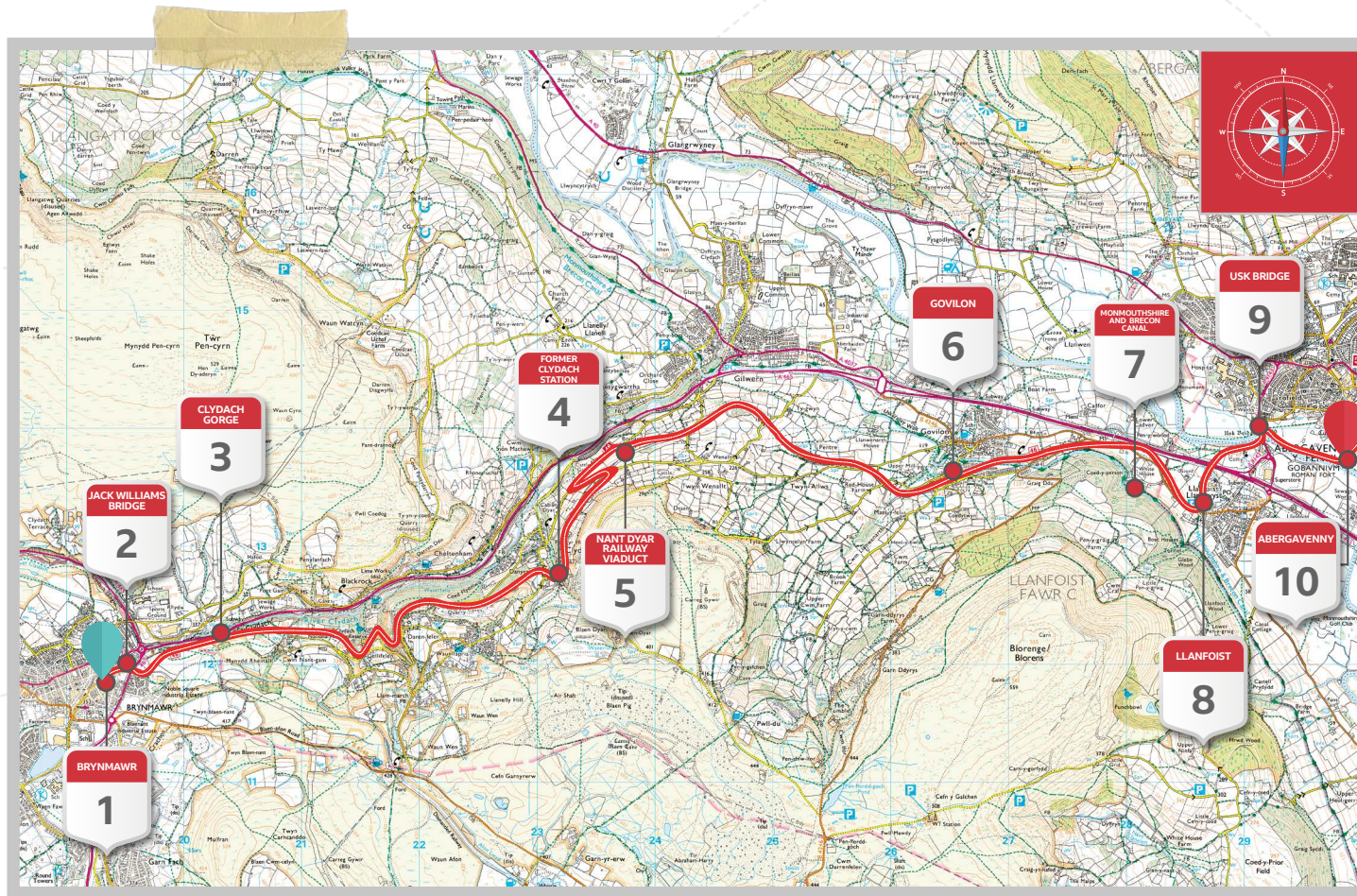


Weatherman Walking

Brynmawr to Abergavenny



BRYNMAWR TO ABERGAVENNY



The Weatherman Walking maps are intended as a guide to help you walk the route. We recommend using an OS map of the area in conjunction with this guide. Routes and conditions may have changed since this guide was written.

The BBC takes no responsibility for any accident or injury that may occur while following the route. Always wear appropriate clothing and footwear and check weather conditions before heading out.

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APPROXIMATE DISTANCE:

9 MILES
ABERGAVENNY

For this walk we've included OS grid references should you wish to use them.

This walk starts in **Brynmawr**, and passes through the incredible **Clydach Gorge**, around quarried slopes and wooded cwms or hollows, and on to **Abergavenny** – a distance of about 9 miles depending on where you choose to finish. Much of the route is along the old track-bed of the former Heads of the Valleys railway line which operated from 1879 to 1958.



Start:

Parc
Nant-y-Waun,
Brynmawr

Starting Ref:

SO 17974 11463

Distance:

Approx. 9 miles

Grade:

Easy to moderate

Walk time:

Approx. 4-5 hours

Parking:

There are car parks in both Brynmawr and Abergavenny.

Travel information:

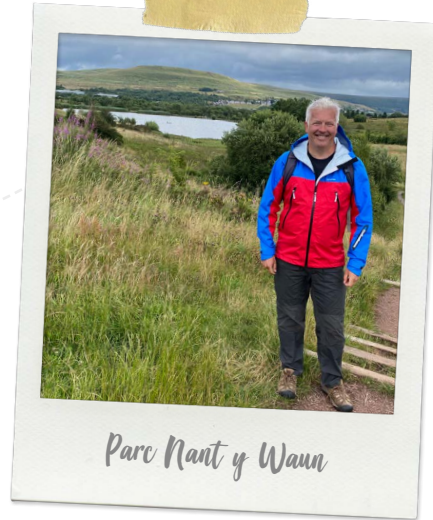
There is a regular bus service between Brynmawr and Abergavenny bus stations, with buses running about every 90 minutes. Check local timetables for details.

Further information:

www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
www.monmouthshire.gov.uk
www.naturalresources.wales
www.sustrans.org.uk
www.traveline.cymru/travel-info

Directions

We're choosing to start in Brynmawr at Parc Nant-y-Waun a nature reserve on the edge of the town. It was created following land reclamation of former mine workings and opened in 2007. The park includes three hectares of native new woodland and a large pond, known as Machine Pond, that was developed as a reservoir more than 200 years ago to supply the old Nantyglo Ironworks. From here join Warwick Road, keeping the park on your right. When you hit the junction with the main road, the B4248, turn right and take the second small road off to your left, Bailey St, to get to the war memorial in front, the centre of the town.



Brynmawr (SO 19110 11700)

Brynmawr lies on the northern edge of the south Wales coalfield and was one of the dozens of communities transformed by the industrial boom in the 19th century. Its name means 'big hill' and, at 410 m above sea level, it is claimed to be the highest town in Britain. Behind the war memorial is the Market Hall Cinema. The cinema in the town is the oldest in Wales having shown its first film in December 1899. It's outlasted 30 British Prime Ministers and two World Wars! It also saw films go from silent to talkies and black and white to colour.

Directions

Follow along Market Square to the right of the cinema, and pass the museum, which has an impressive collection of Brynmawr furniture, made as a co-operative in the 1930s to help families during the Depression. Continue along Alma St and turn right on Darren Felin Road. At the end take the path down to join the A467 and turn left, continue to the roundabout. From here you can either pick up cycle route 46, on the south side of the valley or alternatively, cross the footbridge to take a more interesting but less accessible route on the north side.



Brynmawr Museum and Library



Jack Williams Bridge

JACK WILLIAMS
BRIDGE

2

Jack Williams Gateway Bridge (SO 19926 12218)

The new 5-mile stretch of the A465 Heads of the Valleys road has taken 7 years to complete at a cost more than £300 million. One of its main features is the Jack Williams Gateway Bridge. It was named after a First World War hero from nearby Nantyglo and chosen in a public vote. The route leads from a new tarmacked path to an old industrial transport route, edged with red rocks and green moss and dripping with water. At the bottom of the hill is Haford Arch, once a railroad bridge designed by engineer John Dadford. He created a clever transport route which allowed loaded railroad wagons to travel down the steep gorge along a low gradient, using mainly gravity to ‘power’ them. The empty wagons were then hauled back up the hill by horses.

Directions

Crossing the footbridge back to the south side of the valley you will re-join the Sustrans route 46 cycle path to the left at Cwm Nant-gam. Continue along the straight path with impressive views of the valley ahead. The cycle route is easy to follow and well signposted. Pass through the gates and half a mile on you will reach the remain of what was once Gelli Felen Halt, with a remaining brick hut passenger shed. Continuing on, you will see information signs as you reach Clydach Gorge.



Rejoining the cycle path



CLYDACH
GORGE

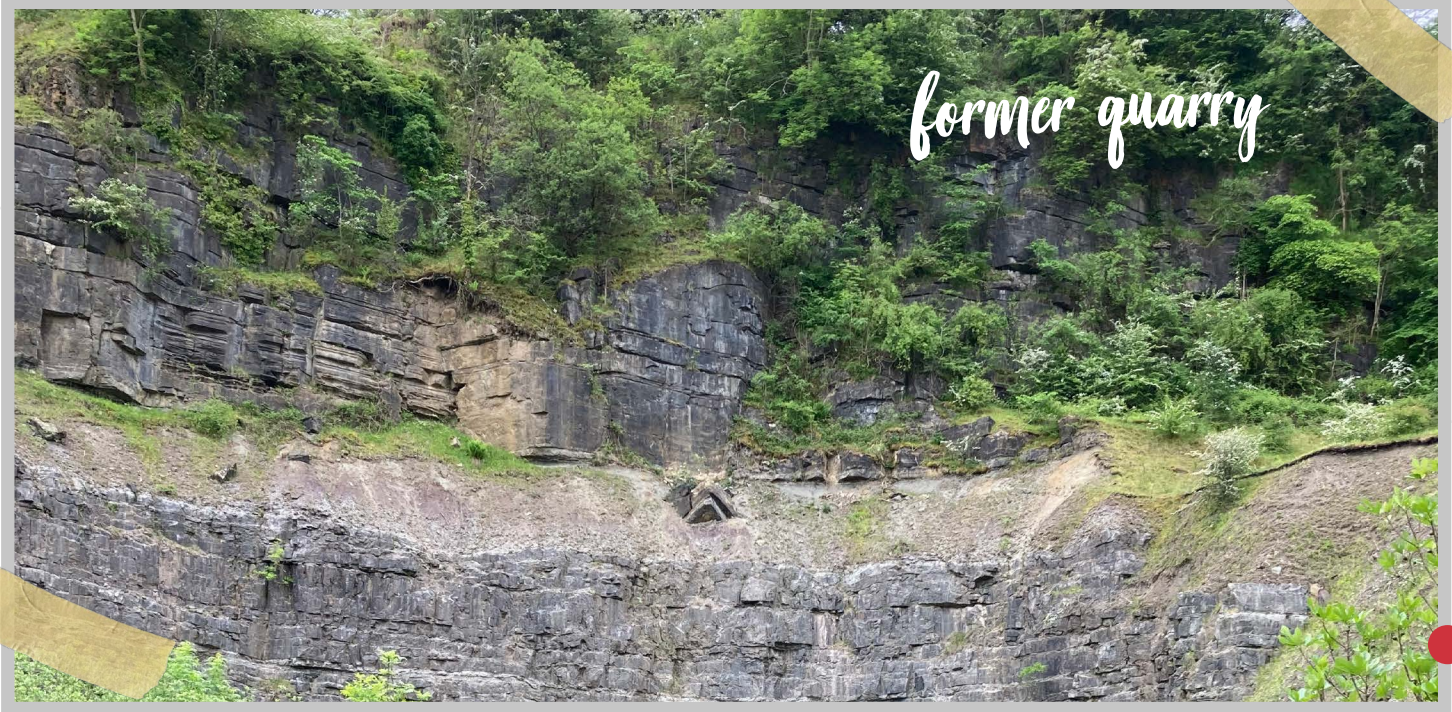
3

Clydach Gorge (SO 22151 12516)

The route has now reached the magnificent Clydach Gorge and Cwm Clydach National Nature Reserve, covering 61 acres of steeply sloping valley. Britain's oldest beech wood, which has survived some 14,000 years, hugs the side of the gorge and there are more than 400 species of fungi and rare plants, birds and butterflies. It is worth veering off the cycle route to take one of the tracks down into the gorge with its collection of 17 'secret' waterfalls. The River Clydach is a short, steep and fast-flowing river crossing from the county borough of Blaenau Gwent into Monmouthshire in the Brecon Beacons National Park and on the edge of the Blaenavon World Heritage Site. It is around 10 km in length. The river rises on the southern slopes of Mynydd Llangatwg, then heads southeast through Clydach Dingle past Brynmawr. It then enters the spectacular Clydach Gorge, dropping about 300m over 5.6 km to Gilwern and its confluence with the River Usk. 'Clydach' is a common name for watercourses in south Wales and is thought to derive from an old Welsh word for 'swift' or possibly 'stony', both of which would apply to the Clydach River.

Directions

You'll reach a crossroads where the cycle path crosses Quarry Road. Next to this is a cottage called Keeper's Cottage where the owners used to operate the railway crossing barrier by hand several times a day. Cross the lane and resume cycle path 46 (also signposted 'Corridor to the Past'), passing over bridges and old quarries on your right. Follow to junction and cross straight on signed 'Llanfoist'/'Govilon', to the former Clydach Station.



Signpost

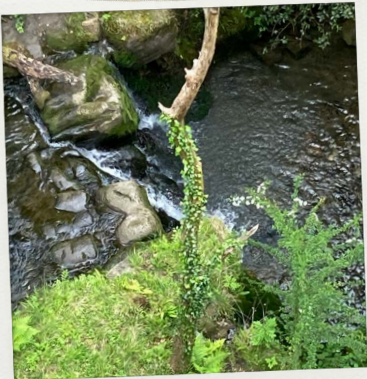


Former Clydach Station (SO 23191 12718)

The station was situated below a quarry-scarred mountainside at the top of which were houses. To the west of the station was the twin-bore Clydach Tunnel. The station had two platforms; on the Up platform was an impressive station building built of locally sourced limestone. A private siding served the Clydach and Abergavenny Lime and Stone Company which operated a nearby limestone quarry and lime kilns supplying the Clydach Ironworks. Opposite the weighing machine was a signal box built in 1898. The works closed in c. 1935 after which goods facilities were withdrawn from Clydach on 2 May 1938. As a result of decline in the local industry and the costs of working the line between Abergavenny and Merthyr, passenger services ceased on 4 January 1958.

Directions

Pass the village of Clydach... well half of it anyway. The village is in two halves – north and south - on the other side of the Heads of the Valleys road! To the right, are the old LLanelly lime works, but the path continues across the Clydach or Nant Dyar railway viaduct.



View from the viaduct



VIADUCT

5

Nant Dyar railway Viaduct (SO 22548 12513)

The viaduct is made of sandstone and composed of eight arches. It's 370 feet long and 75 feet high. It was designed by engineer John Gardner to carry the line over the Clydach Gorge and the Clydach Stream. The distance between the parapets was increased to 26 feet (7.9 m) when the line was doubled in 1877.

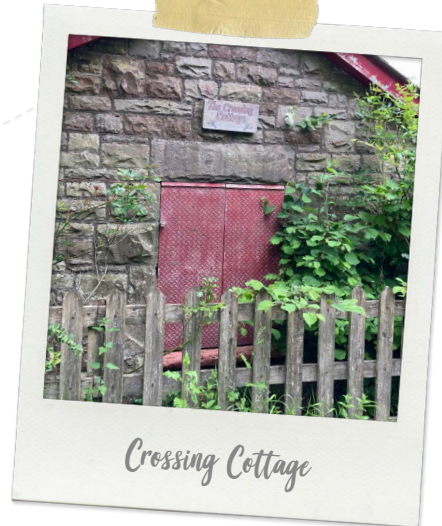


Some New Friends

Derek says, "The landscape around here used to be very industrial but today it's much more pastoral, made up of a patchwork of farms and smallholdings. I stopped off to meet a local pig farmer, Martha Roberts, who has returned to where her grandparents lived, to rear rare breeds. I have to say Martha's pigs were the friendliest I have ever come across and when they weren't wallowing in a mud bath, they were just plonking themselves down over the feet of our crew, keen to be scratched and tickled. Martha also had some three-week old piglets and I gave them their first taste of apple, which was a great success."

Directions

After the aqueduct continue for half a mile until you get to a junction. Here either head left on the cycle route and then right at the next junction or, for a prettier route (with some steps) continue along the road until you see an old telephone box almost hidden in foliage. Turn left down the hill here and pass some attractive houses on your right. Both routes will meet up to go under the bridge and between the platforms at the former Gilwen Halt. Follow the railway path for another 1.75 miles, under several bridges, through cuttings, across embankments and a small viaduct. Emerge into a back lane in front of the old Govilon Station building.



Crossing Cottage



Govilon railway plaque



Govilon (SO 26538 13591, former railway station)

Govilon lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park. Its name derives from the Welsh word for ‘forges’. The village was an important gateway for local industry during the industrial Revolution and falls within the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site. Even before the railway there were tramroads which linked to the canal. Iron, coal and limestone were taken from the horse-drawn trams onto narrowboats bound for the docks of Newport and, from there, all over the world.

Directions

From the former station cross straight across the road and continue along the path between houses. A few hundred yards ahead the route crosses over the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, with attractive barges and narrow moored up along its banks.



Canal wharf



Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal



Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal (SO 26854 13702)

The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal/Camlas Sir Fynwy a Brycheiniog is a small network of canals following the line of the Usk Valley through the Brecon Beacons National Park. It is currently navigable for 56 km and with only 6 locks (5 of them in Llangynidr). Its rural character and tranquillity belie its original purpose as an industrial corridor for coal and iron, brought to the canal by a network of tramways and/or railroads. The “Mon and Brecon” was originally two independent canals – the Monmouthshire Canal from Newport to Pontymoile Basin and the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal from Pontymoile to Brecon, before joining in 1812. Both canals were abandoned in 1962, but the Brecknock and Abergavenny route and a small section of the Monmouthshire route have been reopened since 1970.

Directions

Continue on along the railway cycle path for another 1.25 miles to emerge in a car park at Llanfoist Crossing. Turn left down lane. As it swings right into a garden centre, keep ahead to a subway under A465. At the junction, turn right along a tarmacked road to go past the cemetery.



Lizzie Daly on The Bloreng



Approaching Llanfoist

LLANFOIST

8

Llanfoist - The Bloreng (SO 28997 13829, OS map reference next to the cemetery on the route)

The village of Llanfoist is located beneath a mountain called the Bloreng, part of the Brecon Beacons National Park, rising 1,838 feet (560 m) above sea level over the vale of the River Usk. In the 1990s 1,000 acres of the mountain was put up for auction by The Coal Board. A group of keen paragliders, who regularly used the site, pooled their resources and – to their surprise – put in the winning bid, buying it for about £50,000. The mountain is designated SSI (of Special Scientific Interest) so members of the South East Wales Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club not only have it for leisure, but also have to look after the moorland and wildlife, including red grouse.



ReUse Centre

Derek says, “If you can organise your walk so that it is on a Wednesday it is well worth doing a short detour to the Household and Recycling Centre as there is a weekly ReUse shop, selling a whole host of other people’s discarded items. It’s staffed by volunteers and all money raised is used for planting trees to help tackle climate change. In Monmouthshire they aim to plant 10,000 trees over three years. Wales is the third top country in the WORLD for recycling. The ReUse shop was first opened in 2019 and has proved to be a massive success. I met several of the volunteers there and had a good browse – if I hadn’t had to carry things for the rest of my walk, I’d have a good old spending spree.”

Directions

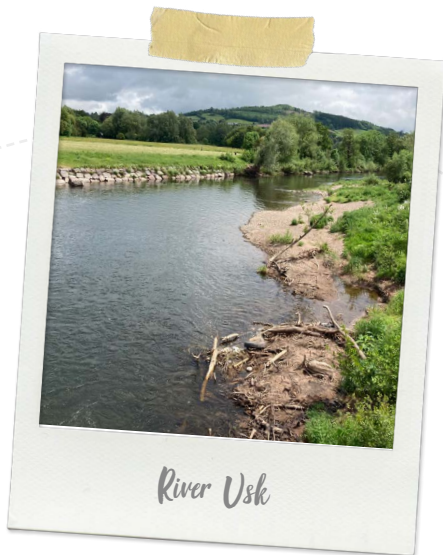
Continuing on the footpath, after passing the cemetery entrance on your right, carry on down the road, under the arch where you will hit the main road – Merthyr Road. Cross the road with caution as it can be pretty busy and turn left to cross the bridge over the River Usk.



Llanfoist Cemetery



Usk Bridge



River Usk



Usk Bridge (SO 29160 13933)

This bridge is known as both the Abergavenny Bridge and the Usk Bridge as it crosses the River Usk and separates Llanfoist from Abergavenny. It is part of the A4143 Merthyr Road. The original structure dates to medieval times but was substantially strengthened and reconstructed in the 19th century. The great artist JMW Turner produced two paintings of it when he was in the area in the 1790s. The first, *Abergavenny Bridge, Monmouthshire, Clearing Up after a Showery Day*, is held in the collection of the V&A and the second *Abergavenny Bridge* by The Tate.

Directions

As you approach the end of the bridge there will be steps down to the meadow below, which has black cattle grazing in it during the summer. Follow the riverbank and take the second path across the grass towards the castle. The road head up towards Abergavenny, passing an attractive park and gardens towards the top of the hill.



Linda Vista Gardens

ABERGAVENNY

10

Abergavenny (SO 30157 13988, Abergavenny Bus Station)

Abergavenny was originally the site of a Roman fort, Gobannium, it became a medieval walled town within the Welsh Marches. The town contains the remains of a medieval stone castle built soon after the Norman conquest of Wales. Today it is famous for its annual food festival attracting small specialist producers from all over Wales and it is filled with nice cafes and food outlets.



Derek visiting Clydach Gorge

End of the Walk

Derek says, “This walk surprised me – I really didn’t think it would be as spectacular as it was. There are some wonderful views, but, if you’ve got time, it’s well worth dipping in to one of the footpaths that head into Clydach Gorge as it’s like stepping into a fantasy world with ancient woodland and wonderful waterfalls. It’s hard to believe just how close you are to the main Heads of the Valleys road. The sound of the gushing water washes out any traffic noise. As a bit of a foodie I’ve always liked Abergavenny, so it makes a really good finish destination to a walk.”