

A VISIT TO THE BRENDON HILLS, SUMMER 2009

The moor that once resounded to the shovel
and the pick

Now ripples in the summer wind, where the
barley's growing thick,

Where sparks and furnace smoke once rose,
and dusty horses strained,

The pines have grown, and the grassy grooves
are peaceful once again.

From a dark and ferny archway, rusty water
issues still,

Bringing to light the haematite which drew
the miners' skill,

Sunlight glistens on the ripples, like the
crystals in the vein,

Clear as diamonds, red as blood, bearing the
iron's cherry stain.

MINING in the BRENDON HILLS

Linda Drummond-Harris

When researching possible ideas for the 2010 field trips, Bob Mustow and I stumbled across the West Somerset Mineral Railway website www.westsomersetmineralrailway.org.uk and discovered under 'Events' that there was a guided walk the following weekend. We decided to investigate and on a very wet Saturday drove to Raleigh's Cross where we joined with a large group led by one of the Exmoor National Park Wardens.

How many dreams of fortune died, in the
grinding times of old,

When galena mimicked silver, and pyrite
fooled for gold?

But the humble miners' boots still daily plied
the stony road,

And the iron in his sinews broke the iron from
the lode,

From Florey, California, from Kennisham and
Combe,

To the engine house at Raleigh's Cross,
where the tramway rumbled home.

The iron heart of Somerset, full-circle turned
to rust,

The aching lives and dwellings of the miners
fell to dust,

Yet, standing in the silence, as the wind
moans in the pines,

I still hear the hearty company of those lost
industrious times.

Alan Bentley



Despite the inclement conditions we thoroughly enjoyed the tour. Our guide related the story of the rise and fall of iron mining in the Brendons and the history of the West Somerset Mineral Railway, the creation of which had a profound effect on the residents, the local economy and the landscape. The three hour walk took in parts of the West Somerset Mineral Railway still visible in the scenic Brendon Hills, and included one of West Somerset's finest feats of Victorian engineering, the 'Incline'.