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Between the Valleys

A self guided walk from the Rhondda Fach to the Cynon Valley



Follow in the footsteps of Emily Roberts on a walk she did in the early 1910s
Find out how coal transformed rural valleys into industrial landscapes
Explore the moorland, mountains, woods and glades above the valleys
Discover a spectacular natural landscape and enjoy stunning views

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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Cover image: The terraces of Tylorstown from Old Smokey © Jenny Lunn

Between the Valleys

Discover changing landscapes in South Wales

What comes to mind when you think of the Valleys of South Wales? Probably coal mining.

It transformed rural valleys into an industrial landscape of collieries and waste tips, while houses were built up the valley sides in long terraces.

Miners and their families loved to escape from the noise and pollution of the valley bottoms to the countryside above and between the Valleys.



This walk recreates a journey done by Emily Roberts, who walked from Ferndale in the Rhondda Fach valley over to Penrhiwceiber in the Cynon valley in the years 1910 to 1914.

Along the route you will appreciate a sense of open space, fresh air and natural scenery of moorland and mountains, forests and glades, streams and a waterfall.

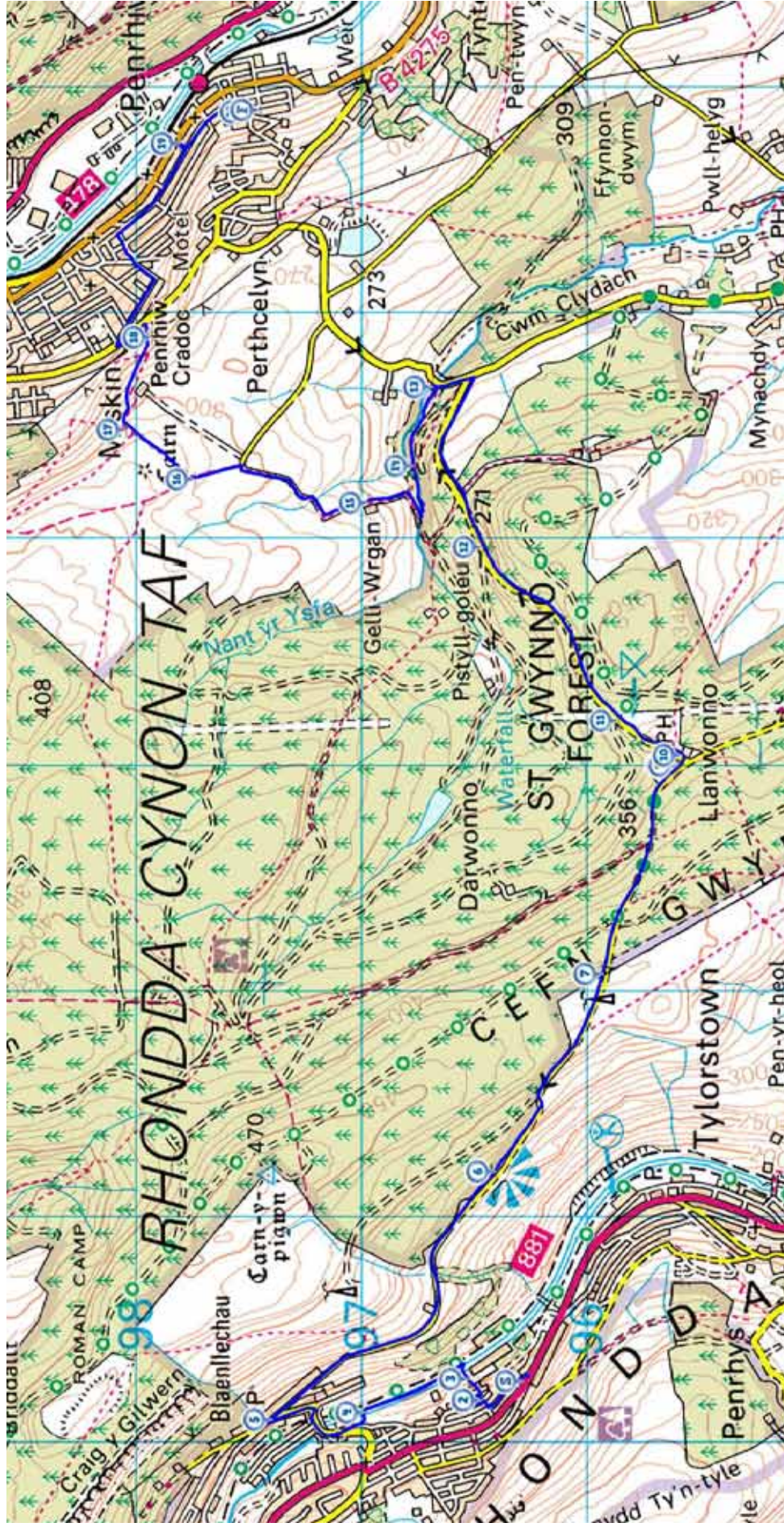


You will also see how the physical landscape and the valley towns have changed since the decline of the coal industry.

This is a land of contrasts and surprises. And on this walk you will enjoy wonderful views, diverse scenery and the fascinating stories that this landscape has to tell.

Picture credits Blaenllechau Road towards Old Smokey / Road through St Gwynno's Forest
© Jenny Lunn

Route overview



Practical information

Location	South Wales Valleys
Start point	Oakland Terrace, Ferndale, Rhondda Fach Valley, CF43 4UB
Finish point	Morris Avenue, Penrhiwceiber, Cynon Valley, CF45 3TW
Distance	7 ½ miles
Level	Moderate – The walk starts in one valley and then climbs over the mountain and down into the next valley. Some of the climbs are a little steep so do take your time. Other than the gradual ascent and steep descent the route is gently undulating.
Terrain	The route is on a mixture of pavements, country roads and footpaths.
Conditions	Some of the route may be difficult in snowy or icy conditions.
Suitable for	<p>Families – A long section of the walk is along a country lane with no pavement so take care with children.</p> <p>Dogs – Dogs will enjoy the woodlands and open moorland; keep on a lead on roads and grazing land.</p>
Refreshments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- There are a few small shops and cafes in the towns of Ferndale and Penrhiwceiber at the start and end of the route.- The only place on the route to stop for refreshments is The Brynffynon Hotel (Stop 10) – closed Mondays.- There are picnic tables in St Gwynno's Forest (Stop 11).

Facilities

In Ferndale, there is a urinal at the bottom of Graig Terrace near the start point and public toilets (no disabled or baby changing facilities) on Lake Street near the town centre.

No facilities in Penrhiwceiber at the end of the walk.

Places to visit

The Cynon Valley Museum & Gallery in Aberdare is open from 9am to 4.30pm from Monday to Saturday. Free admission. There is a café and it is family friendly. (Tel: 01685 886729)

The Rhondda Heritage Park in Trehafod is open from 9am to 4.30pm from Tuesday to Sunday. Free admission. There is a restaurant. The Energy Zone is for children in the 2 to 13 age bracket. (Tel: 01443 682036)

The Welsh Pit Ponies Centre at Fforest Uchaf Farm near Pontypridd is open 01 May to 30 September from Sunday to Friday. Family friendly. (Tel: 01443 480327)

Dare Valley Country Park near Aberdare has a visitor centre with café and toilets, an adventure playground, orienteering course and many other outdoor activities for children and families. There is also a campsite. (Tel: 01685 874672)

Tourist information

Two Tourist Information Centres in Cardiff;

- The Old Library in the city centre (Tel: 029 2087 3573)
- The Millennium Centre, Cardiff Bay (Tel: 029 2087 7927)

In the Valleys, tourist information is available at The Cynon Valley Museum & Gallery, The Rhondda Heritage Park and at Pontypridd Museum in Pontypridd (Tel: 01443 490748)

Getting there

The walk is linear starting in one valley and finishing in the next. There is no direct public transport connection over the top of the mountain back to the start point so we recommend a combination of transport.

By car

From the south, we suggest parking in Pontypridd near the railway station. Catch a train (every 30 minutes) towards Treherbert and alight at Porth. From Porth catch a bus to Ferndale (5 miles). Alight at Ferndale Clinic before the town centre. The start point (the former Our Lady of Penrhys Church) is opposite the bus stop. From the finish in Penrhiwceiber, you can return to Pontypridd by train (every 30 minutes).

From the north, we suggest parking in Aberdare near the railway station. From Aberdare catch a bus towards Ferndale (7 miles). Alight at Ferndale Clinic after the town centre. The start point (the former Our Lady of Penrhys Church) is near the bus stop. From the finish in Penrhiwceiber, you can return to Aberdare by train (every 30 minutes).

By train

From the south, catch a train running between Cardiff Central and Treherbert (every 30 minutes). Alight at Porth then catch a bus towards Ferndale (5 miles). Alight at Ferndale Clinic. The start point (the former Our Lady of Penrhys Church) is opposite the bus stop. From the finish in Penrhiwceiber, you can return towards Cardiff by train (every 30 minutes).

By bus

It is possible to catch a bus from Cardiff or Pontypridd to the start point in Ferndale and back from the finish point in Penrhiwceiber.

By bicycle

Pontypridd is the hub of the National Cycle Network in South Wales. The start of the walk is on National Route 881 (Rhondda Face Railway Path), the middle part of the walk coincides with National Route 47 (The Celtic Trail) and the end of the walk is on National Route 478 (Cynon Trail).

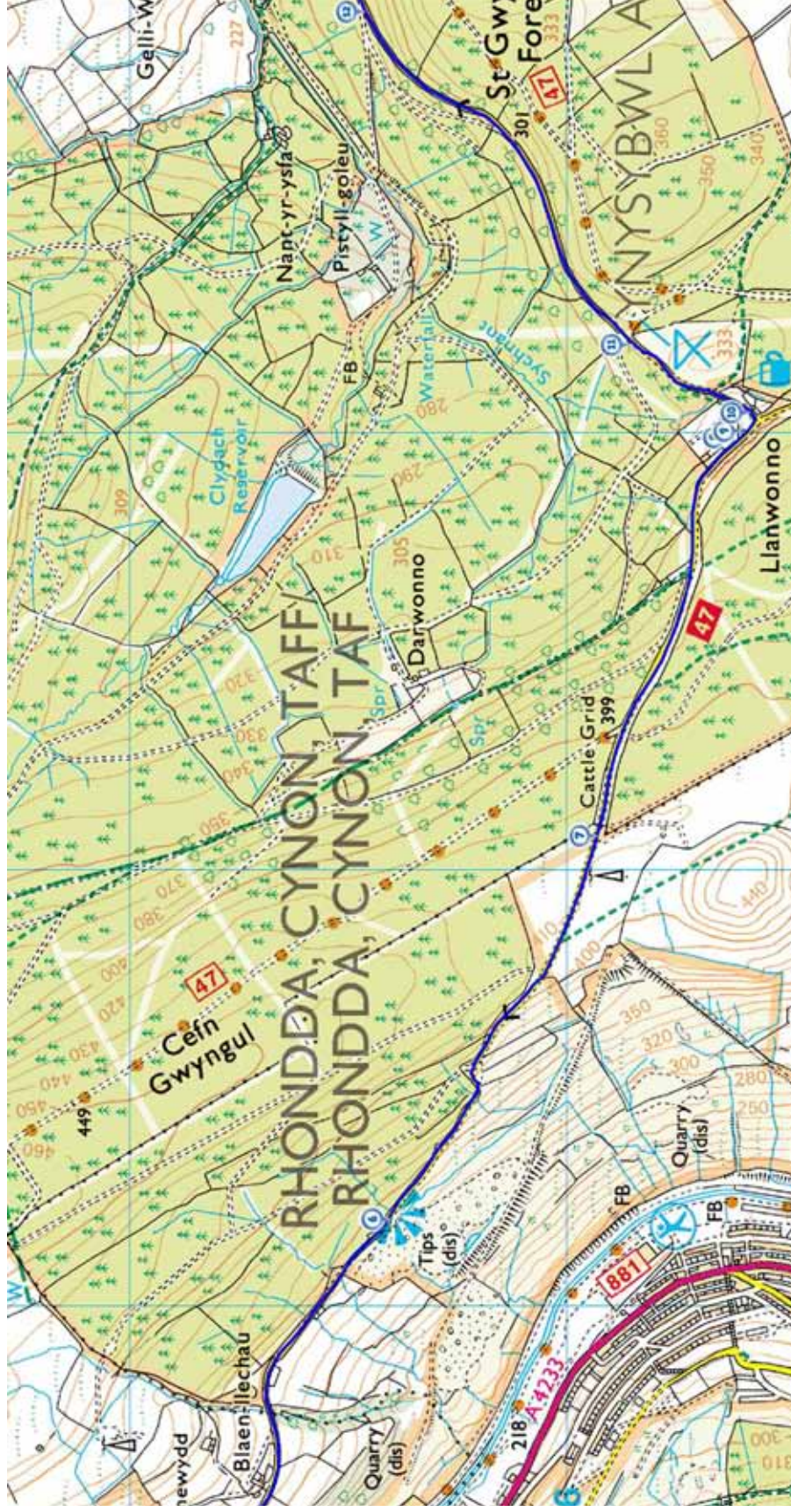
Detailed map of the start of the route



Stopping points

1. Church of Our Lady of Penrhys (disused)
2. 30 Albany Street
3. Sir Stanley Baker memorial, Greenwood Park
4. Ferndale miners' memorial, Greenwood Park
5. Blaenllechau Road, just above the junction with Commercial Street

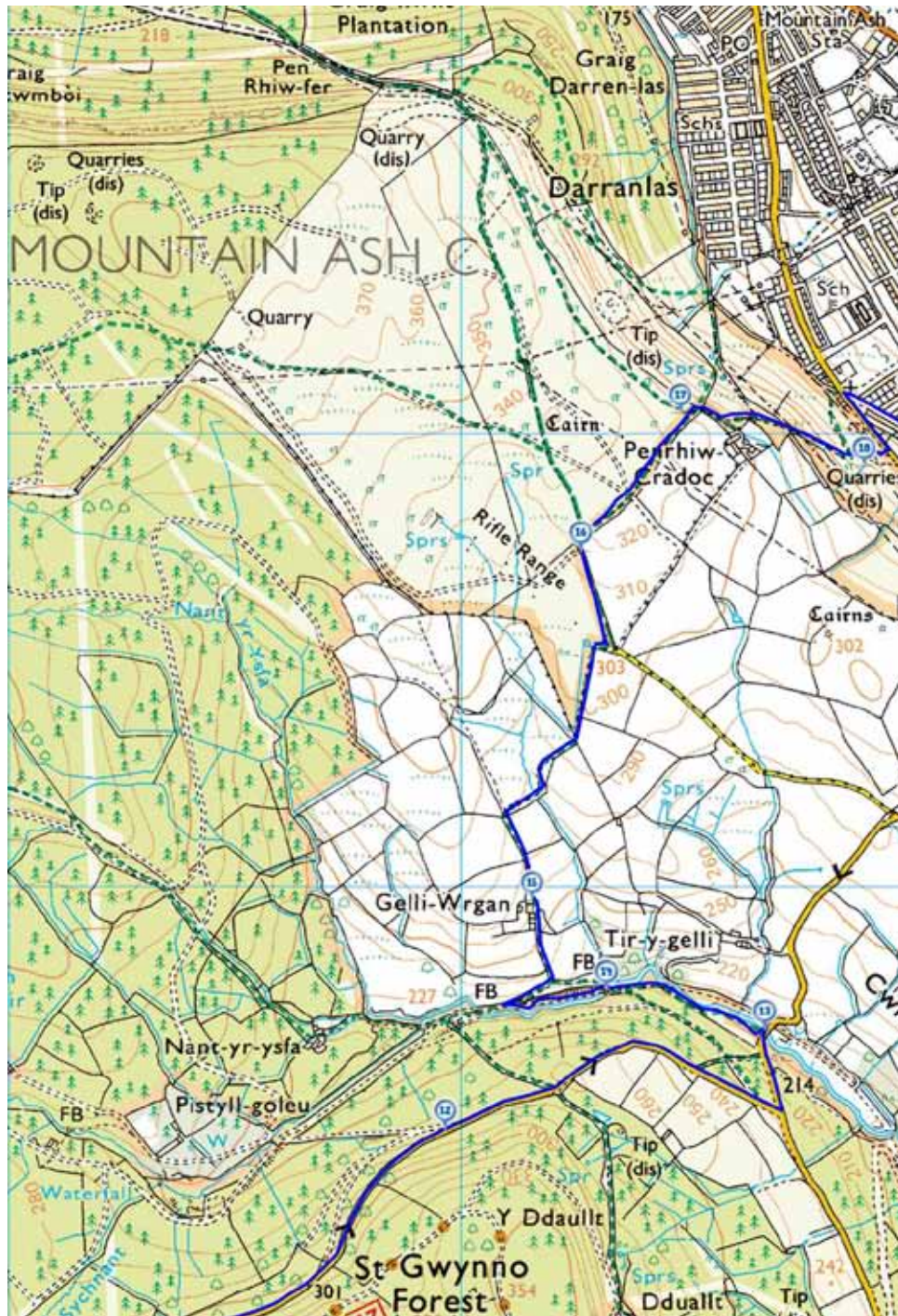
Detailed map of the second part of the route



Stopping points

6. Viewpoint part way up Blaenllechau Road
7. Blaenllechau Road, before cattle grid
8. St Gwynno's Church
9. Grave of Griffith Morgan, St Gwynno's churchyard
10. The Brynffynon
11. Llanwynno forest car park
12. Top of forest track leading down to Pistyll Goleu

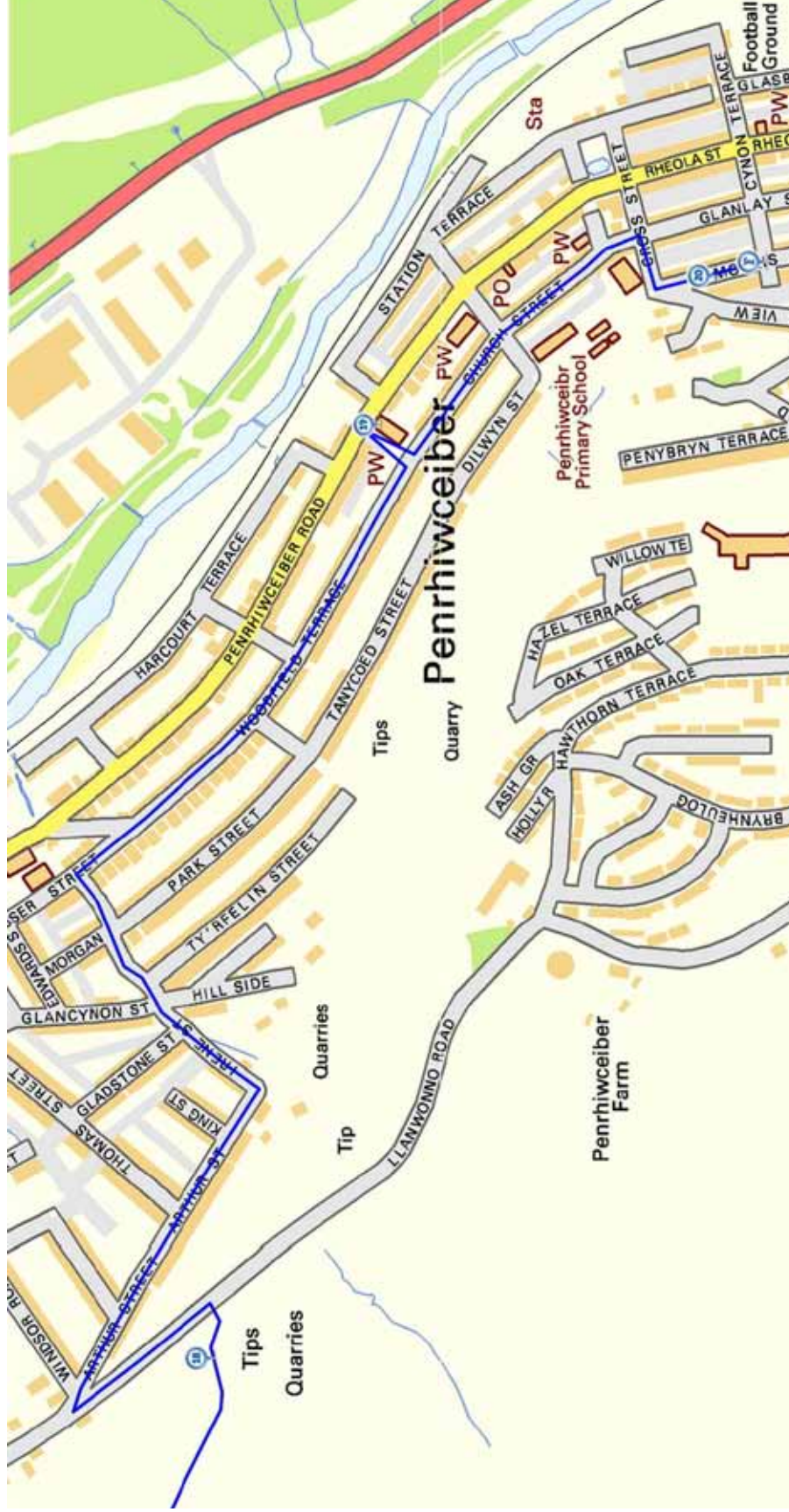
Detailed map of the third part of the route



Stopping points

- | | |
|--|--|
| 12. Top of forest track leading down to Pistyll Goleu | 15. Gelli Wrgan farmhouse |
| 13. Road bridge over Nant Clydach | 16. Gate on footpath above lane |
| 14. Footbridge over Nant Clydach | 17. Hillside overlooking Mountain Ash |
| | 18. Hillside above Llanwonno Road |

Detailed map of the fourth part of the route



Stopping points

- 18.** Hillside above Llanwonno Road
- 19.** Carmel Welsh Independent Chapel, Penrhwiwceiber Road
- 20.** 56 Morris Avenue
- 21.** 56 Morris Avenue

Directions

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

1. Welcome to the South Wales Valleys

Church of Our Lady of Penrhys (now disused), corner of Oakland Terrace and New Street, Ferndale

Directions 1

From the Church of Our Lady of Penrhys on the main road go along New Street on the lower side of the church building. Follow this road for about 200 metres until you reach a set of steps on the right. Go down the steps and turn left onto Brown Street. After about 75 metres turn right down to Albany Street. Turn right and walk along to Number 30 on the right hand side. Listen to Track 2.

2. Long terraces

30 Albany Street

Directions 2

Almost opposite Number 30 Albany Street is a short street leading down to a recreation ground. Go down the street and follow the path past the play area onto the grassy area. Stop halfway across the grass at the memorial to Sir Stanley Baker (actor and film producer born in Ferndale) and listen to Track 3.

3. King Coal

Memorial plaque to Stanley Baker, southern end of Greenwood Park

Directions 3

Continue across the grass to a break in the fence on the far side. Follow the path down to the riverside. Turn left on the riverside path and follow it for about 400 metres. Where the path forks, go left up the embankment. Stop at the memorial to miners who worked, were killed or injured in Ferndale's four pits. Listen to Track 4.

4. A busy, noisy, industrial place

Memorial to Ferndale's miners, northern end of Greenwood Park

Directions 4

From the memorial, follow the tarmac road up the slope. At the top turn right onto the main road and cross the bridges over the river and the former railway line. After the bridge look for the steps up on the left hand side (which cut off the road's hairpin bend). At the top of the steps turn left on Commercial Street. At the next junction turn sharply right into Blaenllechau Road. There is no pavement on the first part past the first two houses so take care. Stop where the pavement starts outside the third house on the left (Number 6). Look across the road at the sign for downhill traffic and listen to Track 5.

5. Acute turn

Blaenllechau Road, just above junction with Commercial Street

Directions 5

Follow the road as it climbs gradually up the hillside. There is no pavement so do take care as the road is narrow in places. After about 1 mile (1.6 kilometres) is a small lay-by on the right side for cars and a viewpoint. Stop here to listen to Track 6.

6. Welsh Wales

Viewpoint part way up Blaenllechau Road

Directions 6

Continue up the road as it steadily climbs the hillside until it flattens out. Stop just before the gate and cattle grid. Listen to Track 7.

7. Old Smokey

Blaenllechau Road, just before cattle grid

Directions 7

A diversion to the top of Old Smokey is highly recommended for the views. The slopes are very steep and the material can be loose so take great care. When you are ready go over the cattle grid and continue along the road for just over half a mile. Stop outside the church and listen to Track 8.

8. An ancient place of worship

St Gwynno's Church

Directions 8

Go through the gate into the churchyard. If the church is open it is well worth going inside. Beside the gate is the west door. Go to the right round the corner to the south door. On the far side of the south porch is the grave of Griffith Morgan. Listen here to Track 9.

9. A sporting legend

Grave of Griffith Morgan, St Gwynno's churchyard

Directions 9

Do take time to explore the graveyard and enjoy the views although take care as the ground is uneven in places. When you are ready leave the churchyard by the gate and turn left onto the road. Go left round the corner and stop outside The Brynffynon. Listen to Track 10.

10. A place to pause

The Brynffynon

Directions 10

The Brynffynon is the only place en route that serves refreshments so a stop here is highly recommended. When you are ready, continue down to the road through the dip and follow it for about 300 metres. Stop when you reach a crossroads with a forest track going down to the left and a car park on the right. Listen to Track 11.

11. Mixed woodland

Llanwynno forestry car park

Directions 11

Continue along the road for about two-thirds of a mile (1 kilometre) until you reach a forest track which forks back down to the left. Stop at the top of this track and listen to Track 12.

12. An inspiring landscape

Top of forest track leading down to Pistyll Goleu (Fountain of Light)

Optional diversion to the waterfall (1 mile return) – Go down the track. At the bottom just before the bridge turn left through the barriers. Follow this track as it climbs gradually upwards. It then bends round to the right and goes slightly downhill. Just before a dip in the track you should be able to hear the waterfall. There is a small path on the right of the track which leads to some steps down to the bottom of the waterfall. When you are ready retrace your steps back to the road.

Directions 12

Continue along the road as it undulates for about half a mile. When you reach a junction turn left which is signposted Mountain Ash 2½ miles. Go down the road as it descends steeply. Stop on the bridge at the bottom and listen to Track 13.

13. A natural playground

Road bridge over Nant Clydach

Directions 13

If you are on the bridge, retrace your steps and just before the steep hill turn right through two sets of barriers onto the riverside path. Continue with the river on your right for about 400 metres until you reach a footbridge. Listen to Track 14.

14. Branch line

Footbridge over Nant Clydach

Directions 14

After crossing the footbridge continue with the river on your left for about 200 metres where there is a footpath off to the right signposted as the 'Loops and Links' trail. (If you reach another footbridge over the river you have gone too far.) Follow the path over a stile and up the hillside. It is narrow and can be rough underfoot. After a short distance the path turns left and passes between two stone walls as it continues to climb steadily upwards. When you reach a gate, go through and stop by the farmhouse. Listen to Track 15.

15. Rural life

Gelli Wrgan farmhouse

Directions 15

From the farmhouse, continue up the lane as it winds its way up the hillside. Do stop from time to time to look at the view including back over the top of the forest to Old Smokey. About half a mile from the farmhouse the lane reaches its highest point and makes a sharp bend to the right. On the left side of the lane are some large stones at the bottom of a footpath which is marked as part of the Loops and Links trail. Follow the grassy path up the hillside. Stop at the gate at the top and listen to Track 16.

16. The top of the world

Gate on footpath above lane

Directions 16

Go through the gate and keep to the right side of the field with the dry stone wall on your right. After a short distance you reach a farm track crossing the path but continue straight on with the wall on your right. A short distance after passing under some power lines, the wall turns 90 degrees to the right towards a farmhouse. Stop here at the corner where there is a marvellous view over Mountain Ash below. Listen to Track 17.

17. A changed landscape

Hillside overlooking Mountain Ash, near Penrhiw Cradoc farmhouse

Directions 17

Follow the path towards the farmhouse and then diagonally downwards below the grounds of the farm. Continue following the path diagonally down the hillside. When you are almost beneath the overhead power lines and close to a pylon look for a small quarry below. Stop here and listen to Track 18.

18. Strike and riots

Hillside above Llanwonno Road

Directions 18

From beneath the overhead power lines make your way down through the small quarry to the road. Turn left down Llanwonno Road and then fork back right into Arthur Street. Follow Arthur Street to the very end then turn left down Irene Street. At the T-junction at the bottom turn right along Woodfield Terrace. Go along Woodfield Terrace for about 500 metres until you reach Number 1. Go down the set of steps opposite Number 1 to Penrhiwceiber Road. Stop outside the Chapel on the right side and listen to Track 19.

19. Centre of the community

Carmel Welsh Independent Chapel, Penrhiwceiber Road

Directions 14

Return up the steps to Woodfield Terrace and turn left, where it becomes Church Street. After about 300 metres, turn right round the corner of the former school building into Cross Street, and then take the first left into Morris Avenue. Stop outside Number 56 on the right hand side. Listen to Track 20.

20. A hard life but a happy home

56 Morris Avenue

Directions 20

Remain on Morris Avenue to listen to Track 21.

21. Emily's walk

56 Morris Avenue

Directions to the railway station

Retrace your steps along Morris Avenue and turn right down Cross Street past the school. At Penrhiwceiber Road use the pedestrian crossing to go straight across into the continuation of Cross Street. Turn left at the end into Station Terrace. After a short distance take the footpath forking off to the right which drops down to the station. From here you can catch a train towards Aberdare or Pontypridd and Cardiff.

Credits

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

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