

Waterfall Country (Pontneddfechan Circular)			Waterfall Country (Shortcut and Extension via Penderyn)		
1 st walk check	2 nd walk check	3 rd walk check	1 st walk check	2 nd walk check	3 rd walk check
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Waterfall Country/Bro'r Skydau (Pontneddfechan Circular)

Start & Finish: Pontneddfechan/Pontneathvaughan, Angel Inn Bus Stop.
Or car parks along or a little off the route. See the route map for details.

Pontneddfechan, Angel Inn Bus Stop, map reference SN 900 076, is 18 km north east of Neath/Castell Nedd, 241 km west north west of Charing Cross, 79m above sea level and in **Neath - Port Talbot, Wales**.

Length: 22.4 km (13.4 mi).

Cumulative ascent/descent: 545m. For a longer or shorter walk, see *below* **Walk Options**.

Toughness: 8 out of 10

Time: 6 ½ hours walking time (longer if including stops for photos and amazement)

Transport: Pontneddfechan, Angel Inn Bus Stop is served by lines 161, 162 and 55 (Neath or Glynneath – Pontneddfechan/ Min yr Awel), with – between them – 4 buses a day Mon-Fri and 2 on Sun. Line 162 connects with lines X7 & X5 (Swansea – Neath – Glynneath - Pontwalby Bridge), with an hourly service Mon-Sat. The Pont Walby, Halfway Inn stop is a 1.7 km walk away from the start of the route. On summer weekends, there is a free Glynneath – Pontneddfechan shuttle bus (check visitwales.com).

Saturday Walkers' Club: This walk is doable as a daywalk from London if you have motorised transport, or if starting the walk from Pont Walby. Accommodation is available in Pontneddfechan and in Neath.

OS Landranger Map: 160 (Brecon Beacons)

OS Explorer Map: OL12 (Brecon Beacons National Park)

Walk Notes:

This route, entirely in the Fforest Fawr Geopark area of the Brecon Beacons National Park, is the ultimate waterfalls experience, and possibly not just in the UK, packed up in a moderately strenuous walk, with more strenuous options possible. It leads through the wooded gorges of the Upper River Nedd and its tributaries Pyrddin, Mellte, Hepste and Sychryd above Pontneddfechan, often referred to as the Celtic Rainforest, as they pass through a millstone grit and limestone plateau, and along Moel Penderyn (hill) to the east. The rivers have eroded deep, narrow valleys in the plateau, which lies some 300m above sea level, with caves, wooded mossy gorges, river cliffs, block scree, rapids, cascades and waterfalls in what is the greatest concentration of them in the UK.

The route passes a total of 13 named falls or cascades (2 of those on extensions), including all 8 of the most famous ones in the area, plus countless other unnamed falls, cascades and rapids, as well as one of the largest cave entrances in the UK.

Some sections are easy to walk as you follow disused tramroads to former silica mines (some entrances can still be seen), others go over more demanding terrain, at times rough, rocky and slippery and/or exposed. En route to lunch, you rise out of the Nedd Fechan valley up to the limestone upland with fine views to the mountains in the Fforest Fawr, source of the rivers passed on the route, and across to the Central Beacons. The return to Pontneddfechan is along a scenic and lofty route high above the wooded Mellte and Hepste gorges, topped near the end with another excursion to some more falls and stunning rock features. A longer walk via Penderyn with surround views in all directions, loops around the slopes of Moel Penderyn.

Warnings and General Notes:

The paths in the core sections deep in the gorges rarely see the sun. They **are somewhat mud-prone at most times**. A lot of those paths are also serrated by **tree roots** and/or full of **rocks and boulders**.

All versions of the walk require you to walk behind the water curtain at the Sgwd yr Eira fall. At low water levels, this can be done while staying dry. At higher water levels, the swirling water will get you somewhat wet though. **The path** behind the Sgwd yr Eira water curtain **is always wet, slippery and somewhat treacherous**. The **roar of the falling water can be un-nerving**.

Some of the optional routes are dangerous due to any of these factors: narrowness of path combined with exposure, danger of rockfall or landslides, fallen trees, scrambling sections, river crossings across slippery and unstable boulders. The relevant dangers are listed at the start of the respective text segments.

The sections from Pontneddfechan to the Sgwd Gwladus and the ones between the northerly car parks and the Sgwd yr Eira **are very popular at all times and far from quiet**.

Some audio trails accompany parts of the route, posts with an audio trail marker are mentioned in the text. The files can be downloaded at <https://www.breconbeacons.org/things-to-do/walking/audio-trails>.

Walk Options:

Several car parks are shown on the route map, on or close to the route, enabling starts from other spots.

The route includes several out-and-backs to waterfalls or caves, as well as an instance of a walk to a viewpoint of a fall followed by another one to the fall itself. All of those are **by nature optional**.

A short but strenuous extension is described to the **Sgwd Einion Gam waterfall**. This requires at least two river crossings and is only safe to do at low water levels.

Shortcut I: cut the whole northerly part of the route, further up the Nedd Fechan River and over the limestone upland to the pub in Ystradfellte and the Porth y Ogorf caves (cut 5.1 km and 117m ascent, **5/10**). **An Extension off this shortcut** from a viewpoint overlooking the **Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn**, leads via a scramble down a rock face to the fall itself. A rough forest path leads back onto route.

Shortcut II: cut just the most northerly part of the route over the limestone upland to the pub in Ystradfellte (cut 3.4 km and 118m ascent/descent, **6/10**).

An exposed and somewhat dangerous path between the **Sgwd Uchaf Clun-Gwyn** and the **Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn** (two of the main waterfalls), cuts 1.35 km and 20m ascent.

An Extension in the afternoon (add 3.2 km and 99m ascent/descent, **8/10**) loops around the grass and heather-filled slopes of Moel Penderyn to Penderyn, with surround views in all directions. Penderyn provides for a good food pub (plus another pub off route), the eponymous distillery (off route, steeply downhill), and bus stops for services to Pont Walby/Glynneath, near the start of the walk route (hourly Monday-Saturday).

A variation near the end leads down to the **site of former Gunpowder Works** on the Mellte River with the Loonies Leap, and from there into Pontneddfechan. This cuts out the Pwll Berw and Skydau Sychryd.

Lunch (details last updated 08/09/2022)

The New Inn Ystradfellte, Aberdare, Powys CF44 9JE (01639 721 014, <https://www.waterfallways.co.uk/>). The New Inn is located 10.0 km/6.2 mi into the walk. Open Wed-Sun 13.00-22.00 (17.00 Sun). Food served to 19.30 (16.30 Sun).

Tea (Main Walk and Shortcut II) (details last updated 09/09/2022)

The Burger Pod Cwm Porth Car Park, Ystradfellte, Aberdare, Powys CF44 9JF (07968 093 535). The Pod is located 11.5 km/7.1 mi into the walk. Open all day Wed-Sun.

Tea Penderyn (extended walk) (details last updated 08/09/2022)

The Lamb Hotel Chapel Road, Penderyn, RCT CF44 9JX (01685 811 357). 230m off route, near a bus stop.

The Red Lion Inn Church Road, Penderyn, RCT CF44 9JR (01685 811 914, <https://redlionpenderyn.com/>).

Located 5.7 km from the end of the walk. Open all day Wed-Sun. Food 12.00-14.30 & 18.00-20.30 Wed-Sat, 12.00-16.30 Sun. Pizza sold Wed-Sun from a trailer in the car park (<https://www.littlelionpizza.co.uk/>).

Penderyn Distillery Visitor Centre & Shop Pontpren, Penderyn, RCT CF44 0SX (01685 811 914, <https://www.penderyn.wales/>). Open 09.30-17.00 every day (-18.00 in summer). 1 km off route steeply downhill, by a bus stop.

Tea Pontneddfechan (details last updated 08/09/2022)

The Old White Horse Inn 12 High Street, Pontneddfechan, Powys SA11 5NP (01639 721 173). Open 12.00-15.00 and 18.00-23.00 Mon-Fri and all day Sat-Sun. Food served.

The Angel Inn Pontneddfechan Road, Pontneddfechan, Glyn-Neath, Neath-Port Talbot SA11 5NR (01639 722 013). Open all day every day. Food served.

The Sgwd Gwladys Bar & Lodge Pontneddfechan Road, Pontneddfechan, Glyn-Neath, Neath-Port Talbot SA11 5NR (01639 721 519, <https://www.sgwdgwladys.co.uk/>). Open 09.00-18.00 Mon-Tue and 09.00-22.00 Wed-Sun. Food served.

Welsh Glossary

aber: estuary, confluence, river mouth; afon: river; allt: hillside, cliff; aran: high place; ban/fan/bannau (pl): peak, beacon, crest, hill, mountain; big: peak; blaen: source of river, head of valley; bod: dwelling; bre: hill; bron: hill-breast; bryn: hill; bwlch: gap, col, pass; cadair: chair; cae: field; caer/gaer: stronghold, fort; capel: chapel; carn/garn/carnedd/garnedd: cairn/heap of stones, tumulus; carreg/garreg: stone, rock; castell: castle; cefn: ridge, hillside; celli: grove, copse; cerwyn: pot-hole; cist: chest; clwyd: hurdle, gate; clog/clogwyn: cliff; clun: meadow; clydach: torrent; coch/goch: red; coed: wood; craig/graig: rock; crib/cribyn: crest, ridge, summit; crug: mound; cul: narrow; cwm: hanging valley, corrie, bowl, dale; cyfrwy: ridge between two summits (saddle); ddinas: fort; dibyn: steep slope, precipice; diffwys: precipice, abyss; dim: no; din: hill-fortress; disgwylfa: place of observation, look-out point; dôl: meadow; du/ddu: black, dark; dwfr/dŵr: water; dyffryn: valley; -dyn: fortified enclosure; eglwys: church; eira: snow; eisteddfod: meeting-place, assembly; esgair: ridge; fach/bach: small; fawr/mawr: large; fechan: smaller; ffald: sheep-fold, pound, pen, run; ffordd: way, road; ffridd: pasture; ffrwd: stream, torrent; ffynnon: spring, well; gallt: wooded hill; ganol: middle; garth: promontory, hill, enclosure; glan/lan: river-bank, hillock; glas: green, when referring to grass, pasture or leaves; or blue, when relating to the sea or air; glyn: deep valley, glen; gors: bog; gorsedd: tumulus, barrow, hillock; gwyddfa: mound, tumulus; gwylfa: look-out point; gwyn/gwen: white; gwynt: wind; hafn: gorge, ravine; hafod: summer dwelling; hen: old; hendre(f): winter dwelling, old home, permanent abode; heol: road; hesgyn: bog; hir: long; is: below, lower; llan: church, monastery; llawr: level area, floor of valley; llech: slab, stone, rock, rock; llther: slope; lliest: shieling, cottage, hut; llwch: lake, dust; llwybr: path; llwyd: grey, brown; llwyn: bush, grove; llyn: lake; llynwyn: pool, puddle, moat; isa(f): lower, lowest; maen: stone; maes: open field, plain; mawn: peat; mawnog: peat-bog; melyn: yellow; merthyr: burial place, church; moel/foel: bare, bald/bare hill; mynydd: mountain, moorland; nant: brook, stream, dingle, glen; neuadd: hall; newydd: new; ogof/gogof: cave; pant: hollow; parc: park, field, enclosure; pen: head, top, end, edge; penrhyn: promontory; pentre(f): homestead, village; perfedd: middle; perth: bush, brake, hedge; plas: hall, mansion; pont/bont: bridge; porth: gate, gateway, harbour, bay, landing-place, ferry; pwll: pit, pool; rhiw: hill, slope; rhos: moor, promontory; rhudd: red, crimson; rhyd: ford; sarn: causeway; sgwd/rhaeadr: waterfall; sticill: stile; sych: dry; tafarn: tavern; tâl: end, top; talar: headland (of field); tan/dan: below; tarren/darren: escarpment; tir: land, territory; tor: break, gap; tre/tref: settlement, hamlet, town; twlch: tump, knoll; twll: hole, pit; tŵr: tower; tŷ: house; twyn: hill; uchaf: upper, highest; uwch: above, over; waun/gwaun: moorland, meadow; wen/wyn: white; y, yr, 'r: the; ynys: island, holm, river-meadow; ysgol: ladder, formation on mountain-side/school; ysgwydd: shoulder (of mountain); ystafell: chamber, hiding-place; ystrad: wide valley, holm, river-meadow.

Notes:

Pontneddfechan

Pontneddfechan, also known as Pontneathvaughan (pronounced /pɒnt.niðˈvɔːn/) ("bridge over the Little Neath" in Welsh) is the southernmost village in the historic county of Brecknockshire, within the Vale of Neath, and in the modern county of Powys. It stands at the confluence of the rivers Mellte and Nedd Fechan and gives access to a series of waterfalls in the Upper Neath valley. Dinas Rock/Craig-y-Ddinas is a quarried limestone promontory east of the village, popular with visitors.

Industrial activities started in the area in 1822 for mining silica rock. It was extracted for firebricks made at the works in nearby Pont Walby, which find use in lining furnaces and kilns. The stone sleepers for the silica mine tramway can still be seen in places on the waterfall walk.

In 1857, the Vale of Neath Powder Company built a gunpowder works, on the Mellte River near the Upper and Lower Cilhepste Falls. The site was chosen for remoteness and the availability of water power and timber for producing charcoal, an ingredient of gunpowder. An inclined tramway from the Vale of Neath Railway brought in sulphur and saltpetre, the other ingredients. The gunpowder was used in the coalfields of South Wales and for the slate industry in North Wales. The buildings were linked by a horse-drawn tramway, whose horses wore copper horseshoes to reduce the likelihood of sparks.

In 1931, the UK Government took black powder off the 'permitted list of explosives', and the works closed down. They were deliberately set fire to and mostly demolished for safety reasons in the following year.

Rivers/Afonydd Nedd Fechan, Pyrddin, Mellte, Hepste, Sychryd

The **Nedd Fechan** rises on the eastern slopes of Fan Gyhirych in the Fforest Fawr and flows south for 12 km to join with the Mellte at Pontneddfechan, their combined waters continuing as the River Neath/Afon Nedd to the sea near Swansea. The only significant tributary of the Nedd Fechan is the **Pyrddin** which joins it at Pwll Du ar Byrddin ('The black pool of the Pyrddin'). Downstream of the Pyrddin confluence there is abundant evidence of the former silica rock mining industry. A number of adits are visible on both sides of the river, most of which were served by horse-drawn tramways. The former tramways now provide easy access along the lower section of the gorge. Along this stretch, the river forms the boundary between Powys to the east and Neath - Port Talbot to the west.

The **Mellte** is formed by the confluence of the Afon Llia and the Afon Dringarth in the Fforest Fawr and its name is derived from 'mellt' - the Welsh word for 'lightning' - after its tendency to rise and fall rapidly in

response to heavy rainfall. It runs underground for ½ km at Porth yr Ogof (cave) as it crosses the limestone outcrop, resurging at Pwll Glas. There are fifteen known entrances to the cave system.

The headwaters of the **Hepste** are the Afon y Waun, Nant y Cwrier and Nant Hepste Fechan, rising on the dip-slopes of the Fforest Fawr and combine to form the Hepste near the farmstead of Hepste Fechan. It enters onto the limestone outcrop near this point and sections of its course downstream remain dry in all but flood conditions as the flow disappears underground. The river flows over the Millstone Grit outcrop from some way beyond Hepste Bridge to then plunge over a band of resistant gritstone to form Sgwd yr Eira and the Cilhepste Falls and join the Mellte. Its lower section forms the border between Powys and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The **Sychryd** is a short river of 5 km entirely in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is still notable for the spectacular gorge and two waterfalls through which it flows in its lower section beneath Dinas Rock/Craig-y-Ddinas and the once-famous Craig y Ddinas/Dinas Rock Silica Mine. Its two upper arms rise near Penderyn and just below Craig y Llyn.

Brecon Beacons National Park

Home to spectacular landscapes, a rich variety of wildlife and fascinating cultural and geological heritage, the Brecon Beacons National Park in Mid-Wales boasts a magnificent array of Old Red Sandstone peaks, open moorland and green valleys, spanning 1.344 km² (520 mi²). Pen y Fan within the Central Beacons is perhaps the best-known summit but there are many others in the five distinct parts of the National Park (Black Mountain (Y Mynydd Du) in the far west, Fforest Fawr, Central Beacons, the Llangattock and Llangynidr Hills, and the Black Mountains to the east).

Waterfall Country/Bro'r Skydau

Waterfall Country is an unofficial name often given to a concentration of waterfalls located in the south west corner of the Brecon Beacons National Park, the Vale of Neath and the Swansea Valley.

The area covered in this walk, within or just outside the Brecon Beacons NP has an unusually large number of publicly accessible waterfalls. The area is not officially defined but generally includes the group of falls on the Nedd Fechan, Pyrddin, Hepste, Mellte and Sychryd rivers, all of which lie between the villages of Pontneddfechan and Ystradfelte within or on the boundary of the county of Powys.

All of the falls occur on tributaries of the River Neath occupying valleys that have been deeply incised into the landscape. Likely over-deepening action by glaciers during the various ice ages has resulted in these tributaries cutting down into their own beds as they adjust to a base level lower than in pre-glacial times. The underlying geology is a generally southerly dipping succession of sandstones and mudstones (often referred to as millstone grit). The softer mudstones have been more readily eroded by the water, which has left the harder sandstones forming the lips of the falls. In many cases, the siting of individual falls is closely linked to northwest-southeast-aligned fault lines. <https://waterfallcountry.wales/>

Shake Holes, Swallow Holes and Limestone Pavements

Shakeholes (or sinkholes or dolines) are a depression or hole in the ground caused by some form of collapse of the surface layer. Some are caused by karst processes, for example, the chemical dissolution of carbonate rocks or suffusion processes. They tend to occur in karst landscapes, which can have up to thousands of sinkholes within a small area, giving the landscape a pock-marked appearance. These sinkholes can drain all the water, so that there are only subterranean rivers in these areas.

Chapel/Capel

The high number of Baptist, Wesleyan and Methodist chapels as compared to Anglican churches in the walk area reflects the dominance of Nonconformism in Wales in the 19th century, which significantly outnumbered Anglican church attendance. Welsh Nonconformism is characterised by its political voice in strong allegiance to the Liberal party, with whom it shared a central belief in the importance of individual choice, in contrast to early Methodism which had been conservative in its political attitude. This led to the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales in 1920 and the formation of the Church in Wales.

Of local interest is Dr Thomas Coke, a native of Brecon, who in 1800 was responsible for guiding the British Wesleyan Conference to send Welsh-speaking preachers to Wales, resulting in the growth of Welsh-speaking congregations.

Penderyn/Moel Penderyn

Penderyn (*Pen* = 'head (of)' and *deryn/aderyn* = 'bird'), is a small village in the Cynon Valley on the A4059 between Hirwaun and Brecon, formerly in Brecknockshire, then Powys, but now the most northerly settlement in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The village sits just within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

There are four disused churches and chapels as well as the Penderyn Distillery/Distyllfa Penderyn (formerly the 'Welsh Whisky Company'). The company was launched in 2000 and sales started in 2004. Whisky had been distilled in Wales for hundreds of years, but stopped in 1894. The distillery also produces a Cream Liqueur, a Vodka and Brecon Gin (the latter was awarded "Gold Best in Class" at the International Wines & Spirits Competition in 2011). Further distilleries have opened in Llandudno and Swansea.

Moel Penderyn overlooks the village from the west, rising to 371m above sea. Disused limestone and gritstone quarries adorn its eastern and northern sides.

NAMED WATERFALLS passed on this walk (two of those on extensions):

Pump Pwll/Five Pools – a wide cascade across the Pyrddin with five separate drops
Sgwd Gwladus/Lady's Falls – 7m drop; Gwladus is a personal name, falsely anglicised
Sgwd Einion Gam/The Fall of the Crooked Anvil – 21m drop into a plunge pool + 3m
Sgwd-y-Bedol/Horseshoe Falls – three falls in quick succession
Sgwd Ddwli Isaf/The Lower Gushing Falls – two drops: 10m + 3m
Sgwd Ddwli Uchaf/The Upper Gushing Falls – 7m drop
Sgwd Uchaf Clun-Gwyn/The Upper Fall of the White Meadow – 9m drop
Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn/The Lower Fall of the White Meadow – 30m drop in 4-5 stages
Sgwd y Pannwr/The Waterfall of the Fuller – i.e.: a wool washing pool – 8m drop
Sgwd yr Eira/The Waterfall of Snow – falls behind which you can walk – 10m drop
Loonies Leap – not really a waterfall, but a former weir in the gunpower works
Pwll Berw/The Boiling Pool – two drops
Sgydau Sychryd/Sychryd Cascades – 8m tumble down a steep rock-filled gorge

WALK DIRECTIONS

Step off the bus in **Pontneddfechan** in **Neath – Port Talbot** outside **The Angel Inn**, by **The Sgwd Gwladys Bar & Lodge** opposite, and with a bridge across the **Nedd Fechan River/Afon Nedd Fechan** ahead. **Powys** and the **Brecon Beacons National Park** lie beyond the river. *Turn left* by a 'Pontneddfechan' village sign, between the pub on the left and a toilet block and info panel about the **Waterfall Country/Bro'r Skydau** on the right. In 30m ignore a lane coming down from the left and go through an ornate metal gate to the left of an ornate metal field gate (with Waterfall Country/Bro'r Skydau lettering) by an info panel on the **Elidir Trail/Llwybr Elidir** and with a signpost ('Llwybr Elidir/Eilidir Trail – Pont Melin-fach Car Park 1hr 10mins, Sgwd Gwladus 35mins') with markers **60/audio trail 1**.

Continue down the wide gravel track, passing a rockface on the left and having the river down below on the right in a gorge – in 20m with **The Old White Horse Inn** visible on the right across the river. The path follows a former tramroad to some silica mines. In 120m stay downhill to the right of a wooden field gate, leaving the tramroad, by marker post **61/audio trail 2**, to avoid an overhanging rock face. There is an interesting info panel on the geographical aspects of the gorge ('A Slice Through Time') on the right behind and the area is covered in wild garlic n season. In 40m re-join the tramroad. In 80m pass marker post **62/audio trail 3** and in another 40m marker post **63/audio trail 4**. In 30m you cross a stream coming down from the left and in another 10m spot a **small waterfall** away on the left (feeding that waterfall). In 30m go through a gap to the right of a metal field gate and in 110m pass marker post **64/audio trail 5** by a large man-made structure on the left, likely a part of the mining infrastructure?

In 70m ignore a metal field gate on the left into a pasture and in another 120m another one out of that pasture (on this stretch you can see a metal barred mine entrance on the opposite riverside). In 220m go through a wooden gate to the right of a metal field gate (or over a stile to the right of it) and in 15m pass a metal-barred mine entrance by marker post **65/audio trail 6**, just before a right bend of the river, and in 70m pass another mine entrance. In 50m cross a streamlet and in 50m by a bench on the right, you pass marker post **66/audio trail 7** by a faint path bearing left. In 40m cross another streamlet and in 80m a path joins from the left, then in 60m one more from the left behind (on the OS map). In 30m go up a short, stepped section and continue uphill at a lesser gradient. In 100m the path levels out by a bench on the left and in 70m you go over a short, stepped boardwalk, and in 60m another one, while crossing another streamlet. You are back at the river level and in 90m pass a bench on the left and in 25m reach the meeting of the **Pyrddin River/Afon Pyrddin** and the **Nedd Fechan** by the **Pwll Du ar Byrddin** and a three-way signpost by a bridge across the Pyrddin.

There are two out-and-backs to consider here, before continuing up along the Nedd Fechan, one with a possible extension (safe only at low water levels):

- To a **viewing platform overlooking the Sgwd Gwladus** across the river: *turn left* this side of the first bridge ('Viewing Point 5 mins'), in 140m pass the **Pump Pwll** pools below a rockface on the right, in 25m *fork up to the left* and in another 50m reach the railed viewpoint by a stone bench.
- To the (base and top of the) **Sgwd Gwladus itself and the best view of it** (standing in the river) and a **possible extension** to the **Sgwd Einion Gam**: cross the bridge ('All Other Routes') over the **Pyrddin** and *turn left* ('Sgwd Gwladus 0.2 m/0.3 km'), gently uphill along a clear path. In 140m you pass the **Pump Pwll** pools below a rockface on the left and in 90m can see the viewing platform across the river. In 25m by marker post **68/audio trail 9**, *turn left* to the **Sgwd Gwladus** 40m away. The best views of the fall can be had by wading into the river (water levels permitting). Return to the marker post and *turn left* along a clear zigzag path uphill to the rock band that forms the top of the fall. A public footpath joins from the right down through the wood. The surface of the sandstone shows clear signs of fossilised tree roots. From here you can **either return** to the meeting of the rivers and commence the walk, **or** add to it the...
- **Out-and-Back to the Sgwd Einion Gam** (870m each-way) [**Dangers**: fallen trees, landslips, rockfall, at least a couple of tricky river crossings across slippery boulders; consider **only at low water levels and with good footwork**; route and river crossings may change over time as floods move trees and boulders.] You follow a rough but clear path to the right of the river for 140m and then for 20m descend to walk at water level just to the right of the river. In another 80m a faint left fork is the first of several opportunities to cross the river, between here and a large overhanging rock face in 90m. Once on the left-hand side, continue along a clear path through a part-wooded area. In 180m by some steep rock re-cross to the right-hand side. In 25m cross a streamlet in a dip. In 50m ignore a fork down to the river and rise along a narrow path which levels out in 40m, then in 80m descends back to the water level. In 50m cross a stream and soon after you reach the fall. The best views of the **Sgwd Einion Gam** are from across – or at least within – the river. There is also a slightly perilous path on the right up to the rock band above the pool at the bottom of the rockface.

Back at the meeting of the rivers, from the far side of the Afon Pyrddin, now in **Access Land**, in 10m go over a short, stepped boardwalk and in 20m, at a four-way signpost with markers **67/audio trail 8** on the left where a faint public footpath joins out of the wood above on the left, you continue in the same direction along a rising path, signed 'Pont Melin-fach 35 mins'. The gradient is quite steep and in 50m you are already high above the water level with some **cascades** visible below and continue with a lesser gradient, in 80m through a mud-prone section (there are some boardwalk sections as well as an avoidance path up to the left). In another 70m you cross a railed bridge (there is **an unnamed waterfall** visible below through the trees), and in 50m another one and in 30m cross another boardwalk.

The path levels out and in 60m you go over another boardwalk. In 50m, just before a bench and another railed bridge, you have fine views of a **large unnamed waterfall** way below as well as a **waterfall** coming down the opposite side of the gorge. In 100m cross another railed footbridge with the next fall now on the right, the **Sgwd y Bedol**, partly hidden by trees initially. In 20m go over the first of four more railed footbridges, now with unrestricted views of the waterfall, by marker post **69**. At the last of the bridges, you have a stream coming down the side in a **stepped waterfall** [the **Nant y Llechau**]. You now get glimpses of the next large waterfall ahead upriver and eventually pass marker post **70** and cross a two-railed footbridge over a stream joining out of a gorge. There are steps on the far side of the bridge and to the right you have the rock bed running along the river.

At low water levels, follow the rock bed upstream for an out-and-back to the base of the Sgwd Ddwli Isaf: in 30m pick up a path through woodland for 60m, then go across the rock bed again for 60m. **Else**, continue along the rising path and in 100m pass a marker post on the left with an Elidir Trail marker on the reverse. In 15m a steep and scrambly descending path joins up from the base of the waterfall. In 40m go over a two-railed footbridge across a stream (the lower falls are right below now) and pass marker post **71**. A faint zigzag path on the right leads to a fine viewing point of the top of the waterfall. The path rises further beyond the top of the falls and in 90m, where it nearly levels out, you get views of the **Sgwd Ddwli Uchaf** ahead. The path starts rising again and in 70m, at a fork, a downhill fork leads in 50m to the water level for best views of this waterfall (return via a path joining from the left en route).

In 30m ignore a right fork and in 25m a path joins from the falls. In 40m you get nearly complete views of the river above the waterfall, including some **cascades** and in 50m pass marker post **72**, by the top of the waterfall away to the right. In 330m cross a railed footbridge over a stream, as the path rises again where there is a small wooded island in the river, and **an unnamed waterfall** beyond it. The path levels out in 80m and in 60m you pass marker post **73** on the left, level with the top of the unnamed waterfall. In 30m cross a stream and in 40m you pass some **rapids** and cross more boardwalks and in 60m you emerge into a grassy picnic area, with the **Pont Melin-fach car park** on the left. *Turn left* to the car park, by marker post **74**, a map and a couple of info panels, then continue through the car park to a road ('Heol Calch') in 40m. *Turn right* to cross the Nedd Fechan River on the Pont Melin-fach, **leaving the Access Land**.

On the far side of the bridge, by a signposted footpath turning left over a stile, you have a choice:

For Shortcut I (cut 5.1 km and 117m ascent/descent), leaving out the northerly part of the route to the pub in Ystradfellte and to the Porth y Ogof caves, continue up along the lane and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Shortcut I**.

For the Main Walk, *turn left* over the stile, signposted 'Pont Rhyd-y-cnau' and **[!]** immediately *bear up to the right* in the direction of the sign, ignoring an obvious path ahead on the level towards the river. After a short and sharp rise around to the right, the path turns left and follows the audible river high above the water level, with the large **Coed y Rhaiadr** (a fine bluebell wood) on the opposite river side. In 150m you can see the river through the trees below with **some unnamed waterfalls** ahead. The path drops and reascends and in 100m you pass a redundant stile with a yellow marker. For the next 180m the river is mostly out of sight again, but never out of earshot (but in 80m there is a **waterfall** opposite on a tributary stream) and in another 30m you have a complete view of the river again with a fine **unnamed waterfall**. In 20m *turn right* with the path, where the river meanders to the right around a tongue of land jutting in from the left, which includes a scenic short gorge carved out by the Nedd Fechan.

Walk out along the tongue of land to appreciate this wonderful spot, with washed-up trees and branches indicating the water levels when in spade, and turn back to follow the path to the left along the river. In 50m you are level with the river and in 30m rise steeply. In 30m you cross a stile in a fence line and continue on the level. In 100m cross a streamlet and in 40m another one (both are on the OS map). There is the first of several **unnamed waterfalls** on the river. In 100m you are high above the water level in a wide part of the valley with moss-covered sides and lots of bluebells in season, with the river visible about 100m ahead, as well as **some more cascades and small waterfalls**. In 90m, at a bend in the river, you pass those falls and can spot a large, recent rockfall on the opposite river side.

River and path turn to the right, and in 30m you *turn left* to continue in the same direction through an area teeming with wild garlic in season. In 200m go over a stile in a fence line with a yellow marker (in season the slopes are bluebell-filled) and in 250m you pass a three-way footpath signpost by a **large waterfall** on the river, as well as a **waterfall** on a tributary stream. Ignore the right turn uphill ('Capel Hermen') and continue in the same direction ('Pont Rhyd-y-cnau'). In 20m cross a stream and rise up to a four-way signpost by a car wide bridge over the river on the left, the **Pont Rhyd-y-cnau** ('Bridge of the ford of nuts'). *Turn right* with a Restricted Byway ('Car Park Cwm Porth') up along a boulder-filled, deeply rutted track, ignoring the left turn over the bridge into the wood and the continuation of the public footpath along the river. The track turns right then left as it rises steeply out of the **Upper Neath Valley**. [There is a good footpath to the left of the track for most its route uphill.]

There is a deep gorge on the right, but it's mostly hidden from view by an earth wall. You get some views into the gorge just where the gradient of the track eases a little, and in another 110m cross one of the streams running into the gorge on a concrete bridge. In 110m go through a metal field gate with a restricted byway marker on a gate post and continue further uphill between trees, with pastures beyond. In 180m, near the top of the rise, go through a metal field gate with a footpath marker onto a tarmac lane at a bend. You have fine views on the left to the higher ground of the **Fforest Fawr** (SWC Walk 307 – Fforest Fawr Traverse) and ahead and to the right to the wooded ranges and hills surrounding the **Upper Neath, Mellte and Hepste valleys**.

Here you have a choice:

For Shortcut II (cut 3.4 km and 118m ascent/descent), *turn right* along the lane and in 80m *turn right* with the lane (this is **the highest point of the short walk**, at 296m above sea) and walk towards a T-junction with the Pontneddfechan - Ystradfellte road 60m away by **Bryn-bwch Campsite**. *Turn left* along the road, with the rockface of the **Garreg Fawr** visible ahead, to the right and above of **Ystradfellte** village (SWC Walk Storey Arms to Libanus or Circular via Ystradfellte). In 30m *bear right* along a car wide gravel track and through a metal field gate with a signposted bridleway ('Porth-yr-Ogof'), descending gently into the valley of the **Mellte River/Afon Mellte**. In 230m **[!]** *turn left* with a marker post and a handwritten sign, off the track that descends further into the valley. In 20m go through a metal gate and continue along a fenced path and in 120m ignore metal field gates on either side by a farmhouse on the left.

In 50m go through a wooden gate and cross the **Nant y Carad** on a footbridge and rise with the path and a marker post, in 210m going through another wooden gate. You keep ascending along a grass path and in 60m cross the top of this rise. In 300m go through a wooden gate and in 180m a metal gate and in 35m reach a tarmac lane opposite the **Waterfall Country/Bro'r Skydau Car Park** at the **Porth yr Ogof** caves. Go through the car park to the far end by a toilet block on the right and a map and info panel on the left. The Main Walk joins from ahead through a gate out of a wooded area. *Turn around* and pick up the directions below at the asterisk *).

For the Main Walk, *turn left* along the quiet country lane. You have **Fan Nedd** rising ahead, whose runoff off the left flank flows into the furthest tributaries of the Nedd Fechan River. On the right behind a fence is the **Gwaun Bryn-bwch** upland bog, sourcing the stream just walked along up out of the Nedd Fechan valley. In 780m ignore both a signposted bridleway through a metal field gate on the right and the tarmac drive (a Public Road) coming up from the **Dyffryn-Nedd** farm. In 240m you pass a large **shake hole** on the right just by the roadside and in another 120m by a two-way signpost ('Dyffryn-Nedd' from the left, 'Ystradfellte' to the right), *turn right* over a stile into a lightly wooded area and follow an indistinct grass path gently uphill through slightly soggy ground, staying to the right of a linear depression and then turning left.

At the top of the immediate wooded area, but still with some trees ahead in more open country, you have two distinct rock bands visible ahead, one lower one to the half left and a higher one dead ahead. *Bear left* (**entering Access Land**) to stay to the left of the lower rock band, gently uphill. Follow the rock band over the brow and continue in the same direction towards a fence line at the far end of the area. There (about 30m to the right of a metal field gate and 70m to the left of the far-right field corner by a hanging wood) go over a stile with a yellow marker **out of Access Land** into a pasture and *veer right* through it. Stay to the right of a clump of trees and in 100m go through a wide gap in a collapsed and overgrown drystone wall and *veer left* to a lichen-covered footpath marker post 40m away. *Turn left* along the upper field boundary, with **Fan Nedd** again dead ahead. In 70m ignore a metal field gate on the right and *veer left* away from the fence to in 60m pass a marker post and continue to the left of and below a hanging wood.

There are plenty of shake holes away to the left in the field and in 60m you can spot a stile ahead to the left below, 50m away. Aim for this, going through some bracken (this is slightly different from what the OS map shows) and follow a marker on the stile up to the right. Stay to the left of another shake hole and some trees and eventually you can see a ladder stile in a drystone wall at the top of this field to aim for (the ladder stile is 80m from the stile into the field). Over that wall, you *veer left* and keep ascending just to the left of some rocky outcrop for 50m and then descend through some more rough ground to a track and some fence remnants at the bottom of this.

Corn Du and Pen y Fan (on 50°) are now visible ahead, with **Fan Fawr** closer by and to the left of them (SWC Walk Storey Arms to Libanus or Circular via Ystradfellte). Go through a rusty metal field gate (often open) by a decrepit stile away on the left and *turn right* along a fence line (back briefly **in Access Land**). You now follow any sensible route through this upland limestone plateau for 520m, avoiding shake holes and some tussocky boggy sections as well a prominent boggy depression, all the way to the far-right corner of the walled area by a marker post. En route ignore a rusty metal field gate on the right ('Private Land – No Public Right of Way' sign).

Turn right out of the walled Access Land through a metal field gate and follow a grassy track (a restricted byway), with a fence on the right and a drystone wall on the left. You are now re-tracing SWC Walk Storey Arms to Libanus for 1.25 km. In 30m a public footpath joins from the left out of a pasture and you start the descent into the valley of the **Mellte River/Afon Mellte**. In 300m go through a metal field gate, now with some buildings visible below, and in 100m go through another one onto a deteriorating tarmac drive at a bend. Continue downhill and eventually you reach the village centre in Ystradfellte with a car park on the right, **The New Inn** on the left and **St. Mary's Church, Ystradfellte** ahead, as well as **Godre Pentre** (= 'end of the village') cottage, owned by the **Croydon Caving Club**, 70m away down the Pontneddfechan Road to the right (a white house with white metal gate).

From the pub, *bear right* from the previous direction along a road, to the right of the church, signed 'Penderyn 4, Rhaedrau/Waterfalls 1'. In 50m you pass the **village store and Post Office** (weekdays only) on the left and in 140m cross the **Mellte River**, which is often dry on this stretch, with the water only flowing below the limestone boulders in the riverbed. On the far side of the bridge, ignore a signposted public footpath turning left and continue uphill along the road between trees and hedges. In 130m ignore a right turning drive to **Porth yr Ogof Farm** and *turn left* with the road and in 60m *turn right* with the road. In 80m, by a footpath signpost on the left, you *turn right* over a stepless stile into a wood (dominated by Lesser Celandines in spring) and follow a clear path, initially contouring along a ledge and then, upon emerging in an open area by a wall corner on the right, *turn right* downhill along the wall, and in 40m *turn left* with a marker post along the fenced boundary. In 250m go over a ladder stile

and continue along a clear path. In 110m go over a stile and in 80m through a wooden kissing gate into the **Porth yr Ogof Car Park**. In 50m, on the right you reach an info panel ('The Disappearing River at Porth yr Ogof') and a map about the **Fforest Fawr Geopark**, by a toilet block on the left.

- *)** *Turn right* down a part-stepped path to the river level and at the bottom of the path,
- a right turn in 50m gets you to the spot where the gushing **Upper Stream** of the Mellte diverts from the main riverbed and disappears into the limestone outcrop,
 - a left turn in 50m gets you to the largest cave entrance in South Wales, the **Porth yr Ogof** ('Gateway to the Cave') where the often-dry main riverbed enters the ½ km long system.

Return up the part-stepped path to the car park and *turn right* through it.

In 60m you pass a shed on the right containing a **shop and a tourist information**, by **The Burger Pod** on the left. There is another map and an info panel as well as marker **86**. Walk through bike barriers and cross a tarmac lane and continue along a wide gravel track, a signposted public footpath ('Sgwd Clun-Gwyn via Hendre-Bolon'). In 130m go through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate and *bear right* with the track by **Cwm Porth Farm** up away on the left. In 450m go through a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate and cross a stream on the track. In 250m you ford a stream and **[!]** *turn right* with a 'Sgydau/Waterfalls'-sign through a metal gate with a yellow marker, ignoring the path ahead ('Private – No Public Access').

[Note: the waymarked right of way in this area has been diverted from what is shown on the OS map with effect May 2022.]

You follow a fenced path with the stream on the right initially. In 35m *turn left* with the path, now with the **Mellte River** visible to the right below, and in 60m *turn right*, with a wooded area on the right and **Hendre-bolon** farm up on the left. In 60m, near the bottom of the drop, continue in the same direction along the river with a yellow marker on a fence post, **[!]** ignoring a left turn signed for the 'Skydau/Waterfalls'. The path follows the river closely and in 180m turns to the left to a footbridge across the river 75m away. A public footpath joins across it ('Clun Gwyn 20 mins').

This is the end of Shortcut I.

****) Continue uphill along the path** ('Sgwd Clun-Gwyn 5 mins'), back in **Access Land**, up some rock steps and then *turn right* with the path. In 40m from the steps, the path ascends again and levels out in 60m. In another 40m fork either way (the right fork along a fence gives you better views into the gorge though) and in 50m you reach a path junction at a four-way signpost. *Turn right* down some railed steps ('Sgwd Clun-Gwyn 2 mins'), initially cobbled then flagged, passing marker posts **14 and 15** to a viewpoint looking back upriver to the **Sgwd Uchaf Clun-Gwyn**.

Here you have a choice:

For a shorter, but rough and partly exposed route to the next waterfalls, the **Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn** and the **Sgwd y Pannwr** (**Dangers:** narrow and exposed paths, rockfalls and landslides, minor down scramble over rocky ground to the waterfall level), continue downstream along the river, passing a '**Dangerous Path Ahead**'-sign. [Note: this path at time of writing is officially closed to the public but eminently passable]. You cross a stream and dip down to in 70m cross another stream (both on the OS map). You re-ascend for 40m and ignore a path forking downhill to the right. In 15m ignore a path joining from the left behind (this is **a link route to the Main Walk** route along the 'tourist path' at a slightly higher level).

The path continues through some undulations and in 200m you cross another stream, on a very narrow path high above the river. In 70m continue under an overhanging rock face and in 40m you have the top of the **Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn** down below. In 20m fork downhill, away from the rock face and in 20m scramble further downhill, carefully minding your steps. In 35m you pass a (temporary) barrier and go down some more rock steps and then follow a short zigzag path down to the water level, at the bottom of which a fine viewpoint of the middle and upper tiers of the waterfall is 30m away to the right. Go back to the downwards path and in another 40m you reach the bottom of the falls. You are back on the Main Walk. Pick up the directions at the triple asterisk ***).

For the Main Walk, return up the engineered path to the path junction by the four-way signpost and *turn first right* along a narrow gravel path ('Sgwd yr Eira 30 mins'; i.e.: **not** along the main broad tourist path to the Gwaun Hepste Car Park). In 15m you pass marker post **16** and ford a stream and continue along the partly railed or stepped path. In 220m (having passed marker posts **17-19**) cross a stream on a footbridge and in 110m pass an info panel and a wooden gate away on the right. [A fork off the rough and dangerous path joins through the gate.] In 110m you cross a stream and in 30m pass marker post **21** and after 75m in a sharp left turn, you can spot a viewing platform across the gorge on the far side of the river. It overlooks the next waterfall and Shortcut I has an out-and-back option to that platform. Ignore the very steep downhill path ahead and *turn left* with the main path. In 140m by marker post **23**, *bear right* with the path, ignoring a left fork into trees [though this is being built out to be the main, accessible path option], which re-joins in 70m. In 140m pass marker post **24**. In 80m you reach a three-way signpost with marker **25** and *turn right* back on yourself ('Sgwd y Pannwr 15 mins') for an out-and-back (1.6 km and 90m descent/re-ascent) to the next truly stunning waterfalls, the **Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn** and the **Sgwd y Pannwr**.

In 80m pass marker post **26** and continue along a couple of stretches of boardwalk, before a steep part of the descent. In 20m *turn sharp right* by marker post **27** as the river becomes audible. You then cross a railed bridge and go down another stepped section (this can be slippery), then a boulder-filled stretch and pass marker post **28** before another boardwalk and a level stretch. In 75m from the second boardwalk, *turn left* by marker post **29** and go down another stepped section to emerge in another 30m in an open area by the river with marker post **30** on the right. The **Sgwd y Pannwr** is ahead and 40m to your left, the **Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn** 250m away to the right: in 100m pass marker post **31** and in 50m marker post **32** and in another 50m go over another boardwalk section and continue over a rocky stretch. In another 50m you reach a '**Dangerous Path Ahead**'-sign at the bottom of the tiered fall. The rough and dangerous path joins from ahead. You can scramble up the path for another couple of viewpoints overlooking the middle and upper tiers of it. Then turn around and...

***) You follow the clear path downstream along the river and in 50m go over a boardwalk section. In 50m pass a marker post for the **Waterfall Link Path** with marker **32** and in another 50m marker post **31**. In 100m you reach marker post **30**, pointing to the left. The **Sgwd y Pannwr** is on your right and 40m ahead. *Turn left* and in 15m, a faint path on the right leads to a fine **viewing point overlooking the whole width of the waterfall 90m away**. [**Dangers**: narrow and exposed paths, fallen trees, rockfalls and landslides.] Continue up the path back onto the Main Walk route: the path goes over boardwalks in places and is stepped in others, often rocky and slippery and sometimes muddy. You pass marker posts **29-26** en route and eventually reach a three-way signpost with marker **25** back on the Main Walk route.

Turn right along the main path, signed 'Sgwd yr Eira 10 mins', and in 40m pass marker post **33**, then in 110m marker post **34** opposite a bench on the left. In 170m you *turn right downhill* ('Sgwd yr Eira 8 mins') at a signposted three-way junction with marker **35**, down a steep stepped path that zigzags down into the gorge of the **Hepste**

River/Afon Hepste, passing marker posts **36 and 37** along the way. Just before the last left turn, you get a glimpse of **several smaller waterfalls** downstream, these are the **Cilhepste Falls**. At the river, you pass a sign 'Turnaround Point! To re-join the Four Falls Trail', just before marker post **38**, and follow a narrow, rough and slippery path towards the **Sgwd yr Eira**.

Follow the path past the pool at the bottom of the fall and behind the water curtain around to the far side of the river, in the process entering **Rhondda Cynon Taf**, where you pass marker post **58/audio trail 8** and a sign for the 'Turnaround Point! Re-trace your steps on the Sgwd yr Eira Trail' (on the reverse). The path ascends the side of the gorge steeply and after a short while you get fine views back to the river above the waterfall. Continue up the engineered path, part stepped or railed, and *turn hard right* back on yourself en route, ignoring a faint path ahead (this is a public footpath all the way along the Hepste River) to continue steeply uphill to a signposted three-way path junction with marker **57**.

Here you have a choice:

For an Extension via Penderyn (add 3.2 km and 99m ascent/descent), *turn left* ('Penderyn 30 mins') along a clear earthen path gently uphill and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Extension**.

For the Main Walk, *turn right* ('Craig y Ddinas 1 hr') along a public bridleway. In 75m you pass a bench, with some views ahead into the wooded valley. In 180m you *bear left*, now having emerged from the wood and continue with some trees to the left, with far views to hills on the far side of the Upper Neath Valley, while passing a low **audio trail 7** post. In 100m *veer left* with the path, now with **Moel Penderyn** rising on the left along a wide gravel path with a drainage ditch on the left and in 140m, by marker post **56** on the right, you ignore a left forking car wide track and continue in the same direction along the gravel path. In 80m cross a stream on the path and in 60m *turn right* by a marker post. In 60m *turn left* and in 160m enter some trees. In 25m you ford a stream and in another 25m emerge in the open again. In 75m pass marker post **55** and in 50m re-enter trees.

In 20m cross a stream and in about 300m you are out of the wood in the semi-open. In 35m pass a bench on the left and in 80m cross a stream, and in 130m another one. *Bear right*, starting a gradual descent in a broadly south westerly direction, in 150m with a linear village visible ahead in the valley. In 140m go through a gap in a fence line (a missing gate) and pass a marker post with a yellow marker on the reverse. There is a slight re-ascent and in 350m you are back in the open, with some views back over the shoulder up the wooded **Mellte Valley**. In 60m pass a bench on the left and keep descending. In 45m you reach a three-way signpost with markers **54/audio trail 5**.

Here you have a choice:

For either an out-and-back to or loop through the Gunpowder Works site with the Loonies Leap, *turn right* downhill ('Weithdy Powdwr Gwn/Gunpowder Works') and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Gunpowder Works Loop**.

For the Main Walk, continue in the same direction ('Craig y Ddinas 20 mins') along the public bridleway. In 260m a path joins from the left behind by a grey marker post. This is the Extension from Penderyn.

For an **out-and-back to the Pwll Berw waterfall** and the upper end of the **Sychryd Gorge**, *turn left* along it. [Else: continue four paragraphs below: "In 150m...".] In 50m *turn right* by a grey marker post.

****) In 60m the path starts to descend steeply along a stepped section and at the bottom of the steps you find marker post **53**. A steep path down a cleft, leads down to the pool at the bottom of the **Pwll Berw** waterfall. *Turn left* past the former **Craig y Ddinas/Dinas Rock Silica Mine** on the left and in 30m cross a two-railed footbridge over the **Sychryd River/Afon Sychryd**. On the far side you find an entrance to another mine (this can be walked for a long stretch). You can follow the path around to the right for a short stretch for a view of the waterfall, but will have to get back to marker post **53** at the bottom of the steps.

For a short Out-and-Back along the ex-tramway to the mine to the top of the **Sychryd Gorge**, (**Dangers**: part-precipitous and exposed path, rock fall, landslides, a dangerous step not recommended in wet weather) continue in the same direction past the marker post and in 65m make a dangerous step over some falling ground (**not recommended when the rock is wet**) to continue in the same direction. In 100m you walk under an overhanging rockface. In 70m you reach another rockface at the top of a gorge and have to make a judgment call whether you want to continue for another 30m to a metal grill blocking any onwards route, as part of this stretch is along the sleepers of the tramway, and some of them are missing, **with just a great big drop underneath!** Return to marker post **53** and...

Else, go back up the steep path and *turn left* at a T-junction with the path from Penderyn to the junction with the Main Walk route in 50m. *Turn left* at the junction.

In 150m pass an **audio trail 3** marker post and in 120m the descent gets steeper. In another 60m you walk over the exposed and slippery rockbed for 60m, with a welcome metal railing on the left. The path eventually continues along gravel, still rough and steep, until in 100m you emerge in the open on the level, with the **Ddinas Rock/Craig y Ddinas** on the left (an Iron Age hillfort site). In 50m there is a car park on the left and a path joins from the right by an **audio trail 1** marker post [up from the Gunpowder Works]. In 30m *turn left* down some steps into the car park and go to an info panel on the left, then turn around and go to the beginning of a gravel path turning left out of the car park. Follow the path for a 400m each-way out-and-back to the **Sychryd Cascades/Skydau Sychryd**, at the bottom of that boulder-filled gorge ('Llwybr Hygych Sychryd Hawdddec/Sychryd Accessible Trail 400m'). In 120m you pass a rockface often frequented by climbers and in 160m pass a picnic bench. In another 20m you pass an info panel by marker post **51/audio trail 2**, opposite the very impressive **Bwa Maen** (= Stone Bow) tilted and bent rock. In another 80m you reach the end of the trail, at the bottom of the boulder-filled gorge of the Sychryd. Return to the car park and *turn left* to a road at a T-junction, not far from **the joining of the Sychryd and Mellte Rivers**. *Turn right* and cross the Mellte on the road (re-entering Powys) and then *bear left* with the road to a roundabout 40m away by the first houses of **Pontneddfechan**, with the village hall away on the right.

*****) [This roundabout is the unsigned end of the bus lines to Pontnechfechan, but there is a better stop, with a shelter, just 4 mins ahead.] Continue along the road, with some houses on the right-hand side, and in 330m pass a **bus stop for services to Glynneath and Neath** and in 80m a path joins from the left from a bridge over the Mellte. You then have some houses on the left and a steep wooded hillside on the right. In 150m ignore a signposted footpath forking right uphill, just before a **chapel** on the left and in another 240m the road from **Ystradfellte** joins from the right above, by **The Ddinas Inn** on the left. The raised **A465** has been audible for a while and in 80m you pass another bus shelter. In 20m you can see **The Old White Horse Inn** away on the right down a side road and in a further 20m cross the **Nedd Fechan River** back into **Neath – Port Talbot** and to **The Angel Inn**, as well as the **Sgwd Gwladys Bar & Lodge** and an unmarked **bus stop for services to Glynneath and Neath**.

Shortcut I (cut 5.1 km and 117m ascent/descent)

Initially you have the Nedd Fechan to your right below, then the road turns to the left and in 30m you ignore a signposted footpath on the right over a stile ('Comin y Rhos'). You now have the streambed of the **Nant Glyn-bryn-cam** to your right below. In 150m by a metal field gate on the right, the stream is at street level. You curve to the left with the lane where a tributary stream joins and further up the lane ignore a footpath joining from the left over a stile. The stream is now to the left of the lane and a large farm is visible away on the left beyond a pasture ('**Glyn-mercher-uchaf**'). In 100m, by the drive to that farm and where the lane turns up further to the right, **[!]** continue in the same direction over a stile into a small pasture along a Permitted Footpath ('Heol-fawr').

The stream is away to the right and you *bear right* towards it, not straight ahead to the field boundary fence. In 30m *bear left* with a marker post and in 5m go over a stile in that fence line. You now follow a clear if somewhat mud-prone path guided by several marker posts along the slope of the bracken-covered pasture, with the stream to the right, sometimes close, other times a bit further away. You eventually go through a gap in a fence (a broken gate lies on the ground at time of writing) and follow a barbed wire fence, briefly on the left but soon on your right. You rise up to the top of the pasture and get free views on the left towards a wind turbine-topped hill (the **Maesgwyn Wind Farm** above Glynneath). Curve to the left with the fence, with a large farm away to the right near the top of this rise ('**Heol-fawr**'). In 140m in the top-right field corner just after the terrain has levelled out, you go over a stile onto a car wide track (a restricted byway) and *turn right* along it.

The track turns right then left and eventually you go through a metal field gate with a footpath marker on a gate post and pass the farm to its left, in 60m continuing along its tarmac drive, still gently uphill. The hill away to the right is the **Moel Penderyn**, across the Mellte and Hepste valleys. In 80m, where the drive turns left, you *turn right* along a signposted footpath along a grassy track and in 20m go over a stile to the left of a metal field gate into a pasture. You have crossed the watershed into the valley of the **Mellte River/Afon Mellte**. Stay with the wall on the left and in 40m from the previous stile, *turn left* over a stile into a larger pasture and *veer right* towards a grey cottage beyond the field. In 110m go over a stile by a footpath signpost and down some steps onto the Pontneddfechan - Ystradfellte road and *turn right* along it. The cottage is in fact the converted **Capel Hermon** from 1797 (rebuilt in 1854 and 1928 in the Vernacular style with simple round-headed windows on the first floor).

In 50m you pass a phone box on the left and a **service station and shop** on the right. The shop offers a good range of drinks and snacks and is **open all day every day, apart from when Wales' Rugby Team is playing**. In 90m ignore a signposted footpath turning left into a steep pasture. In 170m cross a cattle grid with a metal field gate to the right and then, by a small car park with a Waterfalls Country map and info panel with marker **80**, *turn left* along a concrete and gravel drive (a signposted public footpath). The drive is also signed for 'Bryn Bwch Camping ¼ mile', 'Sgwd Clyn Gwyn 15 mins' and 'Bunkhouse, Coffee Shop, Walking Maps, Clyn Gwyn Bunkhouse and B&B'. You go through a dip and in 170m where the drive bears further up to the left to the farmhouse, you *bear right* with a 'Skydau - Waterfalls' sign through a metal-gate-within-a-metal-field-gate with marker **81** and follow a wide gravel path, in 20m turning left by a two-way footpath signpost ('Sgwd Clyn Gwyn 15 mins'). You have a barbed wire fence on the right and in 110m go through a metal-gate-within-a-metal-field-gate.

In 150m pass a bench on the right just before a marker post on the left and by marker post **82** on the right. *Turn right* here for an 210m each-way **out-and-back to a fine viewpoint hanging over the top of the Sgwd Isaf Clun-Gwyn** (by marker **83**) on

the River Mellte, as well as for the optional scrambly descent to it (see next paragraph), then return to here and continue in the previous direction downhill. In 190m the optional descent to the waterfall joins from the right by marker **84** on a fence post on the right. You can follow the steep forest path for 400m all the way to the waterfall, or just descend for 30m or so to a good viewpoint of the next waterfall, the **Sgwd Uchaf Clun-Gwyn**. Continue in the same direction and pick up the text at the asterisk ***)** below.

For the descent from the viewpoint to the waterfall (**Dangers**: narrow and exposed paths, scrambly stretch down a steep rockface, slippery rock bed at the top of the waterfall, rocky path back en route), *turn left* along the fence and follow a clear if narrow and very exposed zigzag path downhill the steep wooded slope, including some scrambly down steps with only tree roots for a hold. You land on a projecting tongue of land with a scrambly but not steep descent to the right of it leading to the top of the multi-tiered waterfall. From there, either go back up to and down the other side of the projecting tongue of land, or follow the river upstream to the right of the tongue of land (depending on water levels, this may involve a couple of steps through the water).

You follow the river upstream, for the first 100m or so over some rocky terrain, then along a good forest path. Ignore a first left turn, but a bit further on, where it rises up from the water level, *turn left* along a clear path, ignoring the faint continuation along the drop. The path keeps rising and turns to the right and in a further 60m it turns up to the left. There are fine views from here (and from a little lower down to the right) of the **Sgwd Uchaf Clun-Gwyn**, higher up the Mellte. In 25m you meet a broad gravel path at a T-junction by marker **84** on a fence post on the right. *Turn right* along it.

)** In 25m pass a bench on the left by another viewpoint of the top of the waterfall. In 30m a stepped path bears down to the right to the top of the waterfall. From there you can follow a path along the river to get back onto this upper path 110m along. In another 40m you pass a bench and then cross a two-railed footbridge over the Mellte, with a metal gate on this side only. A public footpath runs along the other riverside. The Main Walk joins from the left along the path. *Turn right* along it and pick up the directions above in the main text at the double asterisk *)**.

Extension (add 3.2 km and 99m ascent/descent)

In 120m by a marker post, a faint path joins from the left. You are now on a wide gravel path and in 120m the terrain levels out and you get views on the left to a grassy upland beyond the **A4059**. In 80m you get further views on the left to the **Central Beacons Horseshoe** ridge. Half right ahead is **Moel Penderyn**. The landscape is one of high grass and scattered trees, mainly birch. In 220m pass a marker post, where another faint path joins from the left and *bear right* along a fence line, gently uphill. The large **Penderyn Quarry** (limestone, Hanson Aggregates) is visible ahead. The gravel path discontinues and you commence along bouncy but carrying boggy ground. **Corn Du** and (the very top of) **Pen y Fan** can now be distinguished at the left end of the Beacons ridge. You have a barbed wire fence on the left with a collapsed drystone wall beyond.

In 230m you go over the brow of this rise and in 40m pass a marker post (with the marker missing) inscribed 'Penderyn'. By a metal field gate on the left, *bear left* downhill with the fence and in 110m *turn right* through a metal gate and you cross a couple of streams and *turn left then right* with the path, now gently uphill. In 65m *turn left* with the path, now with views back on the left to the mountains in the **Fforest Fawr**. And in 100m at a fence corner, you can even see **Fan Hir and Fan Brycheiniog** on **The Black Mountain/Y Mynydd Du** (on 315° and 17 km away). You continue

downhill with a barbed wire fence on the left and with the spoil heaps of disused quarries on the right. In 50m ignore a public footpath joining over a stile on the left out of a pasture, ultimately **up from the Hepste River** and in 20m *bear left* along the fence with a marker post.

In 400m go through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a metal field gate with a footpath marker on it and continue in the same direction past the steel skeleton of an unfinished barn. In 60m go through another wooden kissing gate to the right of metal field gate with a yellow marker, **out of the Access Land**. There are some farm buildings away to the right and you follow the gravel car wide drive downhill in 330m to a road junction in **Penderyn**. *Turn right* along **Church Road**, ignoring Chapel Road opposite downhill and in 60m **Lamb Road** turns down to the left. **The Lamb Hotel** (pub) lies at the bottom of the road 230m away, and a **bus stop for services to Pont Walby and Glynneath** 80m to the right from there along the A road.

Continue up the hill along the steep and narrow lane with very few passing places but also very little traffic. At the top of the rise, you have **St. Cynog's Church, Penderyn** on the right and **The Red Lion** on the left, with its **Little Lion Pizza Trailer** in the car park. In 40m from the pub, Church Road turns left downhill, signed 'Hirwaun 2 ¼'.

This is the route down to the **Penderyn Distillery** and a **bus stop for services to Pont Walby and Glynneath**: in 750m cross the A4059 and *turn left* to in 250m reach the bus stop by the distillery visitor centre and shop. You follow the road along the churchyard wall and in 50m *turn right* with it, ignoring a signposted footpath ahead over a ladder stile. In 90m *turn left* with the lane between drystone walls and follow it through a dip by **Pantcefnffordd Farm** on the right and back up an incline to a left turn. Here you continue in the same direction along a signposted public bridleway along a gravel car wide track, in 40m going through a metal field gate. You are at about 300m above sea, and a stile on the right leads into the Access Land of **Moel Penderyn**, rising to 371m above sea. Continue along the track, gently uphill along the flank of the hill.

From the top of the rise there are very **fine views back** to Penderyn's church and The Red Lion pub and the quarry beyond. On the left beyond the immediate valley rises a wooded ridge up to its top at 600m above sea. To the right and ahead are the wooded gorges of the Mellte Valley, some wooded tops with windfarms and the Upper Neath Valley. Also visible ahead is the dual carriageway A465 **Heads of the Valleys Road**. Eventually you go through a metal gate in the fence around the Access Land of the hill and continue in the same direction further downhill along a grass path through the bracken-covered slope. In about 250m, approximately by spot 325m on the OS map, you can see a linear conurbation in the valley ahead. Eventually you are without higher ground on the right, and get **views** again to the mountains in the **Fforest Fawr and out to The Black Mountain**.

In another 150m, where the car wide track turns down to the left, you continue in the same direction through a metal gate and follow a narrow grass path down through the bracken and heather, then bracken and birch tree covered hillside. In 350m the gradient gets steeper by a small area of exposed rock bed on the right, and you can see a small valley on the left below, that of the **Sychryd River/Afon Sychryd**. In 350m by a marker post, a public footpath joins from the left and in 130m you briefly have a wire fence on the right. In 100m a path joins from the left by a grey marker post. The Main Walk route is another 50m ahead, and you *turn left* along it, but for an **out-and-back to the Pwll Berw waterfall** and the upper end of the **Sychryd Gorge**, *turn left* here.

Pick up the directions in the main text at the quadruple asterisk ********).

Gunpowder Works Loop

Initially you follow an earthen path along a ledge with the drop on the left which after a while starts to descend through the wooded slope. The path makes a left turn after 80m followed in 20m by a right turn and continues down a stepped section. In 70m *turn hard left* with the path and in 50m *hard right*. In 50m there is a bench on the right overlooking the weir of the **Gunpowder Works on the River Mellte**, with the **Loonies Leap**. *Turn hard left* with the path and in 35m *turn right* to in 30m reach the footbridge over the river with some more fine views of the ruins and a river island beyond it. There are various info panels dotted about by the ruined parts of the works, including the **Corning House** and the **Weir** and the **Turbine and Pumphouse**. *Turn left* along a good gravel path along the river, downstream (**Dangers**: rock fall, landslides, subsidence of the path). [**Should the path be closed** and impassable, re-cross the bridge and *turn right* along a narrow path along the river for 450m to a steel footbridge across the Mellte, cross it and pick up the route a few rows below).

In 50m you pass the ruins of the **Old Corning House** and in 180m an info panel by the entrance to a former tunnel for horse-drawn trams to travel further up the site. In 110m (by a **small waterfall** below) and in another 100m you pass some info panels and in reach a **steel footbridge** on the left. In 30m pass a car barrier and in 20m go through an often-open metal gate in a high wire fence with a 'Private Property' sign to continue along this **deemed permissive track to Pontneddfechan** (this route features on the 'Gunpowder Trail' map as part of the 'Waterfall Country' pack of trail maps sold by the National Park Authority): in 170m pass a house on the right and continue along the gravel drive and in 250m go through a metal field gate onto a roundabout at the Min yr Awel end of Pontneddfechan.

Pick up the directions in the main text at the quintuple asterisk *********).