

My Favourite Ride 6

The Bwlch and Rhigos Loop

A circular ride starting and finishing at McDonald's Briton Ferry.

Distance 49 miles. Total ascent 3,179 feet. Max elevation 1,759 feet.

Terrain: Lanes, B Roads, some short sections of A Roads. Challenging.

This ride starts at McDonald's Briton Ferry SA11 2YW, 51.6287244, -3.8227228

Google Plus Code J5HJ+C2 Neath

The Bwlch Mountain Road is a scenic, steep and winding road connecting the Afan valley to the Rhondda valley. Renowned for the dramatic, sweeping views, this high altitude road features steep hairpin bends and breathtaking views. These are followed by steep and fast descents into the Rhondda valley and then the next challenge begins, namely the Rhigos Mountain Road. Equally as dramatic with its own high altitude, magnificent views and hairpin bends followed by the steep and fast descent into Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Neath valley.

From the start at McDonalds, we head out on a cycle path alongside the A48 and then follow the A48 to Port Talbot, an uninspiring stretch of road but a necessary commute, at Port Talbot we pick up another cycle path alongside the Afon Afan and through Cwmafan and onto Pontrhydyfen. We cross over the famous viaduct and turn right onto the Afan Argoed cycle path taking us up to Cymmer, we pick up another cycle path here as far as a T junction near Blaengwynfi, we join the main A4107 here and start the climb through Abergwynfi, cross over the cattle grid and then the proper climb begins, select a comfortable lowish gear and plod on, and on, and on. At the top, take a break and look back down at the magnificent view of the Afan valley. You are near the high point here of 1,759' at 16.5 miles, a gentle descent from here to a view over Treorchy on the left followed by another viewpoint at the T Junction with the A4061 and the ever present Ice Cream van and sheep. We go left here down into Treorchy and the Rhondda valley, going right would take us down into the Ogmere valley. We go down into Treorchy to the junction of the A4058 at the traffic lights, turn left and look for our lunch stop. Once upon a time we were spoiled for choice for cafés of Italian origin, all gone now, the last couple of times I was there I had food in Greggs!

Treorchy History – like many towns and villages in Wales, Treorchy evolved and grew around the coal industry, prior to industrialization, most of the land was owned by one of the great families of Glamorgan and Treorchy came under the domain of the Marquess of Bute Estate. The discovery of coal transformed the area and after 1851 Treorchy became an industrial town based around the coal mining industry during the 19th and 20th century, but by the end of the 1970s all the local pits had closed creating an economic downturn in the community. Treorchy is now mostly retail, in fact, in 2020, Treorchy was named by the Great British High Street Awards as the UK High Street of the year. It was praised for the number of independent shops in the town and for organizing a number of events, from Christmas parades to art festivals, as well as a gay pride gathering which was a first for the area, not surprisingly! More to it than a Rugby club and a Choir it would appear!

So will we find a café I wonder? On the assumption we will and following suitable sustenance, off we go again cycling through the town and the A4061 through Treherbert, past the Rugby field and around the first hairpin bend, over the cattle grid and then the second hairpin bend then up and up in a lowish gear to climb the Rhigos Mountain. A long slow climb with some great views on the left side, continue upward to the junction and the entrance to the windfarm, it levels out a bit here but

continue onward to the viewpoint. Great views here down into the valley below and of Llyn Fawr. Below you will see the old Tower Colliery which is now Tower Zip World. Tower Colliery began as a drift in 1805 with the first shaft dug 1864, it continued to produce quality Anthracite until it was closed by British Coal in 1994 but opened again in 1995 after being purchased by its employees. It continued producing coal until closure in 2008. In recent years the site has been transformed completely for leisure activities. Looking down the valley you will also see Hirwaun Industrial Estate, (pronounced Hirwin by locals), a once booming industrial area first established in 1942 as a site for manufacturing munitions for the Second World War, munitions factories were being heavily bombed at that time and a location was needed that was "remote" from other industrial areas. It was a very busy industrial Estate until the mid-1990s but much quieter these days.

All downhill from here it has been said, often by me but nobody believes me anymore! Well close to the truth this time, a double hairpin and a very fast descent all the way down to the roundabout at the bottom. On the right hand side here is a factory called EFTEC Ltd., a Swiss owned chemical company manufacturing coatings and adhesives for the automotive industry, car assembly plants all over the world. So why am I mentioning this I hear you say? I spent the last twenty years of my working life there and retired from there, fond memories, well, some!

We go left here through Rhigos, (pronounced Rickos by locals), and down the Rhigos bank until we reach the traffic lights at Glynneath. On the right hand side is a picture of Ruth Maddock and front left is a statue of Max Boyce playing his guitar, cycle past Max and through Glynneath and follow the B4242 all the way down the Neath valley, past Resolven where I was born and dragged up, onward to the Rock and Fountain where we come to the last little blip of the ride, a very short hill but a nuisance because our legs will be tired by this point, continue to Aberdulais and directly opposite the old Dulais Rock pub, we join and follow the canal cycle path all the way back to the start point at Briton ferry or you can divert for home wherever it suits you.

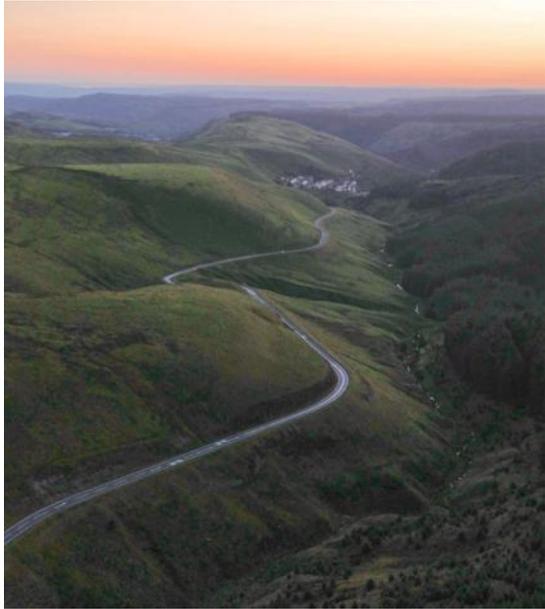
The Afan valley cycle path



Getting near the top of the Bwlch



Looking back down the Afan valley



First view of the Rhondda valley



Looking down on the Tower Colliery as was



First view from the Rhigos viewpoint

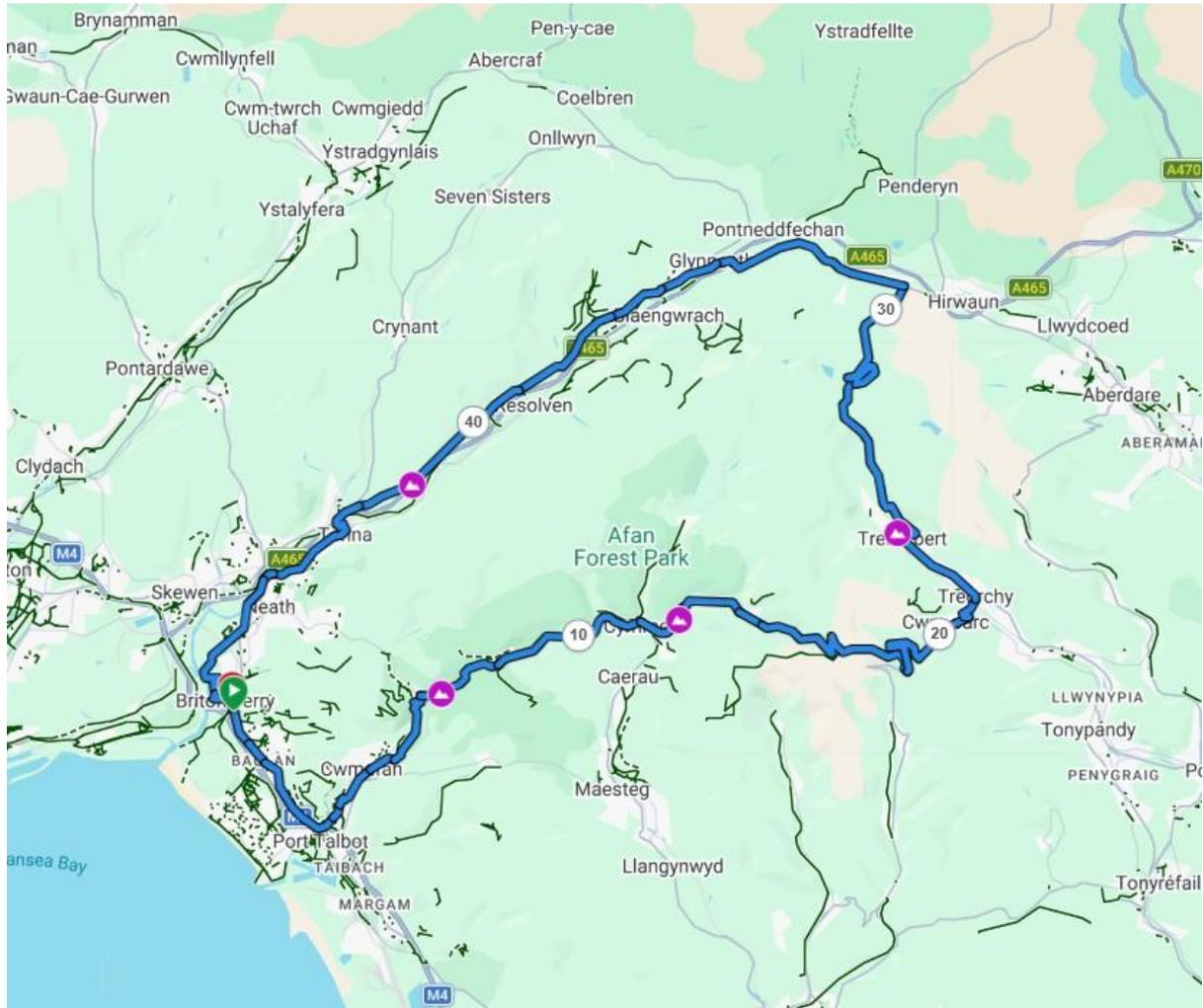


Looking down on the Tower Colliery today.

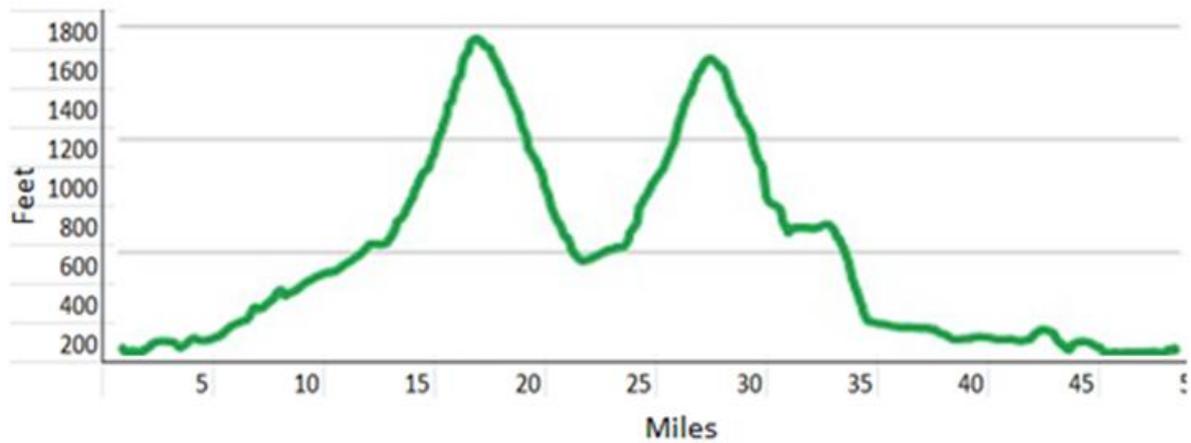


A faster option going down?





Bwlch – Rhigos Loop
 49 miles, 3,176 feet total ascents



<http://routes.swanseacycling.co.uk/events/event/bwlch-rhigos-loop-from-mcdonalds-briton-ferry>

