

# Walking Itineraries

## 4 The Gunpowder Works Pontneddfechan



### Information

#### Where is it?

Pontneddfechan is located at the north-eastern end of the Vale of Neath. At Glynneath follow the signs on the B4242 for Pontneddfechan. Once in the village, the road forks next to the Craig-y-Dinas pub. Take the road directly in front of you and not the road heading up the hill. The starting point for the walk is the car park at Dinas Rock, about half a mile from this pub SA11 5ND. Explorer Map OL 12 or Landranger Map 160 Grid Ref SN 911 079.

#### Distance

2.5km (1.5 miles)

#### Time

Allow about 1 hour

#### Terrain

The route is level with a mixture of stone-dust surfaces, cobbled tram road and grassy paths. This trail is suitable for wheelchairs and disability scooters. Please note that after heavy rain some sections of the path can become muddy.

**Grade** Easy.

### Please note

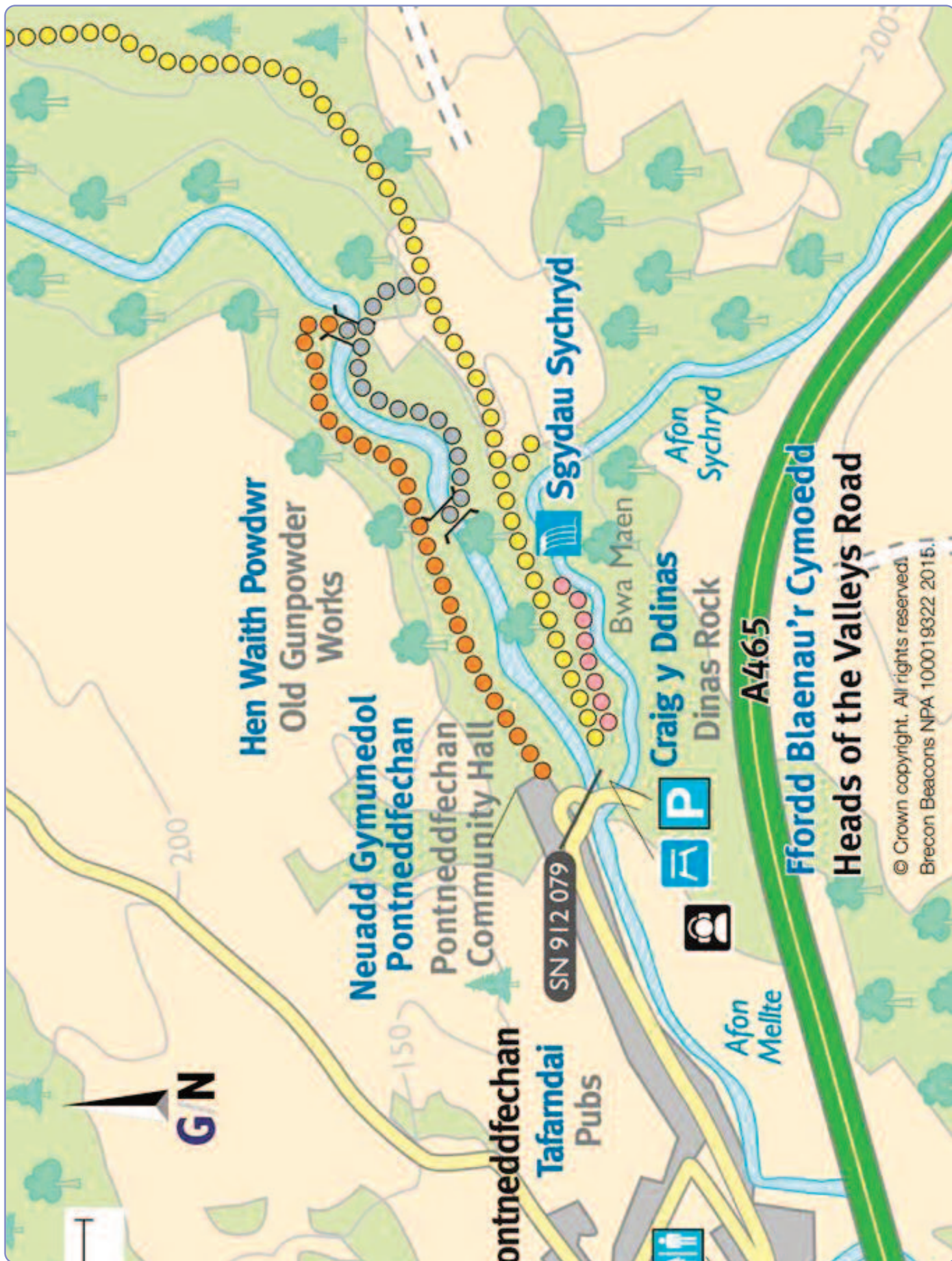
Trails can become slippery due to adverse weather conditions. Please take extra care when walking especially near the river. Suitable footwear, sturdy shoes or boots with a good grip, are best worn at all times.

The steep sided, wooded valley of the Afon Mellte, famous for its beautiful waterfalls, contains the remains of what was once a thriving industry. Pontneddfechan gunpowder works produced blasting powder for coal mining and limestone quarrying. It opened in 1857 and operated until 1931 and was the biggest, and one of the most important in Wales.

This site was chosen for the ready availability of water power; for security and for its remoteness in case of explosions! Also, the surrounding woodlands were a source of charcoal – a key ingredient in the manufacturing process. The other two ingredients, saltpetre and sulphur were brought to the site via a horse drawn tramway from the Vale of Neath railway.

This easy access trail follows a former tram road in the Afon Mellte river gorge, which is listed as a Special Area of Conservation. It passes the ruins of the former gunpowder works and watermills that once powered the site.





1 Head back out of the car park across the bridge. Take the track to the right, alongside the community hall. Stop and read 'The Old Gunpowder Works' interpretation panel on the right hand side of the footpath.

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2 Follow the path as it bends gently left and right, past the old manager's house. Take note of the 'C+H 1863' plaque on the wall referring to the gunpowder firm of Curtis and Harvey which took over the works between 1862-63. The firm later became part of Nobel's Explosives Company and then ICI. Continue walking the line of the old tramroad, passing the first set of ruins which includes a pit into which the workers could jump for safety if they were set on fire!

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3 Continue along the path, passing the Natural Resources Wales interpretation board on the right. The river below is the Mellte. The river derives its name from Mellt - the Welsh word for 'lightning' - it can rise then fall rapidly after heavy rainfall.

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4 Continue along the path and past the footbridge (but not crossing it). Immediately beyond the footbridge, walk down the steps on your right to inspect the old turbine and pump house which were important for supplying water power:

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5 Continue along the path past the ruins of a 'press house' where the gunpowder was pressed to make it more explosive, then past the old tunnel entrance on your left. Continue past the ruins of the Corning House on left, until you reach the only concrete building - the new coming house. The Corning House was where cakes of granulated powder were broken up by wooden hammers and separated by size.

6 On your right is a footbridge overlooking the river. Looking upstream from the footbridge is a weir on the left and, on the right, the remains of a building where there used to be a waterwheel.

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7 Cross the footbridge. Turn right at the audio box to follow a path. After 20 metres keep left and follow the path. Drop down onto the former tramroad and turn left, keeping the river on your right.

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8 Follow the rough path until you reach a tall metal footbridge. Cross the bridge, turn left and retrace your steps back to the start.

### Variation Can be walked in reverse.

**To shorten** A 400 metre accessible walk 'The Sychryd Trail' can be accessed from the Dinas Rock car park.

**[www.breconbeacons.org/8-walk-waterfall-country-sychryd-all-abilities-trail](http://www.breconbeacons.org/8-walk-waterfall-country-sychryd-all-abilities-trail)**

**To lengthen** There are many longer walks in this area which take you to different waterfalls.

**[www.breconbeacons.org/waterfall-country-walking-trails](http://www.breconbeacons.org/waterfall-country-walking-trails)**

## Activities suitable on this route

Geocaching - Dinas Rock GC5PANT, journey sticks, colour palettes, photography, birdwatching.



# The Gunpowder Works Pontneddfechan

- 1 Craig-y-nos
- 2 Talybont
- 3 Taf Fechan
- 4 Pontneddfechan
- 5 Llangorse
- 6 Pen-y-crug
- 7 Twyn-y-gaer
- 8 Llanfoist
- 9 Sugar Loaf Mountain
- 10 Cribarth

**BRECON BEACONS**  
OUR NATIONAL PARK



## Information

**Parking** Free parking is available at Dinas Rock car park. Please note, no buses, only minibuses and no valuables to be left in cars.

**Refreshments and toilets** Pontneddfechan has several pubs. The Community Hall runs a café mostly at weekends during the summer - phone 01639 721604 to check opening times or see local information boards. There are public toilets next to the Angel Inn, Pontneddfechan (Grid Ref SN 928 125). There is a disabled access toilet located in the community hall (part-time opening hours). Next nearest disabled toilet is at Cwm Porth car park near Ystradfellte.

**Public Transport** The X55 Swansea-Glynneath via Neath runs hourly every Mon-Sat, excluding Bank Holidays.  
[www.traveline.cymru/timetables/?routeNum=X55&item\\_clean=198,223&direction\\_id=1](http://www.traveline.cymru/timetables/?routeNum=X55&item_clean=198,223&direction_id=1)

**Nearest Towns**  
Glynneath - most facilities.

**Websites**  
[www.breconbeacons.org/glyn-neath-gunpowder-works-pontneddfechan](http://www.breconbeacons.org/glyn-neath-gunpowder-works-pontneddfechan) This link includes more information on the gunpowder works and a link to an audio trail which can be downloaded as an MP3 file before you visit.

[www.forestfawrgeopark.org.uk/understanding/archaeology-and-industrial-heritage/legacies-of-the-industrial-age/the-gunpowder-works/](http://www.forestfawrgeopark.org.uk/understanding/archaeology-and-industrial-heritage/legacies-of-the-industrial-age/the-gunpowder-works/) for more information about the area.  
[www.Geocaching.com](http://www.Geocaching.com)

**Dogs** Suitable for dogs. Please keep on a lead near any livestock.

## Sample Itinerary

- 10.30 Arrive at Dinas Rock car park.  
Tea/coffee at the cafe (check for opening times).
- 11.00-12.00 Follow the trail
- 12.00-12.30 Lunch at café/local pub  
or picnic at Dinas Rock
- 12.30 on Walk to Sgwd Gwladys waterfall  
(see above) 2.5 miles return (4km),  
Start point next to Angel Inn.

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