

RURAL RAMBLE

ABERDULAIS HISTORIC TRAIL

Transport and Industrial Heritage amidst natural beauty



Aberdulais was one of many industrial hotspots in centuries past and a major transport interchange. The trail links Tonna via the Neath and Tennant Canals, the Tinworks and Waterfall* site.

*Aberdulais T & W site has restricted opening hours/days in winter.

The Route in detail

Alight from the X7 bus at Henfaes Road, Tonna and immediately turn left (GR 770988) on to a minor cul-de-sac leading to the Neath Canal at Tyn-yr-Heol Lock (200 metres).

The Neath Canal was surveyed as far back as 1791 by Thomas Dadford and opened between Glynneath and Briton Ferry in 1795 by engineer Thomas Sheasby. The 17 kilometre route cost £40000 and had 19 locks, this one being the Tyn-yr-Heol Lock. The house here was built towards the end of the 18th century as a lock-keeper's residence and fulfilled that function for over 150 years. It is now fully restored and privately owned.

Cross the canal at the Tonna Lock with its attractive, recently restored, Lock House, and turn right on to the canal towpath.

Follow the path for about 1 kilometre; at left is an unattractive gas distribution depot, at right the canal under a steep, well wooded, slope. At Aberdulais, cross the road then under the railway bridge to Aberdulais Canal Basin.

The Basin was the junction between the Neath (Glynneath-Briton Ferry) and the Tennant (Aberdulais-Port Tennant) Canals; also a loading and transfer point for freight traffic. Commercially, the Neath Canal was carrying 150000 tonnes of coal by 1820 rising to a peak of 200000 tonnes, mostly transferring to the Tennant Canal. The Tennant crosses the river Neath on an aqueduct (extant in poor condition) south of the basin, followed by a lock.

Take a short walk towards the river to see the aqueduct taking the canal over the river Neath and beyond, the bridge carrying the Vale of Neath Railway.

The Vale of Neath Railway opened in 1851 between Aberdare (later also Merthyr) and Neath; its main purpose was carriage of coal and minerals from the Taff and Cynon valleys to Swansea Docks. It was acquired by the Great Western Railway in 1865 and developed as a strategic mid-valleys route to Pontypool. Passenger trains commenced in 1853 and ran for 111 years, ceasing in 1964; there was a station at Aberdulais. Freight traffic continued until recently though the line is now 'mothballed' due to lack of mining activity.

Leave the canal basin, drop down to the road, turn right and proceed over the river, turn right again past the former lock house, over the canal and under the A465 emerging on to the A4109. Turn right and opposite is the entrance to Aberdulais Tinworks and Waterfall.

This site has a fascinating industrial past. Initially copper smelting was superseded by ironmaking and finally manufacture of tinsplate. This activity was powered by water from the Aberdulais Falls, assisted by a waterwheel powering turbines. The Aberdulais Tinworks and Waterfall site has been tastefully restored by the National Trust which provides interpretation of the various aspects of the historic past (n.b. Entrance fees payable).

The bus stop for the return journey is on the main road opposite the Centre.



Information Panel

Start point:	Tonna Lock (GR 770988)
End point:	Aberdulais Falls (GR 771993)
Map:	O.S. Explorer 166 or Landranger 170
Distance:	1.5 kilometres
Time:	2 hours
Terrain:	Easy to moderate
Refreshments:	Aberdulais National Trust Tea Rooms
Toilets:	Aberdulais National Trust
Trains:	Neath 2 kilometres
Bus stops:	Tonna Lock Hill (200 metres) Aberdulais Falls (opposite National Trust 100 metres)
Parking:	Aberdulais Falls (free but limited) n.b. this walk is designed for public transport users
Buses:	The start is on the X7 route (Swansea-Neath-Glynneath) every hour weekdays' daytime; the end is on the X8 route (Coelbren-Neath-Swansea) every hour weekdays' daytime.