

My Favourite Ride # 3

Rhayader – Devil's Bridge Loop

A circular ride starting and finishing at the Elan Valley Visitor Centre Rhayader

Distance 45 miles. Total ascent 5,766 feet. Max elevation 1,680 feet.

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

Another magical but sometimes very lumpy ride into a vast emptiness of Wales along and around the Elan valley reservoirs, along Cwm Ystwith to Devil's Bridge

This ride starts at the Elan Valley visitor Centre Nr Caban Coch Reservoir LD6 5HP

52°16'09.2"N 3°34'21.6"W Google Plus Code 7C9H+P3 Rhayader

From the start at the Elan valley visitor centre we cycle back toward Rhayader on the B4518 for a few miles to the junction of NCR8 going north toward Llangurig, we follow NCR8 for about 0.5 miles only but we continue going straight and a steady ascent up and over Penrhiw-wen (1600') and then a fast descent down into Cwm Ystwyth and the start of the Craig Goch Reservoir. This is the highest of the four reservoirs that drowned the Elan valley in the 1890s to provide fresh water to Birmingham. The giant Claerwen Reservoir was added around 50 years later. During the construction phase it was used by the Royal Airforce for testing the bouncing bombs used in the Dambusters raid on Nazi Germany in WWII. The Elan valley Reservoirs and their dams have their own unique style, the water flows by pipe to and aqueduct for 73 miles to the city of Birmingham; the journey is powered by gravity alone and takes a day and a half.

We continue going straight along this road NCR81 following the Afon Elan through Blainycwm to the village of Cwmystwyth. You will see here extensive remains of mining activities dating back to the Bronze Age. Silver, lead, and zinc mining peaked in the 18th century, and water was extensively used in the extraction process. The Banc Ty'nddôl, the earliest gold artefact discovered in Wales, was found on the site in 2002. Mining in the area caused substantial environmental impact, Silver lead and zinc have been mined in the valley of the River Ystwyth since Roman times, an activity that reached its peak in the 18th century. The largest of the very many mines was Cwmystwyth Mine. It is reputed that the average age at death of the miners in Cwmystwyth was 32, largely because of acute lead poisoning.

Shortly after passing through Cwmystwyth we take a right turn following the B4578, a steady climb up to The iconic masonry arch spanning the road which was built by Thomas Johnes of Hafod in 1810 to mark the Golden Jubilee of George III. We are at 447m elevation at this point, we then have a fast descent down into Devil's Bridge (Pontarfynach). The story goes that around the eleventh Century, the Devil visited Wales as he had never been there before and he had heard that the scenery was breath-taking. He soon came across an old lady who seemed upset. "What's the matter?" he asked out of curiosity. "Oh, I'm in such a terrible muddle and I don't know what to do! My cow has wandered across the river and I can't get her back." "Ah!" said the Devil "what you need my dear, is a bridge, and I am just the man to build you one. Why don't you go home, and in the morning there will be a bridge waiting for you. All I ask in return is to keep the first living thing to cross the bridge!" "Okay then" she said "It's a bargain. I'll see you in the morning. Nos da, Goodnight."

That night she wondered about this stranger who would build her a bridge. "What a strange request! Why should I cross the bridge to get my cow back if he gets to keep me in exchange? Mind you it is

very tempting offer.” The next day she got up and called for her faithful dog. Together they went down to the river. “Well, well.” she couldn’t believe her eyes. In front of her was the best bridge that she had ever seen! “I told you that I would build you a bridge” said the Devil appearing from nowhere. “Now it’s your turn to keep your side of the bargain.” “I know, you get to keep the first living thing to cross the bridge,” and she started to walk towards the bridge. But just when she got to the entrance, she stopped, took out a loaf of bread from her apron pocket and hurled it across the bridge. As quick as a flash and before the Devil could stop it, the dog chased after it. “Aaaaaaagh!!!!” screeched the Devil. “You stupid old woman, I don’t believe it! Your smelly, hairy farm dog has become the first living thing to cross my bridge. It’s no good to me,” he screamed and then he vanished. Well, the Devil was never seen in Wales again as he was so embarrassed at being outwitted by the old lady.

There is a very old bridge that crosses a deep gorge. Above it are two other bridges built at later dates. But the lowest one....Well, they say that the Devil himself built it!

There are a few refreshment options in Devil’s Bridge, one being the train station for the narrow gauge railway that runs between Devil’s Bridge and Aberystwyth. After refreshments we cycle back the way we came and start with a steady climb back up to the Arch and then a fast descent back to Cwmystwyth. We follow this undulating road all the way back to the start of the Craig Goch reservoir and turn right down and across the bridge (Pont ar Elan) crossing the Afon Elan and follow the road with the reservoir on our left. We continue along this road as far the Dam at the end of the reservoir, we can cycle over the Dam to a parking area on the other side. At the bottom of the Dam is the start of Penyarreg Reservoir. We have choice at this point of staying on the road by going back across the Dam or following an unpaved cycle track to the end of the reservoir and the Dam. At the bottom of this Dam is the start of the Carreg-ddu Reservoir, we follow the road alongside the reservoir until we reach the next dam at Caban-coch Reservoir. We continue along this road or the cycle path and shortly arrive back at our start point at the Elan valley Visitor Centre.

Elan valley visitor Centre at Caban Coch



Y Cwm Ystwyth



Mining remains at Cwm Ystwyth



The Arch above Devil's Bridge



The 3 bridges at Devil's Bridge

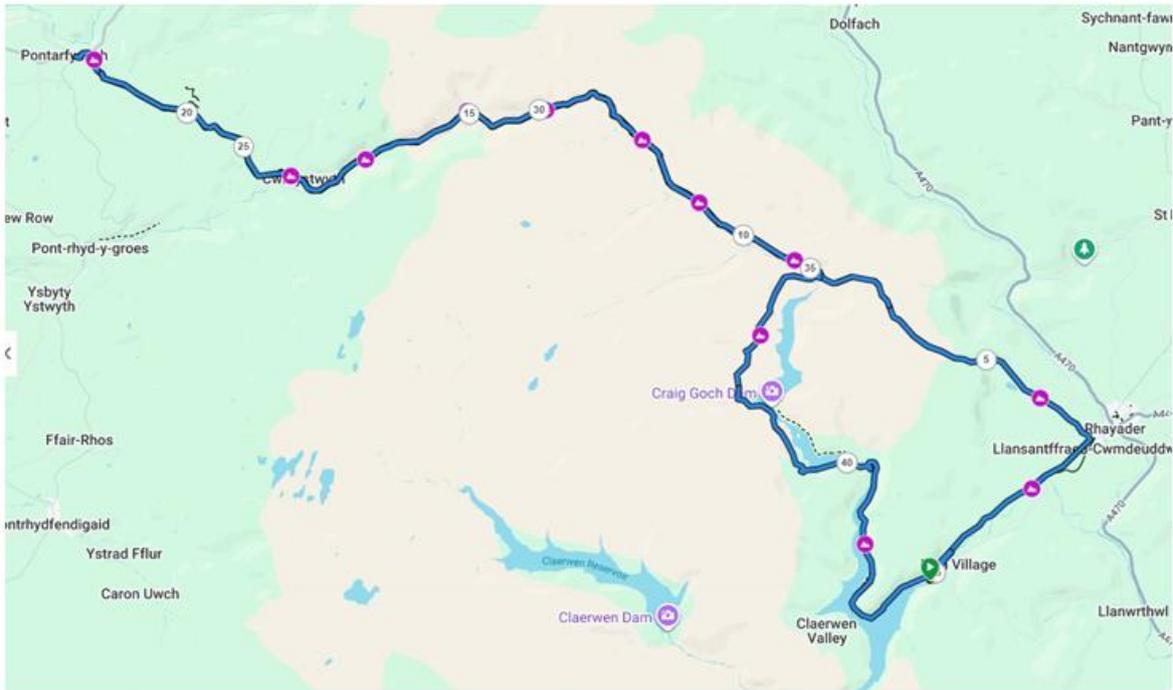


The Waterfalls at Devil's Bridge



Craig Goch Dam





Elan valley visitor Centre - Devil's Bridge Loop
45 miles, 5,766' total ascent

