

WALK 7: GRWYNE FAWR RESERVOIR

BRING WALKING BOOTS, & CLOTHES SUITABLE FOR THE WEATHER

HISTORY WALK

This walk follows part of the track to Talgarth which was used by Baldwin, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Gerald of Wales, during their recruitment campaign for the Third Crusade in 1188. The monks of Llanthony Valley used it to travel to Llangorse Lake for fish. Some reservoir workers used it to walk daily from Talgarth to the reservoir site and back, leaving home at 4am. The 10-hour 9d-(old 9 pence)-an-hour shift ended at 5.30; then there was the 2 hour trek home.

P BLAEN-Y-CWM CAR PARK

OS map OL 13: Grid Ref: SO 2526 2847

Distance: 6 miles

Duration: 3-4 hours, leisurely

About 800 feet of gradual ascent

Difficulty: Moderate, with rocky uneven path

- 1** Park in the Blaen-y-cwm car park, look back at Blaen-y-Cwm house **A**, then look at the map of Tin Town on the information board and read the information about the village on the leaflet **B**.
- 2** Leave the car park on the path beyond the board; opposite where it joins the road there is a **gap in the wall** and a **foot bridge**; go across to see the remains of the schoolhouse and sites of the school and isolation hospital.
- 3** Return and walk up the road to what was the old railway track which forks to the right through the wood.
- 4** Walk up the railway track to two gates and take the **left one** leading to the **top of the dam**; walk along the dam wall then retrace your footsteps.

- 5** Return through the gate and take the **other gate** to follow the path above the reservoir. Continue with the **fence on your left** until you reach a gate just above the water meter house (bothy).



- 6 Optional:** Just below the gate there is a **gap in the fence** giving access to a path leading down to the **bothy** - the path is steep and requires a little agility in places.

- 7** Retrace your steps to the dam, go back through the **left gate** and walk to the nearside of the dam wall.

- 8** Go down next to the wall until you come to a path heading **down to the left**. Follow the zigzag path down, go through a small gate, cross the footbridge, **turn left** and walk along the track to another footbridge on your left.

- 9** Cross this bridge and head diagonally up the slope on another old railway track (with boggy bits) which joins the track at the top.

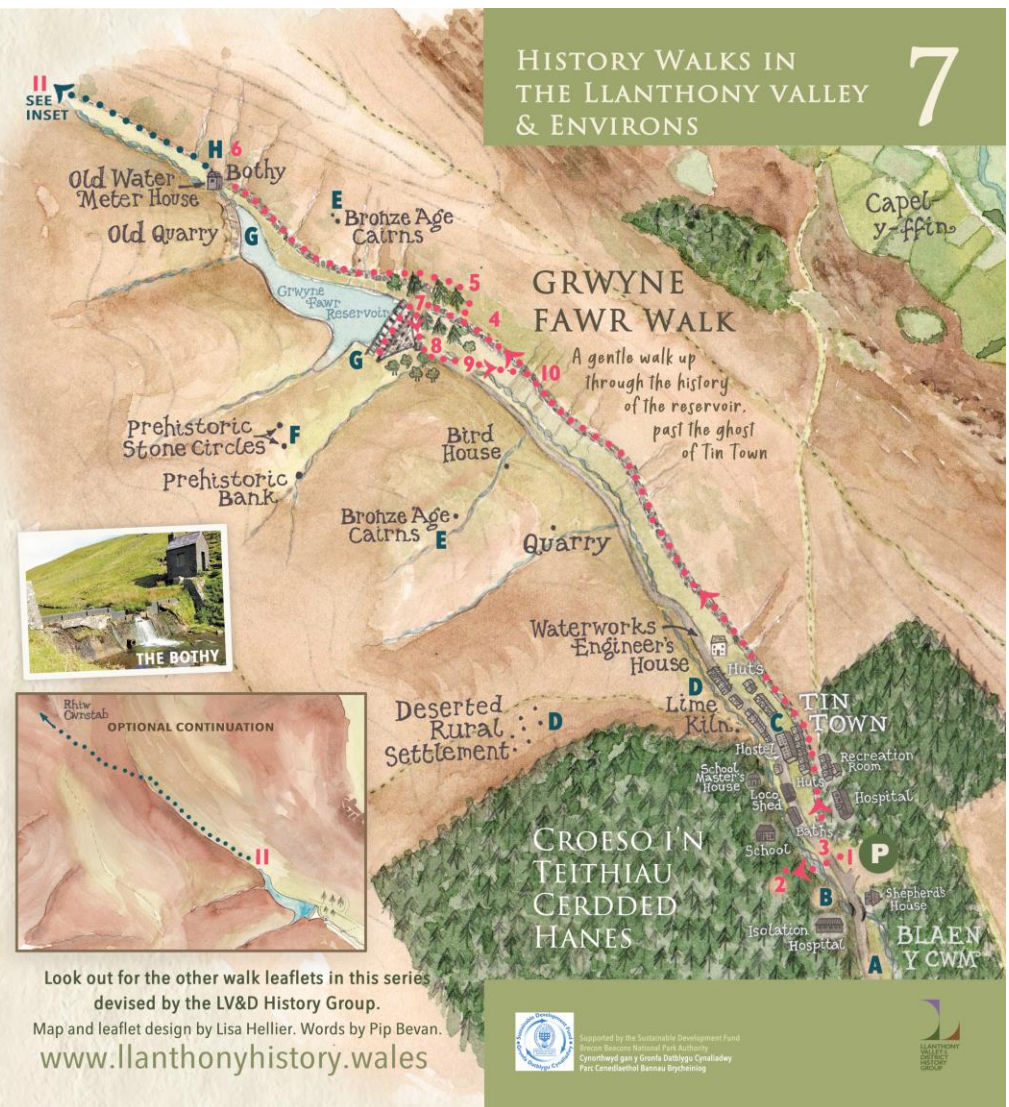
- 10** Turn right and walk back to the car park.

- 11 Optional continuation from 5** to the top of Rhiw Cwnstab (3 miles round trip: use OS map).

At the turn of the 20th century, following outbreaks of cholera, Monmouthshire County Council accepted that Abertillery, the second largest town in the county, needed a fresh water supply.

In 1906 an engineer reported that the nearest place high enough for a reservoir was in the Grwyne Fawr Valley. The project, launched in February 1912, was delayed by WW1 and only completed in 1928.

By 1919 a rail track ran 11 miles from Llanvihangel Crucorney station, through Cwm Coed-y-cerrig, and up the valley, rising 1,168 ft.



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.

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A BLAEN-Y-CWM

In its heyday Blaen-y-cwm was a 100 acre holding. There is evidence of three houses on the land: Cefn Coed Ewys - a longhouse; Marged's house - a *hafod*; and the surviving Blaen-y-cwm.

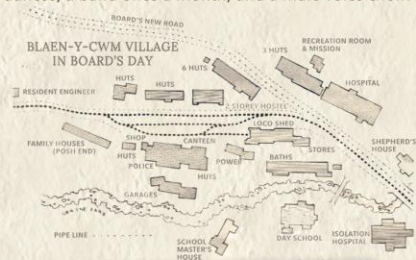
Isabel McGrachan, whose research on the history of local houses and residents is in the Gwent Archives, bought the empty house in 1955 for £350.



B TIN TOWN NAVVY VILLAGE 1913-28

In 1913 construction of huts began and there was a canteen and a few small shops; a school opened in 1914 and a hospital in 1915.

By 1925 there was a population of more than 400. There was a large recreation hall hosting whist drives, weekly dances, a band once a month, and a male voice choir.



C BEFORE 1913

The river flowed past Blaen-y-cwm; the only way to market was a bridle path along the mountain. The river banks were dotted with sheepfolds.



D EVIDENCE OF POST-MEDIEVAL INHABITANTS



There was a lime kiln on the opposite side of the stream just out of the wood, and higher up on the slope the Nant y Gadair Fawr Settlement. In the bracken are the remains of the stone structures including banks, terraced platforms and drystone walls, some regular and some circular. Coffein identifies the group of buildings as a post-medieval 'deserted rural settlement'.

E BRONZE AGE INHABITANTS

In this part of the world the Bronze Age was roughly from 2400-750BCE. The climate was warmer and people settled across the uplands. It is believed that they lived in round houses made of wood, wattle and daub and thatch, clustered in small groups with stock



pens and small hand-worked fields. Bronze Age cairns have been identified on the slope of the Gadair ridge before and beyond the reservoir and on the slopes of the opposite ridge just above the reservoir. The cairns were probably territorial markers.

F PREHISTORIC INHABITANTS AT CWM GIGWS ISAF

Above the dam on the lower slopes of the Gadair Ridge is a hut circle 7 metres in diameter slightly terraced into the slope; a stone bank ran to the east of the structure creating a small enclosure. Flint flakes have been found in two spots near the stream beyond the dam.



G BUILDING THE DAM & THE REMAINS

By 1915 the pipeline to Abertillery and the railway to the dam had been constructed. Due to the war work was delayed until 1919 when construction of the dam wall began. The stone was blasted from what is now the north end of the dam.

The road alongside the Grwyne Fawr stream was the first track; later the track to the top of the dam was built with a third track linking it to the lower track. There are remains of numerous stone structures below and on the slopes above the dam.



The workforce consisted of stonemasons, navvies, carpenters, blacksmiths, fitters, turners, engine and crane drivers. Three railway tracks are footpaths used in this walk.

H WATER METER HOUSE



Between 1915 and 1928 the water meter house measured the flow of water from a small dam above the planned reservoir which ran through the pipeline to the Abertillery service reservoirs.