Countryside Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work;
- Guard against all risk of fire;
- Leave all gates and property as you find them;
- Keep your dogs under close control, preferably on a lead as there may be other animals along the route;
- Keep to public paths;
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls;
- Leave livestock and machinery alone;
- Take your litter home;
- Help to keep all water clean;
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees;
- Take special care on country roads.

Advice for Walkers

To get the most enjoyment from walking and exploring Torfaen's varied countryside, making use of an ordnance survey map is strongly recommended. The countryside can change rapidly and way-markers can easily be missed.

Ensure that you wear appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear in case of muddy and slippery surfaces.

Walking is a perfect activity to improve your physical health, it can help your circulation and maintain a healthy heart!

Some of the paths referred to are not Public Rights of Way but are permissive paths or are across common land which enjoys open access.

Public Transport

Torfaen has a good network of public transport. To plan your journey visit **www.traveline.org.uk**

Tourist Information Centre

Blaenavon Tourist Information Centre provides information on days out, attractions, accommodation, activities and route planning in the area.

Tel: 01495 742333,
or visit: **www.visitblaenavon.co.uk**

4hr WALK

Difficulty of walk - 3 (moderate)

With thanks to:

TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH / BWRDEISTREF SIROL TORFAEN

PONTYPOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL / CYNGOR CYMUNED PONTYPŵL

Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru
Countryside Council for Wales

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Pontypool Park Circular Walk

It will take you further back through time the higher you climb.

Explore our Countryside

Pontypool Park Circular Walk

This is a walk of 4 miles and two thousand years. It will take you further back through time the higher you climb, then you return through the centuries as you descend.

(If you are starting from the bus stops in Hanbury Road, go through the Park Gates and the Italian Gardens, go over the river bridge, turn right then go on to and past the Active Living Centre ahead of you).

Starting from the Active Living Centre car park, take the bridge over the Afon Lwyd, continue past the centre then turn right and follow the drive for about 150m then turn left at the second fingerpost (to the Folly).

Go uphill for about 80m then turn right onto the board walk. (If this route is closed take the lower path and at the end climb up the well worn path to meet the end of the boardwalk). This will take you through some of the many beech and sweet chestnut trees that are found all over the park.

At the end of the boardwalk continue up the hill to the fingerpost that directs you to the Grotto. Take the right hand fork going through the belt of trees, then go around the lower side of the small round copse of trees to the stone **Arbour**.

From here, turn uphill and walk up through the grassland. When it begins to level out, you will see a round stone hut, not unlike Hagrid's Hut in 'Harry Potter'; this is, in fact, the **Shell Grotto**.

A Trevethin garden was the home of a dilapidated pile of stones that was thought to be on old pigsty. Further investigation showed it was really a garden Arbour its stones were moved and rebuilt at this new location to enable everyone to enjoy its sunny outlook which matches the original in terms of the views over the Severn Estuary.

Taking break in the Arbour.

The Grotto *may look plain and understated from the outside but its interior is its glory! It was built in the early 1830's as a romantic garden feature at a time when it was the height of fashion to have a shell grotto. Molly Hanbury Leigh, an avid shell collector, is thought to have designed the interior. The fanned ceiling is swathed in intricate patterns of flowers and geometric shapes, picked out in a myriad of shells. The walls are set with minerals, gnarled bits of wood and stalactites. Deer bones and teeth form a gory but fascinating floor. The Hanbury family held grand picnics in the grotto; one of the guests being the future King Edward VII.*

With your back to the door of the Grotto, look to your left for a ladder-stile in the wall ahead, go over the stile and turn left up the track. Go over the stile, walking past Pen y Parc and continue up the hill for about 1.5km, along the well-defined track.

As the track enters an open field, go up the little rise and then walk towards the octagonal tower known as **The Folly**. While you catch your breath, take in the view. On your far right you can see the Newport Transporter Bridge, the Bristol Channel and the Wentwood Forest. As you pan to the left, you can see the reservoir at Llandegfedd ahead of you and coming right round, the Skirrid or Holy Mountain off to your left.

The Folly is visible for many miles along the valley. Local legend claims it is built on the site of a roman watch tower but in reality it is another romantic folly built around the 1770s. The Hanburys used it as a summer house and as a lookout point for hunting the estate's deer.

In 1940 the tower was demolished as it was feared enemy bombers would use it as a landmark to direct them to the nearby 'bomb factory' at Glascoed. The skyline remained bare until 1994; the folly was restored by a community that had worked hard to raise the funds to re-build its razed walls and officially re-opened by Prince Charles, Prince of Wales in July 1995. For information on opening times for the Grotto and Folly, ring 01496 764688.

The Folly Tower.

Pontypool Park Circular Walk

Continue past the tower and take the path that follows the wall on your right. Go through th[illegible] and car park and look up to see the 'Litt[illegible] ydd Garn y Clochdu ahead of yo[illegible] left onto Folly Lane and walk down this old **Roma[illegible]d.**

It is possible that the **Roman** *[illegible]ba[illegible] came from the fort of Gobannium at [illegible]ergavenny, went [illegible] the hill to cross the Afon Lwyd at [illegible]ewy[illegible]dd and th[illegible] climbed up and over Mynydd Llanhilleth. As you continue down this ancient route, take a look at the ol[illegible]n ho[illegible]s along the way. These would have been built before Pon[illegible]o[illegible] became a town in its own right, being part of the sizeable ancient Parish of Trevethin (Tref = Town, Eithin = gorse). One of the farms, Pant y Gollen, is well over 500 years old.*

Continue down the lane for about 1km, then once past 'Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw', bear left off the estate roads down a lane that passes an old pub called the 'Masons Arms'. The original part of this building was once the rectory for **St. Cadoc's Church**.

Many grand memorials line the church paths.

Go past the old pub and climb over the stone stile on your left and walk down through the church yard then turn right, going through an older section of the graveyard with some interesting monuments.

Take the path that goes to the left of the church, leaving **St. Cadoc's** through an impressive lych gate; cross the road and go through the kissing gate alongside the Yew Tree Pub.

Saint Cadoc *began building his church in the 6th century, but the devil, having other ideas, pulled his walls down at night. After many attempts to build his church, St. Cadoc laid in wait one night and caught the devil tearing down the walls. As Old Nick gathered up the stone in his apron, St. Cadoc picked up a miraculous bell he had been given for the church and rang it. Its pure sound startled the devil who then dropped the stones on the hill above, now known as Mynydd Garn Y Clochdu (Cairn of the bell).*

Take time to explore the churchyard and wander its avenues of fascinating memorials. Keep an eye out for the tiny iron crosses that mark graves of some of the victims of a terrible local disaster. In 1890, there was an explosion in Llanerch Colliery and 176

One of the Llanerch Crosses.

St. Cadoc's Church.

men lost their lives. The tragedy was reported in the national press and funds poured in to help support the 70 widows, the bereft mothers and the 240 fatherless children.

Walk down through the fields and woods (for about 700m) on what was called the 'Cobbled Path', originally another Hanbury construction. No romantic folly this time but a way of ensuring their household staff could walk to the church on Sundays without getting their shoes muddy!

At the end of the path, go down the steep driveway and turn right onto Park Road. Cross over, continuing down the hill for about 200m, then turn left and follow the cobbled driveway back into Pontypool Park.

As you walk along what was once the back entrance to Pontypool Park House you will pass the old stable block and yard that now houses Pontypool Museum and on your left you will see the restored Ice House. Before you enter the park, you walk past the rear of St. Albans R.C. school which incorporates most of the original Pontypool Park House that was once the family home of the Hanburys.

The first **Hanbury** *to come to Pontypool was Mr Richard Hanbury who purchased iron works in the area in the 1560s. Capel Hanbury built the first house in the park in 1681 but it was not until 1704 that a Hanbury, Major John, took up permanent residence in Pontypool. Down the generations the house was remodelled, more follies were built and themed gardens added, most of which were redesigned in 1801 by Capability Brown and which form the basic landscape elements of rolling hills and valleys which are seen today.*

In 1912, John Hanbury announced he would be leaving Pontypool Park and so the house was let to nuns from St. Albans Convent. The park itself was sold to the then local councils and has been enjoyed by the public ever since.

The **Ice House** *on your left has the unique feature of looking like a single building but it has* **two** *chambers hidden behind its walls with the only access being from the top opening. Originally the ice would have been collected from the park ponds and nearby canal in the winter and stored in the insulated pits to be used to keep food fresh in the summer. This ice could not be used in food as it had all the leaves, twigs and other nasties found floating in the water frozen at its core. It was not until 'fresh' ice blocks could be brought by train from the cities that the family could indulge in fruit ices and luxurious ice cream.*

Romantic 1790 view of the Park House and its deer!

Continue straight ahead into the park and then bear right at the 'deer pond'. (If you are returning to the bus stops, turn sharp right here, taking the path signed 'Italian Gardens'. Once past the Bowling Pavilion and Greens, bear right and retrace your steps over the bridge.)

Turn right in front of the Active Living Centre and return to the car park.

Major John Hanbury, the first permanent resident at the Park.