

Country Walks Around Wrexham

Route 4 – Gwenfro and Clywedog Valleys (4 miles / 2 hours)

Nant Mill, Coedpoeth – Vron – Pentre'r Fron – Minera – Smelt – Nant

The walk starts at Nant Mill, Coedpoeth. The village is on the A525 between Wrexham and Ruthin. Nant Mill is signposted from the A525 at the eastern (lower) end of the village. Grid ref. SJ 289501. Ordnance Survey Explorer map 256 covers the area but the extract supplied here should be all you need.

Cars: Plenty of parking is available at Nant Mill.

Buses: There are regular services to Coedpoeth from Wrexham. Alight as soon as the bus reaches Coedpoeth at Heol Offa and join the walk at the asterisk * below. Travel information: 01978 266166.

Nant Mill has a public car park and picnic site (always open) with a small shop and visitor centre (open Easter to September daily 10.30am - 4.30pm; October to Easter weekends only).

Halfway along, the route passes a public house.

It should be noted that this route may be muddy in places and suitable footwear is recommended.

- *The route is not suitable for wheelchairs, buggies or small children.*

The area covered by this route bears the marks of a long association with industry although, as can be seen in the river valleys of the Gwenfro and the Clywedog, nature has mellowed the industrial scars to produce a rich and varied landscape.

WALK DIRECTIONS

From the car park at **Nant Mill (1)**, take the steep access road up to the junction.

Climb over the stone stile opposite, one of the few remaining in the area, and walk straight ahead through the field. Cross the drive and then walk towards an old stone gatepost at the end of the hedgerow across the field.

From the stone, look to your left where you will see a protruding field corner, with an oak tree close by. Your route goes directly to this point, from where you should follow the fence and hedgerow to a stile in the corner.

Continue in the same direction across three more fields to join a residential road. At the main road look across to the left where you will see the entrance to **Lloft Wen (2)**.

Turn right and a few metres further on, fork left into New Road.

Walk down the hill and turn left onto Heol Offa to pass **Tyn-y-coed (3)**.

*** Those arriving by bus join the walk here. Head north along Heol Offa, (with houses on your left, fields on your right.)**

At the T-junction turn right and immediately left beside **Llidiart Fanny (4)**.

In spring and summer the roadside verges here are a riot of colour created by a variety of flowering plants such as colt's-foot, hedge woundwort, rosebay willowherb, dog-rose, common knapweed and meadow buttercup. Cat's-ear, bittersweet, red campion and nipplewort can also be found.

Walk along the road to the bridge, from which Offa's Dyke can be seen to your right. Continue uphill and cross the stile on your left, opposite a farm entrance. **Vron Colliery (5)**, one of the many coal mines in the area, lay just uphill on the right.

Take the path diagonally across the field. From here there is a good view of the bridge over the River Gwenfro, and the modern **tower silo (6)** at Llidiart Fanny. Continue over two footbridges and the stile to the right of the buildings at Hafod Farm. Go over the stile in the right hand corner of the yard, crossing directly over the track to a stile. Follow the slope down to a footbridge.

Cross the River Gwenfro and look for a path heading up the hillside through the **gorse (7)**. At the top of the bank head uphill in the same field, along the hedge, to cross a stile at the corner. Turn half-right to find the next stile and continue to the road. From here Minera Mountain can be seen to the right and there is a good view of **Coedpoeth (8)** ahead, with Earl's Hill, Shropshire, on the horizon above Bathafarn Chapel. The Wrekin's unmistakable bulk rises in the southeast while most of Wrexham is visible to the left.

Turn left and after 200 metres leave the road to pass alongside the first building, Laburnum Cottage, and pass to the left of the garage. This path merges with a track and passes a house, eventually reaching a footbridge on the left. Cross it and go straight up the lane to the road junction. The site of **Grosvenor Colliery (9)** lies a short distance to the southeast, close to Talwrn Road. Continue in the same direction along Gwern-y-gaseg Road to the Five Crosses Inn.

Follow the road directly opposite for about 150 metres, and then turn left into the driveway leading to **Minera Hall (10)**, taking the bridleway on the left. Follow the path for a short distance taking the first path on the left before reaching the bridge. Veer left where it forks (the right fork takes you to a pleasant spot by the river). Follow the path uphill along the hedgerow and cross the open field to a lane.

Turn right and, at the gates of the haulage company's depot, turn left, following the fence. Bear right where the path meets a driveway and join a narrow road.

At the T-junction turn right and then right again. Immediately turn left, to find the signed start of a narrow enclosed path leading to the open hillside high above the River Clywedog. After some distance turn left onto a tarmac path and climb for 100 metres, ignoring the first gateway, to a stile on your right. Follow the path across the field and into the wood.

Just before the opening to a field turn uphill for a few metres and cross the stile. Continue over two more stiles above Nant Farm. Descend to the lane, turn left and continue to the ford.

On the opposite bank there is a path forming part of the Clywedog Valley Trail, which follows the river to Nant Mill. You may wish to return that way. However, on this walk we suggest you follow two pleasant quiet lanes.

Do not cross the river but follow the road ahead to the junction. Turn right, passing the remains of 17th century Rhos-berse Farm on the bank above. Opposite, and before you go under the power lines, take the unmarked path on the right back to Nant Mill.

POINTS OF INTEREST

(1) NANT MILL is now a Visitor Centre run by Wrexham County Borough Council. It was originally a corn mill with two wooden "overshot" waterwheels. Built for Thomas Fitzhugh in 1832 by his tenant, John Price the miller, it cost £1,000. Fitzhugh had obtained an earlier corn mill (now demolished) by marriage in 1816.

Nant Mill still occasionally ground corn (wheat, barley and oats) in the 1920's and was later used with a metal Pelton Wheel (a simple turbine). During World War II an electric mill was used for grinding bone meal.

After being part of a 90-acre tenanted farm, the site was purchased by the local authority in 1973. Unfortunately, the oldest building on the site, which may have been an earlier mill, was demolished.

(2) LLOFT WEN. In 1748 Calvinistic Methodism is said to have been introduced into Coedpoeth, with preaching at one time being practised at Lloft Wen.

The house was once occupied by William Low who was born at Rothsay, Bute and served his apprenticeship as a civil engineer and surveyor in Glasgow. He was involved in the construction of the Great Western Railway and on its completion returned to Glasgow to form a partnership. However, when his partner died, Low moved to Wrexham where he had a large practice as a colliery engineer. In the mid-19th century William Low and a partner were owners of Vron Colliery. They introduced many improvements and worked the pit successfully for a number of years.

Low later moved on to Roseneath, which later became part of the War Memorial Hospital. He was very interested in the idea of a tunnel under the English Channel and in 1865 he produced plans for an Anglo-French Submarine Railway, based on his experience as a mining engineer. In 1867 he had an interview with Emperor Napoleon III, who encouraged him with the project and soon after this a company was formed with offices at Roseneath. The scheme ended with the outbreak of the Franco-German War, but was briefly resurrected in 1882 by Sir Edward Watkin.

Another notable resident of Lloft Wen was William Lester who did a vast amount towards paving the way for the Trade Union Movement. He had influential contacts and wrote petitions and organised meetings between the miners and officials. Often there were demonstrations through Coedpoeth en-route to other mining villages. In 1870 coal-miners demanded better wages and improved working conditions and two years later Lester opened a local branch of the National Association of Miners. In 1882 police and soldiers had to give protection to some Coedpoeth miners who had been on strike but wanted to cross the picket line and return to work. The North Wales Miners' Federation was set up a few years later.

(3) TYN-Y-COED (house in the wood) is a large grade II listed building which adjoins Offa's Dyke. It is mentioned in the rate books of 1780. In 1850 it belonged to John Bennion, a Wrexham solicitor who had lived there for 20 years. At that time the property covered about 12ha (30 acres).

(4) LLIDIART FANNY is a listed farmhouse built in 1616 and standing on Offa's Dyke. Llidiart Fanny translates into English as Fanny's Gate, but in old registers and rate books it was shown as Llidiart Vani, or Llidiart Vaney (perhaps Mani's Gate or Mani's Gap). It is believed that the gap in the dyke here was the site of a toll-gate where a woman called Myfanwy collected money from people travelling along this drovers' road.

(5) VRON COLLIERY was the scene of an accident in 1819 when the pit flooded and 2 men lost their lives. Another man, John Evans, escaped after being buried for 12 days. His daughter reported that he had eaten tallow candles and drunk water droplets from the roof to survive. The colliery closed during the Depression after 124 years continuous work.

(6) THE TOWER SILO was built in 1970 from enamelled steel. Silage-making was introduced to this country at the beginning of the agricultural depression in the late-19th century. Grass, mown in the summer, is compressed under cover and allowed to ferment. This preserves the grass as a nutritious cake that can be fed to cattle in winter. The Llidiart Fanny silo helps support a herd of 75 dairy cows.

(7) GORSE was crushed and used as a feed for livestock until the beginning of this century. A gorse mill can be seen at Erddig Visitor Centre. Gorse (like most legumes) is a nitrogen fixer, i.e. the roots grow nodules that store nitrogen absorbed from the atmosphere thus increasing the fertility of the soil. The flowers are edible and can be used to decorate salads.

(8) COEDPOETH translates into English as 'Burnt Wood'. The village stands on a hill and is bordered by the Clywedog and Gwenfro rivers. Trees from the area provided charcoal for lead smelting at Old Smelt in the village and for the iron furnaces at Bersham. With the opening of Vron Colliery in 1836, the village began to prosper. The surrounding area is rich in a number of minerals such as coal, ironstone, lead, lime, silica and zinc. Since the last mine closed down in 1945, the character of the village has changed and it now serves mainly as a dormitory to Wrexham.

(9) COEDPOETH OR GROSVENOR COLLIERY. The earliest reference to coal mining in this area was in 1411 when the right was given to the Burgesses of Holt "to dig for coal". In 1683 Roger Mostyn of Brymbo was given sole digging rights by Sir Thomas Grosvenor. Coedpoeth Colliery was started in 1790 and there is a possibility that it was one of Earl Grosvenor's mines. The New Talwrn Colliery Company took over the mine and produced household coal. In 1938 an electric winch was constructed at the head of the winding shaft. The company ceased working the pit in 1939 but a year later it was re-opened by three partners and in 1942, eight men were employed.

(10) MINERA HALL was the home of John Burton from 1781 until his death in 1860. He was a familiar figure in the industrial expansion of the area and had associations with the Minera lead mines and collieries in the Coedpoeth area.

The building was once the centre of the Minera Hall Estate, which consisted of over 200 acres in Minera, Coedpoeth and New Brighton. The estate was split up and sold by auction in November 1918.

FOLLOW THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE

RESPECT – PROTECT – ENJOY

- Be Safe – Plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

(Please help clean up our countryside – take home someone else's litter).

If you experience any problems on this walk or if you would like to make any other comment please contact Public Rights of Way, telephone 01978 292057, or visit our website www.wrexham.gov.uk/rightsofway.