The Lime Trail of Benthall Edge – *history, geology, ecology*

Benthall Edge is now a wooded landscape overlying limestone, coal and clay, mixed with ironstone. This geology influences the plants that grow here. On the limestone areas, ash trees prefer the alkaline soil whereas oak trees grow on the slightly acidic soil of the clay/coal measures.

Benthall Edge, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), has been the site of intense human activity for centuries. Abandoned limestone quarries are now home to rare grassland plants, such as Butterfly and Bee Orchid. The human impact on the woodland is only noticeable when you look a little closer. The landscape bears scars of collapsed clay adits, drift mines and spoil heaps. Most of the woodland would have been cut to make charcoal to fuel the iron furnaces before the advent of coke. Remnants of the charcoal hearths are still visible today.

Historical evidence suggests that limestone has been quarried along Benthall Edge since the early 13th century. The Abbot and Convent of Buildwas were granted a right to quarry from the Lord of Benthall. The industrial revolution and intensification of farming saw an increase in demand. Lime was used to improve the fertility of the agricultural fields. It is estimated that over 1.2 million cubic metres of limestone has been removed during the last 750 years!

The higher quality ball stone limestone from the top of the slope was used as a flux to remove the impurities from the iron stone during the smelting process. This had to be brought down the steep valley side using inclined planes with small trucks held by cables. The lower quality lime was burnt in the lime kilns to produce quicklime for construction and agriculture.

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

The Trust was set up in 1991 to look after 260 hectares of land for the benefit of wildlife, local people and visitors. The Trust is responsible for over half of the land within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, managing an important landscape with Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and endangered species.

The Trust also looks after 60 historic structures, traditional hay meadows and over 25km of paths. The Trust is unusual in that it has an open access policy on all 260 hectares of land it manages. The Trust employs up to 25 local contractors to undertake various works. The Trust also has a strong volunteer programme carrying out a wide variety of tasks, contributing thousands of work hours each year.

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

The Trust's aim is to promote, protect and conserve the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site

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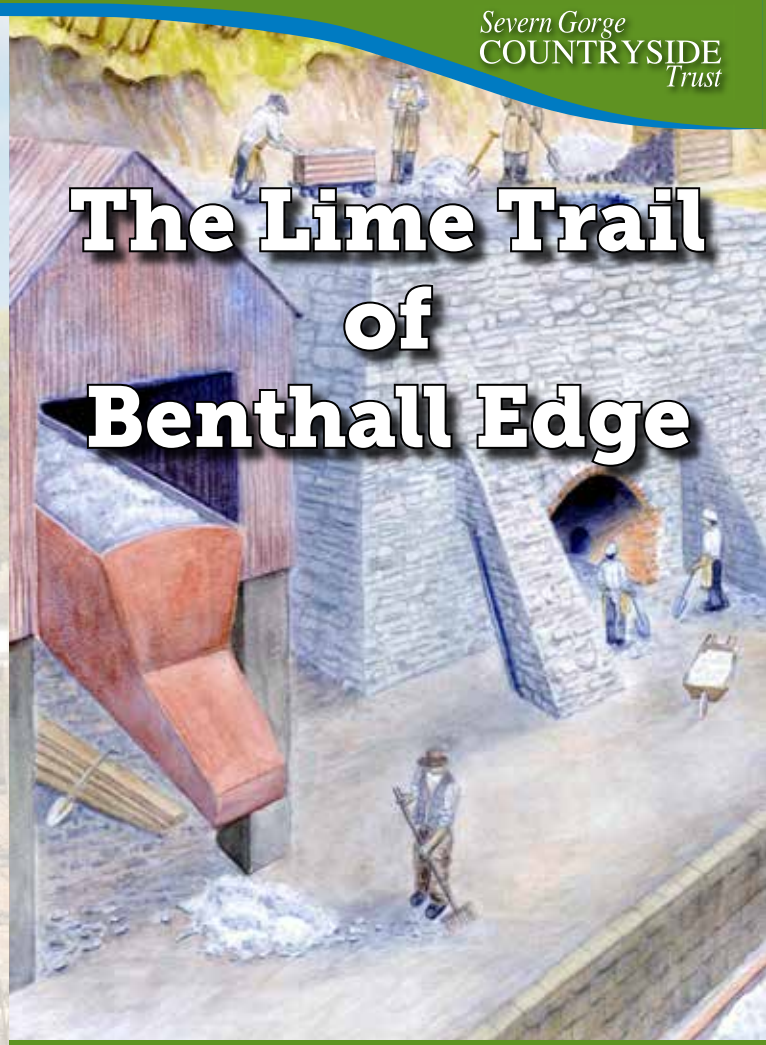
Artwork by MA Creative.
Cover illustration: Bower Yard lime kilns by Lynne Morgan
Back cover: The Iron Bridge © Mike Ashton

Severn Gorge COUNTRYSIDE Trust

The Lime Trail of Benthall Edge



Nearest parking: Ironbridge Central Car Park
Access: Woodlands paths
How long: 3km, 1½ hours
How easy: Steep hills and lots of steps
Pushchair friendly: No
Toilets: In The Square, Ironbridge
Crossing Roads: None

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Start at the Severn Valley Way (SVW), south side of the Iron Bridge near the Toll House.

Bower Yard Lime Kiln

☛ Follow the path under the brick bridge.

1 The path you are walking used to be the Severn Valley railway line. It operated from 1872-1960 and carried trains between Kidderminster and Shrewsbury. A siding was built alongside the Bower Yard Limekilns where quarried lime was burnt to make quicklime for agriculture and building use.

☛ After 150 m turn left through a squeeze stile and head up the steps signposted Broseley. At the next fingerpost continue following the sign for Broseley.

2 There are lots of steps and it may take 20 minutes to reach the top.

☛ When you get just below the top of the steps and fingerpost, take the path on the right and follow the red way markers.

☛ At the next finger post follow the path signed Pattens Rock Quarry (PRQ) passing over two wooden footbridges as you go.

3 The brook you are crossing is the Bower Brook and it runs all the way down to the River Severn.

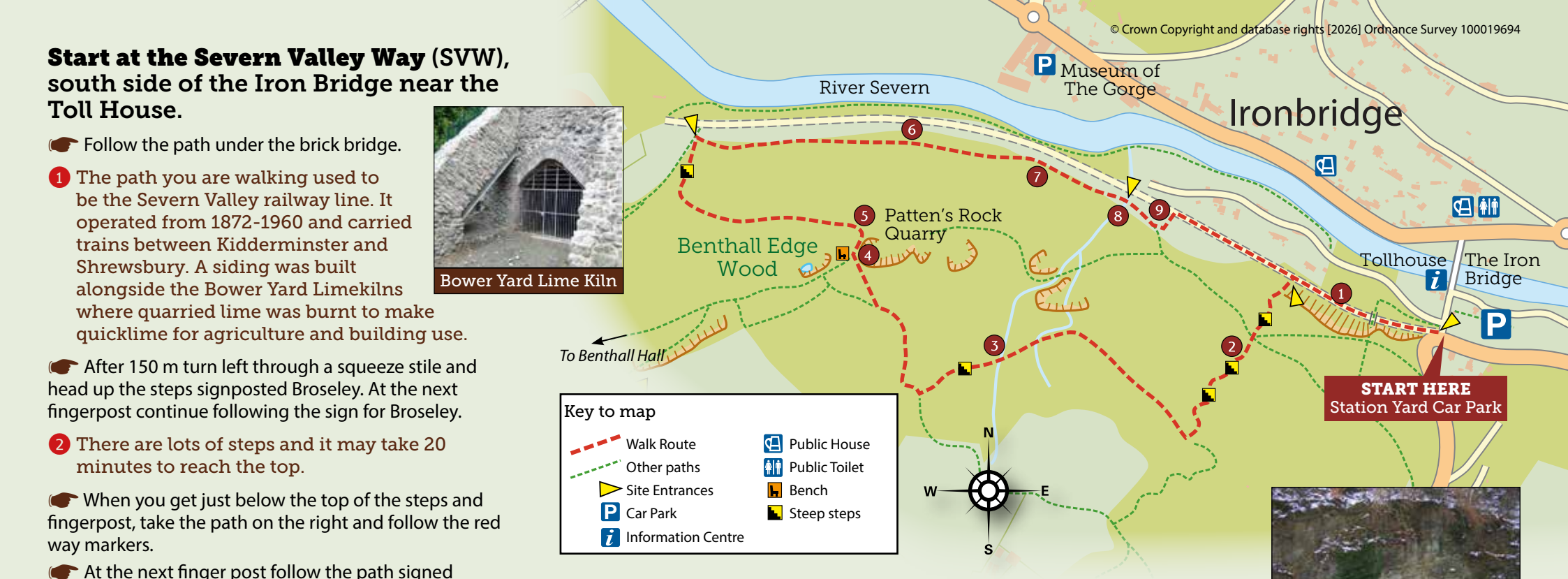
☛ At the next finger post turn right signed PRQ view, crossing over a footbridge en route.

Follow the boardwalk up the hill, and at the finger post turn right to PRQ view point.

☛ At the bench take a well-deserved break and enjoy the amazing view of the quarry and Ironbridge.

Patten's Rock Quarry

4 This is the largest quarry on Benthall Edge; it is now a really good example of limestone grassland. The quarry takes its name from lime master John Patten who operated out of Bower Yard.



☛ Begin the descent of Benthall Edge by following the steps down the hill.

5 At the next bench on your left enjoy the fabulous view of the Coalbrookdale valley.

☛ At the bottom of the very long flight of steps turn right and follow the path signed Ironbridge.

6 As you walk along the path keep an eye out on the right for small level areas in this steep landscape. These are remnants of charcoal hearths, used to turn the wood into charcoal.

☛ Whilst crossing the bridge look to your right

7 This is the site of an old incline plane used to extract the lime stone from Patten's Rock Quarry using small trucks and cables.

Bee Orchid

☛ At the bottom of the steps bear right following the finger post signed Bridge Bank.

Quarried rockface

8 If you can hear water, look right. This is Bower Brook again; it has been culverted in the past and now flows out of a pipe. The pipe is thought to be either from a boiler or ventilation furnace chimney.

☛ Go through the gate and follow the signs to view the Bower Yard lime kilns.

9 You are now in the Severn Valley railway siding where the trains were loaded by hoppers up until it closed in the 1960's.

☛ Retrace your steps to the finger post and follow the route signed Ironbridge via the SVW, after passing through the kissing gate turn right and head back towards Ironbridge.