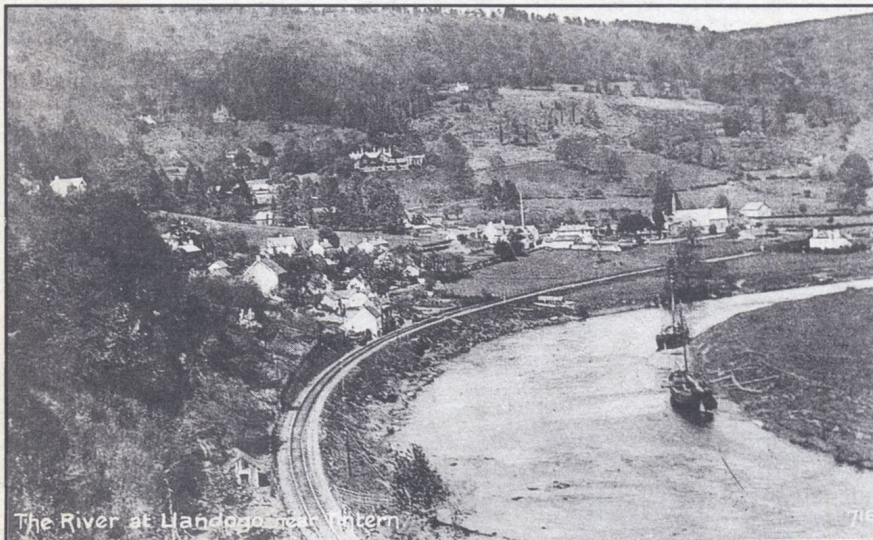


Barging Up The Wye



Ian L. Wright Collection

The River at Llandogo near Tintern

Ian Wright follows Frank Barton and Pat Hucket as they reach Monmouth on the first leg of a barge voyage they hope will take them to Hereford

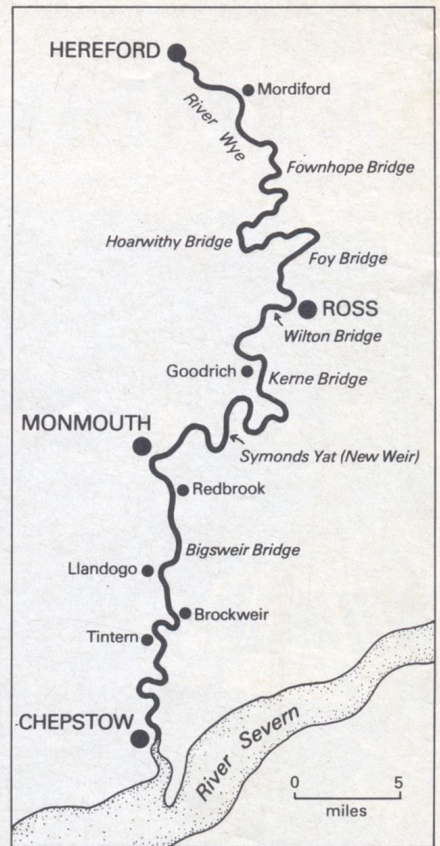
Is it possible to take a 230 ton steel motor barge up the river Wye to Hereford? Frank Barton, a Hereford garage owner with a rare sense of adventure, thinks it is, and on 9th April he successfully brought the 124ft barge *Silver Cloud* through the Wye Bridge at Monmouth with the help of a lorry, a winch, a strong fresh on the river, and the encouragement of several hundred Monmouth citizens watching the amazing spectacle.

This is an unprecedented event because the last traders on the Wye above the tideway at Bigsweir were small Wye barges of between 18 and 40 tons. They moved only when there was enough water in the river and sometimes twenty bow hauliers

Trows on the river Wye at Llandogo. These were probably some of the last boats to navigate up from Monmouth – until recently.

laboured to bring them through the shallows. The river trade above Llandogo ended in 1876 with the opening of the Wye Valley Railway but what must have been the last Wye barge was still afloat at Symonds Yat in 1897.

The epic voyage of the barge *Silver Cloud* and her attempt to reach Hereford began earlier this year in Rotterdam where ex SAS man Frank Barton and REME Staff Sergeant Pat Hucket bought the 120hp barge and brought her under her own power to Penzance. The intention of the two navigators is to work the 20ft beam vessel up the Wye to Hereford where they hope to moor at Greyfriars Bridge and establish her as a floating restaurant. After calls at Padstow and Ilfracombe, Pat and Frank headed the barge up the Bristol Channel to Chepstow. On 28th March a correspondent who lives in Monmouth saw *Silver Cloud* on the Wye at Tintern. "I thought I was hallucinating", he told me, but later the truth of what he had witnessed was confirmed in the *Western Daily Press*. At Tintern *Silver Cloud* was boarded by Customs officers who



gave the 230 ton vessel a two-hour search. It must be many decades since a Customs examination was carried out this far up the Wye. As a result of the delay the navigators missed the tide.

It was at Tintern that Pat and Frank hit trouble. Just close to the Tramway Bridge the barge struck an obstruction in the river bed and lost a blade of her propeller. A replacement of too fine a pitch – the only one available at the time – was obtained and fitted at low tide and after several days' delay *Silver Cloud* was able to force her way on half power up through Redbrook on non tidal water that was running fast. She reached Monmouth against heavy currents on the weekend of 8th April.

When it was realised at Gwent County Council HQ that Frank Barton really did intend to pass under Wye Bridge in Monmouth, worried Gwent Chief Executive Officer Michael Perry sent a signal to Frank advising him to increase the £500,000 insurance he has on *Silver Cloud* because as owners of the bridge, the Council were concerned at the vessel's clearance through the arch and would hold him responsible for any damage to the structure. On the Saturday, having placed *Silver Cloud's* huge bulk partly through the third arch from the town side, Frank be-