

Ceiriog Valley walk - general information

STAGE ONE

The area around Chirk has seen many changes over the centuries. Many hands, from the Celts, Romans, Welsh and English have modified the settlements.

St Mary's Church probably began as a small wooden structure but was replaced in the 12th century with a single Norman nave and tower. The second nave was built 300 years later. It contains monuments to the Trevors of Brynkinallt Hall and the Myddletons of Chirk Castle and has fine stained windows.

In 1282, when Llewelyn, Prince of Wales was defeated and killed by Edward I, the land around Chirk was confiscated and handed to Roger Mortimer. The creation of a borough charter in 1324 and the building of the castle cemented English rule over the area now known as Chirkland, and though an English stronghold, it always remained within Wales.

On route 1b, you will pass the magnificent castle gates, which were built by Davies Bros in 1719.

The area has always been an important crossing point for the River Ceiriog, the oldest bridge in the valley being the bridge at Pont Faen, which carried the Chester / Cardiff road! The later Holyhead / London coach road, built by Thomas Telford, also crosses the river at Chirk.

The developments in industry and transport during the 18th and 19th century saw the expansion of small-scale mining operations. The coal mines at Chirk Bank, Black Park and Brynkinallt needed a means of transport. The building of Telford and Jessop's canal and aqueduct in the valley in 1801 provided the vital link with the west Midlands. These structures are now included in the Llangollen Canal World Heritage Site! With the development of steam the masterpiece was slightly overshadowed by Robertsons magnificent railway viaduct in 1852.

There is a Tourist Information Point at Chirk Post Office, Colliers Road. Now choose from three options to start the walk.

STAGE TWO - 'THE ENGLISH BIT'.

Warfare has played a major role in the history of the Ceiriog Valley; the number of related features found in the valley demonstrates this fact. The features span the ages, from Roman encampments (Rhyn Park); Offa's Dyke (Bronygarth); The Welsh .v Saxon Battle of Crogan (Castle Mill); and the imposing Chirk Castle.

Offa's Dyke consists of a 168 mile long earthen bank, which is at times 8 metres high and in places is accompanied by a western ditch. It runs across the Ceiriog Valley and when constructed in the 8th century divided Mercia (Saxon) from the independent British Kingdoms (Celts). Some experts believe that the dyke may well be older, dating from Roman times.

In 1165 a mighty battle took place at Castle Mill which lies down below our walk, where Offa's Dyke crosses the river. Henry the 2nd assembled a huge army *'to put an end to border skirmishes'*. Despite being heavily outnumbered, the Celtic Welsh, who knew the ground and assisted by atrocious weather, defeated the Saxon hoard. Interpretation boards at the site recall the full story.

The most impressive features of this section are views of Chirk Castle. It is a border castle, constructed in the late 13th century by Edward I. It formed part of the "Ring of Stone" built in North Wales to cement the king's control over the native population. The design of the castle has been compared to that of Beaumaris, Anglesey. The building and gardens are well worth a visit. This is a National Trust property, check the opening times.

It may have been built originally with an imposing double-towered gatehouse, mirroring the

remaining drum towers. The castle gatehouse would have faced towards Wales, presenting a palpable menace to the rebellious Welsh princes. Some historians believe that it was built on the site of an earlier Welsh castle, but no physical proof has been found.

Chirkland, including the castle itself, had many owners before Sir Thomas Myddleton purchased it in the year 1595 for £5,000. It was developed over the years by the family and survived the English civil war relatively unscathed. The Myddleton's still own the Chirk Estate, though the castle and surrounds are managed by the National Trust.

In the area of the fish ponds and the Trout Farm (seen as you walk through Pentre Wood) you have a good chance of seeing herons and badger setts.

STAGE THREE - TERRACED LANES AND PASTURES

Down below our route, just to the Welsh side of Offa's Dyke, is the impressive house of Penisa'r Glyn. From 1939 to 1969 it was run successfully as a private hotel by 3 ladies. During the war, teachers from Manchester stayed over weekends in order to be away from the noise of the bombings and to get some sleep. Originally, it was a small estate attached to Chirk Castle. It can just be seen from close to Offa's Dyke. As you contour the meadows you will also see the house and outbuildings of Penisa'r Glyn Farm down below you. In this area large deposits of limestone were found and extensive quarrying & mining took place. Lime kilns are still visible.

In Pontfadog, take time to visit the Tramway Waiting Room which houses details of the former Glyn Valley Tramway which ran until 1935.

STAGE FOUR - GLYN CEIRIOG MEADOW AND WOODLAND

The settlement of Glyn Ceiriog is the largest in the valley. It was dominated for many years by the slate quarries perched just above the village. The Cambrian and Wynne slate quarries employed large numbers of workers from the village and were the centres of many social activities. These groups included debating, choir, horticultural, reading and various bands which competed in local and national Eisteddfods.

The close knit community was on the whole deeply religious and almost exclusively Welsh speaking. This can be seen by the number of churches and chapels dotted throughout Glyn Ceiriog.

The rich cultural heritage culminated in the building of the Ceiriog Memorial Institute in 1911. The building has many uses including a library, women's parlour, a social institute and local museum, all still used today. Visitors are welcome to view this fascinating building, which is located in Ffordd Uchaf (High Street). It was built to commemorate notable Welsh people; in particular the valley's poets, John 'Ceiriog' Hughes, Huw 'Eos' Morus and Rev. Robert 'Cynddelw' Ellis. The Welsh names are given as an honour to outstanding poets and members of the community at the Powis Eisteddfod, which is periodically held in Glyn Ceiriog (most recently in 1999). Beside the playing field you can see the circle of "Gorsedd" stones, the centre of the traditional ceremony.

Glyn Ceiriog had other industries, such as the two flannel mills, which involved the cleaning and treatment of woven wool for the production of blankets and flannel. The upper mill was converted into a trout farm (now closed), using the millrace to provide the water for the large tanks. The lower mill is now a high quality woodcraft business. 'Coed Ceiriog', located by the school playing field, is a new co-operative venture bringing together many local people engaged in sustainable woodland management and the use of local timber.

The church of St Ffraid (Bridget) is located up a hillside north of the present village but close by the

original (pre-mining) centre of the community. It provides breathtaking, panoramic views of the village and surrounding valley.

For more information pick up a free "Glyn to Pandy" leaflet at local shops.

STAGE FIVE - THE PANDY HUMP

Here, dominating the valley, is Pandy Crag, a volcanic tuff formation and an area identified as a possible RIG (Regionally Important Geological) site. The area has a great variety of mineral deposits located close together. Many of these were quarried including slate, silica, granite and china stone which was used to give opacity to porcelain.

You may choose to avoid the stiff climb and walk along the road. If so you will pass large flooded caverns, which can be viewed through an iron gate. These were granite and silica workings.

On the recommended walk over the 'Hump', you will rise to the highest point of the walk at 350 metres. (1165 ft) and have fine views over the Berwyns to the west and Y Foel to the north. Closer at hand, to the south, the land drops steeply to the river Teirw (Bulls), which flows down its steep valley to join the river Ceiriog at Pandy.

The valley was visited by George Borrow (Wild Wales, 1854) who captured the essence of the valley: *"The valley was wild and solitary to an extraordinary degree, the brook or torrent running in the middle of it, covered with alder tree"*.

The area is rich in wildlife and you may see birds of prey such as buzzards, kestrels, peregrine falcons, hen harriers, red kite and merlins. In spring and summer you may hear the call of the curlew nesting on the high ground. In the woodland you may see flycatchers, jays, yellow hammers and wrens. Watch out for grey wagtails (the yellow ones!), pied wagtails and dippers by the rivers. If you are very lucky you may see some of the shier mammals of the area which include hares, badgers and foxes, stoats, weasels, otters, and the rare polecat.

STAGE SIX - QUARRY AND TRAMWAY

The hamlet of Pandy is named after its fulling mill which is now The Woolpack. The mill may well have been the first of its kind in Wales and was used to transform local woven woollen material into flannel, using fullers earth.

The quarry at Hendre was the largest employer in the valley for many years. Opened in 1873, it provided dolerite, an igneous rock similar to granite, which was used for road construction and as facing stone for prestigious buildings. The quarry was the furthest point of the Glyn Valley Tramway. The National Trust path follows part of it's route. As you follow the track look out for the few remaining sleepers and the ruins of many of the former quarry buildings

The poet Huw 'Eos' Morus (1622-1709) lived in Pont y Meibion from the year 1647. This farmhouse is on the main valley road just above "The house with a bell". He lived in the days of Cromwell and wrote a range of poetry. He is best remembered for his political poems. As an ardent Royalist he attacked the Parliamentarians in his verse. He did not condemn them openly, preferring the use of allegory, so avoiding the persecution dealt out to other critics.

STAGE SEVEN - 'THE PHEASANT STRUT'

Llanarmon D.C. was for many centuries a stopping point for drovers on their way to England. See the church of St. Garmon with two yew trees each over 1000 years old. The religious site was established here in the 5th century and the grass mound just inside the gate is believed to have been a "Preaching Mound" which pre-dated any building.

The village name can be translated as Llan (the church land), (G)armon (the 423AD French travelling saint who established the Christian Community), Dyffryn (the wide valley of), Ceiriog (the river name). The valley floor at Llanarmon is some 260 metres above sea level, compared with 75 metres at Chirk.

The renowned poet John 'Ceiriog' Hughes (1832 -1887) was born in the farm at Pen-y-Bryn, Llanarmon. He began his working life as a farm hand and went on to become one of the greatest Welsh poets. It was Ceiriog's ability to blend words to music that captured the imagination of Victorian Wales. He produced some of the finest lyrics in the Welsh language on themes such as nature, love, and patriotism. Some of the poems such as 'Nant y Mynydd' and 'Alun Mabon' remain popular today.

In 1923, proposals by the Warrington Corporation for the creation of two large reservoirs were submitted to Parliament. The Corporation planned to acquire some 13,000 acres of land which included the villages of Tregeiriog, Llanarmon D.C. and Pentre. The impact of the construction of the two reservoirs would have changed the valley for ever. Fortunately for the inhabitants of the valley, a massive amount of support was received from all corners of Wales. In Parliament Lloyd George condemned the scheme and the whole project was rejected. He described the valley as "*A little bit of heaven on earth*", and asked "*Why should anyone want to flood this exquisite little valley?*"

| Place name | Pronunciation | Meaning in English |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Y Waun | Uh-Wine | The Moor |
| Pont Faen | Pont-Vine | Stone Bridge |
| Bronygarth | Bron-uh-garth | Hillside Enclosure |
| Pontfadog | Pont-vad-og | Madog's Bridge |
| Dolywern | Doll-uh-wern | Swampy Meadow |
| Glyn Ceiriog | Glin-key-re-og | The Glen of Ceiriog |
| Pandy | Pan-dee | Fulling Mill |
| Tregeiriog | Tray-gee-re-og | "Town" of Ceiriog |
| Llanarmon | Thlan-ar-mon | Saint Garmon's village |
| Dyffryn Ceiriog | Duff-rin Key-re-og | Ceiriog Valley |