



THE
OLD
MINERAL
LINE

How to find us

To Watchet

By bus

From Taunton: No. 28 and no. 18 (Minehead to Taunton)

By car

From the east: Leave the M5 at Junction 24 (Bridgwater) and follow the signs for Minehead (A39). After about 16 miles (25.7 km) turn right down minor road signposted to Watchet.

From the west: Leave the M5 at Junction 25 (Taunton) and follow the signs to the A358 towards Minehead. At Williton turn right and then left following the signs to Watchet (about 18 miles (30 km) from the motorway).

To the Brendon Hills

By bus

For up to date information check the Travel Line website at www.travelinesw.com or the Exmoor National Park at www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/getting-around.

By car

To Ralegh's Cross Inn: Leave the M5 at Junction 25 (Taunton) and follow the signs to the A358 towards Minehead. Approximately 1 mile (1.6 km) after the sign for Bishops Lydeard, turn left along the B3224 for 8 miles (12.8 km). The Inn is on the left hand side at a crossroads.

From Ralegh's Cross Inn to Langham Engine House: Pass Ralegh's Cross Inn on your left, continue along the road (now the B3190) and at the junction at Beulah Chapel take the right hand road (B3224). Continue for approximately 5 miles (8 km). The Chargot Woods car park for Langham Engine House and Bearland Ventilation Flue is on your right.

By train

Alight at Watchet. Visit www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk for times and details.

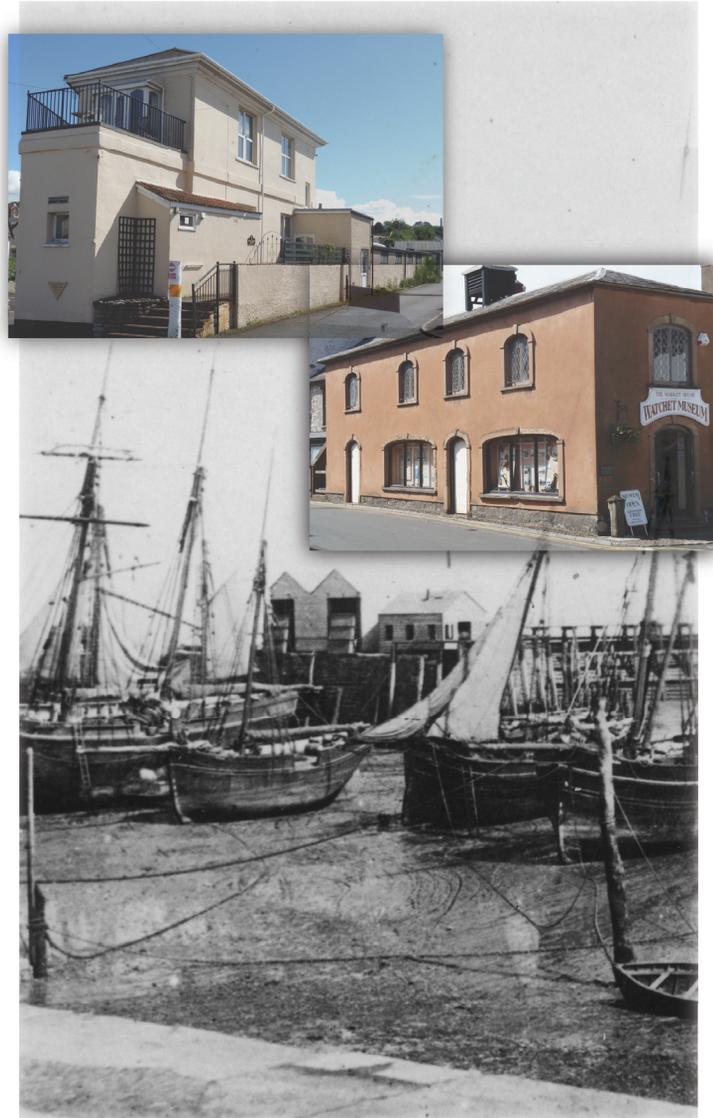
On foot

Many WSMR sites are accessible by foot following public rights of way. Ordnance Survey map OL9 covers Exmoor National Park, and includes the Brendon Hills and Watchet. Other maps are also available from most Tourist Information Centres.



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The West Somerset Mineral Railway at Watchet



A hidden heritage

A hidden heritage

West Somerset Mineral Railway

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Watchet before the Mineral Railway

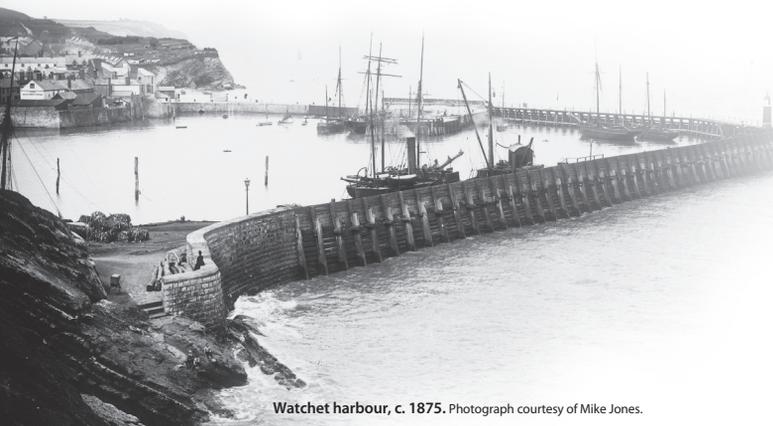
There is evidence of an urban settlement at Watchet in Saxon times. Watchet was one of King Alfred's thirty-one burghs; it had a mint from c.980 until c.1154. Watchet suffered two Viking raids in the tenth century.

At Domesday, a mill and an agricultural estate are recorded. The area was part of the estates of William de Mohun who built Dunster castle.

Watchet's cloth industry grew in the medieval period. It also traded in limestone, seaweed and had fisheries.

Catastrophic storms in the 1450s virtually destroyed Watchet's harbour and swept part of the town away. The harbour was cleaned out and a new pier built in Queen Elizabeth I's time at the expense of the lords of the manor, the Luttrells and Wyndhams. Trade, mainly with Bristol and Wales, grew in salt, coal, wine and livestock; smuggling was also important in the seventeenth century.

However, despite further repairs to the harbour in the early eighteenth century, silting became a problem and Watchet declined as Minehead grew.



Watchet harbour, c. 1875. Photograph courtesy of Mike Jones.

Watchet and the railway

In the mid nineteenth century the two railways (West Somerset Mineral Railway, and West Somerset Railway) had an impact on the town's infrastructure and economy.

The harbour was owned by the Earls of Egremont, and in 1843 the Town Slip and the Esplanade were constructed.

The West Somerset Mineral Railway Act of 1855 authorised the rebuilding of the harbour, which began in 1860. New west and east piers were constructed by William Tredwell in accordance with drawings prepared by James Abernethy, and completed at the end of February 1862.

Iron ore was loaded by hand into 40 ton vessels for conveyance to Newport, and return cargoes of coal and mine timbers gave the shipowners constant employment. From 1859 to 1883, 25 Watchet vessels and 26 crew members were lost at sea.

On 29 December 1900 a severe storm destroyed most of the west pier and about half of the eastern pier, and wrecked several vessels in the harbour. In 1902 Watchet Urban District Council was formed to enable its rebuilding.

The new work was constructed of precast mass concrete blocks; the former lighthouse was re-erected at the end of the west pier. The arm of the west pier from which ore had been loaded into ships was not reinstated. Work was completed in January 1905, but because of storm damage during the reconstruction, the cost had increased from £18,000 to nearly £24,000.



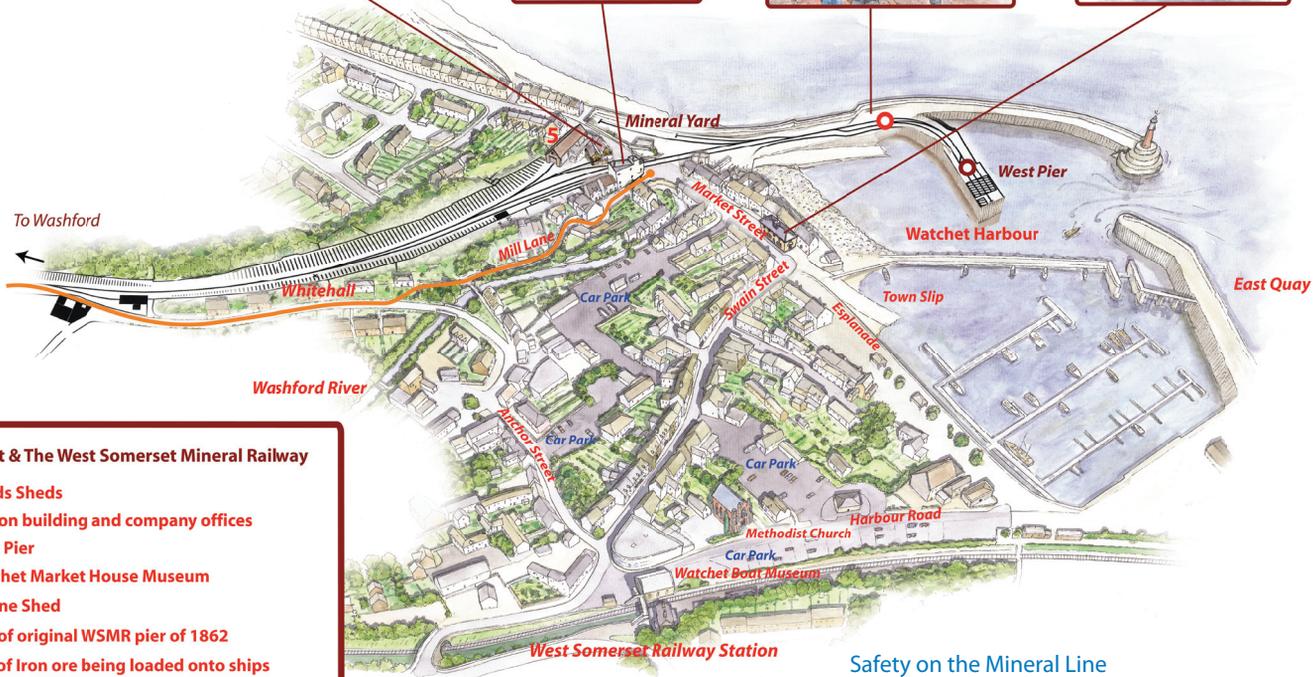
Damaged boats in Watchet harbour following the great storm of 1900. Photograph courtesy of Chris Tilley.

Cover images: The Old Station House (privately owned, left), Watchet Market House Museum (right). Photographs courtesy of EPNA. Watchet Harbour (below). Photograph courtesy of Mike Jones.

West Somerset Mineral Railway

At Watchet

THE
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Watchet & The West Somerset Mineral Railway

1. Goods Sheds
 2. Station building and company offices
 3. West Pier
 4. Watchet Market House Museum
 5. Engine Shed
- Site of original WSMR pier of 1862
 - Site of Iron ore being loaded onto ships between 1904-7
- Watchet to Washford Trail
- Former route of WSMR and its sidings (no longer visible)

Safety on the Mineral Line

- Visitors are requested to use caution when exploring West Somerset Mineral Railway sites.
- Children should be kept under close supervision and should not be allowed to climb on walls or banks.
- Take care on uneven ground and on the West Pier.
- Stout footwear is strongly advised.



West Somerset Mineral Railway

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The Mineral Railway at Watchet

Watchet station yard looking from the south, c. 1904. Photograph courtesy of Mike Jones.



The West Somerset Mineral Railway was an 11 mile (18 km) long railway constructed from 1857 to 1864 to transport iron ore from the Brendon Hills to the harbour at Watchet.

From Watchet the ore was then shipped to south Wales for smelting. From Newport it was taken to Ebbw Vale, or one of the other ironworks owned by the company, to be smelted.

Mineral Railway trains carried iron ore mined in the Brendon Hills to Watchet station. From there a horse pulled the wagon over Market Street and onto the quay, to be loaded into the 40 ton vessels that carried the ore to Newport in south Wales. From Newport it was taken to Ebbw Vale, or one of the other ironworks owned by the company, to be smelted. The cast iron produced in the furnaces at Ebbw Vale was converted into wrought iron and rolled into rails. After 1865, steel rails were also made at Ebbw Vale.

The West Pier during the peak of production

Until 1875 the iron ore was shovelled by hand into waiting boats. This was made easier by the installation of hydraulic tippers in the 1870s

which dispatched the minerals into the boats. In 1883 the Brendon Hill iron mines were closed due to the availability of cheap iron ore from Spain.

The West Pier after 1900

In 1900 a tremendous storm swept across the south west, and had a devastating impact on Watchet harbour, destroying the Mineral Pier. As a result the town of Watchet formed itself into an urban district council to pay for repairs. The new harbour was finished in 1907. In 1908 the Somerset Mineral Syndicate built a timber jetty at the site of the former Mineral Pier.

From 1907 to 1914 the line from Watchet to Brendon Hill was re-opened by the Somerset Mineral Syndicate, and the Watchet Briquetting Syndicate, to produce iron ore briquettes from the crumbly ore stockpiled at Colton Pits mine. The briquetting plant was sited in a small field at Washford, and they were then taken to Watchet for shipment. In March 1910 the directors of the Somerset Mineral Syndicate and the Watchet Briquetting Syndicate wound up both companies, and in July the effects of the Watchet Briquetting Syndicate were sold. In 1918 the west quay was leased to a Cardiff ship breaking firm.



Bert Hole captures the Mayor and Town Band turned out to mark the departure from Watchet on 4th July 1907 on the occasion of the re-opening of the railway by the Syndicate. The 'new' locomotive is still fitted with the condensers which it needed to work London's Metropolitan Line. Photograph courtesy of Mike Jones.



Watchet Market House Museum

As a result of Heritage Lottery funding for the West Somerset Mineral Railway project a refurbished exhibition of Mineral Line artefacts was created in 2009, including a model of the *Lizzie*, which took the iron ore over to Wales, and a working model of the Incline.

In addition to Mineral Line artefacts and photographs the Museum houses many documents and artefacts charting Watchet's history through the ages. There is also a winter lecture programme on specialist subjects.

Mineral Line checklist in Watchet



- ① Retrace the steps of the horses who pulled wagons of iron ore over Market Street and onto the quay
- ② See where iron ore used to be unloaded into 40 ton vessels which carried it to Newport in south Wales
- ③ Visit the Market House Museum, which has an exhibition on the Mineral Railway
- ④ Walk the trail to Washford, which follows the old Mineral Line track bed
- ⑤ Look out for the old Station House, the goods and engine sheds on Market Street (now private property)



The WSMR seal c.1855, redrawn by Mike Jones.



Further information

Contacts

West Somerset Mineral Railway - visit www.westsomersetmineralrailway.org.uk for further information about the Mineral Line, the Heritage Lottery funded project, a selection of images and educational material.

Watchet Market House Museum - is the ideal starting point for exploring the Mineral Line. For opening hours please visit www.watchetmuseum.co.uk.

Exmoor National Park Centres - provide informative displays, maps, publications and specialist knowledge to enhance your visit to Exmoor.

- Dunster 01643 821835
- Dulverton 01398 323841
- Lynmouth 01598 752509

Please check www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk for more information about the Exmoor National Park Authority, and for opening hours of the National Park Centres.

West Somerset Railway - this railway connects several Mineral Line locations. Occasional tours run from Minehead. Visit www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk or call 01643 704996 for more information.

Raleigh's Cross Inn - is a sixteenth-century coaching inn situated a few miles from the remains of the West Somerset Mineral Railway on the Brendon Hills. To find out more please visit www.raleighscross.co.uk or call 01984 640 343.

Forestry Commission - is owner of two key Mineral Line sites. For more information visit www.forestry.gov.uk.



Watchet Market House Museum. Photograph courtesy of ENPA.



Large font versions of these leaflets are available to download from www.westsomersetmineralrailway.org.uk.