



Rural Ramble: Aberdulais Heritage 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 and ultimately Cefn Coed Colliery Museum*.

**Aberdulais T&W site has restricted opening hours/days in winter; Cefn Coed is closed during the winter months*

The Route in detail

Alight from the X55 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.



Start point
Tonna Lock
End point
Aberdulais Falls or
Cefn Coed Colliery Museum



O.S. Explorer 166
O.S. Landranger 170



1.5 km or 5 km



2 hours or 4 hours



Easy to moderate



Aberdulais National Trust
Tea Rooms



Aberdulais National Trust
Cefn Coed Colliery Museum



Neath 2 kilometres



Tonna Lock Hill (200 metres)
Aberdulais Falls
(opposite National Trust)
Cefn Coed (opposite museum)



Aberdulais Falls (free but limited)
Cefn Coed Museum (free)
n.b. this walk is designed for public
transport users

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 tinplate. 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).

From Aberdulais Falls, proceed up the A4109 for 200 metres taking the second left turn to Cefn-yr-Allt road. After passing a small housing estate, the road emerges into open country and woodland for the next 4 kilometres before re-joining the main road 1 kilometre from Cefn Coed museum.

The recently reopened museum tells the story of coal mining at the Cefn Coed Colliery, once the deepest anthracite mine in the world. It was one of the most dangerous coalmines in Wales where many lost their lives. The story of the men who worked there and at other anthracite pits in Wales is told through words, pictures and artefacts throughout the museum. The underground gallery, a simulated working seam, brings the harrowing conditions to life. The museum has a preserved steam winding engine, dating from 1927, now powered by electricity, as well as other items of mining machinery. It is home to the sole surviving gas powered tram which ran in Neath and now beautifully restored.

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



The start is on the X55 route (Swansea-Neath- Glynneath) every half hour weekdays' daytime; the end is on the 58 route (Coelbren-Neath-Swansea) every hour weekdays' daytime. Sunday buses are very infrequent and not recommended for this itinerary.



First Day tickets Swansea Bay or Neath Port Talbot areas giving a day's unlimited travel (adult, youth and family options) can be purchased from the bus driver

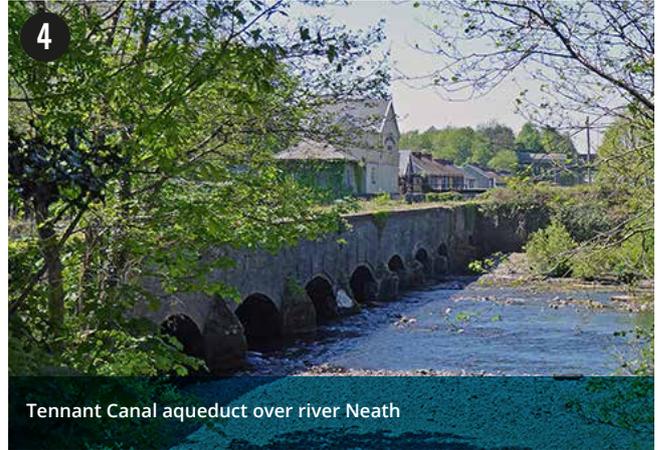
If coming by train, Neath Plus Bus tickets for onward travel can be purchased with your train ticket.





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Aberdulais Canal Basin



4

Tennant Canal aqueduct over river Neath



5

Tinworks-restored drams and chimney stack



6

Aberdulais Waterfall



7

Tinworks-restored waterwheel and buildings



8

Cefn Coed Museum-underground passage



9

Cefn Coed Museum-restored Neath Gas Tram

