Tales of the Trails: Ynysybwl and Llanwonno

Cycling trails exploring the history and heritage of the area

Site of Lady Windsor Colliery

It’s hard to imagine now that this green hillside was once black and scarred, with a coal mine that was operational for over a century from 1884 to 1988. The high-quality coal produced here was ideal for maritime uses.

Over the years, conservation work has regenerated this area into a nature reserve.

“The hillside along here was black from the pollution, so nothing grew. You’d see tiny little men stood up on the gantries, with all this belching filth coming out of it. Quite an incredible sight. I’d never seen anything like it… The transformation has been amazing how green it has become.”

Steve Axe, worked in Ynysybwl during the 1980s

Corpse road (Mynachdy Road)

This road was known as the ‘corpse road’ because it was the way used to carry coffins up to St Gwynno Church at the top of the hill.

St Gwynno Church

This graveyard is the burial place of legendary athlete Guto Nyth Brân or Gruffydd Morgan (1700-1737), one of the greatest runners of his time. There are many stories about him, including that he caught a hare chasing sheep or outran a bird in flight. His final feat was to run 12 miles in an astonishing 53 minutes. Upon completion of the race, he was clapped on the back in congratulations and promptly died of a heart attack.

His life is celebrated every year on New Year’s Eve with the Nos Galan road races, when a mystery runner carries a torch from Ynysybwl to Mountain Ash to kick off the races.

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 Ynysybwl Regeneration Partnership 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 these places, with the Lady Windsor colliery opening in Ynysybwl in 1886, and most of the 7,000-strong village community relying upon the pit. Since the colliery closed the valley has undergone a transformation, with community enterprises like Daerwynno Outdoor Centre and Up-Cycle making the most of the area’s potential for outdoor activities.

Explore these trails yourself to discover more about the past, present and future of Ynysybwl and Llanwonno.

“I think the impression most people have of the valleys is that they are just a wasteland, but it’s not… It’s a beautiful place and ought to be explored more.”

Dewi Pritchard, former pit blacksmith and teacher

Lady Windsor Colliery memorial

The colliery was responsible for the growth of Ynysybwl from a small village of around 270 people to a thriving industrial town. During its peak period, the colliery employed over 1,000 people. Working conditions were poor, but it was one of the first collieries in Wales to provide pithead baths and a medical treatment room in the 1930s.

“It wasn’t really the job for me. It was a dangerous job – people got injured, people got killed. You get disillusioned with places.”

Dewi Pritchard, former pit blacksmith and teacher

The memorial sits on the Taff Trail, a popular cycling and walking path converted from the Ynysybwl to Pontypridd railway line, which closed in 1953.

Butchers Pool

Formerly known as Butchers Field because it was where animals would be brought on the way to market, this area was later developed into a paddling pool. When the much-loved pool was threatened with closure in 2014, the community came together to save it. Together the Friends of Butchers Pool and Ynysybwl Vision have raised money to keep it running and gradually renovated the pool.

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cyclinguk.org/talesofthetrails

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales

Guto Nyth Brân sculpture

This sculpture outside the pub was created by a local artist. If you look through the hole in the centre towards the church, you can see the gravestone of Guto Nyth Brân.

Daerwynno Outdoor Centre

The dedicated volunteers at this community-run outdoor activity centre offer a year-round program of activities for school children, including climbing, orienteering, canoeing, and wildlife and nature education.

Steve Axe, worked in Ynysybwl during the 1980s

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Key
- Llanwonno short route
- Llanwonno long route
- National Cycle Network towards Pontypridd and Cardiff (south)
- Start/finish
- Daerwynno Outdoor Centre
- Waterfall
- Guto Nyth Bran (athlete) buried in churchyard
- Llanwonno church
- Corpse Road (Mynachdy Road)
- Butchers Pool
- Lady Windsor Colliery

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### Llanwonno short route

- **Distance:** 8.8 miles/11 km
- **Ascent:** 200m
- **Start/finish point:** Picnic area north-east of St Gwynno Church, Llanwonno
- **Recommended direction:** clockwise

If you're looking for a less adventurous experience, this shorter route is a perfect introduction to Llanwonno forest. The route gently meanders up on bumpy tracks through the forest to reach the high point above Cwmaman. Take a moment to enjoy the stunning forest views before continuing to the impressive Victorian dam, a perfect picnic spot. The route then climbs briefly to rejoin the outbound route, back to the start point. The route is mainly off-road, on bumpy double track fire roads and is best ridden on a hardtail mountain bike or gravel-adventure bike.

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### Llanwonno long route

- **Distance:** 13.4 miles/21.5 km
- **Ascent:** 477m
- **Start/finish point:** Picnic area north-east of St Gwynno Church, Llanwonno
- **Recommended direction:** clockwise

Presenting the very best of Llanwonno forest, this route will reward the rider with panoramic views of the Brecon Beacons, reveal stunning forest vistas, a hidden waterfall, and beautiful Victorian dam, the perfect spot for a picnic. The route then climbs briefly to rejoin the outbound route, back to the start point. The route is primarily off-road, on bumpy double track fire roads and is best ridden on a hardtail mountain bike or gravel-adventure bike.