

## RURAL RAMBLE      PONTRHYDYFEN TO CYMMER

*A highly scenic and historic walk along the former railway*



This trail follows the course of the former Rhondda and Swansea Bay (R&SB) railway on a largely level course along this spectacular valley. Over recent decades the once heavily industrialised landscapes of the Afan Valley have been transformed to an area which - reclaimed by forestry and nature - has become a paradise for walkers, cyclists and bird watchers. You can visit the fascinating South Wales Miners Museum at Afan Argoed en route.

This section of the R&SB opened to freight traffic in 1885 to convey coal from collieries in the upper Afan Valley. It was extended through the Rhondda tunnel (longest in Wales - c.3500 metres) in 1890 to compete for the Rhondda coal and at the same time introduce passenger trains between Treherbert and Swansea. Closure of the passenger service was in 1962 and coal traffic ceased west of Dyffryn Rhondda in 1964; the line stayed open east of there until 1970 conveying coal to Aberthaw Power Station.

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

From the Oakwood bus stop, walk down the hill, cross the river with the aqueduct (left) then turn right on a minor road leading to Rhyslyn car park (GR 796842).

Rhyslyn is the site of the former R&SBR Pontrhydyfen station and note earthworks (right) where the platform was situated. Going east, there were two railways, the R&SBR which crossed the river on a high single span viaduct (now replaced by a footbridge), the other a spur route constructed but never used to link with the South Wales Mineral Railway.

At the end of the car park, there is an interpretive board and two trails leading up the valley. Take the right hand trail, crossing a pedestrian bridge (which replaced the former railway bridge) leading to the Kanji Wood.

Created in 2003, the woodland was the idea of Neath-born martial arts expert C W Nicol, now a Japanese citizen and well-known in his adopted country. It celebrates twinning of Afan Forest Park with previously neglected woods near Tokyo (adopted by Nicol). It has numerous species of conifer, woodland and Japanese plants, as well as a number of Japanese characters carved from wood and symbolising life, people and the forest.

Drop gently down to the main trail and shortly after, there is a diversion just below the A4107, to avoid major subsidence. Continue to Afan Argoed (GR 821952) where you have the option (right) of a path to the Visitor Centre where there is a café and toilets.

The site houses the South Wales Miners' Museum, where children can try on cap lamps and helmets and find out what it was like to work underground in the dark; outside are many interesting relics from the valley's coalmining past, including trams, wheels and mining equipment and a miniature railway track which operates on 'open days'.

Retrace your steps, turn right and continue passing the former Cynonville station with platform and shelter intact. It continues a slightly winding course through picturesque though depleted forest, just above the river. At right (GR 838956) is Afan Lodge Hotel; another place for refreshment.

Note a considerable amount of tree felling has taken place. In 2010, a tree disease called *Phytophthora ramorum* was discovered on Japanese larch in Afan Forest and elsewhere. As a result, many trees have been felled, particularly in this part of the valley. The forest was planted as recently as the 1930s, and the felling programme is now allowing native hardwood species such as oak and rowan, to re-establish.

The trail winds through the valley with the village of Abercregan (left) where you can see the SWMR embankment. It soon crosses under the derelict viaduct (linking the GWR with the SWMR) before ending at the site of Cymmer's twin stations. The platform at Cymmer Afan remains intact (GR 860962) complete with original Refreshment Rooms, now a local pub. It is a short walk to Cymmer bus interchange.



## Information Panel

<b>Start point:</b>	Rhyslyn Car Park, Pontrhydyfen (GR 796942)
<b>End point:</b>	Cymmer Old Station (GR 860962)
<b>Map:</b>	O.S. Explorer 165 and 166 or Landranger 159
<b>Distance:</b>	7 kilometres
<b>Time:</b>	3 hours
<b>Terrain:</b>	Easy to moderate
<b>Refreshments:</b>	Cedars' Café, Afan Forest VC Afan Lodge, Dyffryn Rhondda Cymmer Refreshment Rooms
<b>Toilets:</b>	Afan Forest Visitor Centre Cymmer Refreshment Rooms (Patrons only)
<b>Trains:</b>	Port Talbot 4 kilometres Neath 6 kilometres
<b>Bus stops:</b>	Oakwood Interchange Cymmer Interchange
<b>Parking:</b>	Rhyslyn Car Park, Pontrhydyfen (free) Cymmer Old Station (free) The 83 bus connects Cymmer with Pontrhydyfen
<b>Buses:</b>	Route 83 Port Talbot-Oakwood-Cymmer, every hour weekdays' daytime; no Sunday service
<b>Tickets:</b>	First Day Swansea Bay for day's unlimited travel (adult, 16 & under & family options)