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## THE CAMBRIAN WAY

**CLASSIC WALES MOUNTAIN TREK  
SOUTH TO NORTH FROM CARDIFF TO CONWY**

**by George Tod with Richard Tyler**

**CICERONE**

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Front cover: *The dramatic outcrop of Craig Maesglese (Stage 14)*

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Since his death in 2012, his work has been carried on by the Ramblers Cambrian Way Working Group and the Cambrian Way Trust.

Thanks are due to Jacky Cross, Tony Drake, Max Grant, Amanda Hill, Mavis and Bob Rear, Oliver Wicks, Ramblers GB, Ramblers Cymru, Snowdonia and Brecon Beacons national parks and members of Ramblers groups along the route.

Special acknowledgement is due to Dilys Harlow and Alan Browning for supplying the geology section and downloadable geology map and table.

### Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

#### International distress signal *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

#### Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'

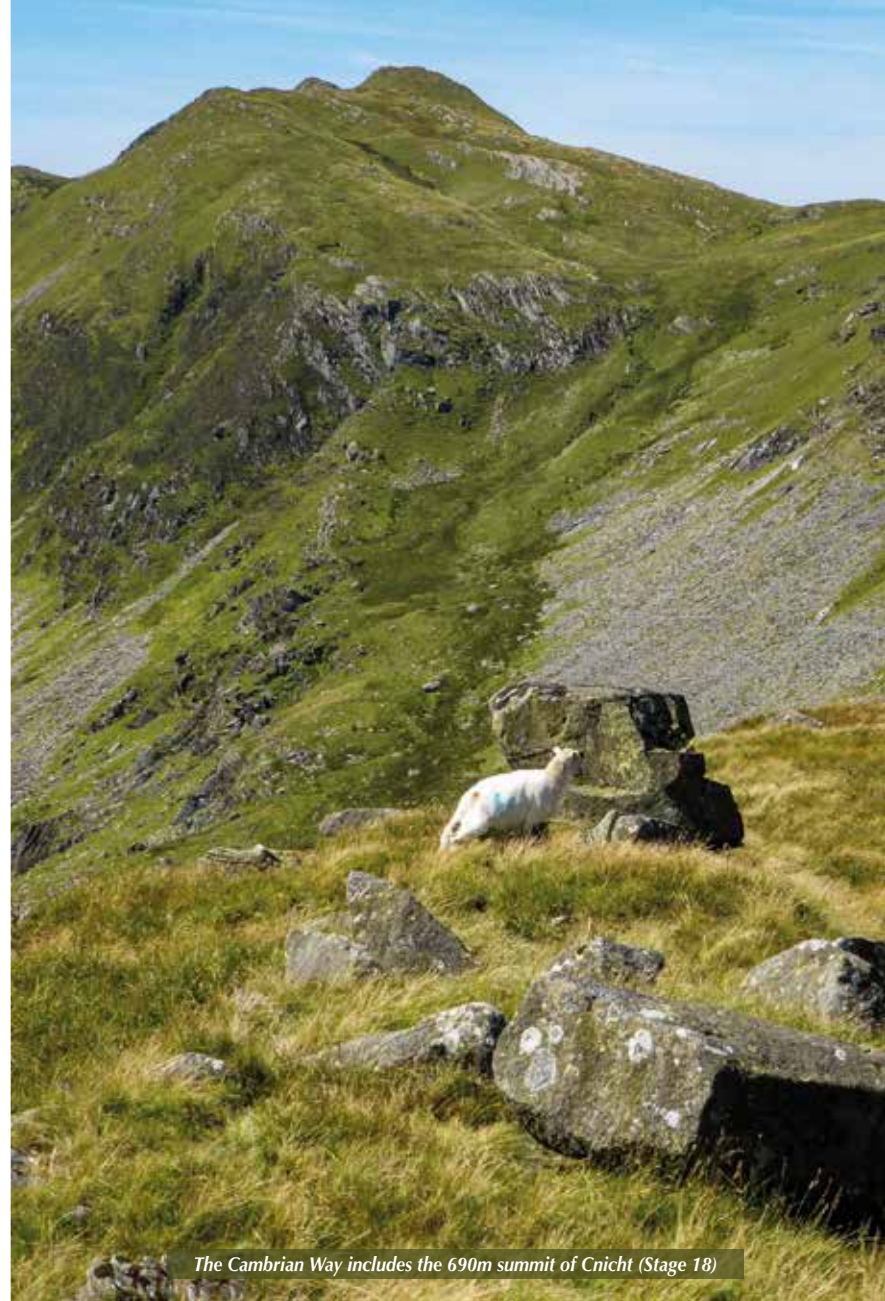


Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



Emergency telephone numbers UK: 999





Weather reports [www.mwis.org.uk](http://www.mwis.org.uk)



The Cambrian Way includes the 690m summit of Cnicht (Stage 18)

**Route symbols on OS map extracts**

(for OS legend see printed OS maps)














-  route
-  alternative route
-  start point
-  finish point
-  alternative start point
-  alternative start point
-  route direction



The extracts from OS maps used in this book have been reproduced at 1:50,000

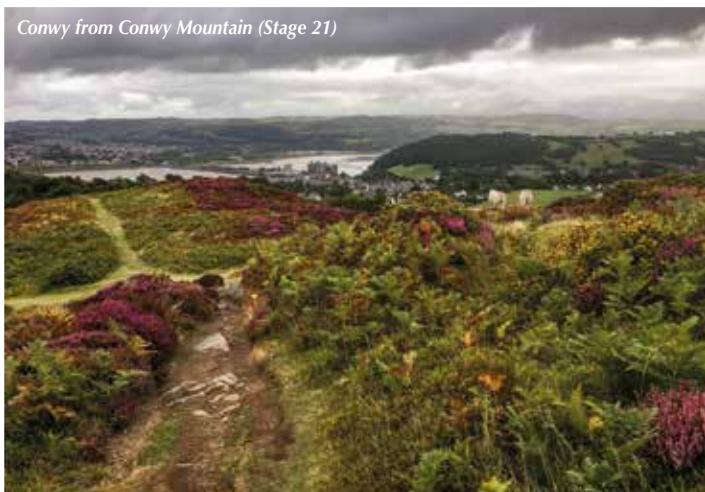
GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/990/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/990/GPX).

**Features on the overview map**

-  County/Unitary boundary
  -  National boundary
  -  rail services
  -  Urban area
  -  National Park  
eg **BRECON BEACONS**
  -  Forest Park/National Forest  
eg **National Forest**
  -  Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty/National Scenic Area  
eg **Clwydian Range**
- |   |       |
|---|-------|
|  | >800m |
|  | 600m  |
|  | 400m  |
|  | 200m  |
|  | 75m   |
|  | 0m    |



Conwy from Conwy Mountain (Stage 21)



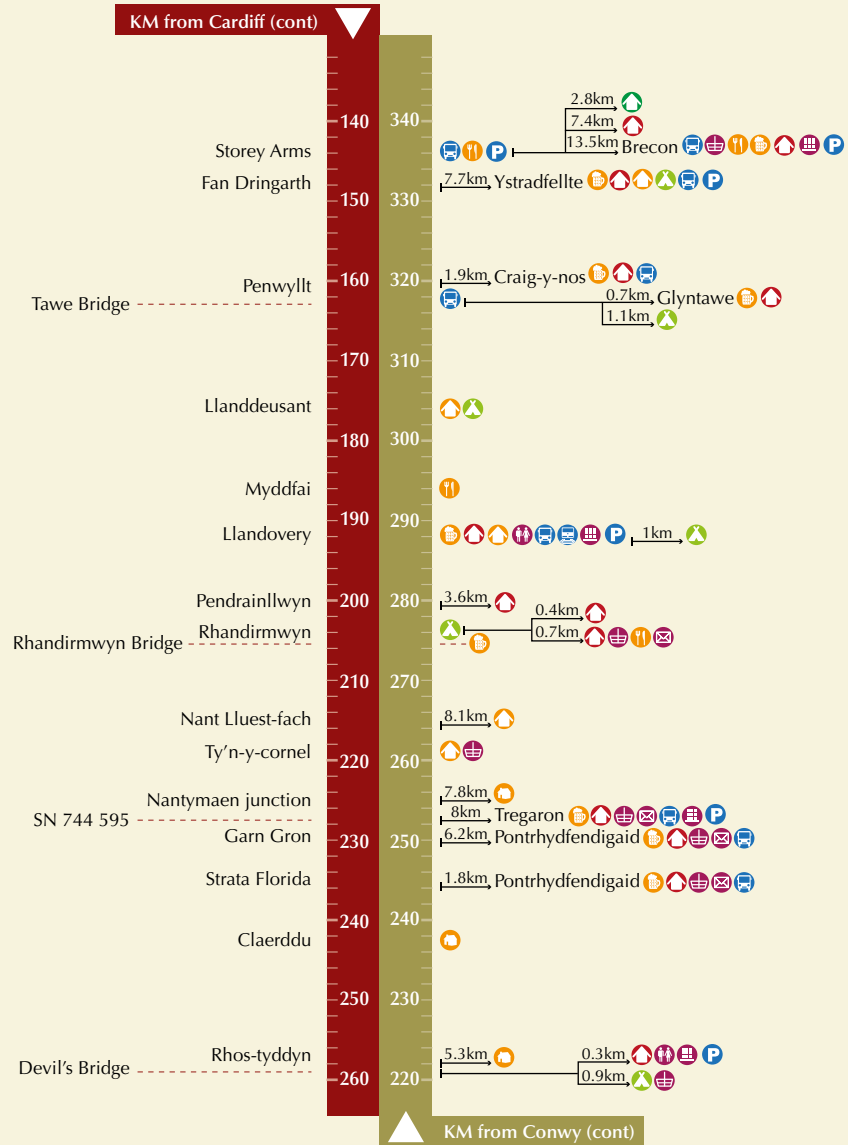
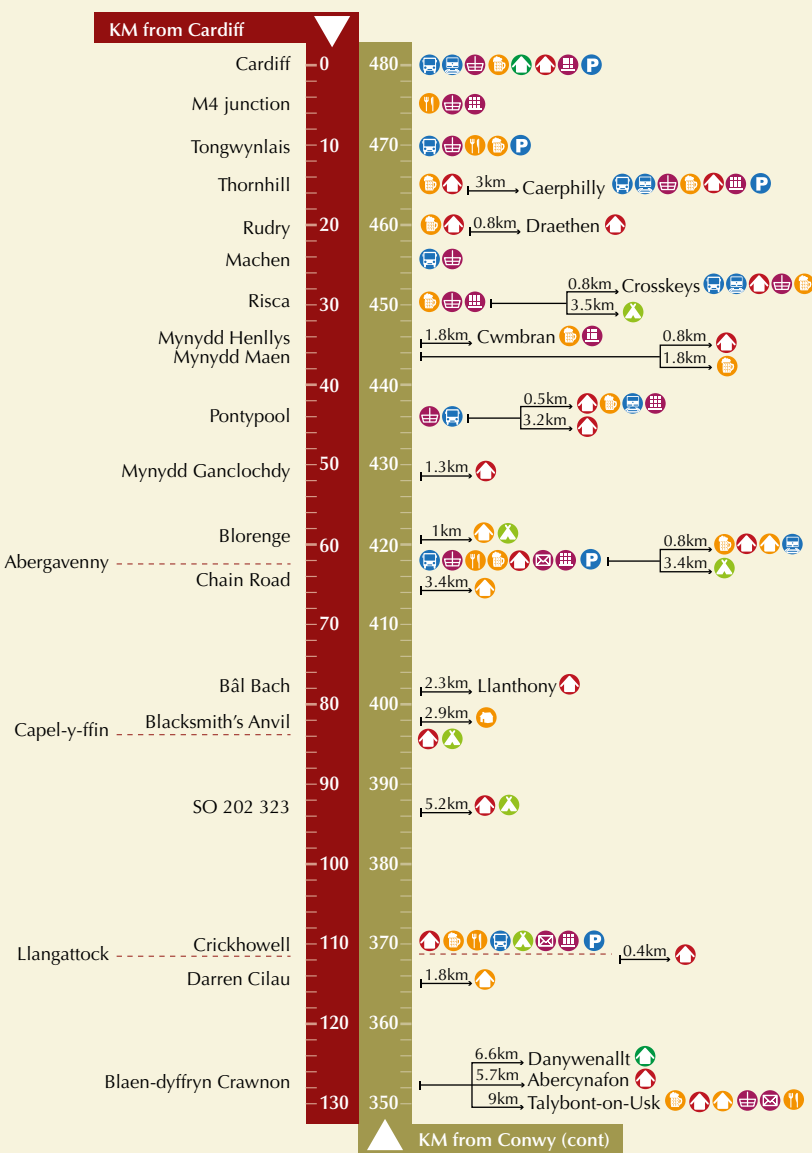


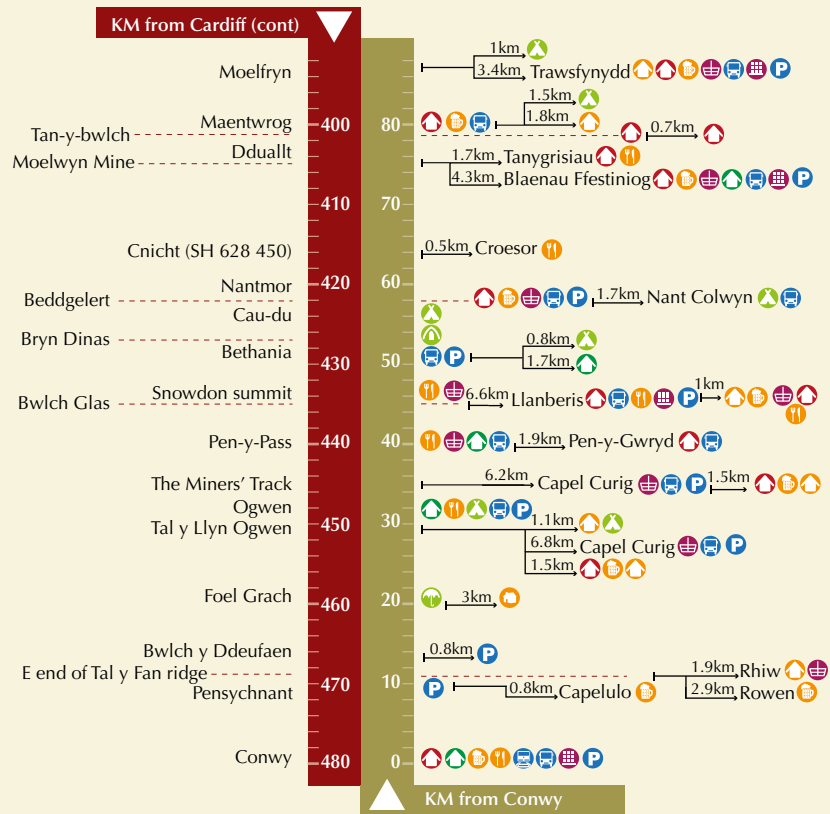
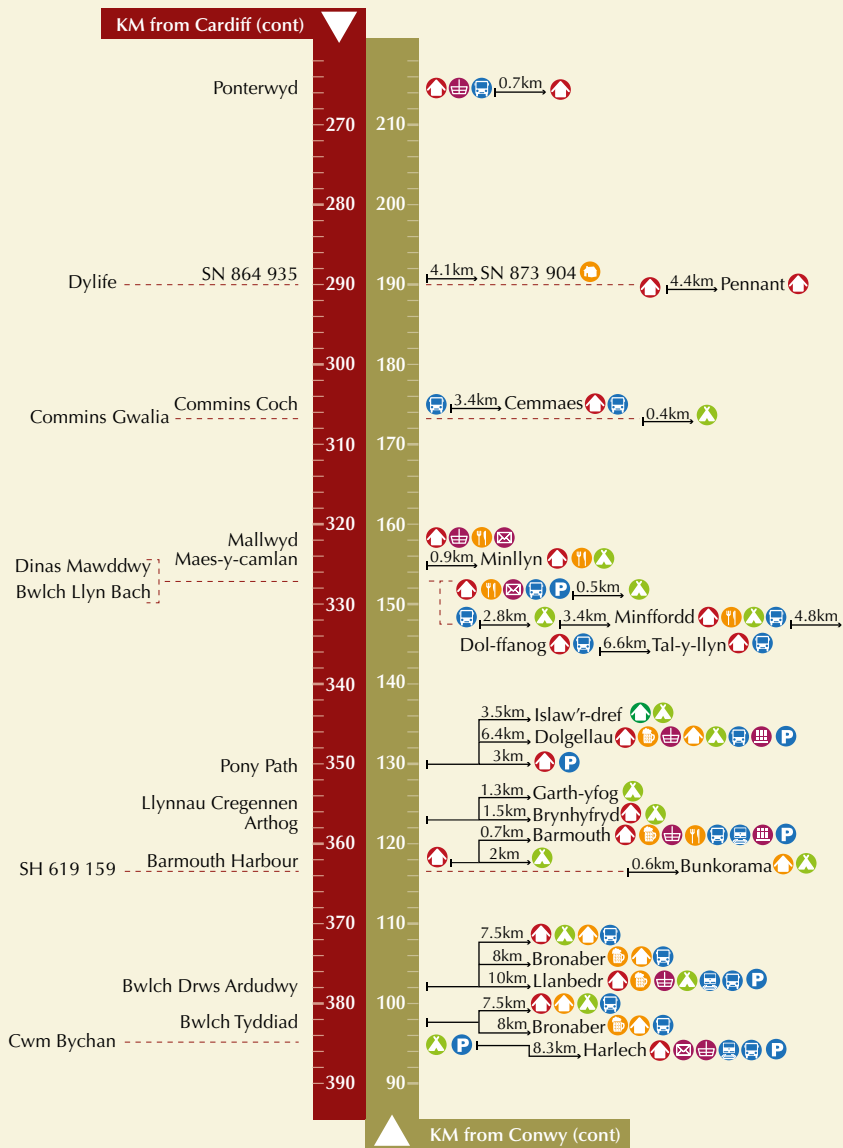
## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

| Stage        | Start/finish                     | Distance                 | Ascent                    | Descent                   | Time             | Page |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|------|
| 1            | Cardiff to Machen                | 24.5km (15¼ miles)       | 480m (1570ft)             | 440m (1440ft)             | 6–7¼hr           | 38   |
| 2            | Machen to Pontypool              | 18.5km (11½ miles)       | 830m (2720ft)             | 770m (2520ft)             | 5¾–6¾hr          | 48   |
| 3            | Pontypool to Abergavenny         | 20km (12¼ miles)         | 580m (1890ft)             | 640m (2080ft)             | 5–6¼hr           | 56   |
| 4            | Abergavenny to Capel-y-ffin      | 21.5km (13¼ miles)       | 1130m (3700ft)            | 870m (2850ft)             | 6¼–8hr           | 64   |
| 5            | Capel-y-ffin to Crickhowel       | 26.5km (16½ miles)       | 950m (3110ft)             | 1180m (3860ft)            | 7–9hr            | 71   |
| 6            | Crickhowell to Storey Arms       | 33.5km (21 miles)        | 1720m (5630ft)            | 1370m (4490ft)            | 9¾–12½hr         | 79   |
| 7            | Storey Arms to Glyntawe          | 19km (11¾ miles)         | 690m (2250ft)             | 930m (3040ft)             | 5–6¼hr           | 95   |
| 8            | Glyntawe to Llandovery           | 29.5km (18½ miles)       | 1360m (4460ft)            | 1500m (4930ft)            | 8¼–10¾hr         | 105  |
| 9            | Llandovery to Tŷ'n-y-cornel      | 26km (16 miles)          | 870m (2850ft)             | 620m (2030ft)             | 6¾–8½hr          | 115  |
| 10           | Tŷ'n-y-cornel to Claerddu        | 23.5km (14½ miles)       | 820m (2700ft)             | 690m (2250ft)             | 6¼–7¾hr          | 124  |
| 11           | Claerddu to Ponterwyd            | 24km (14¾ miles)         | 910m (2970ft)             | 1140m (3740ft)            | 6½–8¼hr          | 133  |
| 12           | Ponterwyd to Dylife              | 23.5km (14½ miles)       | 920m (3030ft)             | 780m (2550ft)             | 6½–8¼hr          | 141  |
| 13           | Dylife to Dinas Mawddwy          | 37km (23 miles)          | 1470m (4820ft)            | 1740m (5720ft)            | 10–12¾hr         | 149  |
| 14           | Dinas Mawddwy to Bwlch Llyn Bach | 15.5km (9½ miles)        | 1170m (3830ft)            | 980m (3210ft)             | 5–6¾hr           | 163  |
| 15           | Bwlch Llyn Bach to Barmouth      | 20km (12½ miles)         | 970m (3180ft)             | 1240m (4070ft)            | 5¾–7½hr          | 171  |
| 16           | Barmouth to Cwm Bychan           | 23km (14 miles)          | 1690m (5540ft)            | 1530m (5020ft)            | 8½–10¾hr*        | 180  |
| 17           | Cwm Bychan to Maentwrog          | 16km (9¾ miles)          | 860m (2810ft)             | 1000m (3290ft)            | 5½–7hr*          | 196  |
| 18           | Maentwrog to Beddgelert          | 22km (13½ miles)         | 1340m (4390ft)            | 1320m (4320ft)            | 7–8¾hr           | 205  |
| 19           | Beddgelert to Pen-y-Pass         | 17.5km (10¾ miles)       | 1390m (4560ft)            | 1060m (3490ft)            | 5¾–7¾hr          | 217  |
| 20           | Pen-y-Pass to Llyn Ogwen         | 8.5km (5½ miles)         | 810m (2670ft)             | 870m (2860ft)             | 4–5hr*           | 224  |
| 21           | Llyn Ogwen to Conwy              | 30.5km (19 miles)        | 1580m (5180ft)            | 1870m (6120ft)            | 9–11½hr          | 230  |
| <b>Total</b> |                                  | <b>479km (298 miles)</b> | <b>22,460m (73,700ft)</b> | <b>22,480m (73,760ft)</b> | <b>136–174hr</b> |      |

\* extra hour added for slow progress

# The Cambrian Way Trek Planner





### Symbol Key

- Hotel/B&B/Pub with rooms
- Bothy
- Toilets
- Hostel (self catering)/Bunkhouse
- Pub
- Shop
- Hostel (with catering)
- Refreshments
- ATM
- Camping
- Parking
- Post office
- Camping pods
- Bus
- Shelter
- Railway

NOTE: Bus services are very limited and/or irregular, and may not operate on Sundays.  
Post office services may not be available every day.





*Descent into Glyntawe (Stage 7; photo: Oliver Wicks)*

## INTRODUCTION



*Llyn Caseg-fraith and Y Foel Goch from the rock-strewn Glyder Fach (Stage 20)*

### THE MOUNTAIN CONNOISSEURS' WALK

The Cambrian Way starts in the south of Wales at Cardiff Castle in the centre of the country's capital city and ends at Conwy, the mighty northern fortress of a town. Both castles were built in the 12th century by the Normans in an endeavour to keep the rebellious people of Wales under control. Between the two lies glorious verdant countryside featuring steep-sided valleys with streams and waterfalls, picturesque rolling hills, an abundance of high ridges and, in the north, rugged, cragged and challenging mountains. Much of the route runs through two national parks – Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia – as well as most of the areas in Wales that have been designated as wilderness.

Tempting as it may be, the Cambrian Way should not be the first outing attempted by the novice trekker. It is nearly 300 miles long and much of the route is in open access country, requiring good navigational skills. Some sections are long and remote, and accommodation can be rudimentary. While the mountains are not high, reaching a little over 1000m, the isolation and the challenge of the highest peaks require good mountain walking experience. Much of the route has been waymarked using the Cambrian Way Welsh hat symbol, but waymarks are not generally found on the mountain sections of the way. As the route follows public rights of way from footpaths to roads a whole variety of other waymarks will be found, but this can be at times misleading where

## STAGE 1

### Cardiff to Machen

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Start</b>            | Cardiff Castle (ST 181 765)   |
| <b>Finish</b>           | A468 near St John's Church, Machen (ST 212 892)                                       |
| <b>Distance</b>         | 24.5km (15¼ miles)  |
| <b>Total ascent</b>     | 480m (1570ft)   |
| <b>Total descent</b>    | 440m (1440ft)   |
| <b>Time</b>             | 6–7¼hr  |
| <b>Maps</b>             | OS Explorer 151 and 152; OS Landranger 171  |
| <b>Refreshments</b>     | Tongwynlais, Thornhill, Rudry   |
| <b>Public transport</b> | Wide range of rail and bus services at Cardiff; bus service to Caerphilly from Machen |
| <b>Accommodation</b>    | Cardiff; Rudry 19.5km (+1km); Draethen 22.5km (+1km); Caerphilly (+7km)               |

The walk starts with fine parkland on the banks of Afon Taff and continues with some canal bank and road walking over and under a large road interchange to climb to Castell Coch. Beyond this, there is ridge walking on forest tracks and farmland with fine views to the Brecon Beacons and the Severn Estuary before descending steeply to the old mining village of Machen.

**Cardiff Castle** may look relatively modern, but it is on the site of a third-century Roman fort and the original motte-and-bailey castle was built by the Normans in the 11th century. Huge changes were made in Victorian times to turn it into a fairytale castle, but the old castle keep has survived and the remains of old stonework can be seen at the base of the outside walls. The magnificent clock tower and many other parts were built by the Bute family with their great wealth derived from coal and iron. The Animal Wall in front of the castle, built in the 1890s, contained many grotesque gargoyles, but road widening after World War 1 meant that the whole wall was moved along the road towards the bridge and more animals were added. Weathering caused a lot of damage, so they were extensively restored in 2010.



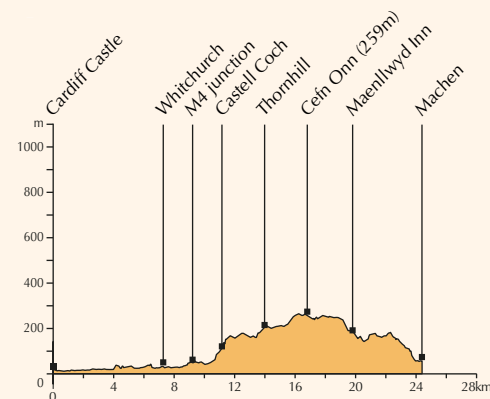
Cardiff Castle's impressive entrance

Starting from the entrance to **Cardiff Castle**, which is Checkpoint 1, go W towards Afon Taff for 300 metres to find the gates of Bute Park on the right. ▶

It is planned to place a plaque here to mark the Cambrian Way.

#### Alternative route along the west bank

Very early starters might find that the park gates are locked (they are open from 7.30am until 30 minutes before sunset). However, the west bank route through Sophia Gardens is almost equally attractive. Return to the east bank after 200 metres by a suspension footbridge.



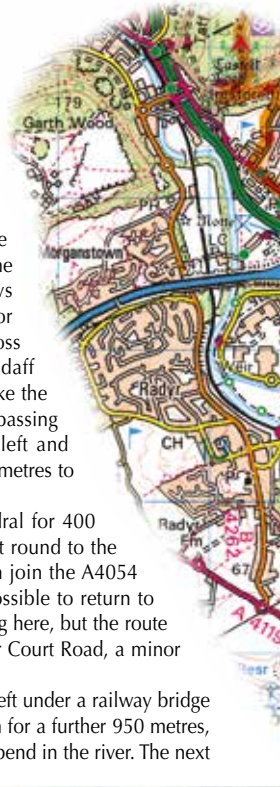
Easy wide paths lead through Bute Park, and there is a choice of walking by the riverside or through formal gardens. After 1.2km the path enters woodland lining the riverbank, passing a weir and footbridge 700 metres further along where the Taff Trail crosses the river to join the Cambrian Way. The route follows the river as it turns to the west for a further 1km, at which point cross the Gabalfa bridge to visit Llandaff Cathedral. ◀ Across the bridge, take the riverside path W for 600 metres, passing by Cardiff University, then turn left and walk across playing fields for 150 metres to reach the **cathedral**.

Head WNW from the cathedral for 400 metres, going near to the river but round to the left of Llandaff Rowing Club, then join the A4054 road near Llandaff Bridge. It is possible to return to the east bank of the Taff by crossing here, but the route follows the west bank along Radyr Court Road, a minor riverside road.

After 900 metres do not turn left under a railway bridge but continue along a riverside path for a further 950 metres, swinging from NW to NE round a bend in the river. The next

If short of time, this diversion can be omitted by continuing along the Taff Trail to rejoin the route at Whitchurch.

Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve (photo: Oliver Wicks)

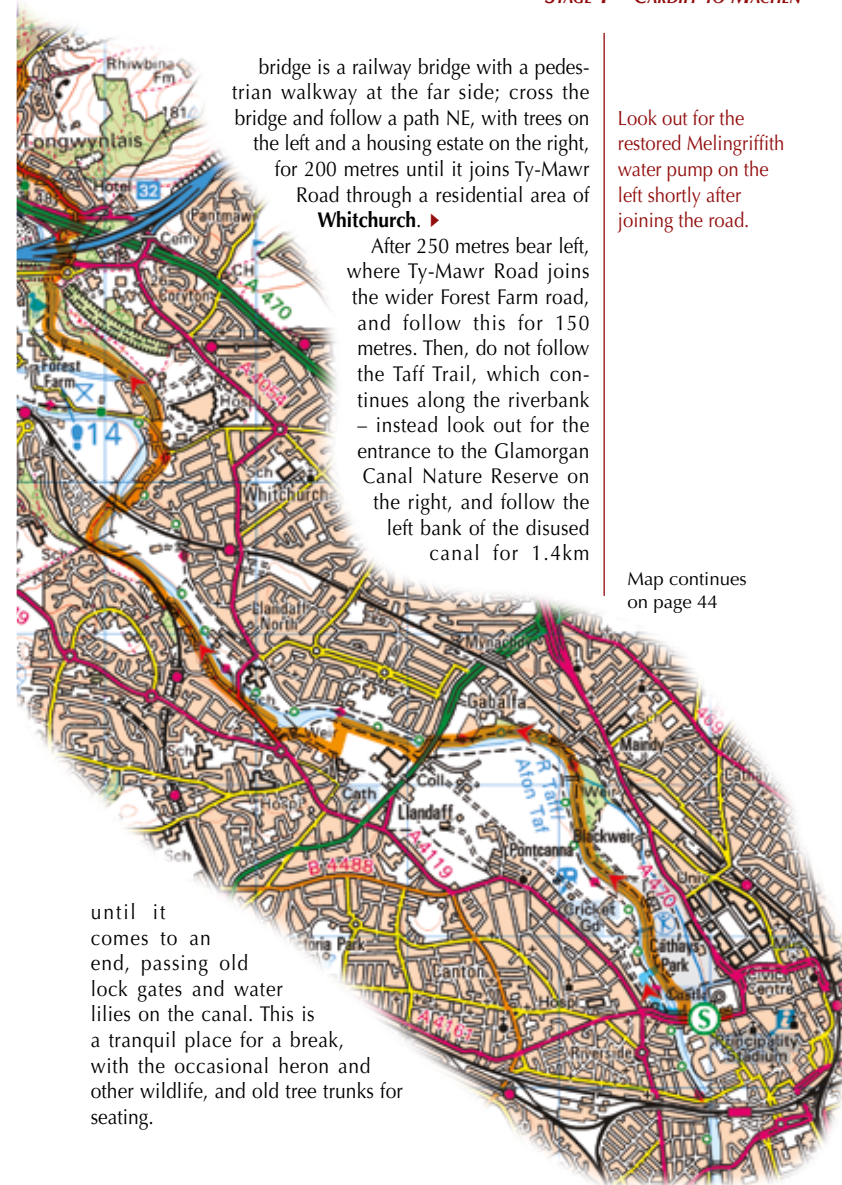


bridge is a railway bridge with a pedestrian walkway at the far side; cross the bridge and follow a path NE, with trees on the left and a housing estate on the right, for 200 metres until it joins Ty-Mawr Road through a residential area of **Whitchurch**. ▶

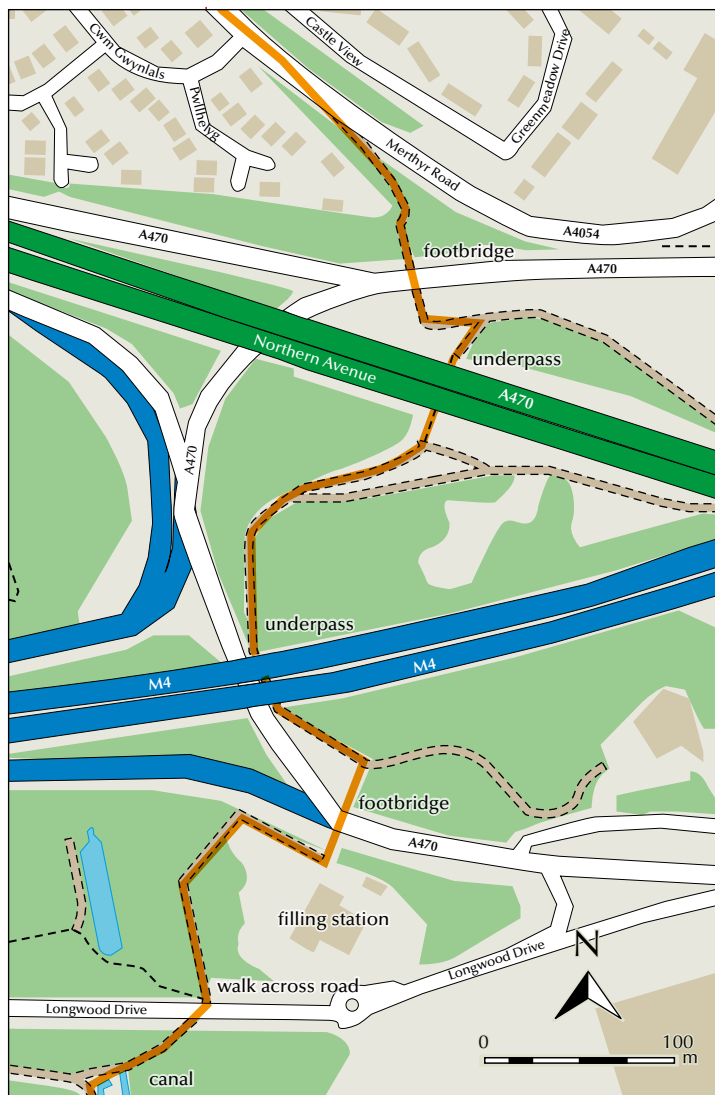
After 250 metres bear left, where Ty-Mawr Road joins the wider Forest Farm road, and follow this for 150 metres. Then, do not follow the Taff Trail, which continues along the riverbank – instead look out for the entrance to the Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve on the right, and follow the left bank of the disused canal for 1.4km

Look out for the restored Melingriffith water pump on the left shortly after joining the road.

Map continues on page 44



until it comes to an end, passing old lock gates and water lilies on the canal. This is a tranquil place for a break, with the occasional heron and other wildlife, and old tree trunks for seating.



At the end of the canal, climb a steep bank with steps to the busy M4 motorway intersection. A series of pedestrian walkways and bridges cross this ‘spaghetti’ junction (see map). First cross a road then pass behind a petrol station to reach a footbridge – from which there is a view of Castell Coch (‘red castle’) on the hillside ahead – then take two underpasses and cross over a footbridge to reach the A4054 (Merthyr Road), a total of 700 metres from the canal. Follow the A4054 NW for 700 metres into **Tongwynlais**. ▶

Turn right in the centre of Tongwynlais and head N up Mill Road, which then becomes Castle Road. Ignore any turnings until you reach the main entrance gate for vehicles after 600 metres, then turn sharp left past car parks and continue for 350 metres to reach **Castell Coch**, which is Checkpoint 2.

**Castell Coch** is a fairytale-style Victorian castle built on Norman foundations. It was a complete ruin until 1870, at which point it was rebuilt as a country residence for the 3rd Marquess of Bute. The internal decor is lavish and worth a visit. It is now owned by Cadw, the Welsh body that looks after historical buildings, and it is open to the public most months of the year. See <https://cadw.gov.wales> for details.

From the castle, turn sharp right on a path going NE up the fairly steep hillside through the forest, another part of the Taff Trail. Do not follow the Taff Trail where it turns left after 300 metres, but keep straight on along the main forest track, which climbs more gently and provides easier walking for 1.6km through Fforest-fawr (‘big forest’), first heading N then NE. A number of tracks join or cross but keep to the main track. ▶

At ST 136 836, The Arches or **Three Bears Caves** can be seen on the left along with an explanatory board telling of their history as three mine entrances, or adits. The site is now in use as a setting for a number of film and TV scenes in productions that include *Doctor Who*, *Merlin*, *Sherlock*, *Harry Potter* and *Robin Hood*. A short way after this is the start of a Sculpture Trail running parallel to the main route; an interesting alternative that adds very little extra distance.

There are pubs, shops and a fish-and-chip shop in Tongwynlais, and hotels and B&Bs near the M4 interchange.

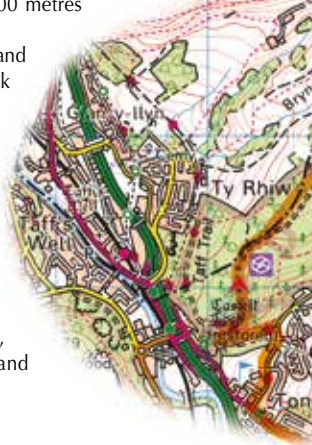
Unfortunately, there are no views here, although there are some points of interest along the way.



Three Bears Caves

At the end of the Sculpture Trail there is a car park and 150 metres further on the track joins Hoel-Y-Fforest, a minor road coming up the valley from Tongwynlais. Cross the road and turn sharp right near an information board along a track into Fforestganol ('central forest'), heading SSE then S through the forest along the eastern side of the valley. Look out for a path on the left heading ESE up the hillside, ignoring the first path after 100 metres and taking the better path after 200 metres (not shown on OS maps). This joins a road in 100 metres after going up some steps.

Turn right along the road and walk for a short way until a track forks off sharp left at **Bwlch-y-cwm** ('pass of the valley'). Take the track, which follows the ridge NNE through woodland at first and past a quarry on the left, entering an area with fewer trees and better views of the countryside. The way goes in and out of small sections of woodland, passing a farm on the right and



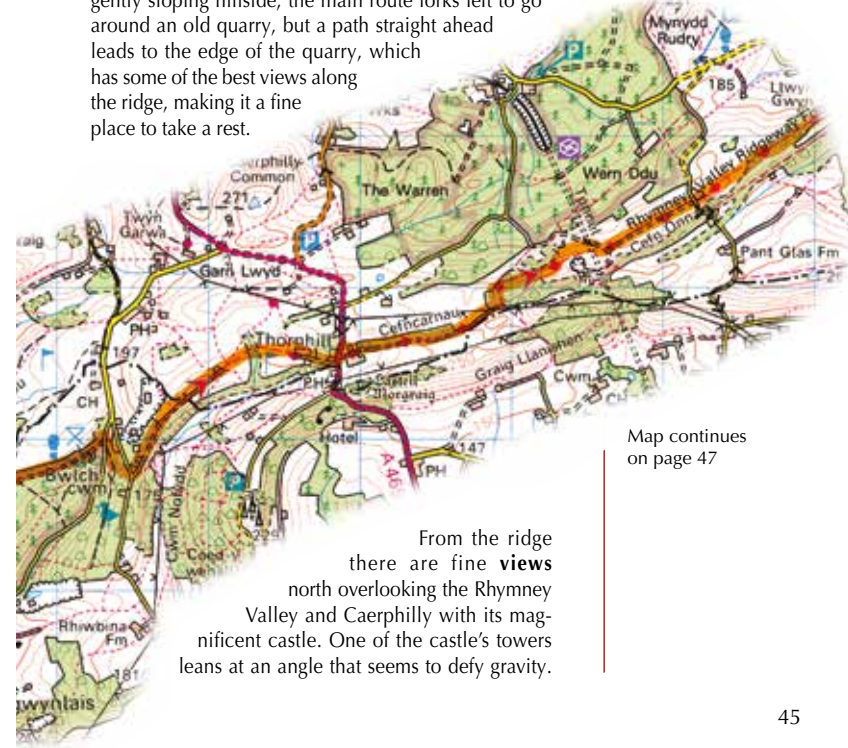
a few gates before reaching the Ridgeway Golf Course at **Thornhill** after 1.5km.

The right of way goes through the middle of the course, so beware of flying golf balls! ▶ At this point the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk joins the Cambrian Way. A 300-metre walk down the golf course access road leads to the **A469** Thornhill Road. The Travellers' Rest pub is about 100 metres to the right, but the route goes across the road past a large farm where it continues to follow the Ridgeway Walk.

Go E along the edge of woodland for 800 metres with some views to the right between the trees. Continue on the Ridgeway Walk for the next 300 metres before passing below an overhead power line and entering more woodland, then turn left after a gate. Before descending very far, after 100 metres turn right to follow a track through the trees along the hillside. ▶ After 400 metres of fairly level walking along the gently sloping hillside, the main route forks left to go around an old quarry, but a path straight ahead which has some of the best views along the ridge, making it a fine place to take a rest.

The club's restaurant is on the route and is open to walkers.

The forest floor is carpeted with wild garlic, which has white flowers and a strong scent in early summer.



Map continues on page 47

From the ridge there are fine **views** north overlooking the Rhymney Valley and Caerphilly with its magnificent castle. One of the castle's towers leans at an angle that seems to defy gravity.

On a clear day it is even possible to see Pen y Fan in the Brecon Beacons – visited on Stage 6 of the walk, five days ahead. To the south is Cardiff and the Bristol Channel.

A short drop down the hillside from the quarry allows you to rejoin the route as it skirts around N of the quarry before climbing back up onto the ridge after 400 metres. (Ignore the right of way through the quarry shown on OS maps – it is impractical.) Follow the ridge for 200 metres ENE through patchy woodland to the open ridge of **Cefn Onn** ('ash tree ridge'). After 500 metres cross a minor road and continue along the ridge as it climbs and then steadily descends for 1.3km. ◀ Continue ahead along the track through the wood for a further 550 metres, dropping further to a dip with a wide metal gate across the track.

Here a path to the N leads down to Rudry (300 metres) for those seeking accommodation.

View from the old quarry on Cefn Onn

There is a **secret World War 2 bunker** at ST 199 865, up a small hill to the right, but this can easily be missed as it is somewhat hidden in the trees. It was a communication and operation centre in the event of an invasion, with a deep, well-concealed bunker and an aerial hidden in the trees. An information board shows what it looked like.



Continue W on the track and descend from the ridge after 350 metres to come out at a crossroads by the **Maenllwyd Inn**. Take the road going NE to the right of the inn for 400 metres, keeping to the right where a road forks off to the left. Where the road turns left towards Penhow Farm after a further 450 metres, turn right to enter the forest through an opening in the trees at SN 208 871 and take the forest track going ENE past old lead mines for 400 metres, shortly entering **Coed Cefn-pwll-du**. ▶ There are a number of forest tracks, but the route follows the main wide track as it swings N then W and N again, gradually descending to reach a minor road where the forest ends after 1.9km at ST 211 888.

Cross the road and head NNE down a lane towards **Afon Rhymni** for 300 metres, passing houses on the right. At the end of the lane turn left and continue for 100 metres then turn right over the bridge and go straight ahead for 100 metres to the A468. Turn right and continue for 100 metres to the point where a road leads up past the **church** on the left.

This is **Machen**, the end of the stage. There are not many facilities here, but there is a bus service to Caerphilly and beyond (turn left instead of right along the A468 and continue for 150 metres to a bus stop past the school). There is also a convenience store on a road to the left past the church.

For accommodation in Draethen (800 metres off-route), take the track that forks right at ST 212 873.

