

WALK 2: CAPEL-Y-FFIN

OS map OL13: Grid Ref: SO 2548 3143

Approx. Distance: 2.5 miles to waterfall (one way).
3.5 miles turning at point 6. Duration about 3 hours (leisurely).

About 450 feet of ascent.

Difficulty: Moderate mostly on road/ track.

Short steep bit down on the path to Pen-y-maes slippery when wet.

BRING WALKING BOOTS,
AND CLOTHES SUITABLE FOR THE WEATHER

- Capel-y-ffin - 'The chapel of the boundary' - is a small hamlet straddling the border between Monmouthshire and Powys.

- The geology is interesting and there is evidence of pre-historic occupation.

- Surrounded by small farms it has been a place of spiritual retreat since mediaeval times and, following the short residence of Eric Gill in the 1920s, attracted a number of 20th century artists.

- The main walk will take you up quiet lanes returning on a mostly down-hill footpath.

- If you want to go further you can continue past Blaen-bwch to a picnic spot by some waterfalls. The path then continues up the valley to the escarpment with views of the Brecon Beacons, the Wye valley, the Malvern Hills and beyond.

www.llanthonyhistory.wales

Look out for the other walk leaflets in this series devised by the LV&D History Group.

Map and leaflet design by Lisa Hellier.

Words by Pip Bevan.

- 1 Visit St Mary's church **A** and the Baptist chapel **B** which is signposted through the gate.
- 2 Walk in the Llanthony direction over the bridge and turn right up the hill.
- 3 Pass the road which turns right and continue on the road up the hill to visit the Monastery **C** on your left and see the Grange on your right: retrace your footsteps and turn left to continue along the road.
- 4 Walk up the lane past Boxbush and Talsarn; cross the bridge painted by David Jones **D**; in winter the Carney **E** should be visible up on the right.
- 5 Continue through the mountain wall gate passing the lane to the Carney on your right. Continue towards Blaen-bwch until you see a path bending back sharply on your right.
- 6 **YOU CAN TURN HERE OR CONTINUE TO THE WATERFALL TO RETURN** - either - Go back the way you came on the road to avoid steep rocky section at Pen-y-maes OR - take the path which follows the contour, (not the more obvious one that goes higher). Take the rocky path down the hill continuing down and to the right by the tree by the fence. This will take you back to Capel-y-ffin with views across the valley to the Monastery and the Grange.
- 7 **CONTINUE TO THE WATERFALL** pass Blaen-bwch following the path - passing the first couple of little paths to the left (or you'll need to cross the stream) but looking out for a path to your left which will take you round to the waterfall.
- 8 Of course if you are feeling adventurous you could carry on up the path to the escarpment using your OS map.

Wales Visitation

A solid mass of Heaven,
mist-infused, ebbs thru the vale,
a wavelet of Immensity, lapping
gigantic through Llanthony Valley
the length of all England,
valley upon valley under Heaven's ocean
tonned with cloud-hang,
Heaven balanced on a grassblade...

Allen Ginsberg

P **PARKING:** Park off the road on the right hand side as you approach from Llanthony; or by the church.

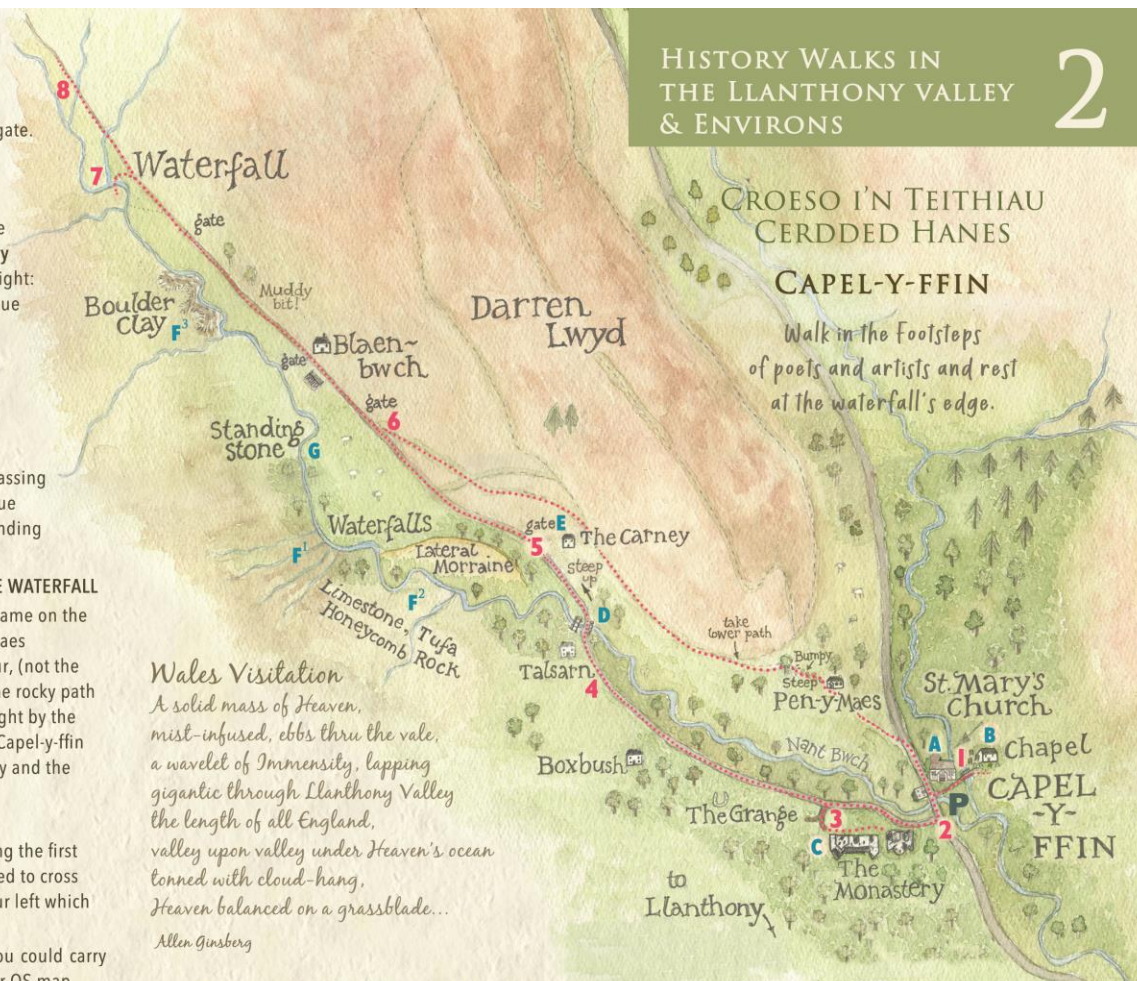
HISTORY WALKS IN
THE LLANTHONY VALLEY
& ENVIRONS

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CAPEL-Y-FFIN

Walk in the Footsteps
of poets and artists and rest
at the waterfall's edge.



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HISTORY
GROUP

ARTISTS & WRITERS AT CAPEL-Y-FFIN

Eric Gill sculptor, typeface designer and printmaker lived at the Monastery between 1924 and 1928.

David Jones artist and poet, frequently stayed at the Monastery between 1924 and 1927 and was engaged to Petra, Gill's daughter, for three years. He produced many local paintings; *Darren Lwyd (Y Twmpa)* appears in many of them.

Eric Ravilious stayed at Chapel Farm with the Saunders family in the early months of 1938. During this time he produced six known paintings including watercolours of his bedroom and the Baptist chapel. He was visited there by John Piper.

Edgar Holloway was influenced by Eric Gill's approach to life and art; in 1941 he converted to Roman Catholicism and in 1943, suffering from depression went to Capel-y-ffin where he met Gill's model Daisy Monica Hawkins whom he married six weeks later. He stayed for a few months after his marriage and often returned, producing local etchings and watercolours.

Reg Gammon was a woodcut illustrator, water colour and oil painter and farmer who lived in Capel-y-ffin at the Carney for just over twenty years.

William Wordsworth was said to have walked the road from Hay to Capel-y-ffin with his sister Dorothy; Gospel Pass was 'a favourite walk'.

Francis Kilvert visited Capel-y-ffin in 1870 and laid a stone at the request of Father Ignatius. He described the monks' life as 'morbidity and unnatural'.

Bruce Chatwin visited in his teens and described the area as one of the emotional centres of his life; his novel *On the Black Hill* is set in the area.

Allen Ginsberg stayed at the Carney in 1967 and, under the influence of LSD wrote *Wales Visitation*.



The leaflet writer and the map designer enjoying their research at the waterfall.

A ST MARY'S CHURCH

The original mediaeval church was renovated in the latter part of the 18th century, inspired perhaps by the newly erected Baptist chapel nearby. The font is mediaeval, but the pulpit, gallery, altar rail and benches date from the 1780s. A south porch was added in 1817. There is a headstone by Eric Gill in the churchyard (to the right of the path to the doorway) and seven ancient yew trees. The church is only 25ft by 12.



B THE WELSH BAPTIST CHAPEL



Baptist congregations probably started clandestine meetings in the Olchon Valley over the hill in Herefordshire in the early 17th century and the Baptists of Capel-y-ffin were long associated with them. The chapel for both communities was converted from a house in 1737 and rebuilt in 1762; it had a congregation of about forty.

C THE MONASTERY

The monastery (well-built) and ruined church (badly-built) were commissioned in 1870 by Joseph Leicester Lyne, known as Father Ignatius, who wanted to re-introduce the monastic tradition in the Anglican church. He had tried but failed to buy Llanthony Priory and bought land near Capel-y-ffin to build a copy of the 12th century Priory. Following his death in 1908 the place passed to the Benedictine monks of Caldey Island who rented it to Eric Gill who lived there between 1924 and 1928. His wife Mary bought it in 1931 and it remained in the hands of the family until 1985 becoming variously a pig-farm, girls' school, guesthouse, and family home.



D THE BRIDGE IN DAVID JONES' PAINTING

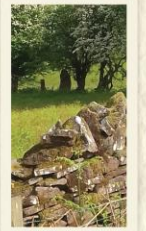
E THE CARNEY

Reg and Betty Gammon came to Capel-y-ffin in 1940 buying and re-building the ruined Carney. In 1942 they bought a farm in the valley. Reg and his son Gordon produced milk, grain, vegetables and fruit at Sychtre until 1953. Reg and Betty retired to Somerset to be near them in 1962. Tom Maschler, Jonathan Cape publisher, bought the Carney and many famous writers visited including Doris Lessing, Bruce Chatwin, Arnold Wesker, Allen Ginsberg, Len Deighton, John Fowles, and Edna O'Brien.



F INTERESTING GEOLOGY

1. **Limestone, Tufa and Honeycomb Rock** – a thin band of carboniferous limestone in the red sandstone supports different kinds of plants; at the base of the cliff is a lump of tufa locally known as Honeycomb Rock.
2. **Lateral Moraine** glacial material deposited along the side of a glacier (above image).
3. **Exposed Boulder Clay** formed of deposition of boulders, stones and sand which may contain rock transported many miles from a different geological succession.



G STANDING STONE

Visible from the path on the other-side of Nant Bwch. Cadw are said to be suspicious of the stone but have tentatively assigned it to the Bronze Age.

Path back to Capel-y-ffin

