

HISTORICAL WALK AROUND BLAEN BRAN COMMUNITY WOODLAND

Start at Car Park below Mine Slope site.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

1. Walk is moderate with some rough ground and steep slopes.
2. Stay on the pathways – hidden pitfalls in the forest
3. First aid –
The best we can do is to offer a plaster or minor wound dressing.
A mobile phone is available to summon help for a major accident.
If anyone thinks they may have a problem on the walk let me know.
4. Care when walking to avoid tripping – stones, brambles etc.
5. If you leave the group, let me know – I want the same number to return as starts out.

Two aspects of walk:-

1. Understand some industrial history
2. To enjoy stroll through woods

Walk not in chronological order – take all day criss-crossing woods

Some points of interest before we walk to next point: -

The Square - Unique layout for miner's housing, chapel added later

The tips – one shovel at a time!! Coal picking in miner's strike of 1926, people taken to court by mine owner.

Removal of top of tip after Abefan disaster

Mine Slope Cottages – probably predate the opening of Porth Mawr mines. 2 of 3/4 cottages built to house miners – mine entrance just above with tunnel to Pontypool

Walk to Mine Slope.

Start with most recent events –

Dec. 2004 – 999-year lease purchased with grant from Cyd Coed

Previous owner, Mr. Larkin – commercial woodland

Before that Forestry Commission

Last drift mine in 1960's – Ivor Lloyd, a farmer.

We will see several Mine levels and slopes on our route. Earliest record of coal mining in deed of 1698 – Thomas Arnold sold 'coleworks' to Major John Hanbury

Most well known – Porthmawr collieries No1 and No2 opened by R.J. Blewitt of Llantarnam Abbey

No 1 – Below Mine Slope Cottages – clay and coal – 1837 (Iron mine on map of 1843?) Possibly an iron mine shown in John Prujean's map of 1843. Supplied clay for the Brick Works of Hanson for firebricks

No 2 – On this site – known as Cwmbran Colliery – 1837 by R.J. Blewitt

Recorded in 1838 Coal transported by tramway to Caerleon wharf.

Large steam engine for haulage up slope and down to canal

Horses – weekly air & exercise – ‘Horses Wall’ in Square

Horizontal steam engine for extractor fan – later vertical steam engine.

Removed and taken to Henllys mine.

Show painting of mineslope – note 1) mine entrance, 2) Fan house for extraction. Controlled by doors operated by young boys.

Mine slope Reservoir – pipes visible in roadway

Lamp house – wall still visible, other related buildings (Blacksmith’s shop)

No 1 level closed about 1865 – records of it still being there later

No 2 closed about 1916 – coal worked from Adit which closed in 1927

Building demolished over 20 years ago and slope entrance sealed – protest

Note tramway rails as we continue walk. No flange on wheels – rail is flanged. Plans to make a feature of these.

Walk to Ford.

Nant Bran

Nant Brân – Brân stream or Brân brook

Blaen Brân – source or head of Brân brook

Glyn Brân – Vale of the Brân

Cwm Brân – valley of the Bran

Importance to town – name on early maps

Brân – crows – note significance of crows nesting on slopes of Mynydd

Maen

Crossing – planning difficulties

Roadway – deposit of soil – covers area of some historical interest??

Enter BBCW

Airshaft on left – fresh air into complex of mine workings under BBCW

Area leased by Forestry Commission in 1933 for forestation programme

These trees planted in 1939

Some original beech trees, some planted by F.C.

Tunnel to Pontypool – entrance?? Recorded on John Prujean's map of 1854

Note original pathways and possible tramways cut to extract coal and waste

Parsons Place – Larkin Lane

Evidence of mining activity along fence to left

BBCW – Coed Gwain-y-fferiad and Blaen Brân/Caia Blaen Brân (field of)

Continue along Larkin Lane - Turn left at marker

Evidence of a level and road for extraction

Return to Larkin Lane – note Coed Gwaun y Fferiad – Priest's Moor, Coed Escob – Bishops Wood; legend of Queen Elizabeth wife of Henry 7th, who owned land surrounding Caerleon, having priest killed.

Crater from bomb dropped in about 1942 – 'Harald's tale'.

Continue to Stile leading to Little Green meadow farm– over the stile on right into new wood and continue along track by fence – rough walking

Level still open – possibly referred to in agreement of 1793, 1796 or 1698

Note road way cut to take coal out to road

Back to Larkin Lane – up Horse track

Outcrop coal on Fire Break – mention Nelson and Spanish Armada.

Continue up path to Top Road – turn left along to Mountain Air Gate

Turn left in Turning Circle – note 'leat' which starts near No 2 gate.

Continue on path to No 3 gate

Dry Stone Walls – used since Iron Age to provide defences or mark ownership.

Mostly used in upland areas

Extensively used in 16th Century as farmers enclosed common land – original walls probably some 400years old. Note rebuilding.

Area outside is Common Land – jealously guarded by the commoners.

BELL PIT

Simple method of mining deeper seams – sides collapsed

Return along Top Road to Gateway (no Gate)

Airshaft or mine slope - note roadway cut through forest

Airshaft - note roadway cut through forest

Drift mine or adit still open – one I entered many years ago.

Back to top Road and continue walk

Alternative route-

Continue up slope for a few yards, turn right and take path between avenue of beech trees.

Note significance of this path, could it be part of the Cistercian Way? It has been used as the main pathway to Blaen Brân farm for hundreds of years.

AGRICULTURE

Blaen Bran Farm – livestock – use of common

Caia (Field of) Blaen Bran – walls, garden etc.

Mr. R. Bevan given notice to quit in 1931 but stayed on for several years employed by F.C.

Remains of farm – one wall in Larch wood

WATER

16th century – leats dug to provide water for pond near the White House in Pen yr heol for use in the iron industry

Late 19th Century – water pipes to provide clean water to U.C.B. & P'newydd

1928 – water Board acquired 999 year lease Blaen Bran Farm and Coed Gwaun y Fferiad

1929 – Brickyard acquired by Water Board for filter beds.

1931 – Work started on reservoir – stone bought from Park Estates quarry

? – Upper reservoir constructed

1940/50 – Reservoir improved

1974 – Cracks in dam –reservoir closed.

Walk along Top Road, enjoy views.

Near fence note a sheep dip – this was probably supplied with water from a 'leat' above the road.

Walk down path to ford. Car park.

Thanks for joining us, hope this has proved interesting and enjoyable.