

## **Bringing water to the city**

A self guided walk around the Elan Valley in mid Wales



Explore the 'Welsh Lake District'

Find out why this area was chosen for a series of dams and reservoirs

Visit an unusual village built to house construction workers

Discover how land management practices affect water quality

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**the stories of our landscapes  
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This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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Cover image: Pen y Garreg dam © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

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# Bringing water to the city

## Discover the spectacular dams and reservoirs of the Elan Valley in mid Wales

A glass of water. A flushing toilet. A hot shower. It's easy to take these things for granted.

In Birmingham during the Victorian era there was a shortage of clean water. People were dying from waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid.

The city authorities embarked on an enormous engineering project to supply clean water to the ever-growing population: a series of dams and reservoirs in a remote Welsh valley.



Pen y Garreg reservoir  
© Martin Haslett

This walk explores the Elan Valley, nicknamed the 'Welsh Lake District'. Find out why this site was chosen and what challenges faced the engineers in construction.



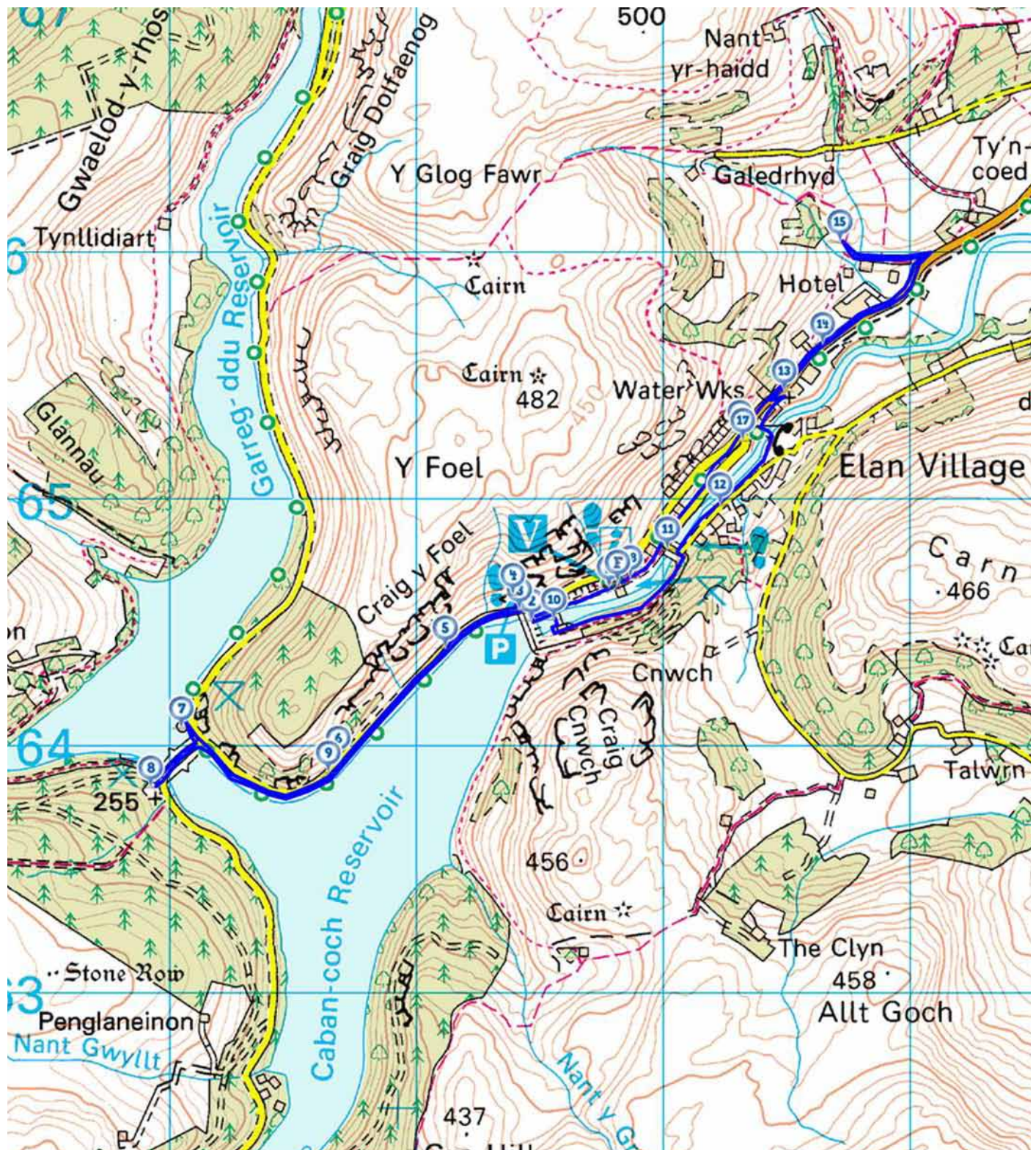
Caban Coch dam face  
© Martin Haslett

Marvel at the precision engineering that allowed water to flow under gravity to Birmingham over 70 miles away and visit the unusual village built to house the workers. Discover how good land management practices protect the quality of the water which still supplies the West Midlands with drinking water.

This dramatic natural landscape of hills and valleys is made all the more spectacular by the series of ornate dams and large reservoirs.



## Route overview



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## Practical information

<b>Location</b>	Elan Valley, near Rhayader, Powys, Wales
<b>Start &amp; finish</b>	Elan Valley Visitor Centre, LD6 5HP
<b>Getting there</b>	<p><b>Car</b> - Rhayader is on the A44 which runs across mid Wales from the West Midlands to Aberystwyth; car parking is available at the Visitor Centre (small charge)</p> <p><b>Train</b> - The nearest station is Llandrindod Wells (15 miles) which is served several times a day by trains from Birmingham and South Wales</p> <p><b>Bus</b> - There are 3 buses a day from Rhayader to Elan Valley Visitor Centre (Mondays to Fridays only)</p>
<b>Walk distance</b>	6 miles (optional extension of 2 or 3 ½ miles)
<b>Level</b>	Moderate – A relatively easy walk with some short steep sections
<b>Terrain</b>	Most of the route is on level tarmac paths but there are some narrow, rocky paths in places
<b>Conditions</b>	Steep rocky sections can be slippery in wet weather
<b>Suitable for</b>	<p><b>Families</b> - There are some steep drops in places so take care of children</p> <p><b>Dogs</b> - Sheep graze freely in many parts of the valley so keep dogs under control</p>



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**Refreshments** Light refreshments and full meals are available at the cafe in the Visitor Centre

There are several benches and tables along the walk route suitable for picnics

There are several cafes, tea shops and pubs in Rhayader

**Toilets** There are public toilets (including baby changing facilities) in the Visitor Centre at the start and end of the walk and in Elan Village (between Stops 11 and 12)

**Other info** Visits to the Elan Valley are best made when visibility is reasonable; in poor weather the area can be shrouded in mist

It is possible to visit all the reservoirs in the Elan Valley by car. There are car parks and viewing points at each one

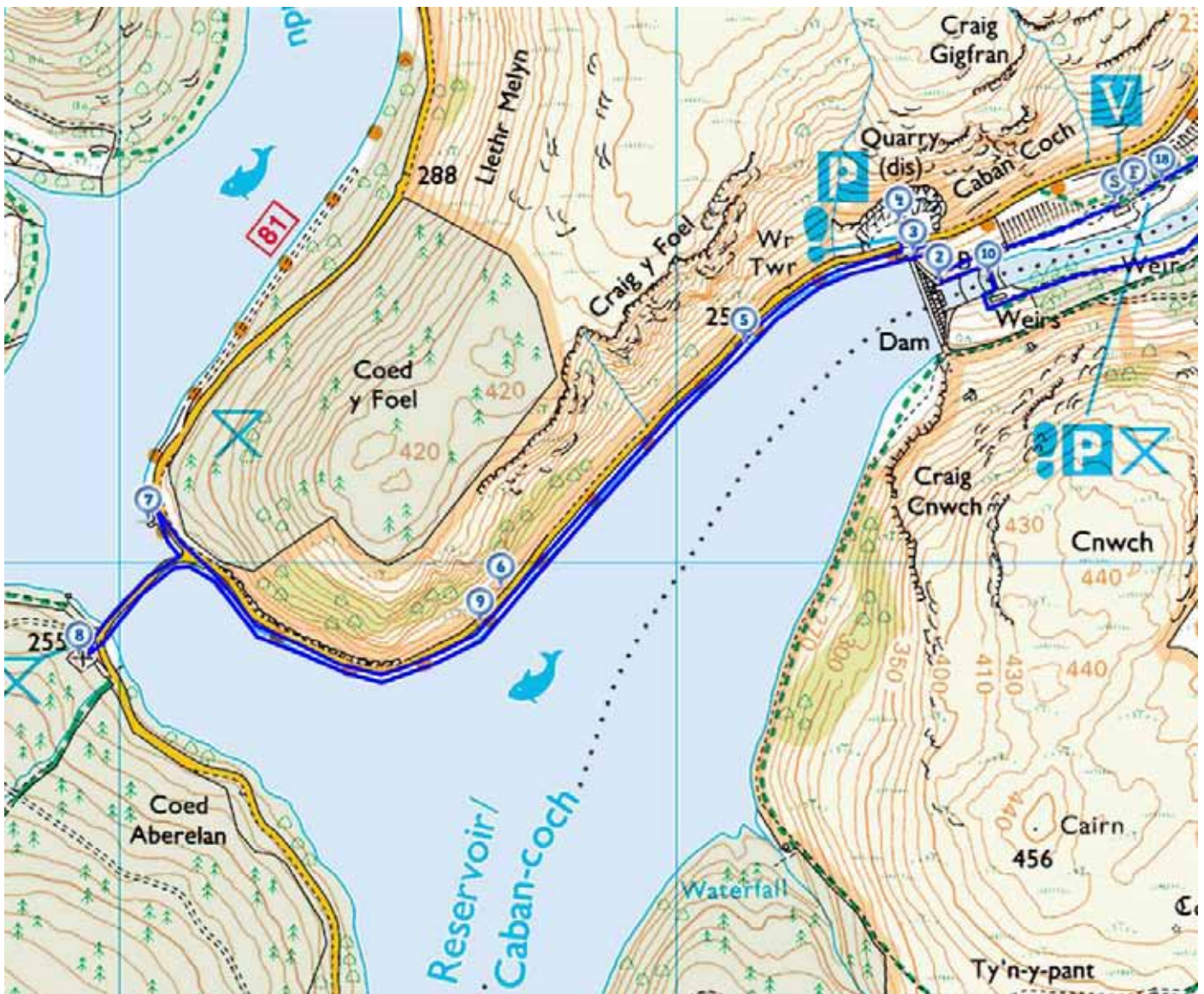
**Places to visit** **Elan Valley Visitor Centre** is open every day except Christmas Day from 10am to 5pm (4pm in winter)

**Rhayader Museum and Gallery** (East Street, Rhayader) is open all year (Summer: closed Mondays; Winter: closed Mon to Weds)

There is a scale model of the Elan Valley dams and reservoirs in **Cannon Hill Park** in Edgbaston, Birmingham

**Tourist information** Rhayader Tourist Information Centre, Rhayader Leisure Centre, North Street, Rhayader (01597 810 591)

## Detail of first half of route

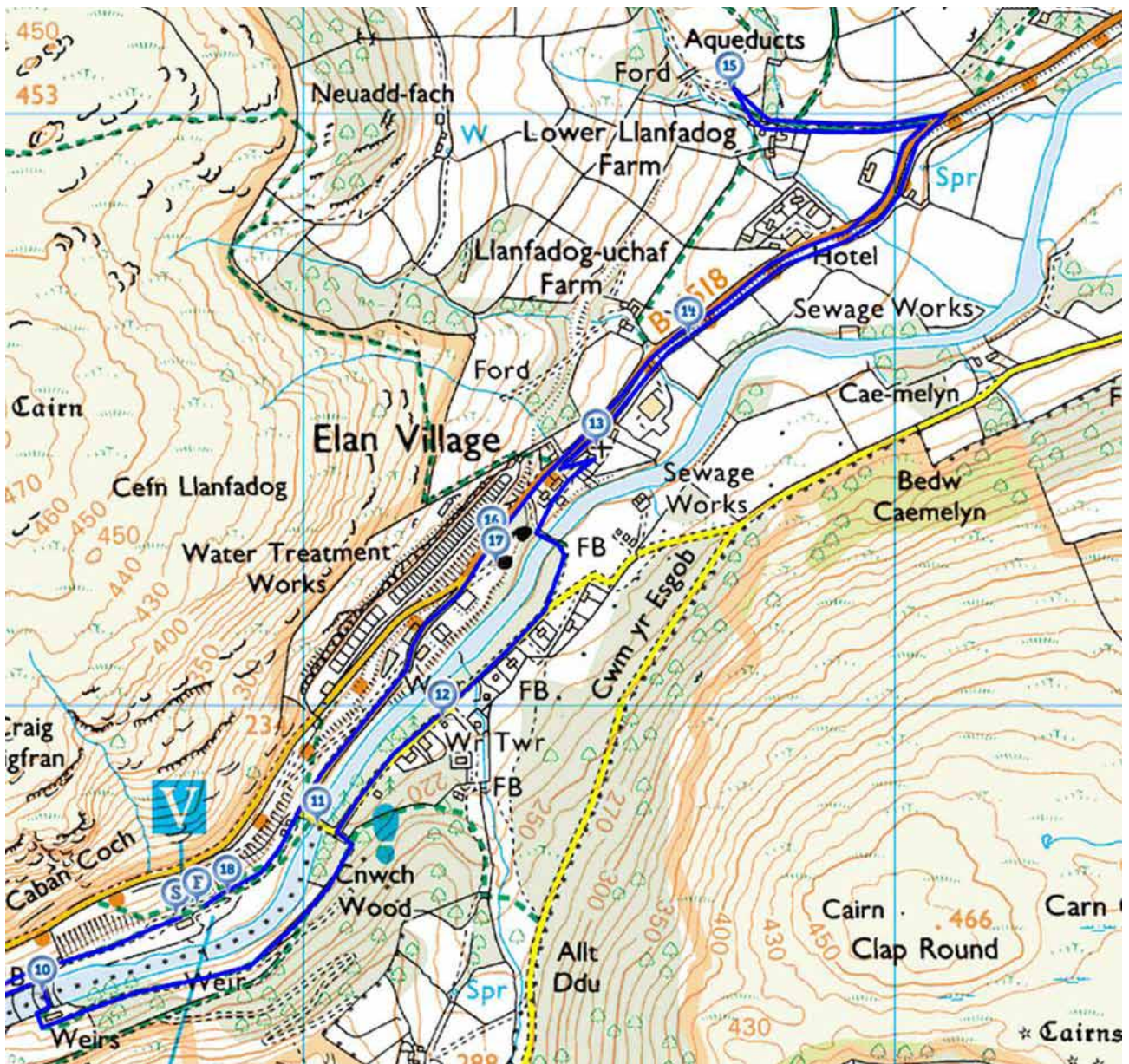


### Stopping points

- S** Elan Valley Visitor Centre
- 2.** Bottom of Caban Coch dam
- 3.** Top of Caban Coch dam
- 4.** Caban Coch quarry car park
- 5.** Footpath beside Caban Coch reservoir
- 6.** Bench beside Caban Coch reservoir
- 7.** Foel Extraction Tower, Garreg Ddu reservoir
- 8.** Nantgwyllt Church
- 9.** Bench beside Caban Coch reservoir
- 10.** Bridge over River Elan at the base of Caban Coch dam



## Detail of second half of route



### Stopping points

- 11.** Suspension bridge
- 12.** Shelter, Elan Village
- 13.** Bethania Chapel
- 14.** Footpath beside campsite on former railway line
- 15.** Above Lower Llanfadog Farm
- 16.** Road junction leading to Visitor Centre
- 17.** Road junction leading to Visitor Centre
- 18.** Elan Valley Visitor Centre
- F** Elan Valley Visitor Centre

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## Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions in the boxes below to get to the next stop.

### 1. Welcome to the Elan Valley

#### Elan Valley Visitor Centre

##### Directions 1

From the Visitor Centre entrance turn left and left again to walk down the full length of the car park with the embankment on your right. At the end of the car park continue on the paved footpath. Go through the gate and past the stone building. Stop at the base of the dam face and listen to Track 2.

### 2. An expanding city

#### Bottom of Caban Coch dam

##### Directions 2

From the base of the dam face take the steps up the embankment. Follow the footpath as it zig-zags upwards. Take care as this path can be slippery in wet weather. At the top turn left and go through the gate. Go over to the left to the viewpoint looking over the top of the dam and listen to Track 3.

### 3. A magnificent dam

#### Top of Caban Coch dam

##### Directions 3

From the top of the dam go through the gate onto the road. Cross the road into the quarry and listen to Track 4.

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## **4. Ancient rocks**

### **Caban Coch quarry car park**

#### **Directions 4**

From the quarry car park go back across the road and turn right. Go through the gate and follow the footpath. Stop after about 200 metres and listen to Track 5.

## **5. A special railway**

### **Footpath beside Caban Coch reservoir**

#### **Directions 5**

Continue along the path for about 800 metres. Stop at the first bench you reach and listen to Track 6.

## **6. Protecting the water**

### **Bench beside Caban Coch reservoir**

#### **Directions 6**

Continue along the footpath beside the reservoir as it gradually bends round to the right. At the end of the path go through the gate to the road junction. Go straight across through the gate onto the path beside the road. Go past the tower with the green dome. Stop just before the next gate and listen to Track 7.

## **7. Careful measurement**

### **Foel Extraction Tower, Garreg Ddu reservoir**

#### **Directions 7**

Retrace your steps back along the path to the road junction. Turn right onto the bridge across the reservoir. At the far side take the road on the left and then turn right up the path to the church. Go through the gate into the church grounds and listen to Track 8.



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## 8. The lost valleys

### Nantgwyllt Church

#### Directions 8

The church is usually open so do go in. Inside are various archive photographs of the old church and dam construction. When you are ready retrace your steps across the bridge over the reservoir and turn right onto the path beside the road. Follow the path as it gradually bends round to the left. Stop at the first bench you reach (the bench you stopped at before) and listen to Track 9.

## 9. A wonderful natural view?

### Bench beside Caban Coch reservoir

#### Directions 9

Continue along the path back alongside Caban Coch reservoir. Go past the top of the dam and retrace your steps down the zig-zag path to the base of the dam. Go round the right side of the stone building. Stop on the bridge over the River Elan and listen to Track 10.

## 10. The river still flows

### Bridge over River Elan at base of Caban Coch dam

#### Directions 10

Continue across the bridge and around the other stone building. Turn left past the building and go through the gate. Follow the track as it climbs gradually upwards through Upland Oakwood vegetation (see Stop 9). Where the track forks bear left and follow it downhill. At the bottom turn left through the gate. Stop by the two bridges and listen to Track 11.

## 11. Keeping out the scruffs

### Suspension bridge

#### Directions 11

Do not cross the bridge but follow the road with the river on your left. There are toilets on the right. Pass two stone houses on the right then stop at the roofed shelter with benches. and listen to Track 12.

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## **12. A Birmingham village**

### **Shelter, Elan Village**

#### **Directions 12**

Continue along the road through the village. Where the road bears to the right take the footpath on the left and cross the river by the wooden footbridge. At the end of the bridge turn right and follow the path past four houses. Where the lane bends up to the left go straight on towards a grey and red church. Go through the gate into the church grounds and listen to Track 13.

## **13. A very Welsh chapel**

### **Bethania Chapel**

#### **Directions 13**

The chapel is usually open so do have a look inside. When you are ready go back through the gate towards the row of houses. At the lane turn right and then right again onto a footpath with the road on the left. After a short distance the path crosses an entranceway to a sewage works and campsite. Stop on the next straight section of path with the campsite on the right and listen to Track 14.

Note: If you wish to omit Stop 15 leave the church and turn right to the road. Turn left along the path alongside the road. Follow the path and then go through the gate to the road junction where the left turn leads to the Visitor Centre. Here you can look at Stops 14 and 15 and resume the route at Stop 16.

## **14. From industry to leisure**

### **Footpath beside campsite on former railway line**

#### **Directions 14**

Continue along the path passing the Elan Valley Hotel. When you reach the entrance to a cottage on the right side leave the path and turn right along the road. There is no pavement so take great care. After about 150 metres take a left back fork through a gate and onto a farm track. At the farm buildings go straight on. Immediately after going through the gate take the path which goes diagonally right up the hillside (do not continue on the track). Stop at the gate at the top and listen to Track 15.

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## 15. Channels, tunnels and siphons

### Above Lower Llanfadog Farm

#### Directions 15

Retrace your steps back down the path, through the gate, past the farm and along the track back to the road. Turn right onto the road then rejoin the footpath on the left where you left it. Follow the path back past the hotel. After passing the chapel continue straight on the path alongside the road. Go through the gate to the road junction where the left turn leads to the Visitor Centre. Stop here and listen to Track 16.

## 16. Rejoicing and resentment

### Road junction leading to Visitor Centre

#### Directions 16

Remain at the junction and listen to Track 17.

## 17. Hardening and filtering

### Road junction leading to Visitor Centre

#### Directions 17

Take the road on the left signposted for the Visitor Centre. Take care as there is no pavement in places. At the suspension bridge go straight on. Stop outside the Visitor Centre and listen to Track 18.

## 18. Giving back

### Elan Valley Visitor Centre

#### Directions 18

Remain outside the Visitor Centre and listen to Track 19.

## 19. A remarkable story

### Elan Valley Visitor Centre

This is the end of the walk.



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## Recommended excursion by car

This walk took in just two of the four reservoirs and dams that were built as part of the original Elan Valley project. If you have a car do drive up to see the third and fourth in the series (Pen y Garreg and Craig Goch) as well as a fifth dam (Claewen) which was built later.

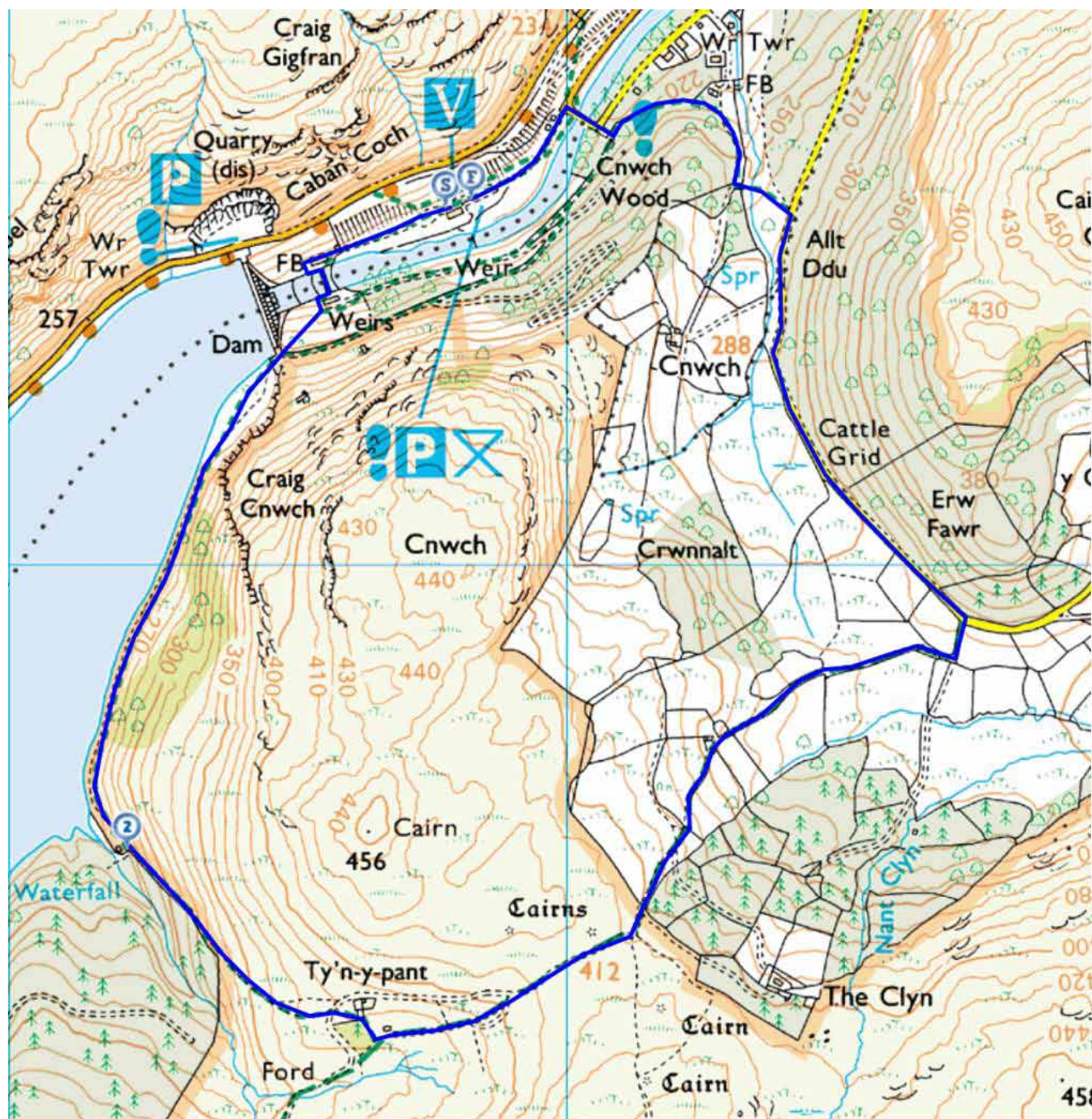


Pen y Garreg (top), Craig Goch (centre) and Claerwen (bottom)  
Jenny Lunn © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



## Optional walk extension

**2 miles (short route) or 3 ½ miles (longer route)**



- Start** Elan Valley Visitor Centre  
**2.** Remains of Nant y Gro dam  
**Finish** Elan Valley Visitor Centre

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### **Directions**

From the Visitor Centre go through the car park towards the face of Caban Coch dam. At the stone building turn left and cross the bridge over the river. Go round the other stone building and then take the path up to the right. From the top of the dam follow the (sometimes steep) path beside the reservoir for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile until it turns left into a small valley. Stop by the interpretation board.

### **Directions for return**

You can return to the Visitor Centre by the same route (1 mile).

Alternatively you can continue to enjoy a longer circuit (2  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles). Follow the footpath up the hill and across open land. This is Abergwesyn Common, National Trust land where a different approach is being taken here to habitat restoration. The grazing of cattle and sheep is being used to restore the blanket bog, which will help to prevent the release of large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.

Beside a plantation the path becomes a lane. Follow the lane until you meet a road and turn left. About 100 metres after passing the driveway to Cnwch take the footpath on the left which leads down through the wood and back to the Visitor Centre.



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## Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **Martin Haslett** for creating the walk, taking photographs and providing the audio commentary
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