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Date: 28th February 2011

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History and wildlife in the Forest of Dean

Posted by [Jess Spate](#) on February 28, 2011 – 1:09 pm
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The Wye Valley and Forest of Dean are not the best known of British tourist destinations but this small area is rich in natural treasures and little pieces of fascinating history.



The Forest of Dean boasts more than 100 square kilometres of forest, mostly oak and beech. What's more, huge swathes of this broadleaved woodland is ancient. It's not the result of a single planting for any one purpose – the stories about a whole forest being created by the Tudors to provide wood for England's navy are untrue – and forestry in this area goes back as far as records do. The forest was certainly well used during the Roman occupation of Britain and before.

The remains of prehistoric occupations aren't obvious to the casual visitor but evidence is there if you keep your eyes open. The Wye Valley village of Trellech (or Trelleck) is one of the best places to look. It's home to two significant monuments. Harold's Stones are a group of three impressive Bronze Age standing stones. The name of St Anne's Well suggests a modern origin but it's thought that in this case Anne is a modification of Annis, Celtic goddess of wells and springs. To this day some people believe the waters to have healing properties. The nearby Tump Turret is all that remains of an 11th Century castle.

There are better preserved castles in the Valley but the most spectacular historical remnant is without doubt [Tintern Abbey](#). This early 12th Century Cistercian abbey is now mostly roofless but the massive Gothic arches remain intact. Outlined against the sky they're one of the great sights of British history. Much of the beautiful sandstone detailing is still visible too.

Not all the attractions are man-made. The Wye has carved out stunning limestone cliffs over the millennia. Some of these rise 200ft or more, but the most picturesque are around the village of Symonds Yat. This is a popular destination for rock climbers and walkers who come to see the local peregrine falcons or the magnificent pinnacle of the Long Stone, or simply walk in the forest and enjoy the beech trees. You can also take a ferry across the river at this point or hire a canoe or kayak to enjoy the views from the water.

Fallow deer are a fairly common sight in the forest. It was a Royal hunting ground in Norman and medieval times and the deer are still there. More recently wild boar have reappeared. While these are a rare treat for wildlife lovers, they shouldn't be approached. Be particularly wary of mothers with piglets. They are very protective of their young and can be quite dangerous, but both deer and wild boar wildlife tours are available.

There are many reasons to visit the Forest of Dean and the Wye Valley. The history and wildlife are two of the biggest drawcards, but it's worth taking time just to enjoy the ancient forest and magnificent trees. Make sure you try a pint of local ale too!

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