

Rural Ramble: Clydach to Pontardawe

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.

A new railway was promoted by the GWR in 1911 to link the Swansea District line at Felin Fran with Gwaun-cae-Gurwen to promote mine development there. Only short sections were built from each end; the section from Trebanos to Cwmgorse had embankments, cuttings and a tunnel built, though no track was ever laid.

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.



Start point
Clydach Mond (GR 695014)
End point
Pontardawe Arts Centre
(GR 723040)



O.S. Explorer 165
O.S. Landranger 159



6 kilometres



3 hours



Easy, except the railway walk
Moderate to Hard



Pontardawe Town Centre



Pontardawe Herbert St



Swansea 9 kilometres



Clydach Mond (100 metres)
Pontardawe Jubilee (200 metres)



Pontardawe Council Car Park
(charged)
The X50/51 bus connects
Pontardawe and Clydach

The Route in detail

From the bus stop at Clydach (GR 695014), head on to the A4067, joining the canal towpath at the Clydach lock (left) after 100 metres. You can witness some earlier restoration of the canal with the former lock in good condition. The canal towards Swansea continues only a short distance, beyond which was filled in years ago. Of interest across the road are offices and works of the International Nickel Co, still open for business, a rare industrial survivor.

After c.200 metres, the path appears obstructed by a former council depot but it is safe to walk through and re-join the path at the other end before crossing under the road, emerging at a canal basin with a visitor centre (open weekends).

From here, the trail passes through particularly attractive country with the canal (left) and Coed Gwilym Park (right). Continue along the path beyond the park for another 2 kilometres to reach the derelict Trebanos lock. Shortly after, the main path (also NCN43) veers away to the right and it is recommended you take the path over the filled-in section of canal almost into Pontardawe. It goes under the by-pass, climbs slightly crossing the Upper Clydach River at a point where the canal is extant and on an aqueduct; emerging in Herbert Street.

It appears more recent industrial development was the reason this section of canal was filled in and it is hard to see where the link to the extant section just south of Herbert Street was; its higher level suggests there was another lock here.

You may wish to take a short detour to the site of the 'railway that never was'; if so, walk up Herbert Street, left at the traffic lights and along the B4603 towards Trebanos. After 1 kilometre, turn right into Graig Road and after a short climb, reach the abutments of a railway bridge; a footpath leads you to the track bed of what should have been the railway from Trebanos to Cwmgorse; engineered but track never laid.

Follow the trail parallel to Swansea Road for 0.75 kilometres until you reach houses (right); here, there is an abandoned bridge over what was probably a former tramway. The going is rough though not dangerous and the intrepid walker will be able to access the entrance of the never-used tunnel (to which access is forbidden).

A final bit of interesting information: a flat-roofed building inside the tunnel was built during the Second World War, not for storing ammunition, but records of Pontardawe Urban Council, obviously considered of interest to the enemy!

Retrace your steps to Pontardawe town centre.

*All distances are given in metric
GR refers to Ordnance Survey grid reference*



Both ends of the walk (Clydach Mond and Pontardawe Jubilee) are on the X50/X51 bus route Swansea-Pontardawe every half hour weekdays' daytime; limited service Sundays.



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





