Discover the Tales of the Trails

Wales’ valleys and the mining communities which sprung up in them are a proud part of our past which deserve to be remembered. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Cycling UK’s Tales of the Trails project has worked with the Cambrian Village Trust to capture the stories of residents and bring them to life with cycle trails which take people into the landscape where they happened.

Coal transformed this valley from a sparsely-populated agricultural area to one of the most populous places in Wales by the late 1800s, with two collieries producing 100 tons of coal a day. It created a politically active community, with industrial disputes and strike action which led to the Tonypandy riots in 1910.

There was also a cycling track around the edge of the ground, said to be one of the finest in the country and used for several one-mile record attempts.

The Mid became a natural meeting place for striking miners. It is here that Labour leader Keir Hardy addressed the miners during the period of the Tonypandy riots in 1910.

Simone Devinett, Clydach Vale resident

“Children were running around the streets like this is normal. We were running around all day. It was a pretty exciting time.”

The Screaming Quarry

According to local legend, a family of travellers once came to Clydach Vale to stay for several days. One evening, they got into a dispute with some local men. The locals chased the travellers out of the village and up the steep paths on the sides of the valley.

Unfortunately, a mother and her five children, one a baby in arms, took the wrong turning and she led her family over the Screaming Quarry, where they all fell to their deaths.

It is said that when you walk down the Owain Clydach incline during the evening of a hot summer’s day, you will hear the blood-curdling screams.

White Cross of Trealaw

As you move around the valley, you might spot this large white cross on the hillside east of Tonypandy. The monument appeared overnight in September 2005, baffling residents. It was created by local man Glyn Thomas to mark the spot where he had scattered his friend’s ashes. He had moved them hidden in the ferns until it was time to create the cross. It has become a much-loved landmark, with the community pitching in to repair it when it was vandalised.

The Mid Rhondda ground, known as The Mid, opened in 1903 and has hosted many large events, including the first ever rugby league international game in 1908 when Wales beat England 35-18 in front of a crowd of 15,000.

The Mid was the home of Mid Rhondda FC, nicknamed ‘The Mushrooms’ or ‘The Mush’ for sixteen years until the team disbanded due to financial pressures in 1928.

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Clydach Vale flood of 1910

Mining-related disasters didn’t just happen underground. Unbeknownst to residents of the village an obsolete Perch seam had been slowly filling with water for years, and on 11 March 1910 it burst. Tons of water, earth and rubble poured down the hillside towards the village, completely destroying 11 houses.

The flood then struck Clydach Vale School. Fortunately the miners were just leaving work and managed to evacuate most of the children, but six people lost their lives.

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Cycling trails exploring the history and heritage of the area

Tales of the Trails has been delivered in partnership with the Cambrian Village Trust and the local community and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

cyclinguk.org/talesofthetrails
This short walk or ride takes you through Clydach Vale Country Park to the small lake at the head of the valley, known as the ‘top lake’. While enjoying the natural regeneration of the valley, you also pass the mining memorial which serves as a reminder of hard lives of the past. The route has gentle gradients but some patches of rough gravel and water drainage channels across the path. Suitable for hybrid or touring bikes.

An adventurous off-road route that rewards the rider with stunning vistas over forest and valley alike. With some testing climbs, smooth rolling double track fire roads, and in places, more technical, steep terrain, especially so on the final part of the descent, this route is a proper micro-adventure. Riders should carry suitable clothing, spares and refreshments and be prepared for the forecast weather, as the route tops out on the Bwlch at 500m. A hardtail mountain bike or gravel-adventure bike is recommended.