

## RURAL RAMBLE

## RICHARD BURTON TRAIL



### ***The Legendary Richard Burton***

The Richard Burton Trail opened in 2011 commemorating the great Welsh actor and film star (1925-1984). Richard, son of a miner, was born in Pontrhydyfen and grew up in Taibach, Port Talbot; he took part in drama productions with the local YMCA then moved to London to become a great Shakespearean actor and finally a world famous Hollywood film star.

### ***Pontrhydyfen has a fascinating transport history***

Owing to its topography, threading transport routes through the area was very difficult, hence the numerous viaducts. Three of these carried railway lines linking the area's collieries to Port Talbot. The Port Talbot Railway (PTR) from Tonmawr crossed the river on a 10-arched red brick (extant) viaduct; the Rhondda & Swansea Bay (R&SBR) from the Rhondda Valley crossed twice further up on single span viaducts. The other (extant) viaduct, originally an aqueduct, carried a water supply across the valley to serve local ironworks.

### ***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.

Head west from Rhyslyn and after 200 metres, bear right, take the higher road, turn left over the aqueduct to Oakwood, turn right down steps and along Penhydd Street, pass the school (right) before dropping down to the Trail and over the impressive red brick viaduct.

On this section, you cross two significant features of transport infrastructure; the aqueduct built 1825 to supply water to the giant waterwheels of blast furnaces at the ironworks; and the impressive red brick viaduct (crossing the Afan at its convergence with the Pelenna) built at the end of the 19th century for transporting coal from Tonmawr to Port Talbot and closed in 1964.

Take the Trail for 500 metres in a northerly direction, turning obliquely right to a forest road leading to Pontrhydyfen. Turn right on to the road, under the viaduct, then left, crossing the river on a footbridge, ascend steps to re-join the main Trail. Turn right and follow the Trail towards Cwmafan with good views down the valley; it strays from the former railway alignment where the Tonmawr branch railway joined the R&SB.

In November 1960 there was a head on collision between a runaway coal train down the valley and a Rhondda-bound diesel passenger train. At that time, coal wagons had only hand brakes and on steep gradients, the guard was tasked with pinning down a proportion to prevent runaways. The accident revealed what happens when judgement was improperly exercised with fatal results in this instance! The accident made national news.

The trail veers from the original R&SB railway (which headed to Cwmafan) at this point. A kilometre further on, you reach the Portrait Bench, where life-sized sculptures in steel celebrate three eminent local personalities; film star, Richard Burton; locally born comedian Rob Brydon and former Afan Forest Park head ranger Richard Wagstaff.

From here the path bears right dropping gently to the river, crossed on a steel footbridge to the top end of Cwmafan. Follow the 'cycle' signs to the Community Centre (GR 781921) and the end of the Trail. You may wish to

continue along Jersey Row and London Row to the parish church of St Michael's whose tower dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Cwmafan was once a major centre for a metal industries (iron, tin, copper) and brickworks whose life was short, opened in the 1870's/80's and all closed as early as 1914. Sadly, no trace of any can now be seen.



## Information Panel

<b>Start point:</b>	Oakwood, Pontrhydyfen (GR 796940)
<b>End point:</b>	Cwmafan Community Centre (GR 785924)
<b>Map:</b>	O.S. Explorer 165 or Landranger 159
<b>Distance:</b>	5 kilometres
<b>Time:</b>	2 hours
<b>Terrain:</b>	Easy to moderate with short steep sections
<b>Refreshments:</b>	Cwmafan
<b>Toilets:</b>	Cwmafan Community Centre (when open) Cwmafan Town Centre
<b>Trains:</b>	Port Talbot 4 kilometres Neath 6 kilometres
<b>Bus stops:</b>	Oakwood Cwmafan Community Centre
<b>Parking:</b>	Rhyslyn Car Park, Pontrhydyfen (free) Cwmafan Community Centre (free) The 83 connects Cwmafan and Oakwood
<b>Buses:</b>	Routes 83 Port Talbot-Cwmafan-Pontrhydyfen & 59 Neath Pontrhydyfen, every hour weekdays' daytime; no Sunday service
<b>Tickets:</b>	First Day Swansea Bay for day's unlimited travel (adult, 16 & under & family options)