

WALKS AND RIDES ALONG THE BRINORE TRAMROAD

an early 19th Century horse-drawn railway running between
Talybont-on-Usk and Trevil

THE BRINORE TRAM ROAD COMPANY. REDUCTION OF TONNAGES.

**From and after the 2nd day of
February, 1863, the Rates, Tolls,
& Tonnages payable to the Com-
pany, in respect of their Tram
Road, will be as follows:--**

| | | |
|---|--|-----------------------|
| Coal and Coke..... | heretofore 2d. per Ton per Mile, will be | 3d. per Ton per Mile. |
| Lime and Limestone | 1d. " " " | 1d. " " |
| Pitwood, Cordwood, and Sleepers | 1½d. " " " | 1d. " " |
| Round Timber, Deals, Pine, Lath, Helves, &c.... | 1½d. " " " | 1½d. " " |
| Iron, Iron Mine, Iron Ore, Cinders, Slates,) | 1d. " " " | 1½d. " " |
| Stone, Clay, and Bricks | 1d. " " " | 1d. " " |
| Hay, Straw, and Compost | 1d. " " " | 1d. " " |
| Goods and other Merchandize not above described | 2½d. " " " | 1½d. " " |

BY ORDER,
THOMAS C. PERKS,
Clerk to the Company.

Shire Hall, Brecon,
May 11th, 1863.

D. WILLIAMS, PRINTER AND STATIONER, BULWARK, BRECON.

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Brinore Tramroad
Conservation
Forum

and made freely
available
for download
to encourage the
conservation of this
important part of the
heritage of industrial
South Wales

Introduction

The Brinore Tramroad, completed in 1815, is one of the longest stretches of primitive railways which can be followed by hikers, cyclists or horse riders. From the Brecknock & Abergavenny Canal (now styled the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal) it runs for eight miles and beyond into the heartland of industrial South Wales. Rising from the Usk valley fields give way to mountain but the easy gradient is ideal for cyclists and walkers. From the summit at Pen Rhiw-calch (head of the limestone road) the route descends at a similar gradient. For those contemplating the full eight miles of its course it can be followed from either direction. For those wishing to discover more there is the wildlife of Talybont Reservoir or the geology of Trefil Quarries which supplied the five major ironworks to the south from the second half of the 18th to the end of the 19th centuries.

Anyone conversant with Welsh will question the spelling of 'Brinore'. This Anglicisation of Bryn Oer (Cold Hill) was accepted practice in the past, adopted by incoming industrialists and others in authority, to produce English approximations of Welsh place names. Bryn Oer refers to an area of coal production lying on the watershed between Tredegar and Rhymney.

The Brinore Tramroad Conservation Forum having completed its work has now been closed. This on line guide is based upon the original Guide which sold over 2000 copies through local outlets. It was decided to release a web version of the Guide, freely available to download, in order to continue to provide information about this important 19th Century railway, part of the industrial heritage of South Wales. We hope that by understanding and appreciating its history and significance it may be valued by all who walk and ride along it.

Obstructions, unlawful use and maintenance issues should be reported to the [Brecon Beacons National Park Authority](#), Plas Y Ffynnon, Cambrian Way, Brecon, LD3 7HP phone 01874 624437

Produced by John van Laun Associates *Industrial Archaeologists* for the Brinore Tramroad Conservation Forum © 2003

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Text by John Jones

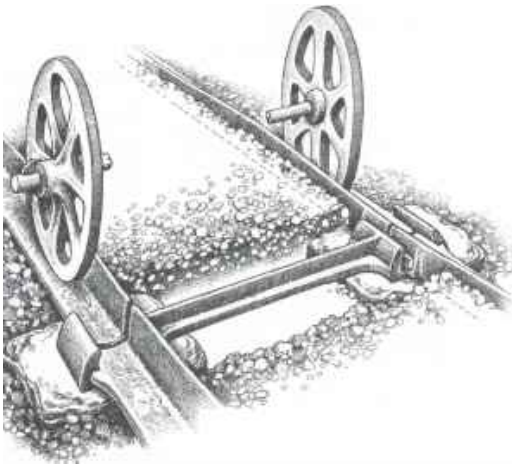
Maps and drawings by Michael Blackmore

Photographs: John Jones, Peter Jones, John van Laun

and [Brecon Beacons National Park Authority](#)

The Origins of Railways

The first railway is generally assumed to be the Stockton & Darlington Railway of 1825 but ten years before this the Brinore Tramroad was built. Even so, this horse-drawn railway was far from the first: as far back as 1603 Huntingdon Beaumont had built a wooden railway in the Nottingham coalfield. By the 1780s wooden railways had migrated to South Wales and it was here that the first all-iron rail was used. However it was in South Wales that rails took on a form which was to become a *cul-de-sac* in railway history.



Basically vehicles could be guided in two very different ways. They might, as is now standard, have flanged wheels running on edge rails, the whole railway being known commonly in South Wales, as a railroad. Alternatively the flange was on the L-shaped plate rail or tramplate and the wheel was plain. In this case the contemporary name in South Wales was tramroad. It was this form which became so popular that it was even considered for the Stockton & Darlington Railway and was used on the Brinore Tramroad.

Canals

The Brecknock & Abergavenny

Canal was authorised by Act of Parliament in 1793 from Brecon to a junction with the Monmouthshire Canal near Pontypool which, once completed, would give access to Newport. Within the act there was reference to specific railways to be built under it. The canal was opened northwards to Brecon in 1800, but was not completed southwards to its junction with the Monmouthshire Canal until 1812 and therefore did not acquire a through link to Newport until then.

Because of the high lockage involved, canals were impractical in hilly country such as the Heads of the Valleys in South Wales. It was for this reason that acts which empowered the construction of local canals also permitted the construction of railways, waggonways or stone roads. If not specifically authorised they could be built for a maximum distance of four or eight miles (depending on the act in question) from the canal or from an authorised railway, provided that they served industrial works. This was interpreted to include lines not only from ironworks but also from quarries within the permitted distance. They could either be built by the canal companies or privately. In either case they were public roads subject to tolls and byelaws. It was under these powers that the Brinore Tramroad was built.

In 1865 the B&A was taken over by the Monmouthshire Railway & Canal Company, and in 1880 both concerns, including the railroads and tramroads built specifically under their acts, became the property of the Great Western Railway.



Stone blocks near Glaschw m Uchaf

The Brinore Tramroad

In 1810 Benjamin Hall became the sole owner of the Union Ironworks in the Rhymney valley. At the same time George Overton and Jonathan Dixon were interested in leasing Rhymney's colliery at Bryn Oer a few miles south of Trefil and in selling its products to the lucrative markets of Brecon and its hinterland. Hall therefore devised a grand scheme to free himself (and incidentally Overton and Dixon) from their only outlet down the adjacent Sirhowy valley. He devised a brand-new tramroad from Rhymney via the limestone quarries at Trefil to the B&A at Talybont on Usk. This would carry limestone for fluxing at the ironworks in the Rhymney Valley in one direction and his iron in the other, as well as Overton and Dixon's coal on which he would receive tolls. In order to cover the distance (over 8 miles) he invoked the eight-mile clause of the B & A Act and in effect sponsored Overton to build the Brinore Tramroad from the canal at Talybont to the eight-mile point, which fell just north of the Quarrymen's Arms at Trefil, and to complete the line to Rhymney and to the Bryn Oer colliery on land which he himself controlled. At the Talybont end Overton and Dixon built

limekilns to burn lime from Trefil and Dyffryn Crawnnon.

To raise capital for this enterprise the Brinore Tramroad Company was floated with 130 shares of £100 each. The overall cost of building the Brinore was £12800 of which Overton received £12000. Built by 1815 it was rented to Dixon and Overton for five years at a rent of £896 per annum but was still a public road with tolls payable by the users. After much haggling over maintenance (for which Dixon and Overton were responsible) the tramroad company took over the line and operated it itself from 1823. The Brinore and Hall's Trefil Tramroad shared a common gauge of 3ft 4in for the L-shaped cast-iron rails held in combined tie-bars and chairs (sills) resting on stone-block sleepers. Thus established, the tramroads continued with relatively little change until 1852 when Rhymney abandoned Trefil. From 1845 there were a number of overtures from railway companies to take over the line but these, probably because of unsuitable gradients, came to nought. The Brinore itself proposed conversion to locomotive working in 1850, no doubt in imitation of Tredegar, itself renowned for its pioneering of locomotives in South Wales.

'Hannah Jenkins [aged 21] works by the ton, and gets 7s. or 8s. for herself and 5s. for her helper [aged 16]. They work about 12 hours a-day; they begin from six to eight o'clock in the morning, and leave off about six or eight o'clock in the evening. They break up three trams of stones (four tons) in a day; they must supply one furnace with stones.'

*Royal Commission on the
Employment of Children 1842*

Everyday Life of the Tramroad



By 1884, and probably well before, Hall's Trefil Tramroad itself had lost its *raison d'être* and was out of use. By the 1860s the Brinore was in trouble, and in 1863 reduced the tonnage rates in an attempt to encourage traffic, particularly coal and to a lesser extent lime and limestone. During the 1870s, if not the late 1860s, it quietly faded away.

Trams were generally made of wrought iron but some had elm sides. Each weighed around half a ton empty and in 1821 loads were limited to one and a half tons but this was increased to 2 tons and finally 2¼ tons in 1835. They could be operated singly, or linked in trains of up to four. One horse could pull a loaded tram on the flat and bring an empty one back up the incline from Talybont. One way of checking their momentum as they descended the 3.5 mile (5.5 km) incline from Pen Rhiw-cach to Talybont was to lock a pair of wheels with a wooden spar pushed through the spokes - a procedure called spragging. This dangerous and noisy practice damaged the track and tended to wear 'flats' on the cast-iron wheels. An alternative was to use a shoe which locked under a wheel but this too was reported as causing excessive wear on the 1 in 76 gradient in 1827. At intervals there were passing places (13 in all) with a basic points system referred to as "turnouts". It is likely that loaded trams coming downhill had priority and the haulier signalled his approach by striking a piece of metal strategically placed to hang at the side of the track.

Tramroad formation approaching Dyffryn Crawnog



Tolls were payable based on a ton per mile rate (around 2d a ton/mile)

known as tonnage which was calculated on the commodity carried. From 1826 trams had to have the owners' name and a number painted on the sides and, no doubt, the tare (empty) weight was recorded as was customary on the nearby Hay Railway opened around the same

time. At the weigh-bridge house on the outskirts of Talybont loaded trams were weighed and a quick subtraction made of the tare weight to arrive at the weight of the contents. The commonest materials transported were limestone and coal but others included wood for pit props taken on the return journey. It has been suggested that even coffins containing the deceased from the rural areas along the route were sometimes transported part of the way to their last resting place.

There are no written records detailing the every day running of the tramroad so the working life of the hauliers remains vague. It is unlikely that one man with his horse travelled the entire route from either Trefil or Bryn Oer Patch to Talybont and back in a day - a distance of 16 to 22 miles. Men and horses probably changed over at the summit at Pen Rhiw-calch, where there are the ruins of two public houses, before the descent to the canal at Talybont. A shed was leased by the company at Pen Rhiw-calch and probably used as a platelayers hut (a term still in use today to describe workers who maintain track). It would be wrong to suggest that the hauliers never had time to admire the panoramic views we so treasure today, but hard pressed in bad weather conditions they must have found it a testing workplace.

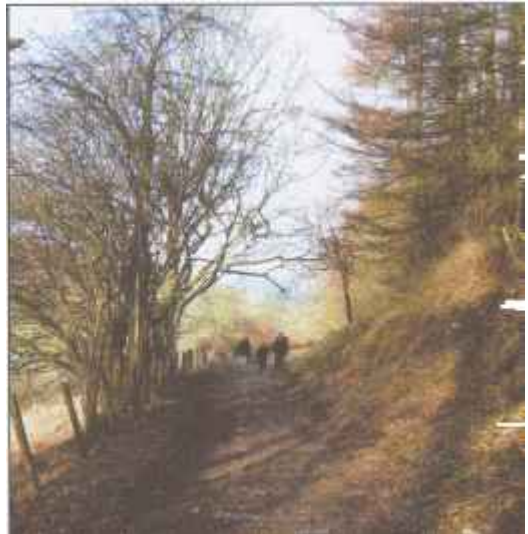
Tramroad above railway

The Brecon & Merthyr Tydfil Junction Railway

From the 1850s main line railways began to invade the area but the Brinore was passed by as a possible route to link the industrial valleys to rural Breconshire. Instead a more westerly approach was made from Merthyr Tydfil rather than Rhymney. In spite of this the line adopted followed a parallel but slightly northerly course to the Brinore between Torpantau and Talybont.

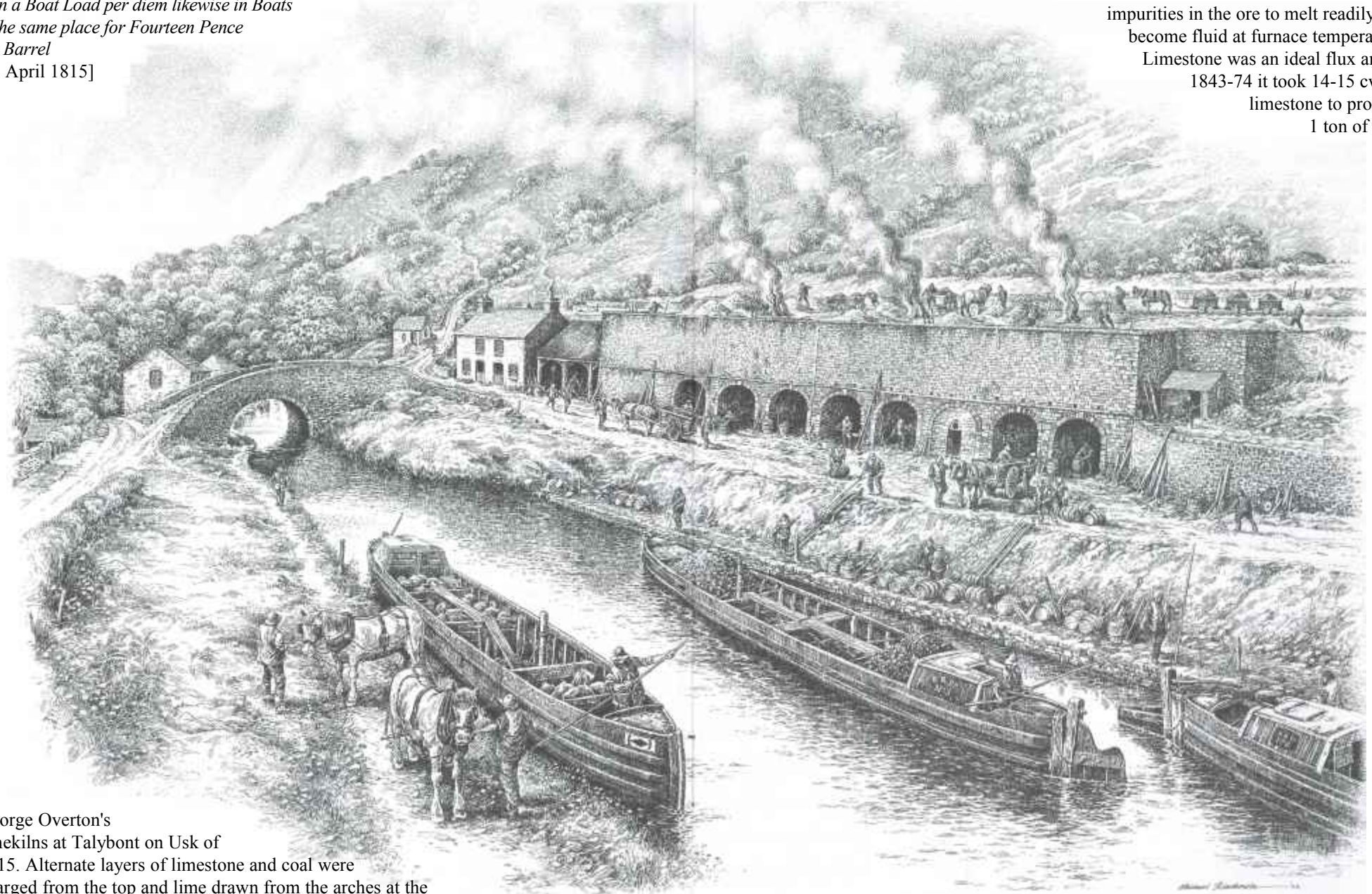
The B & M started as an unassuming little railway company in 1858-60 to construct a line between Brecon and Dowlais in Merthyr Tydfil. By doing so it became embroiled with the giants which dominated the South Wales railway scene. However, in spite of its modest name it eventually reached Newport tapping the coal resources of some of the South Wales valleys. It was opened from Brecon to Dowlais in 1863.

To railway historians it is perhaps best known for the seven-mile bank which runs between the Brinore Tramroad and Talybont Reservoir. The Dowlais end of the line now carries the Brecon Mountain Railway.



*Messrs. Dixon & Overton ...to deliver in Boats at the Public Wharf
at Brecon, Sixty or more tons of coal per diem at Twelve
Shillings per Ton and any quantity of Lime, not less
than a Boat Load per diem likewise in Boats
at the same place for Fourteen Pence
per Barrel*
[25 April 1815]

Flux was used in a blast furnace to cause the
impurities in the ore to melt readily and
become fluid at furnace temperature.
Limestone was an ideal flux and in
1843-74 it took 14-15 cwt of
limestone to produce
1 ton of iron.



George Overton's
limekilns at Talybont on Usk of
1815. Alternate layers of limestone and coal were
charged from the top and lime drawn from the arches at the
bottom. It was then transported in barrels by narrow boats.

ROUTES

The explorer on foot, cycle or horse will not only find exercise but considerable interest in the geology, history, archaeology and flora and fauna in the walks and rides which follow.

From Talybont the sedimentary rock formations give way through the Devonian Sandstone to the Carboniferous Limestone - beyond to the south lie the Coal Measures. At Trefil nearly 200 years of quarrying have left an awesome scar which can be unravelled into a time-scale and placement where the five ironworks (Ebbw Vale, Beaufort, Sirhowy, Tredegar and Rhymney) extracted fluxing stone. During the 1830s civil unrest led to the Chartists using the mountain to store and make arms for their abortive uprising. At the other end of the social scale there is testament to the Duke of Beaufort's shooting parties and the elaborate picnics which accompanied them.

Routes can be followed on the Ordnance Survey 'Explorer/ 1:25000 maps OL12 and OL13. All grid references in the text have the prefix SO and are therefore omitted.

Routes are marked by colour codes as follows:



Start at the canal at Talybont
(1148 2253)



Start at Talybont Reservoir dam
(1037 2053)



Start at Aneurin Bevan Memorial
above Trefil village (1099 1519)

Detours are indicated by broken colour
(for maps see pages 12 and 13).



Limekilns at Dyffryn Crawnnon

A gentle stroll from Talybont
suitable for wheel or push chairs
and the less able walker
(1km or 2.5km)



Access onto the canal towpath at either the lift bridge (113 227) or from the White Hart Inn car park (114 225) and go left. Unusually for a canal you get elevated views of the village and the Usk valley as you go. The first stone bridge leads to the Brinore Tramroad and the second is where the Brecon & Merthyr Railway (see pages 5 and 17) crossed the canal and road. Soon after going under the pipeline taking water from Talybont Reservoir (see page 15) you come to a replica tram and information board. These tell you how limestone was brought to the fine bank of limekilns opposite (117 224). Here limestone was interspersed with coal and burnt to form quicklime and then transported by narrow boat in barrels. There is a seat here to rest and enjoy the countryside. On the other side of the modern bridge was the tramroad counting house. Either turn back or continue on until the towpath reaches the road. Look ahead here to see the entrance and beyond the light at the end of the Ashford Tunnel. You can return by road but the views in reverse from the canal bank will be more rewarding.

An easy walk from
The Aneurin Bevan Memorial
near Trefil
(1 km)



Aneurin Bevan (1897 - 1960) was born at Tredegar and began work in the pits at 13. He rose to prominence as a trade unionists in the South Wales Coalfield and led the miners in the 1926 General Strike. He was MP for Ebbw Vale in 1929 and remained active in the Labour Party for the rest of his life. He was appointed Minister of Health as part of the Labour Government in 1945. He was always a radical within his party.

From the Aneurin Bevan Memorial (109 151, for directions to start see page 20) follow the wide verged road and where it curves left carry straight on following the line of the Brinore Tramroad above the trees. In a short distance the forest drops away and you can enjoy fine views out over the Dyffryn Cwannon valley. Looking across you can see the route of the tramroad through the trees as it contours around the head of the valley. Return from here or go on along the now very rough track to find the remains of a double limekiln (106 153) with more open views. This is where limestone was burnt to make quicklime for building and agriculture

purposes. Easy access does mean that the detritus of modern living is frequently dumped here but a sense of history and the beauty of the countryside still shines through.

Talybont - Reservoir
Return (6km) 1.5 hours



To get onto the tramroad follow the Brinore sign behind the White Hart (114 225) passing over the canal and across the bridge high over the old railway line. Before starting off look back over the metal gate on your left to get a glimpse of the derelict weigh-bridge house, now on private land, where the tramroad company assessed the tolls payable for goods carried down to the canal. Turn right up what appears to be a green lane and carry on through a metal gate until you reach a finger post (109 219).

You can shorten the walk here by crossing the stile on the right and following the footpath markers to a footbridge. Turn right after crossing and follow the stream back to Talybont. Reduces walk by 3.5km.

Continue on until the fields below give way to an open copse of large oak and ash trees. Here there is a double line of well preserved stone-sleeper blocks with the ends of the tie bars clearly imprinted on



A tranquil Talybont Reservoir

them. Further on you can find a series of larger blocks with holes indicating a 'turnout' or passing place. Here there are splendid views west over Aber village to the uplands of the Central Beacons.

On reaching a crossroads with two fingerposts take the forestry road sloping down signed 'Taff Trail' (108 214). At the bottom follow straight on along what was the original route of the Brecon & Merthyr

Junction Railway built in 1863. Just after reaching the green barrier turn right onto the metalled road that crosses the dam. Stop to enjoy the scene before you. Here human influence is everywhere - the impounded water, great conifer plantations and a jigsaw of enclosed fields - Yet a tranquil natural feeling prevails.

To cut out some of the road walking go down the Danywenallt Study Centre drive. Just before the lower cattle grid turn left down a frequently muddy lane. At the bottom cross the open mesh bridge - Perfectly safe but daunting for some dogs. Look around and you should be able to spot a skeletal iron water wheel, all that remains of a mill demolished during construction of the dam. It is also the spot to ponder that the great bank of earth above you is all that holds back two miles of water! Follow the service road away from the Water Treatment Works to join the public road. Reduces walk by 0.5km.

As you cross wider views open up across the water and the surrounding hills.

Waterfowl may be frequently seen and in summer House Martins nesting on the round valve tower perform effortless acrobatics. In late spring the exuberant banks of rhododendrons add colour to the scene The frequent presence of an ice cream van may add to your enjoyment. At the junction ahead turn right and head downhill following the Taff Trail sign. Be

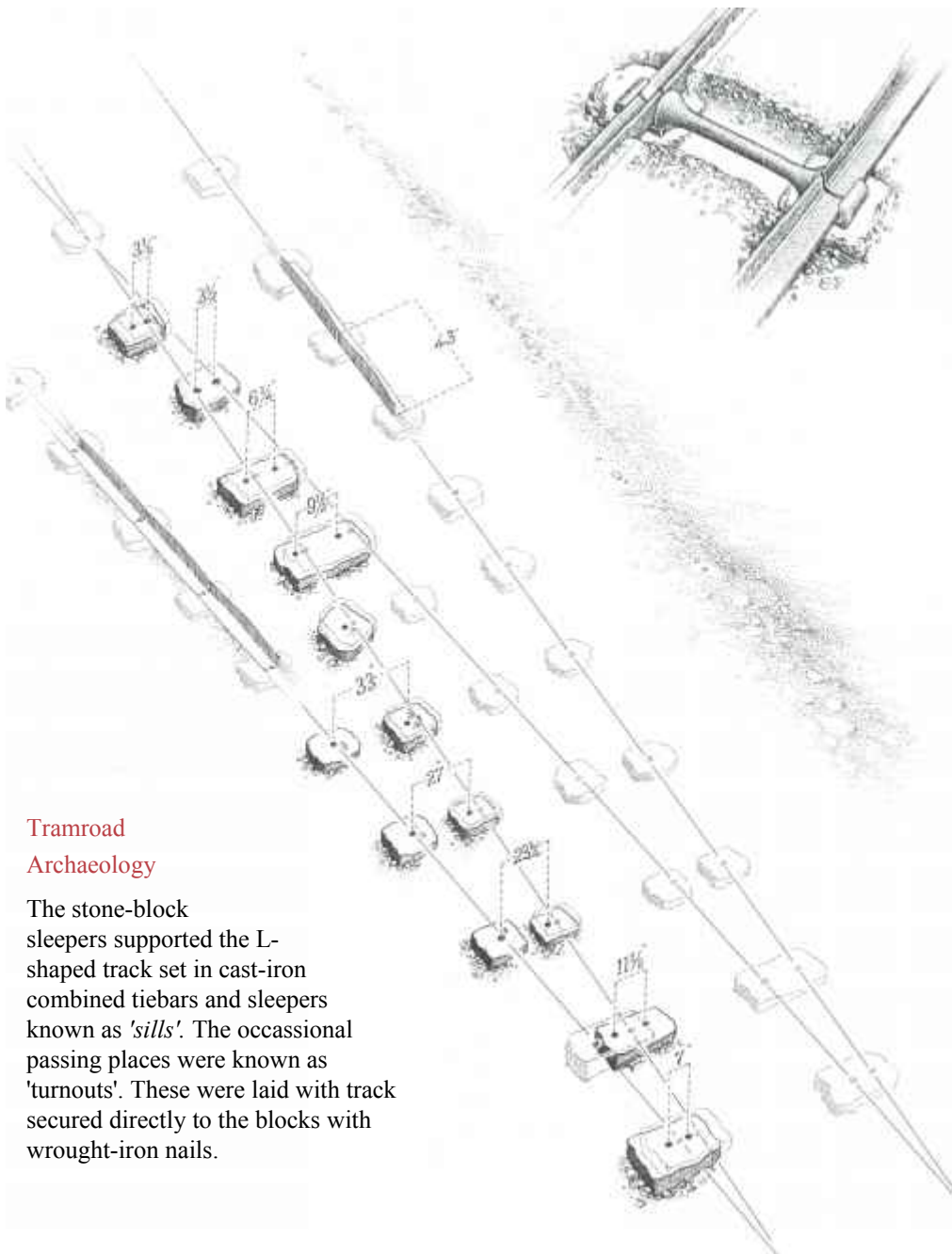
alert for traffic even on this generally quiet road. Go through Aber village until you reach Aber Farm with a range of converted outbuildings - the name is painted on an old plough.

Cross the way-marked stile (105 216) on the right and follow the path down through the field to a second stile in the left-hand corner. Once over turn left, ignoring the footbridge, and follow the river back towards Talybont.

Pass through two fields and just after crossing a wooden stile you will see a weir that diverts the water once used to power Talybont mill. Keep straight on to a footpath marker then cut diagonally up across the field to get onto the road over an old stone stile. Turn right and proceed into the village over the canal lift bridge.

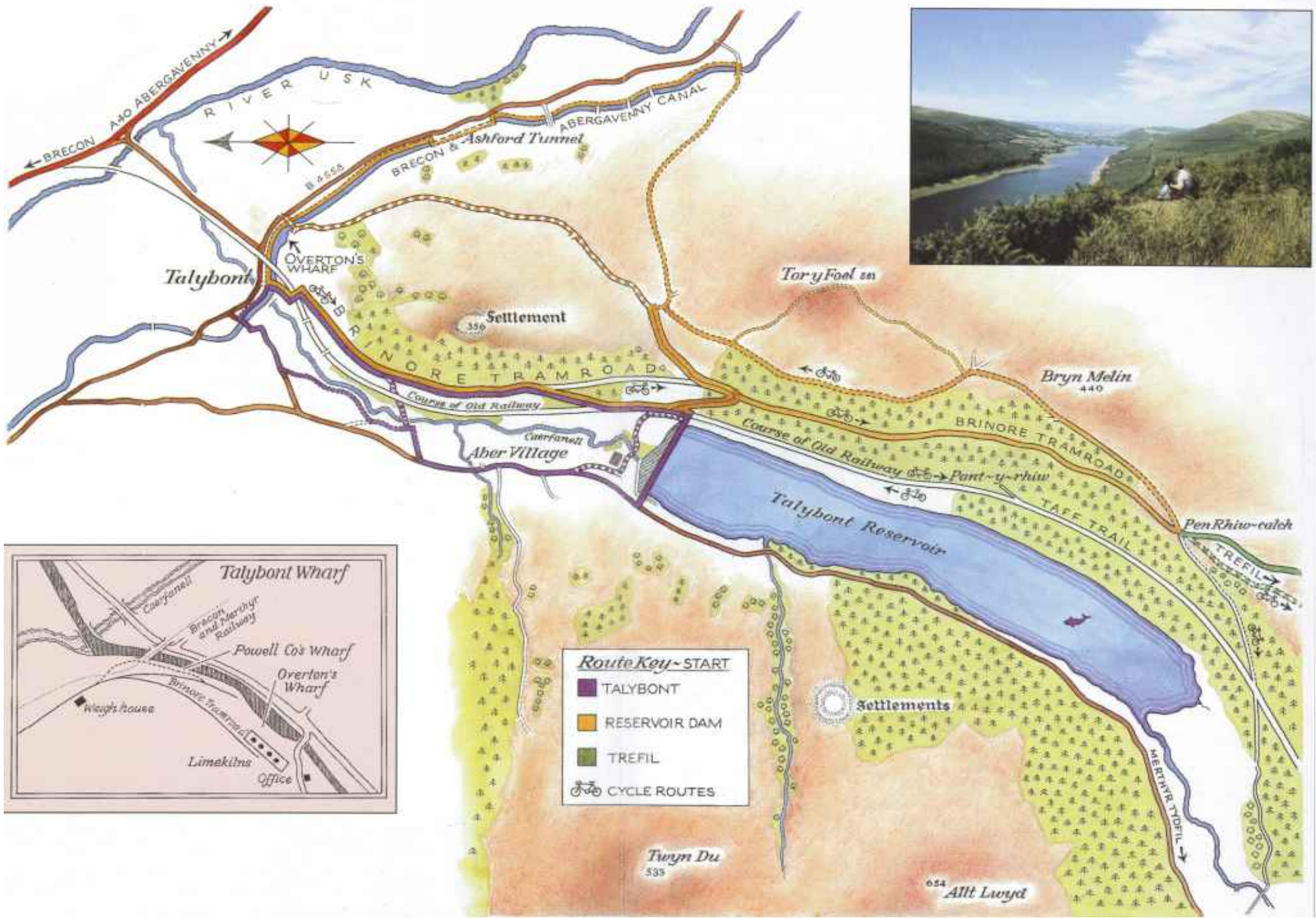
Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal

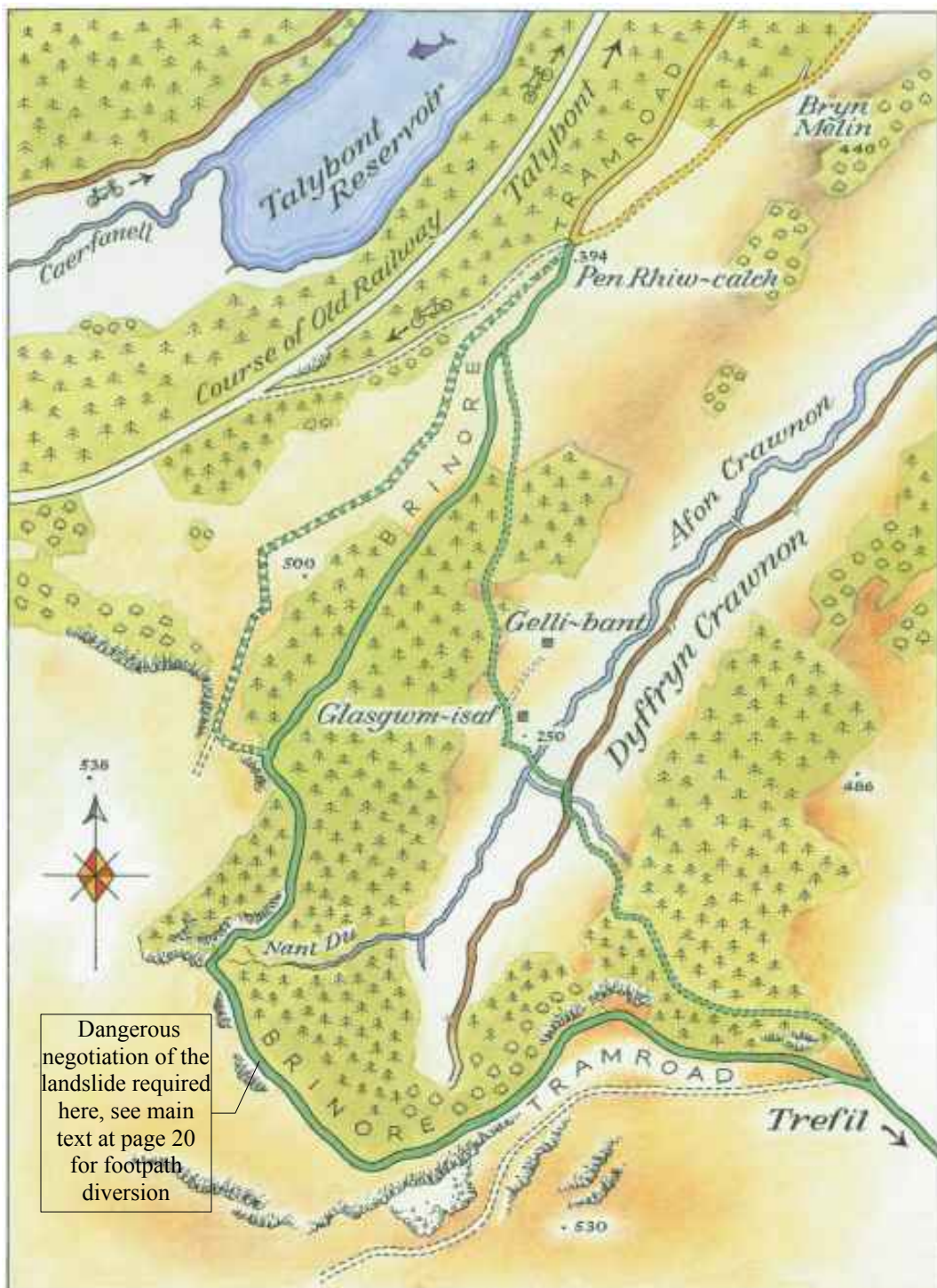




Tramroad Archaeology

The stone-block sleepers supported the L-shaped track set in cast-iron combined tiebars and sleepers known as '*sills*'. The occasional passing places were known as '*turnouts*'. These were laid with track secured directly to the blocks with wrought-iron nails.





Routes north of Trefil

Talybont Reservoir Dam -
Llandetty - Talybont -
Return to Dam (10km) 2 1/2 hours



At the far end of the dam (107 204) turn left along the old railway, through the barrier and shortly right through a wooden gate and on up the track. Cross a small stream, over the stile, ascend through the wood, turn left at the top and in 10 metres you are on the tramroad. Keep left here until you reach a stile on the right indicated by a fingerpost (109 219). Cross and after a ditch head up obliquely right through a gate and keep on diagonally to a stile in the far corner. This is all up hill but the view behind is a reward for your efforts. On the road turn right above the cattle grid (114 205) and turn left after about 50 metres.

At this point you can take a direct route back to Talybont by going left over the cattle grid and following the quiet byway to join the canal bank opposite the lime kilns. Reduction of 3km

Keep parallel to the hedge just below you then over the high stile. Follow the narrow but obvious track dropping gradually to the lower end of a plantation ahead. Through the trees and stop to enjoy the wonderful panorama out over the Usk valley to the Black Mountains and the distinctive Sugar Loaf above Abergavenny.

Reservoir from Bwlch-y-waun



Memorial to George Overton in Llandetty Church

Talybont Reservoir

Increasing demands for water supplies led Newport Corporation to search for suitable moorland valleys to the north which could be dammed as a reservoir. In 1917 they selected the Caerfanell valley running westward from Talybont and proposed a 32-mile pipeline to carry water to Newport. Trials were made but expense and geological problems brought the proposal to naught at that time. The scheme was revived in 1920 in the Newport Corporation Act and work began in 1923 but the original scheme was found wanting and was not fully realised until the late 1930s.

The flooding of the valley farms made the upland fields redundant and forestry was introduced as a land use which now forms a major impact on the landscape. Abandoned walls and remnant hedgerows have left an archaeology of its own.



George Overton

(1774-1827) Engineer

George Overton moved to Llanddettty in the late 1790s as a mining engineer and industrialist. In the early 1800s he built the famous Penydarren Tramroad near Merthyr Tydfil on which Richard Trevithick's locomotive ran - the first in the World. At the time he was building the Brinore Tramroad he was engineer for the projected Stockton & Darlington Railway. The builder of the Brinore Tramroad thus forms an important place in the history of Civil Engineering.

The canal surveyors intended to have a cutting here but the large mound in their path proved to be a big unstable deposit of sand and gravel left behind by a retreating glacier from the last Ice Age. A large trench had to be excavated, the tunnel built along its length and then buried (known as 'cut and cover'). Notches along the roof suggest that the narrow boats were poled through instead of being "legged" by two boatmen along the sidewalls.

Follow over the line of the tunnel to rejoin the towpath running adjacent to the road. Keep with the waterway straight on to Talybont and at this point you may be glad to know that you are within 10 minutes walk of 4 pubs - 3 backing onto the canal - and the village shop.

Just after a concrete road bridge stop to look across at a well preserved bank of limekilns opposite. The information board, with the replica tram will give you a clear idea of how limestone was transported here, burnt in the kilns and taken away on the canal in barrels as quick lime. Approaching the outskirts of the village you pass under the dual

On to the fir tree in front then down to the hedge and through the next two gates Cross diagonally left across the next field to reach a gate in the bottom corner. Carry straight on to a stile and gate slightly obscured by a large tree and over to follow the track leading to a road and the canal. Bracken and nettles here in summer can be a trial for those in shorts! An incongruous iron Bailey bridge spanning the original stone one leads you to a slippery stile giving access to the canal towpath (128 201). Turn sharp right to head for Talybont and a pleasant level stroll alongside the canal as it contours in gentle curves through the pastures. Ducks, Coots and very occasionally Kingfishers can be seen, but a rare treat is to spot a harmless grass snake effortlessly swimming along. Approaching the next bridge you see Llanddettty Hall, once the home of George Overton, and once past you may spot a defunct suspension bridge spanning the Usk. Keep on until you see the light at the end of the 200-metre long Ashford Tunnel.

Eastern portal of the Ashford Tunnel



pipeline carrying treated water from the reservoir east towards Newport, and then a railway bridge once the site of a fatal crash in 1878. Now at the back of the White Hart (114 225) you can return to the Talybont Reservoir by following the route indicated in the **Talybont - Reservoir - Return** route.

Wild runs on the Brecon & Merthyr Junction railway

Not a digestive complaint - these occurred when heavily loaded goods trains ran at excessive speeds out of control down the 7-mile incline from Torpantau to Talybont, frequently overrunning the station by up to half a mile. The most serious happened on 2nd December 1878 when a train consisting of three locomotives - Hercules, Atlas and Severn - a brake van, 25 loaded trucks and 11 empties ran away and finally left the track just below the White Hart Inn at Talybont. Four men were killed and three others seriously injured. The whole train weighed nearly 400 tons and instead of the regulation speed of 10 mph it was estimated to have reached 60 mph before crashing. A simple but effective safety measure was installed as a result of these wild runs consisting of an inclined siding half way down at Pantyrhiw controlled by a signal box. Three "crows" on the whistle meant that all was under control and the way was open to proceed. A long blast sounded danger and the whole train was then diverted up the steep siding before coming safely to rest.

Talybont Reservoir Dam - Pen
Rhiw-calch - Tor y Foel - Cattle
Grid - Return to dam (8 Km)
2 hours



At the dam (107 204) turn left along the old railway, through the metal barrier and up the track obliquely right. Follow the way-marks over the stile, up through the woods, turn left and almost immediately you are on the tramroad. Turn right here and head along this well preserved section with rows of many stone-block sleepers plus two obvious turnouts to spot on the way (see page 11). All along the route there are excellent elevated views of the valley, reservoir and the hills beyond. Continue until you eventually come to a metal gate leading out onto the open hill. Keep on until the tramroad enters a cutting that abruptly ends in a bank with a low wall at the base. Do not go down the track that drops down following the fence, but get up onto the roughly surfaced road above. This is Pen Rhiw-calch (101 176) where the tramroad went under the road via a now demolished bridge. The ruins beside the road were one of three beer houses in

Wear marks on stone-block sleeper



this locality - latter day transport cafes for tramroad drivers! Having savoured the fine views turn back right keeping on the road to Talybont. Great vistas open as you proceed on to the entrance gate of Bwlch-y-Waun (110 187). A well restored section of wall, a fingerpost to Pantyrhiw and a great improvement in the road surface will help you to locate yourself. Here Tor y Foel (115194) rises ahead and if you are fit and energetic climb to the top to be greeted by the most magnificent encircling views. Return to the road down the very steep grassy slope on the left aiming at the bottom corner of the forest plantation below.

Keep on down the road to a cattle grid, cross the left-hand stile and cut diagonally across through a gate. Near the bottom corner of the second field keep well up from the fence and cross over a small stream to the stile that leads back onto the tramroad. Turn left, through a gate, ignoring the stile on the right, and a little way down the right-hand track you will find the track that brought you up from the dam.



Trefil Quarries

Trefil Quarries were worked for fluxing stone at different times by five ironworks. These were served by two early railway systems. The Trefil Railroad (opened 1797) approached the quarries from the Ebbw valley to the east and served Beaufort (established 1779), Ebbw Vale (1790) and Sirhowy (1778). The Trefil Railroad was linked to the Rassau Railroad (1796) which described a semicircle from Beaufort to Sirhowy from which there were links to the various ironworks. The Trefil Railroad became the Trefil Railway Company in 1874 but was not changed to standard gauge until 1919. In the late 1930s it was to form the basis for the extension built by Richard Thomas & Company to Chwar yr Hendre to the north. It closed in 1964.

At a lower level, Hall's Trefil Tramroad (opened 1806) served Rhymney (1801), and the Tredegar Tramroad served Tredegar (1800). Towards Trefil village these two broadly follow the course of the modern road. It was Hall's Trefil Tramroad which sent off the Brinore Tramroad (1815) at the point where it entered the quarries.

The two heights and different track systems (railroad and tramroad) dictated the parts of the quarries worked by the five ironworks. Those to the east were generally worked by Sirhowy (until closure in 1882), Ebbw Vale (until 1929) and Beaufort (until 1833 when they moved to Llangattock Quarries). Those to the north were generally worked by Rhymney (until 1852 when they moved to Twynau Gwynion Quarries) and Tredegar (until closure in 1900).



The Bridge over the Brinore Tramroad at Pen Rhiw-calch

**The Aneurin Bevan Memorial
Stone and Duffryn Crawnon
Circuit (7.5 Km) 2 hours**



Please note potentially dangerous section of tramroad on this section and follow the alternative in the notes below

To reach the Aneurin Bevan Memorial take the right turn (third turnoff) off the Tredegar roundabout on the A465 and continue for around 4km. As far as Tafan Ty Uchaf (formerly The Quarrymen's Arms') you follow the old line of Hall's Trefil and Tredegar Tramroads but as you leave the village you are on the course of the Brinore Tramroad. To the right lie Trefil Quarries which supplied limestone as a flux in the ironworks to the south.

Beyond the village and towards the northern end of the quarries you may notice the 'Duke's Table' on your left (114 141). This low lump of limestone is so named as the spot where the Duke of Beaufort's shooting parties would stop for lunch.

From the memorial stone (109 151) (for Aneurin Bevan see page 9) follow the road and where it curves left carry straight on above the conifer plantation. As the trees drop away there are spectacular views across and down the Dyffryn Crawnon valley. Follow the fence past a double limekiln and along a very rough narrow section of path. On reaching a bridge, metal gate and stile it will be difficult not to be dismayed by the presence of so many wrecked and burnt out cars. Compensation is going ahead along a stretch of grassy even track with great views.

Crossing a stile you have to negotiate a lengthy section of mini landslides and wet patches hampered by fallen limestone blocks.



Winter tramroad walk above the Dyffryn Crawnon

It was around here that two horses fell to their deaths in 1855.

Rocky outcrops tower above you and where they start to get lower look out on the left for names carved into the flat face of a rock alongside the path. 'W.Lloyd 1894' is neatly inscribed, but J.S.Carpe and Keith Davies took less care. Carry straight on over the stile displaying two footpath markers where great care is needed to negotiate a narrow sloping path across a steep landslide.

To avoid the potentially dangerous and difficult negotiation of the the landslides take the signed diversion on the footpath at 095150 to rejoin the tramroad at 092156.

Once across a stream and over a second subsidence you reach a broad grassy stretch. Sadly dense woods obscure the view and some wet muddy patches may hinder your progress, but glimpses of distant hills and moss languidly draping the branches will cheer you on.

Diversion for the energetic - *When you reach a point where the left-hand plantation narrows and a wall and ruins can be clearly seen go through a gate and climb the steep moorland bearing right. On reaching the rough track above turn right to the base of the limestone outcrop called Darren Fach (089163). Go to the top for wonderful views out over the distant hills and reservoir. Either return to your route or carry on down the rough road to Pen Rhiw-calch to rejoin the tramroad by turning left at the fingerpost in approximately 15 minutes. 1.3km further.*

Continue through the forest, felled in places, to a gate. Now there are fields on the left and once past the entrance to a forestry road everything opens out. Forward along the gravel-covered tramroad surface, taking in the lovely views of the distant Black Mountains, to a fingerpost on the right (099 172).

An easy twenty minute diversion. *Carry straight on through four gates to the open moorland at Pen Rhiw-calch. You will be greeted by a spectacular lofty view of the Talybont Reservoir and the mountains opposite. Thirsty tramroad drivers once had a choice of two beer houses here, but sadly they are long gone just like their customers. Now retrace your steps to continue 1km further.*

Tramroad side inscription



Go through the gate and turn right following parallel to the hedge to the dense plantation ahead. At an angle in the forest fence - about 100 metres down from the top of the field - locate a small gate. Go down the old lane, wet and stony in places, surrounded by trees until you enter a rough open field. Ignore the right-hand footpath sign and go on down through a great city of ant hills to a gate. Keep to the indicated route through a second small gate and turn down left immediately to join the farm drive of Glascwm Isaf (098 163) beside the barn with beams protruding from its side. Go down the drive to a metalled road with a neat little stone bridge. Turn right to reach a gate on the left with 'Tergad Campsite' painted on it. Once through proceed up the steep track, pausing to occasionally admire the view behind, and continue until you return to the Aneurin Bevan Memorial.

The Three-in-One Cycle Tour of the Brinore for the fit mountain biker



Start up the tramroad following the signs behind the White Hart Inn (114 225). Keep on until you reach a metal gate leading onto open moorland in approximately 6km. Cross the rough track ahead and follow the fence until the tramroad appears to end in an earth bank at 101 176.

Option 1 (5km). Get up onto the road above, turn left and return to Talybont. There are some great downhill stretches but beware of traffic on the twisting narrow way.

Option 2 (7.5km). Go down the track heading south-west following the fence enclosing the forest on the right. This is

quite rough and challenging but once through a gate and an improved surface you will reach the wide route of the Taff Trail going along the disused railway. Turn right here to get to the reservoir dam and back to Talybont following the Taff Trail signs.

Option 3 (15km). On reaching the old railway as in Option 2 turn left and continue gradually uphill until you reach a barrier giving access to the mountain road above Torpantau (055 174). Turn right and start an exhilarating ride back to Talybont on a well surfaced road.

The Big Brinore Trek for keen

walkers and determined
mountain bikers (19.5km)



Join the tramroad by following the signs behind the White Hart Inn (114 225) for a gradual 6km ascent to where the route emerges onto open moorland at Pen Rhiw-calch (101 176). Cross the road and continue on the now gravel-covered way until you reach a finger post showing a bridleway to the right. (If you get to a gate leading down a forestry road you have come too far). In the field go right and keep about 100 metres down parallel to the hedge. Pass through the gate into the woods, follow the rough lane down through the trees and you will eventually get to another gate at the end of a grassy field full of ant hills. Here keep to the way-marked path around the house and join the drive next to a barn with protruding beams. Carry on to the tarred road ahead, go right and then left through a gate signed Tergad Campsite'. Follow up the rough track until you reach the Aneurin Bevan Memorial (109 151). Turn right along the road and leave where it

curves to return to the tramroad just above the trees. Now the going gets quite difficult in places with some fallen rocks and small landslides to negotiate, but fine views more than compensate your efforts. Eventually you will get to Pen Rhiw-calch again and from here you can return to Talybont on the road. The more adventurous however should take the track dropping down to the right just above the fence when facing the reservoir. Keep on this ancient route, which is wet and stony in places, until you go under the disused railway and follow the side of the reservoir to the dam. Cross and follow the Taff Trail signs on the road to Talybont. Walkers may like to take the footpath opposite Aber Farm to follow the river back to the village and have a tranquil end to the day.



Horse riding is permitted on all the indicated cycle routes

Other Related Sites

[Chartists' Cave](#) (1278 1521) - related to Chartist Uprising of 1839

[Sirhowy Ironworks](#) (1429 1021) - preserved ancient monument dating from 1790s

[Sirhowy Truckshop](#) (1422 1026) - where iron workers and miners were forced to buy their goods

[Bedwellty House](#) (143 084) - now a Council Office but once the home of the Tredegar Ironworks owner

London & North Western Railway viaduct of 1871 (133 109)

Rhymney Upper Furnace, Manager's House and stables (1083 0920) - the first furnace in the Rhymney valley (1801)

Trefil Railroad embankment (134 124) - here the railroad makes a sweep into the valley

(date 1797)

[Cefn Golau Cemetery](#) (1388 0758) - where cholera victims were buried

Butetown (104 091) - three rows of workers cottages in fine palladian architecture (also a museum)

St David's Church (1120 0802) - built in 1839 for the Rhymney Iron Company by Philip Harwicke of Euston Station fame

[Andrew Buchan's shop](#) (1119 0758) - originally the company shop for the Rhymney Iron Company. It has fine overhanging eaves. Built in 1839



Sunset over Talybont Reservoir

Further Reading

Barrie, D. S. M., A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain: vol. xii, South Wales (Newton Abbot 1980)

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Ince, Laurence, The South Wales Iron Industry 1750-1885 (Cardiff 1993)

Jones, Oliver, The Early Days of Sirhowy and Tredegar (Risca 1975)

Overton, George, A Description of the Faults or Dykes of the Mineral Basin of South Wales, Part 1 (London 1825)

Rattenbury, Gordon, *Tramroads of the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal* (Oakham 1980)

Tipper, David, *The Talybont Saga* (Welsh Water 1993)

van Laun, John, *Patterns of Past Industry in the National Park* (Brecon Beacons National Park 1976)

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WELSH TRANSLATIONS

(With the assistance of the Place-Name Research Centre University of Wales Bangor)

Brinore (Bryn Oer) - cold hill

Bwlch-y-Waun - gap of the moor

Danywenallt - below the fair wooded hillside

Darren Fach - little knoll

Dyffryn Cwannon - the valley of the Garlic river

Llandetty - the church of St Tetti

Pantyrhiw - hollow by the slope

Pen Rhiw-calch - top of the limestone hill

Talybont - at the end of the bridge

Torpantau - mound of the hollows

Tor y Foel - the bare mound

Trefil - land in a triangle or a river fork

FACILITIES – go to www.visitourbeacons.com

Talybont on Usk

Shop - Talybont Stores, post office and tourist information point

- (01874) 676663

Hotel with bars and dining room - The Usk Inn - (01874) 676251

Public Houses serving meals - Star Inn, B/B - (01874) 676635

White Hart Inn, Bunkhouse Accommodation

- (01874) 4676227

Travellers Rest, B/B and Self-catering - (01874)

676233

Bed and Breakfast - for information contact Talybont Stores.

Public telephone and toilets near White Hart Inn.

Aber Village

Public Telephone

Bed and Breakfast - see signs or contact Talybont Stores.

Danywenallt Study Centre run by the YHA

residential courses for all ages - (01874) 676677

Trefil

Public House serving meals - Taffan Ty Uchaf (Top House) - (01495) 717690

Bunkhouse Accommodation - Hobo Backpackers, rooms, mountain bike tours -
(01495) 718422

Parking is at your own risk - do not leave valuables in your car. Although every care has been taken in the writing of this booklet, the authors and the Brinore Tramroad Conservation Forum cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information or incidents that may occur to users of the routes described.

Remember you are going out into the countryside so dress for the weather. Strong footwear - especially walking boots - are recommended on all routes.

Brecon and Abergavenny are linked by the A40 which runs parallel to the river Usk. Talybont on Usk lies almost halfway between them on the route of the Brecknock & Abergavenny Canal - a major arterial link in its day from rural Breconshire to Newport on the coast. From this runs the 8-mile Brinore Tramroad south-westwards into the industrial valleys of South Wales. Although not the earliest railway in the world it was a pioneer which led to Britain becoming the 'Workshop of the World'. Its engineer made the first survey for the Stockton & Darlington Railway which was not opened until 10 years after the Brinore. Although it forms a landmark for historians there is much else to be found by the explorer including wildlife, geology and historic land use plus some of the finest views in South Wales.



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