

# In the Footsteps of Pilgrims

## Circular Walk

A circular walk around Cwmbran  
and Mynydd Maen, discovering it's  
links with the ancient past



Explore our  
Countryside



# In the Footsteps of Pilgrims Circular Walk

## A Circular Walk

Following part of an ancient route walked by medieval pilgrims

Approx 15Km (9 miles) / 6-7 hours/  
moderate to energetic

This is a circular walk that can start from three different car parks on the loop. All have access to facilities; their locations are marked on the plan as **1**, **2** and **3**.

Parts of the walk cross open mountainside, steep slopes or rocky areas so please ensure you have adequate clothing and good walking shoes or boots. Care must be taken when crossing busy roads.



Oakfield Gardens

If you are starting at the Llanyrafon Manor **1** or the adjacent Boating Lake **2** Car Parks, walk towards the lake, crossing the footbridge over the Afon Llwyd. Skirt right, around the pond and head for the footbridge over the railway line. Once over the bridge, follow the path as it takes you up onto the Llantarnam Road. Cross the road and turn right.



The boating lake

- 1** Walk along Llantarnam Road, passing the pretty little "Oakfield Gardens", a former clay pit, on the way.

*Llantarnam Road follows the line of an ancient route that was used by pilgrims heading over Mynydd Henllys to reach Pen Rhys Abbey near Risca and then onto St David's in Pembrokeshire.*

Bear left where the original route of Llantarnam Road turns away from the new road to the new town centre; cross over Henllys Way and walk along Victoria Street as it takes you into "Old" Cwmbran.



The Oldbury Vitriol works or the "Chem"

- 2** There is a road turning on your left, Oldbury Road; this once led to a Vitriol Works or "The Chem" that between 1860 and the 1930's produced sulphuric acid for use in pesticides, metal extraction and batteries.



Town Clock, Old Cwmbran

After you pass the fine clock and the council offices in the "town" centre, turn left along Commercial Street. The bridge that now takes you over Cwmbran Drive once passed over the GWR Eastern Valleys Railway and the Canal.

At the end of Commercial Street, cross over onto St Dial's Road, passing St Gabriel's Church on your right and climb up the hill. St Dial's Road is another of Cwmbran's ancient thoroughfares. The old yellow brick walls on your right are now the only tangible evidence of the numerous brickworks once found around Cwmbran. The road now begins to feel more like a country lane, giving you a sense of what this area was like before Cwmbran became a "new town". On your right you get glimpses of the Folly Tower at Pontypool and the Skirrid Mountain out beyond Abergavenny.



**3** Opposite a row of cottages called Upland Terrace, there was once a chapel dedicated to St Dials, which gave its name to the lane and the ward. It was in ruins for many years before it was demolished in the 1960's but would have been a stopping point for the pilgrims on their journey. Not a lot is known about St Dial other than there was another chapel dedicated to him, in Monmouth. Unfortunately this too has vanished, making way for the dualling of the A40!

As the lane comes onto the roundabout, cross straight over to Ty Gwyn Way. On your right is Greenmeadow Farm, a fine 17th century farmstead that now houses

**3** the Community Farm. *This is open to the public and has a café and toilets and is starting point 3 on the walk.*

The footpath that goes up the bank alongside Ty Gwyn Way continues to follow the line of the old St Dial's road as it goes through a tunnel of trees and then bears to the left of Diwedd Lon (Lane End) House; take the sunken lane or "Hollow Way" that goes between the surfaced estate path on your left and the garden wall of Diwedd Lon. This route gives you a true taste of the ancient tracks that once passed through the area.



The "Hollow Way"

Look out for large chunks of the white conglomerate or "pudding" stone that lines many of these ancient routes in Upper

Cwmbran. *It is believed that they were once used as route markers because the stone is bright with white quartz pebbles. This quartz was formed on the coast of Africa over 325million years ago, before the European land mass began its drift northwards. On the banks of the route are also the strangely shaped trunks of ancient beech hedges.*



Puddingstone marker at Thornhill

As you get to the end of the sunken lane climb up the bank and turn left to use the "banana" footbridge to safely cross Ty Gwyn Way, take the second right hand path that runs beside the fence, then after about 50 metres, turn left. (If you look behind you, you will see a pudding stone "marker" set by the other path). As you climb through the Thornhill Estate the footway crosses the Hafren Road for the first time. Carry on up the path as it crosses over the Hafren Road for a second time, goes through a barrier and then climbs steeply up the side of Mynydd Maen (Stone Mountain), crossing over a lane known as Graig Road. The blocks of pudding stone become more numerous, forming a line on top of the bank of the sunken lane. The view to your right is out over Cwmbran and you can now see how far you have climbed out of the valley.

As the path opens out onto Belle Vue Lane, you may make out the roof of a building in the trees ahead. This is Gelli Gravog farm house; it dates from at least 1610 and was once the home of Reginald James Blewitt who became MP for the area during the time of the Chartist Riots and will reappear in our story later on.

Take a sharp left along a green lane lined by old beech hedges and pudding stone markers. After about 500 metres, where the track bears right, there is a view point out towards the Bristol Channel and on a clear day you can see the islands of Flatholm and Steepholm. Continue along the track until you reach a gate that leads onto the common of Mynydd Maen. Go over the gate and bear left through the bracken or "fern", go over the stile and follow the path as it drops down to Llanderfel Farm. Once through the field gate (or over the built in steps) go to the right of the old Monmouthshire longhouse and over another stile. The path begins to climb gently along the lower slopes of Mynydd Henllys, running along another sunken or hollow way. The route passes the site of

**5** Llanderfel Chapel, which is in an enclosure above you on your right (Please Note; there is no public access to this CADW protected site, which is only visible if you stand on the next stiles steps and look back into the Field).

*The chapel, a grange house attached to Llantarnam Abbey, once held a relic of St Derfel, a Celtic prince that fought alongside King Arthur at the battle of Camlan.*



Site of St Derfel's Chapel

*Derfel Gadarn (Derfel the Strong) was one of the fabled seven survivors of the conflict that saw the end of Arthur. Legend has it that Derfel was so sickened by the bloodshed he became a hermit in Merionydd. Towards the end of his life he was persuaded to become the bishop of Bardsey, the island of 20,000 saints. There may*

*have been a chapel on this site since celtic times and later in its life it became a staging post for pilgrims, providing overnight accommodation and sustenance for weary travellers. Poems were written in the 15th century praising the priests for the hospitality they offered to passing pilgrims.*

Continue on the path climbing over another stile; the route begins to opens out and signs of an industrial past become evident on your right in the form of spoil heaps and quarries. Where the track appears to fork, take the right track as the route gently climbs the side of Mynydd Maen.

**7** As you draw level with second and largest stone quarry on the right, look for a stile and a steep green path going down the hill on your left.



Route over Mynydd Maen passed St Derfel's

This is the top of a 3.2km (2mile) long incline that drops 201m (600 feet) to the valley floor. Go over the stile and follow the path as it passes through the site of Henllys Colliery.

*This part of the path is the first section or "top drop" of the steam driven incline railway that took the stone from Joshua Hanson's Henllys quarry in drams to be used along the line*



Looking back at Henllys Quarry



- 1 Start 1: Llanyrafon Manor, ST303 945
- 2 Start 2: Boating Lake Car Park, ST305 940
- 3 Start 3: Greenmeadow Community Farm, ST280 954

- 1 Oakfield Gardens
- 2 Site of Vitriol Works
- 3 Site of St Dials Chapel
- 4 "Hollow Way"
- 5 Llanderfel Farmhouse
- 6 St Derfel's Chapel
- 7 Henllys Quarry
- 8 Henllys Colliery
- 9 Old Row/New Row
- 10 Machine Cottage
- 11 Crossing Bridge Remains
- 12 Limekilns
- 13 Ty Coch Brickworks
- 14 House of John Fielding
- 15 Ty Coch Farmhouse
- 16 The Greenhouse
- 17 St Michael's Church
- 18 St David Lewis Plaque



Artist impression of Henllys Colliery

to build many of the workers cottages you will pass on your journey, as well as the fine Ebenezer Chapel at Two Locks. Joshua Hanson also built Henllys Colliery which opened in 1814, producing coal and fireclay. These materials also descended the hillside on the incline to either supply his substantial brickworks at Ty Coch or to be shipped out on the canal.

Continue down the hill on the line of the incline as it passes between the spoil heaps, bearing right at the bottom; go over the stile and continue down the track to some stone steps at the bottom. As you come out onto a tarmaced lane the cottages on your left are some of the earliest cottages built by Joshua, called "Old Row" and "New Row". Bear right down the lane, passed "Four Houses", bear left around Belle Vue Terrace then bear right, and continue down Incline Lane as it passes "Machine Cottage".



Belle Vue Terrace, Henllys

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Not to scale



- 10** Part of this building once housed the tram weighing machine hence the cottages' unusual name. This was the end of the second drop and start of the third and longest section of the incline.



Remains of crossing bridges over the incline

- 11** As you go down the hill, look out for the remains of old stone walls on either side of the path. These are the remnants of bridges that allowed pedestrians to safely cross over the tramway and its driving chains.

You leave this 2 km section of the Incline at Coed Eva, opposite the old Mill Tavern. Turn left and then turn right at the end of the road, cross over the road at the roundabout, taking the track opposite that leads you past the old Glan y Nant Farmhouse and onto Garth Lane. (Joshua's son Cyrus once lived at Glan y Nant) The incline ended near the Mill Tavern with the materials being transferred to horse drawn trams for the last 1/2 km to the canal.



Limekilns at Garth Road

- 12** As you come to some restored limekilns turn and look back towards Mynydd Henllys and the site of Llanderfel Farm and Chapel. Continue along Garth Lane to the canal at Ty Coch. Just before going over the footbridge, on your left was the site of Joshua

- 13** Hanson's Fireclay and Retort Brickworks. Once over the bridge turn right; at the end of this stretch of tow path, turn left along Ty Coch Lane.

- 14** As you pass in front of Ty Coch Terrace, look for a round black plaque dedicated to John Williams (Fielding) VC.

John Fielding was born in Abergavenny but his family moved to Llantarnam when he was 5. At 20 he ran away to join the army against his parents wishes, changing his name from Fielding to Williams to make it harder for them to trace him and bring him home. At 21 he was based at Rourke's Drift when almost 4,000 Zulus attacked the compound. John and Private Hook broke through the internal walls of the hospital to drag 8 patients out of the burning building to the relative safety of the inner compound. For these actions both John and Private Hook received the VC and a depiction in the epic film "Zulu".

Bear left then turn right onto Ty Coch Way; at the end of the road turn left and walk along Hollybush Way. Take care crossing by the roundabout as this is a very busy road. Continue straight ahead through Llantarnam Park Industrial Estate. Keep an eye out for another old white farmhouse on your right that has been incorporated into a modern office building. This was Ty Coch House and there is a myth that a tunnel ran from here to Llantarnam Abbey. At the end of Llantarnam Park Way, turn left by the Abbeyfields roundabout, walking up the hill until you are opposite The Greenhouse Public House.



St Michaels and The Greenhouse

- 16** If you have time cross over and take a closer look at the plaque above the entrance door.

It shows two tail-coated, clay pipe smoking gentlemen sat at a fine gate legged table. The translated text reads "The Greenhouse 1719. Good beer and cider for you. Come inside and you shall have some"



Plaque at The Greenhouse Public House

In 1839 around 3000 chartists marching to Newport from Pontypool stopped here for refreshment. Reginald Blewitt MP hearing about the march left his home at Llantarnam Abbey (not far behind the inn). Being alarmed at the size and purpose of the group he bravely entreated them to disperse as they were sure to meet certain ruin if they continued. Though a few were persuaded, the majority continued on to Newport and their fate outside the Westgate Hotel.

- 17** In the graveyards of St Michaels Church alongside the inn you can see the white grave stone of John Fielding VC.



Grave of John Fielding at St Michaels Church

Opposite the church is a cottage that has a blue plaque on its wall. This building has had many uses over the years, one being a blacksmiths forge and the metal disc used to place iron tyres onto wagon wheels can still be seen in the front garden.

In 1678, Father David Lewis was found hiding at the smithy after he had visited his recusant cousins at the Abbey, most probably to celebrate mass. He was arrested for the treasonable act of being trained and ordained abroad as a Jesuit priest and of preaching the catholic faith. This gentle man, known as "Tad y Tlodion" (Father of the Poor) was tried and executed outside Usk Gaol in 1679. Local feeling was so strong the official executioner fled in fear of his life and the scaffold had to be built by a fellow prisoner with the promise of freedom. He too fled and a local blacksmith was bribed to do the hanging, drawing and quartering. David Lewis was made a saint in 1970.



Saint David Lewis

From the pub, cross over the road and walk through the new housing estate, John Fielding Gardens, looking out for the slate memorial to the VC hero at the end of the cul-de-sac. Turn right and then left down the path that runs between the house no's 13 & 14 into the school playing fields. Cut diagonally right across the fields to a path that takes you to the right of the buildings then turns right between the houses and onto the Llantarnam Road. Turn left and walk on until you are opposite the path that takes you back over the railway bridge signed to the boating lakes.

If you started at Greenmeadow Community Farm, go to the start of the route description and continue until you reach **3** on the map



## 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](http://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.

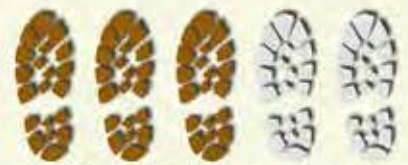
Tel: 01495 742333,

or visit: [www.visitblaenavon.co.uk](http://www.visitblaenavon.co.uk)

### Website

For information on other walks in Torfaen, as well as details of the various activities in the area, please visit the following website:

[www.torfaen.gov.uk](http://www.torfaen.gov.uk)



Difficulty of walk - 3 (moderate)



For more information on the Ancient Cwmbran Project go to [www.ancientcwmbran.co.uk](http://www.ancientcwmbran.co.uk)

And finally... 'Why are there scallop shells on the front?' I hear you ask.

Scallop shells were a 'sign' you carried to show you were on a pilgrimage.



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