Oxygen steel made from liquid iron

The Iron Trail



1 START at The Iron Bridge

Coalbrookdale Company Ironmaster, Abraham Darby III was commissioned to cast and build the bridge. It was the first arch bridge in the world to be made of cast iron, a material which was previously too expensive to use for large structures. Being the first of its sort, the construction had no precedent; the method chosen to create the structure was therefore based on carpentry. Each piece of the frame was cast separately, and fastenings replicated those used in woodworking, such as the mortise and tenon and blind dovetail joints. The bridge was raised in the summer of 1779 and opened on New Year's Day 1781.

☛ **From the bridge, walk towards the village shops; turn left along the Wharfage with the river on your left and continue along the footpath.**

2 The Wharfage

On the footpath edge, you may notice iron kerbs. Not 18th century, but 20th century and placed for aesthetic effect in 1979 for a visit by Prince Charles.

On the opposite side of the road look out for an original iron feature, the mileage marker on a brick wall showing 0 miles to Ironbridge.

Again, on the opposite side of the road look out for brick alcoves set back. These were lime kilns once used to convert limestone quarried from Lincoln Hill into quicklime used for agriculture.

3 Museum of the Gorge

Formerly the Coalbrookdale Company warehouse built in 1834. Its design allowed water to flow in and out depending on river levels. Coalbrookdale iron products were transported downhill from the factory on plateways to the warehouse and stored before being shipped down river to Bristol and world wide. It is now one of the ten fabulous Museums managed by the National Trust.

☛ **Continue just past the mini-roundabout to find a watercourse on your left flowing to the river.**

4 Lydebrook

This is the lower end of the Lydebrook, which used to flow through four forge pools used to cool the iron making process from the Coalbrookdale furnace. Lower Forge and Lower Forge pool were once situated on the opposite side of the road. Iron nails and frying pans were made here.

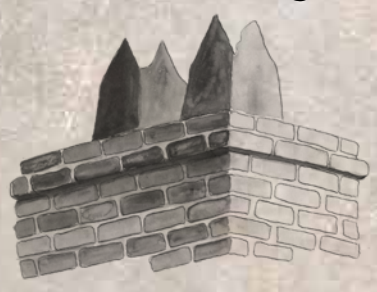
☛ **Turn right into Dale Road, keep on the footpath on the left hand side. Continue walking up Dale Road past the primary school.**

5 Trinity Hall

On the left is Trinity Hall, now a doctor's surgery. In front of the building is an original Coalbrookdale cast iron lamp post, once positioned at the mini-roundabout which you have just passed. The lamp has a plaque stating it was made in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

☛ **Continue uphill to a collection of cottages on your right that you can see on the opposite side of the road – no need to cross**

6 Rose Cottage



Part of Rose Cottage dates back to 1642 and is a Grade II listed building. This building has cast iron chimney pots and iron framed windows.

☛ ***OPTIONAL ROUTE:*** **Cross the road to Upper Forge picnic site *(beware of traffic).***

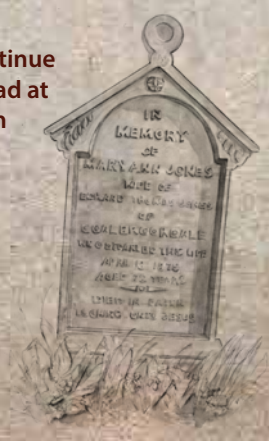
7 Upper Forge

This site accommodated both Upper Forge and Middle Forge. The small pool supplied water to the Middle Forge. During the eighteenth century the pool was enlarged to increase the supply reservoir for the newly created Boring Mill - a conversion of the Middle Forge- for precision turning of cast-iron cylinders.

☛ **Staying on the left of the road, continue past the road 'Paradise' and cross the road at the way marked post, following the path between houses and up the steps to Holy Trinity Church.**

8 Holy Trinity Church

This churchyard, created by Abraham Darby IV, contains a number of cast iron head stones. Look closely and you may find Abraham's own tomb.



☛ **Follow the path around the church through a massive cast iron side gate on to Church Road. Beware of traffic. Cross over the road to enter Dale Coppice woodland.**

9 Dale Coppice

In the 1770s, this beech woodland was once privately owned by one of the Ironmasters, Richard Reynolds, a Quaker and philanthropist and open for public access. Here, he laid out two 'Sabbath Walks' for the benefit of his workmen and their families. One followed this route to the Doric Temple. He was a long way ahead of his time as this was one of the first formal public parks in the UK, two hundred years before Country Parks and National Parks! It is now managed and protected in perpetuity by the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust who manage most of the landscape of the World Heritage Site.

☛ **Take the path and steps upwards to a tall oak fingerpost and follow red arrows up the steps in the direction of Rough Park, turning left along the boardwalk. Continue along this path.**

10 Hannah's Cottage and Garden

Richard Reynolds built a cottage and garden here for his daughter, Hannah Mary, whom he loved dearly.

☛ **Continue along the red route for the remainder of the trail.**

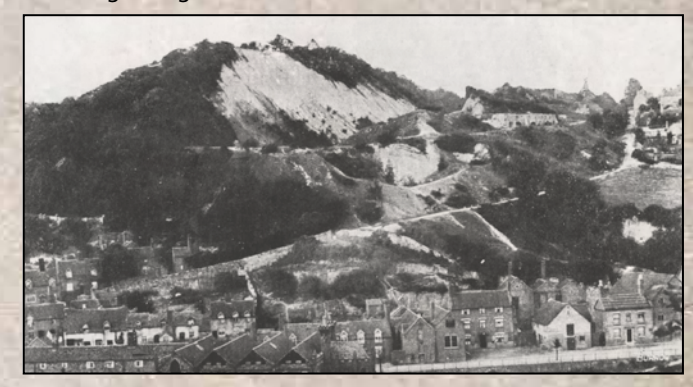
11 Doric Temple

At the top of the hill, Richard Reynolds built a folly known as the 'Doric Temple' for his workers to sit and enjoy the views of Upper Forge Pool, Coalbrookdale.

☛ **You will soon leave the woodland and enter Rough Park through a kissing gate, turn right and follow the path keeping Dale Coppice woodland on your right. Take the right fork in the path and go through another gate onto a track, continue bearing right until you reach a metal gate that leads onto Church Road. Beware of traffic. Cross over the road and follow the fingerpost to 'The Rotunda' entering Lincoln Hill through a kissing gate.**

12 Lincoln Hill

Now a species-rich woodland, Lincoln Hill was a vast limestone quarry, heavily mined and quarried in the 18th Century for the Coalbrookdale furnaces. Here you join the 2nd Sabbath Walk to the Rotunda, a local viewpoint from which to admire the Ironbridge Gorge.



☛ **You will pass an alcove (on your left) once a seat with a view of the valley below. The path eventually comes out of the woodland to a fenced open grassy area with the river 100m below.**

13 The Rotunda

The Rotunda, built in the early 1790s by Richard Reynolds, is believed to have been a circular structure with 9 cast-iron pillars and a lead-covered roof. Inside was a revolving seat allowing spectacular panoramic views of the Ironbridge Gorge and The Wrekin. Now, only the original brick foundation remains.

☛ **Follow the trail down the 200 or so steps at the bottom of which turn right at the fingerpost, then bear left down a flight of steps. Turn left following a path with the house wall on the right to Lincoln Hill Road. Continue across road and onto the public footpath downhill to the Wharfage, turning left to retrace your steps to the Iron Bridge.**