

## RURAL RAMBLE

## PONTARDAWE TO YSTALYFERA

*A historic walk of great natural beauty along the Swansea Canal*



The area around Pontardawe has an interesting transport history and fortunately the Swansea Canal, an early form of bulk transport infrastructure, is still largely extant. Less fortunate for railways in that all trace of the Midland Railway at Pontardawe has been obliterated by road and supermarket development.

The 26 kilometres long Swansea Canal was opened in 1798, built to convey coal and iron from Ystalyfera and Pontardawe to Swansea Docks. By 1873, it was sold to the Great Western Railway (GWR) who saw it as a way to compete with the recently opened Midland Railway. By 1902, the canal ceased to be profitable and commercial traffic ended in 1931, having been active only in the lower 6 miles from 1904. Closed for navigation by a series of acts between 1928 & 1962, it is still used for industrial water supply.

Pontardawe was an industrial town of considerable importance with a functioning steelworks and associated metal industries to the early 1960's. These, with the railways and other industrial infrastructure have been almost completely obliterated, replaced by roads, industry and retail.

## ***The Route in detail***

The bus stop at Pontardawe is close to the start of the walk at Arts Centre (GR 723040) in Herbert Street. Walk towards the crossroads and after 100 metres, the road crosses the canal; turn right and join the towpath. You will see the impressive St Peter's church towering above (left); after 100 metres, cross the road re-joining the path the other side. The next 0.5 kilometres is through semi-industrial landscape before opening into pleasant countryside.

This part of the canal was one of the earliest sections to be restored and is in good condition. The area to the right by the Arena Centre was formerly a centre for storage and distribution of pit props (used to support underground passages in the mines) throughout South Wales.

For the next 2 kilometres, the path continues its course through open country with mountains to the right and canal to the left. Shortly before Ynys Meudwy (GR 741058) are two locks, both in poor condition and now reduced to weirs, the surrounding area is attractive woodland.

At Ynys Meudwy, cross the road and drop down to the next stage, a designated nature reserve managed by the local council. The path is narrower and rougher and the area rich in flora and bird life. After 1.5 kilometres, you reach the A4067 where the canal peters out. For 200 metres, walk on the left hand grass verge (no pavement) to the road junction (GR 753065). Cross with care (fast moving traffic) take a minor track across the river, joining cycle route NCN 43.

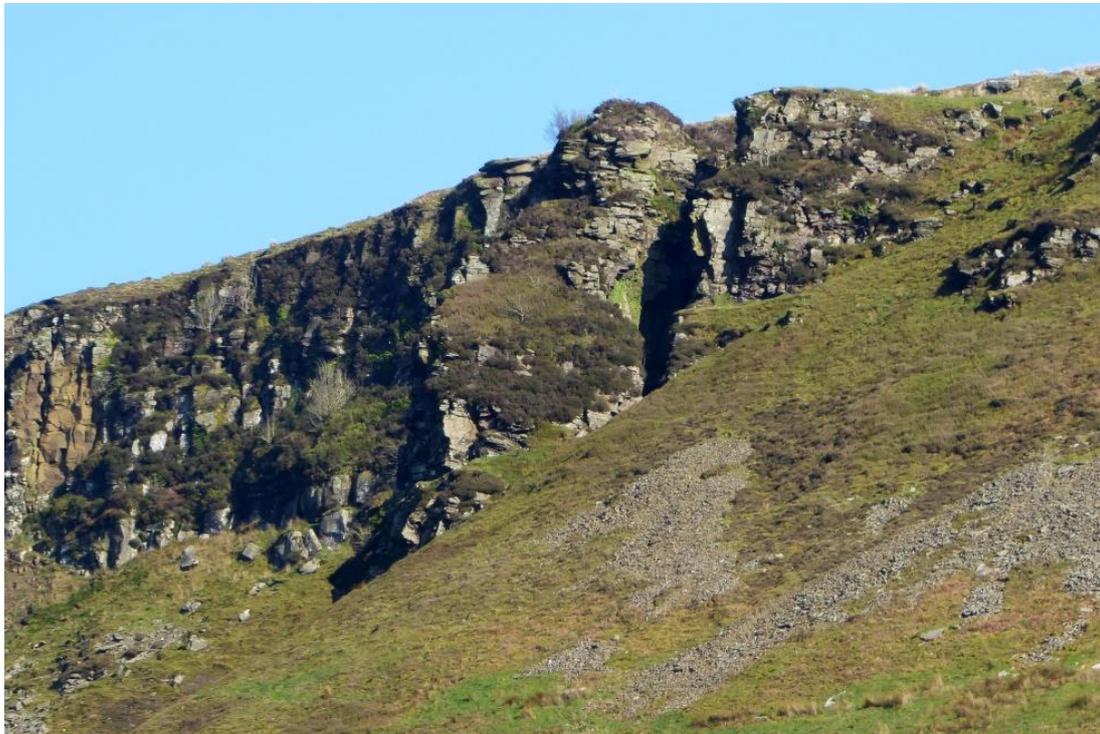
NCN 43 is built on course of the Midland Railway which linked Swansea with Brecon and built to take anthracite coal destined for the English Midlands as well as from local mines to Swansea Docks; it had a branch from Ystalyfera to Brynamman. Passenger trains ran to Brecon until 1930, thereafter to Brynamman until 1952. The railway remained open serving collieries at Ystalyfera and Abercrave until the late-1960's.

Turn left on to NCN 43; here, you will see a moving memorial to the four miners who tragically lost their lives in a drift mine disaster at nearby Tareni Colliery. Follow the trail for 1.5 kilometres to the site of Ynysygeinon Junction railway yards where the now overgrown track bed of the railway to Brecon climbs steeply to the right, the cycle path taking the former Brynamman route.

Ynysygeinon was not only an important railway location but also of a famous legend.

From Ynysygeinon, the trail leads to the road at the roundabout near the Asda store (GR 767083). End your walk here or a further 0.75 kilometres on at the New Swan Hotel, an excellent place for refreshment before taking the bus.

Ystalyfera was a prominent centre of the iron and tin industries and though all trace of the Tinworks has been lost under the Asda Superstore, well restored remains of Ynyscedwyn Ironworks exist at Glanrhyd (between Ystalyfera and Ystradgynlais); a further kilometre beyond the end of the walk but worth a visit.



## Information Panel

<b>Start point:</b>	Pontardawe Arts Centre (GR 723040)
<b>End point:</b>	Ystalyfera New Swan Hotel (GR 772092)
<b>Map:</b>	O.S. Explorer 165 or Landranger 159/160
<b>Distance:</b>	7 kilometres
<b>Time:</b>	3.5 hours
<b>Terrain:</b>	Easy to moderate
<b>Refreshments:</b>	Pontardawe Town Centre Asda, Ystalyfera New Swan Hotel, Ystalyfera
<b>Toilets:</b>	Pontardawe Herbert Street Asda, Ystalyfera
<b>Trains:</b>	Swansea 13 kilometres Neath 6 kilometres
<b>Bus stops:</b>	Pontardawe Jubilee (200 metres) Ystalyfera New Swan Hotel (adjacent)
<b>Parking:</b>	Pontardawe Council Car Park (charged) The X6 bus connects Pontardawe and Ystalyfera
<b>Buses:</b>	Both ends of the walk are on the X6 bus route Swansea-Pontardawe-Ystalyfera every hour weekdays' daytime.