

The Lickey Incline

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Just north of Stoke Prior lies the steepest sustained mainline incline in the railway system of Great Britain with a gradient of 1 in 37 for a continuous distance of 2 miles. The incline starts just north of Bromsgrove station and rises to its peak at Blackwell. The line was part of the Birmingham and Gloucester railway and was opened in 1840.

The gradient was too steep for early steam engines and trains required 'bankers' (additional locomotives) to climb the incline. The bankers waited outside Bromsgrove station and when a train required their assistance came in behind the train to push it up the incline. Sometimes for very heavy trains two bankers working together were required. Bankers were also sometimes required to provide additional braking for freight trains descending the incline. Bankers were not coupled to the trains they were assisting. A number of locomotives were used as bankers the most impressive of which was 'Big Bertha' a ten wheel (0-10-0) monster which worked as a banker for the Midland railway from 1920 to 1956. Each ascent of the incline used about 7cwt of coal.



Big Bertha

Modern steam engines were sufficiently powerful to haul trains up the incline without help from bankers. Early diesels sometimes required to be 'double headed' (hauled by two engines) to climb the incline but present day diesels do not require double heading or bankers.

The line up the Lickey bank has now been electrified and the electric trains which were introduced last year have no problems in climbing the incline. Further they are able to save energy by generating electricity when descending the bank.