

Wrexham North Mine Trail



A 20 mile circular trail by car or bike, passing features relating to the local coal and iron industries. Note that some of the places are on private land and this should be obvious. In such a case please first ask for permission to visit. The trail starts at Bersham Colliery (now the Bersham Enterprise Centre) but you can join and leave it anywhere along the route. It mostly covers features to the north-west of Wrexham. Approximate cumulative mileages are given in brackets. More information can be found on the website below. Note that some of the places may be difficult for disabled persons to access but they should be able to see most of them. The trail should take about 3½ hours to complete.

To get to Bersham Colliery, follow the A483 towards Wrexham and turn off east along the A5152 signposted Rhostyllen. Pass a Little Chef on the left and then turn right, signposted to Bersham Enterprise Centre. Park in the car park next to the headgear.

1	BERSHAM COLLIERY (NGR SJ314482)
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The site was originally known as Glanrafon Colliery and sinking was started in 1864 by the Bersham Coal Company. The last coal was brought up in December 1986 when it was closed by British Coal as being uneconomic. There were two shafts which originally had steam winding engines but these were later replaced by electric ones.

The underground workings stretched as far as Erddig Hall and a large section of solid coal was left underneath it to prevent subsidence. Despite this, however, serious damage was caused, the kitchen roof having to be held up with girders. The National Coal Board had to pay out compensation for this.

WHAT TO SEE

Today the most obvious remains are of No.2 Shaft, which still has its headgear and winding engine inside the tall red brick engine house. The mine tip across the road is one of only a few now left in the UK. The Bersham Enterprise Centre has used some of the old mine buildings. The red brick buildings by the road date from 1936 and were once the telephone exchange and electricity sub-station. The modern buildings date from 1954 and were, from left to right, the lamp room, office, boiler house, pithead baths and canteen.

Head back to the A483 and turn right (0.5) at the roundabout. Turn left (2.7) onto the A541 towards Mold. Go straight across a roundabout (3.8) and turn right (4.3) at the traffic lights. Turn right (4.5) at a mini roundabout. At the T-junction turn right (5.2) and then right again (5.4) signposted Rhosddu Industrial Estate. Follow the road to where it starts to bend right and you will see a tall red brick building in front (5.6).

2	WREXHAM & ACTON COLLIERY (NGR SJ327522)
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The colliery was sunk in 1868 to a depth of 1,050ft. It had several seams, the best of which were the Main Seam (7ft thick) and Brassey Coal (4ft thick). The closure of this colliery in 1924 solved the problem of

manpower shortages at nearby Gresford Colliery (which was owned by the same company). The headgears were constructed of wood.

WHAT TO SEE

Most of the colliery site is now occupied by the Rhosddu Industrial Estate but the red brick engine house still survives and is in use.

Go back to the T-junction and turn left (5.9) and turn right signposted Pandy (6.2). Just past a roundabout, where you can see a large wheel, turn right into the car park of Gresford Colliery Social Club (6.8).

3	GRESFORD MEMORIAL (NGR SJ338536)
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The worst disaster of the North Wales coalfield occurred at Gresford Colliery in 1934. An explosion took place and, with the exception of 1 deputy and 5 men, everyone working in that section was killed. The explosion was followed by a fire which spread to the rest of the mine. For over 24 hours, rescue teams fought the fire but to no avail. As the rescue operations had already claimed the lives of 3 members of the rescue brigade, it was decided to seal off the top of the two shafts. Only 11 bodies were recovered of the 266 miners who were killed.

The mine was re-entered in 1935 and coal production was gradually resumed from January 1936 until its closure in 1974.

WHAT TO SEE

One wheel from the headgear was removed and now forms part of the Gresford Disaster Memorial. There is nothing left of Gresford Colliery itself since it has been covered by the Gresford Industrial Park.

Walk to the roundabout and turn left into the industrial park, then take the second left to the front of F Bender Ltd. On the triangle of grass in front is a small plinth marking the site of the main shaft.

Some of the spoil tip still remains. This can be seen by crossing the road opposite the memorial and walking along the lane and under a railway bridge.

4	GRESFORD COLLIERY CLUB (NGR SJ338536)
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Refreshments and toilets are available here when the club is open.

WHAT TO SEE

You may be able to chat to ex-miners and see photos, etc.

Go back to the road and turn right. At the roundabout (6.9) take the third exit signposted B5445 Gresford. Turn left (8.1) at the traffic lights and pass a pond on the left. Park outside the church (8.5).

5	GRESFORD CHURCH (NGR SJ346549)
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The current church was built in the 13th Century but there was a previous one mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086.

WHAT TO SEE

Inside the church, at the far end, is a small chapel with a lovely mural commemorating the Gresford Disaster. There is a book below with names of those killed and a new page is turned each day. None of these bodies are buried in the churchyard.

Turn right at the T-junction and follow the road down a steep hill and over a dual carriageway (8.8). Turn left at the traffic lights by the Crown Inn onto the B5102 (9.9). Go straight across a roundabout, into the car park of an ornate building (10.2).

6	LLAY MINERS WELFARE INSTITUTE (SJ328559)
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Built in 1929 with contributions by miners from Llay Main Colliery, this is one of the finest buildings of the era.

WHAT TO SEE

In the entrance hall, note the artefacts made by a German prisoner of war, which he dedicated to the victims of the Gresford disaster. Upstairs is a small mining display that is open to the public on request. Refreshments and toilets are available here when the institute is open.

The colliery it was built to serve, Llay Main, was once the deepest in Britain and had over 3,000 workers. The only remains now are the old office and the spoil tip.

Go back to the road and turn left on the B5102. On your right you can see a large spoil tip (10.3) created by Llay Main Colliery. Turn left (11.4) at the Hollybush pub onto the A541. Turn left (11.9) towards the Alyn Industrial Estate and immediately take the right fork next to a post box. Continue along the road between the buildings until (if gate is unlocked) you can reach "World of Difference" where you can park (12.2).

7	LLAY HALL COLLIERY (NGR SJ315539)
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This was sunk by the Llay Hall Coal, Iron and Fireclay Company in February 1877. In 1881 two men and ten horses were killed in an explosion at the pit. No.1 Shaft was unique in that it was only wide enough for one cage at the top and the bottom. A 'passby' in the middle of the shaft allowed two cages to operate. At its peak, Llay Hall employed 460 men and boys (374 underground).

WHAT TO SEE

The site is now an industrial estate. Just after the road fork, the building on the right was the mine office. Further along the weighbridge is on the left and, keeping straight on through the gates, the workshops are passed either side.

The large brick building on the left was the Power House. The Engine House is a red brick building on a blue brick plinth with a corrugated iron roof and windows. In front of this is the blue Washery building, consisting of brick panels supported on a bolted and riveted steel frame.

An inclined gantry leads down from the shaft, down which trucks of coal were lowered. This was operated by a continuous haulage system and the pulleys can be seen under the gantry at the top. The Lamp Room was between the Washery and Power House but only the foundations are now left. On the opposite hillside is a square red brick chimney 100ft high

Go back to the A541 and turn left. Turn right (13.6) just before the Heart Radio building, signposted Westminster Industrial Estate. Follow the road around to the right and park next to the fence at the end (13.7).

8	GWERSYLLT COLLIERY (NGR SJ316537)
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The colliery was sunk in the 1870s and was operated for most of its life with the adjacent Westminster Colliery. It was never large, with only 185 workers in 1896 and 266 in 1908. It was closed in 1925.

WHAT TO SEE

The tall building on the corner is the Gwersyllt Sports & Working Men's Club, which was converted from a mine building in 1931. Refreshments and toilets are available here when the club is open.

Other ex-mine buildings can be seen through the fence at the end. The remains of the spoil tip are opposite the engine house.

Go back to the A541 and turn right. Turn right on the A483 (15.4) and exit at the next junction (16.2) signposted A525 Ruthin. At the traffic lights turn left (16.4) and then turn right (16.5) onto the B5098 signposted to Bersham. At the T-junction turn right (17.3), then take the next turn right (17.4) and pass under a road bridge. You pass the Bersham Ironworks on your right (17.6) but carry on and turn right into the car park (17.7).

9	BERSHAM IRON WORKS (NGR SJ306492)
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Charles Lloyd established the Bersham Ironworks in 1715 and by the 1750s they were producing iron cannons. Isaac Wilkinson took over the works in 1753 and began producing iron cannon for the Seven-Years War. John Wilkinson took over in 1763 and, in partnership with Francis Bacon, developed a new method of gun manufacture whereby the guns were cast solid and bored out later.

A water-powered borer was in use by 1775, and a steam-powered mill by 1779. At the same time John began producing steam engine cylinders for James Watt. Bersham increased in size and reached its peak in 1795. The establishment of Brymbo ironworks nearby and John's death in 1808 caused a decline and the works were sold in 1812.

WHAT TO SEE

The site is a museum but only open during the summer months. Current remains include the octagonal cannon foundry and adjacent fettling shop, a boring mill, lengths of wooden railway, furnace, two weirs and accounts house.

Head back under the road bridge and turn left (18.2). Park in the car park of the Bersham Heritage Centre on the right (18.3).

10	BERSHAM HERITAGE CENTRE (NGR SJ311491)
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This is a museum and there are toilets and refreshments here when open.

WHAT TO SEE

There are a number of exhibits on the local coal and iron industries. The large wooden structure in front is a reconstructed "horse gin" which was a method of winding.

Turn right out of the car park and take the first right down a narrow lane (18.4). Park in the pub car park at the bottom.

11	HOLE IN THE WALL INN (NGR SJ312491)
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Although the real name is the Black Lion, it is known locally as the Hole in the Wall. This was a popular pub for the local miners and apparently had a reputation for never closing so they could get a drink whatever shift they had just finished. There are toilets and refreshments here when open.

Go back up the lane and turn left (18.5). Turn right (18.9) at the T-junction onto the B5097 and then turn left signposted Oswestry (19.0). Turn left at the T-junction signposted Wrexham (19.3) and straight across the roundabout (19.4). Turn right (19.7) signposted to Bersham Enterprise Centre and you will get back to your start point at Bersham Colliery (20.0).



