

# Rural Ramble: Gunpowder and Waterfall Trail

## History, natural beauty and the awesome power of water in a walk

The Mellte River valley north of Pontneddfechan was once a major industrial centre where silica rock was mined and gunpowder manufactured. The Glynneath Powder Mills, established in 1857 to produce powder used in coal mining and quarrying, operated until 1931. The steep sided valley was well suited to gunpowder manufacture, which stretched over two kilometres creating plenty of space between buildings to ensure explosions were localised. The fast flowing river powered the waterwheels and turbines and all raw materials were sourced in the vicinity.

A tramway, now the main path up the valley, linked the mills with the Neath Canal and the Vale of Neath Railway and carried raw materials up the valley. Many buildings were destroyed in the 1940's due to risk of accidental explosion but a few remain and can be seen along the trail. Most prominent is the Corning House built of concrete at the end of the trail. Other stone and masonry structures of which ruins remain are generally built with three solid walls, the fourth and roof made of wood to allow explosion to move up and out of the building limiting damage to expensive machinery.

Dinas Rock is a major feature at the start of the trail and its impressive stature reveals what is known geologically as an 'anticline' revealed after extensive quarrying for limestone and silica in the 19th century.

Silica mines were a feature of the second part of the walk up the Nedd Fechan valley. It was used to make firebricks that lined the metal smelting furnaces of the Industrial Revolution. 'Dinas Silica Bricks' were a prized product, in demand not just locally but worldwide.



Start point  
Pontneddfechan Dinas Rock  
(GR 910080)  
End point  
Pontneddfechan Angel Inn  
(GR 902077)



O.S. Explorer OL12  
O.S. Landranger 160



7 kilometres



3 hours



Easy to moderate



Pontneddfechan



Pontneddfechan  
near Angel Inn



Neath 18 kilometres



Pontneddfechan Min-yr-Awel  
(adjacent to start)  
Pontneddfechan Angel Inn (100  
metres)



Dinas Rock (free-very limited)  
Pontneddfechan (free-limited)  
n.b. this walk is designed for public  
transport users

# The Route in detail

From the Min-yr-Awel bus terminus (GR 910080), walk to Dinas Rock, an impressive edifice used by adventure groups for climbing and abseiling; take the minor road over the river Mellte turning left into the car park.

Retrace your steps over the bridge, turn right and head up on the former tramroad; the building (left), now a community hall, was once a store for gunpowder and the sole one to survive intact following closure of the industry. The trail takes you alongside the river (right) for about 1.5 kilometres on a level course. You will spot occasional reminders of the gunpowder industry with building ruins, many covered by foliage. After 1 kilometre, a bridge crossing the river (once a branch of the tramway) has been refurbished as a footway. Continue on the main trail to the site of a weir with more extensive remains of industry including the Corning House (left); the trail is closed beyond here. Retrace your steps to Dinas Rock then along the road to the centre of Pontneddfechan. By the Angel Inn, turn right through a kissing gate with the Farewell Rock (left) – so named by miners as it represented the northern limits of coal bearing rocks.

This path is another former tram road serving the silica mines and you will see evidence of occasional stone sleepers on the side of the trail. At right is the river Nedd Fechan and left, ruins of a former corn mill and silica mine respectively. 2 kilometres into the trail and you reach the confluence of the Nedd Fechan and Pyrddin. Cross the river on a wooden footbridge turning left on an uneven footpath leading up the right bank of the Pyrddin to the attractive Scŵd Gwladus (Lady Fall), a 10 metre high cascade over a sandstone ridge. View the fall from here or take a steep path to view from above.

Retrace your steps to Pontneddfechan where refreshments and toilets are available and your return bus leaves from opposite the Angel Inn.

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



Pontneddfechan is the terminus of the X55 bus from Swansea and Neath every hour weekdays' daytime; there is a very limited service from Neath on Sundays and Public Holidays.



First Day South & West Wales or Neath Port Talbot tickets give a day's unlimited travel (adult, 16 & under and family options available) 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.





