

MINES, MOORLAND AND MOUNTAIN

A long ramble for experienced walkers only, much of it across moorland, starting from Coedpoeth. 15½ miles (ascent 700m), with shorter versions of 12½ miles (400m) and 8 miles (300m)

Nant Mill - Minera Lead Mines - Cynr-y-Brain - World's End - Ruabon Mountain

(The 12½ & 8 mile walks omit Cynr-y-Brain & World's End; the 8 mile traverses Minera Mountain instead of Ruabon Mtn)

The walk goes up the Clywedog Valley and onto the heather moorland above. There is then a choice of three routes, each with good viewpoints. There is no need to decide which route to take until you reach the moor. There is a wealth of natural and historical interest on the walk.

*It can be cold and wet on the moor; it is always boggy. **Check the weather forecast. Take suitable footwear, waterproofs, torch, whistle, compass and food. Pack a snack for 8 miles and a good meal for the 12 and 15 mile walks..** The longest route can be extended by 1½ miles (total there and back) to visit the Ponderosa for food and toilets.*

Maps: The 1:40,000 map supplied should be sufficient when used with the walk directions. However, Ordnance Survey Explorer 256 is recommended for its greater clarity. A compass is essential.

Access Land: The 15 mile and 12 mile routes both leave public paths on the access land. It is recommended that you check that no exclusions are in place. Visit www.ccw.gov.uk to check.

START Nant Mill Visitor Centre, Coedpoeth. Grid ref. SJ289501

Cars can be parked at Nant Mill all year round. Follow signs on the A483 to 'Clywedog' then on the A525 follow signs for 'Nant Mill Visitor Centre'.

Bus to Coedpoeth; walk down Park Road and Nant Road to Nant Mill. Travel information: 01978 266166.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Distances are approximate so you can read yards for metres. Compass points are given for reassurance.

Follow the waymarked Clywedog Valley Trail to lead mines as follows: At Nant Mill cross footbridge by ford, go up lane. At corner take riverside path ahead: a permissive path through Woodland Trust land. *Opposite are the ruins of New Mills and the strong wall that carried Wilkinson's Waggonway. Beyond the descending steps another riverside wall shows the bridging point. It then followed the path you are walking, note the large rocks protecting the way at the river bend.* Cross lane, take path opposite. At end of enclosed path turn L. *Waggonway went ahead here, ruined buildings are from a later date.* Turn R at road then second L to the mines.

From the circular car park go up path behind map display. Turn R onto roadway and pass Engine House. Go ahead on gravel and sweep up L. Turn R, along dismantled railway for a mile, crossing 3 roads. At buildings and a rectangular multi-entrance lime kiln go ahead between boulders through disused quarry. *The enormous oval Hoffman kiln is hidden across the river through trees to your L.* Before the wooden footbridge turn R and leave quarry by gated tarmac road.

At brow, by last boulder, turn up L. Beyond stile, keep gully to R and go up green track. Go over hill to farm track corner. Follow stone track ahead through buildings, then take first stile by gate on R. Follow fence on L. Cross stile by gate onto moor. **(Soon the 8 mile route diverges, go to Φ below.)**

To continue the main route, follow track by wall but look out for 3 stone walls leading away on L, *2nd also has deep ditch beside. 3rd has protruding gated corner.* 100 metres beyond, find clear path half-R across moor. On arrival at forest stile, do not use it but turn L on moor and keep to forest fence. Follow it for a mile to the junction with Offa's Dyke Path. **(The 12 mile route diverges here – follow Δ below.)**

To continue the main route, carry on alongside fence for a further 1300 metres to the flat top of Cynry-Brain. *For views over the Vale of Clwyd you can cross stile on R and walk 160 metres to the ruin of Sir Watkins Tower, returning to this path to continue route towards masts.*

Beyond masts follow road downhill but at sharp R bend, before roadside barriers, take green track L (*unless you want to continue down the road half a mile to Ponderosa for hot food, drinks and toilets, returning to this point to continue*) leading you down to a clear path below. Continue L (120°E) along this green path through low pass and down along shoulder of hill to ruin of Cae'r Hafod (summer field) where you pass stone waymark and join Clwydian Way by keeping to R fence and taking 2 stiles then a gate. *The Clwydian Way is a long distance path 122 miles through North Wales: its logo a white buzzard.*

Follow the Way as it forks R on track then turns R and crosses a stile. Here, leave Way by turning L steeply down field. Beyond 2 gates, at forest, turn L along the stone track that eventually takes you between houses at Pant Glas (green hollow) and loops sharply R downhill to World's End Road. Turn L. *In less than half a mile you pass Plas Ucha to your L. Ahead is the towering limestone escarpment, Craig y Forwen (Maiden's rock) named either because 'its head is like that of a woman', or 'a young girl in love leapt from it'.*

Do not turn L over ford, but ascend path ahead by stream, and continue up gorge. Beyond stile in mountain perimeter fence go ahead (due east) to find path that takes you easterly over mountain. Ignore crossing path, wide crossing track, fork to R and crossing path. At summit ignore diagonal crossing path (L to mountain road, R to Newtown Forest). Pass memorial cross on R. Descend mile and a half. Keep Mountain Lodge across valley R.

(\ddagger 12 mile route rejoins main walk here.)

Take kissing gate to road, turn L. You soon pass farm, Plas Drain. Descend 200 metres to take stile on L. Go straight over field to join crossing track. After following this to L for 100 metres, take stile ahead. Bear slightly R towards trees on L of rising curve. Continue in same direction with Caer Llwyd Reservoir on your L. *Built 1870 capacity 175 million litres. Larger reservoir to R is Ty Mawr (1907): capacity 593 million litres.* Beyond crest of hill, descend bearing slightly R to cross iron railings. Turn R to cross stile at bottom of field.

Turn L, cross bridge, turn half R to far end of field. Cross footbridge, follow track ahead to gate above farm, Plas-yn-fron. Turn L and go along drive. At lane turn R. In 300 metres, take stile on L. Cross fields to lane then turn R downhill. Take stile on L in 350 metres. Go straight over 3 fields. Turn L to next stile. Turn R to track reaching lane. Turn R. At main road turn L but in less than 200 metres take footpath at entrance on R down drive of Hillside Farm.

(\odot 8 mile route rejoins main walk here.)

Go down drive and ahead through 3 fields using gates then path to River Clywedog. Cross bridge slightly to L and turn R back to Nant Mill.

⊕ 8 MILE ROUTE ONLY (Follow main route above to point indicated, then use this.)

Follow track by wall. Where the wall turns L continue ahead for 150 metres. Cross stream and continue along the high bank. *This is a former watercourse or leat, easier to walk than the parallel footpath by the Afon Sychnant over the bank to your L.* In 600 metres is a sharp inland loop where you descend to cross a small stream. Proceed 15 metres and look straight ahead to the far bank and a narrow path ascending it. This is where you are heading by going another 100 metres along the leat, then crossing the river. Head up bank then go ahead to spoil heaps at mountain road. Turn L.

In 900 metres, at the sharp L bend by spoil heaps, leave road. Do not take track R but go ahead, veering half L (30° E) on narrow path and between large spoil heaps. Go ahead on path ignoring R fork in 20 metres and L fork in 150 metres. Path curves R (60°E) over the brow (*behind you is the aerial on Cynr-y-Brain; on Minera Mountain ahead, a lone tree*) then L to reach open grassy plain passing large spoil heaps to L. Cross this in same direction (due E, turquoise roofs in distance) to follow path leading over shoulder of smallest hump (lone tree 250 metres to L) downhill half R, 500 metres to stile by gate below L. Turn R, take stile, turn L to lane. Go downhill to main road, turn R. Pass chapel, path and phone box then turn L down drive to Hillside Farm. Rejoin main route at ⊕ symbol above.

Δ 12 MILE ROUTE ONLY (Follow main route to point indicated, then use this.)

Turn L (easterly) across moor on Offa's Dyke Path. *Much of the path is boardwalked. This 177 mile national trail, its logo an acorn, runs from Prestatyn to Chepstow, but you won't see the ancient dyke here, as the trail only joins the 8th century earthwork, built by King Offa of Mercia, south of the River Dee.* At mountain road turn R. In less than a mile, just past large roadside rocks, ignore green path forking L, but when woodland is 150 metres ahead, fork half-L up track. Just before brow where path forks R, turn L up narrow path.

Keep R (100°E) at fork and go up hollow way. Keep large grassy craters to L then ignore path L, but in 50 metres veer L (50°E) eventually sweeping R into deep hollow way (due E). Go along flat track at top. *A round stone on your L, with a barely visible V cut into it, marks the county boundary.* Descend over a mile, passing small lake on R, down clear deep parallel hollow ways where main path sometimes changes to drier way alongside. When you reach T junction with Mountain Lodge ahead, turn L. Return to main route at † symbol above.

Please report any problems to Public Rights of Way, tel. 01978 292057 or the Ranger Service, available most weekends, tel. 07800 688803. E-mail rightsofway@wrexham.gov.uk.

POINTS OF INTEREST

1. NANT MILL (Open all year but the Visitor Centre is open 10.30am - 4.30pm Easter to October and weekends only in winter.)

An early corn mill on the site, shown on a map of 1770, and opposite the front door of the present Visitor Centre, had an undershot water wheel. It was used by a miller, John Price, tenant of Thomas Fitzhugh (II) of Plas Power, from 1813 until he completed a larger corn mill, (the present Visitor Centre) with two wooden overshot waterwheels in 1832. The mill-race was extended to feed the new mill and the sluice became an overflow which went under the yard to join the new tail-race. Look out for the leat tunnels under the road, rusty-coloured water coming from an underground watercourse that drained the Coedpoeth iron mines; and the pigsty, with its unusual pigs; as well as some new artwork. Unfortunately the early mill only has a low wall remaining as it was demolished by Wrexham Maelor Borough Council for safety reasons after damage by vandals, before its historical value was realised.

Nant Mill continued to work until the 1930s and was again worked around 1940. At some point the large waterwheels were replaced with a 'Pelton wheel' turbine. Finally electric power was used to grind bones into meal. The miller in the early 20th century lived in Nant House opposite. He also ran a churn mill for making butter. This was about 50 yards above the ford and the shaft was driven by a wheel in the wall of the river, while the shaft for the churn mill lay across the road.

2. CLYWEDOG VALLEY TRAIL AND WILKINSON'S WAGGONWAY

This walk uses part of the Clywedog Valley Trail that runs from Minera to Erddig and King's Mill. Much of the trail follows the course of Wilkinson's waggonway, which started at Minera mines. It passed several mills alongside the River Clywedog and supplied materials to John Wilkinson's Ironworks at Bersham. From there it led to the former toll road at Felin Puleston, where finished goods could be transported nationwide. When the ironworks were moved to Brymbo the waggonway was reclaimed by nature and only found again when the Clywedog Trail was being planned.

3. MINERA LEAD MINES

(Site open all year but the buildings only during summer: 01978 261529 for current times.)

After seeing the inscribed stone at the entrance, you could be forgiven for thinking that Owen Jones was buried here in 1859. However, when several similar stones are found you may begin to wonder what happened to poor Owen! The truth is that these are boundary stones, not gravestones. When he died Owen bequeathed his land to 'the poor of every Company of Merchants and Craftsmen of Chester'. Land was sold for houses and the present 'City Arms'. The land here became extremely valuable as 30 different companies sank 50 shafts to mine lead in the 19th and early 20th centuries. A memorial to Owen can be found in the City of Chester on HSBC Bank by the Eastgate.

Look out for the reconstructed washing and separating equipment where, once the larger pieces of lead ore 'galena' had been extracted, the remaining rocks were crushed and separated again in 'trunk buddles' and in the circular convex 'buddle' where rotating arms let the heavy ore particles stay in the centre while lighter material was washed to the outer rim.

Meadow (or City) Engine House is a restored Cornish beam engine house, which held an enormous steam-driven pump that pulled water from the lower levels of the mines. This was also done by running off water through tunnels known as 'adits' or 'day levels' like the one with rusty-coloured water at Nant Mill.

There were also lead mines on the mountain above. Dixon's Shaft, on the 12 mile route, was one of four mines working the Pool Park vein and jointly producing 1500 tons of lead between 1861 and 1874. The water level there was lowered by a one and a half mile tunnel, the Gomerian Level.

4. FLORA

This walk has a spectacular variety of flora. The disused mineral railway line between the lead mines and the quarry, and the slopes around the quarry, display plants that thrive on limestone, including several varieties of orchid and helleborine. Higher up you may find the tiny flowers of eyebright and even the occasional mountain pansy. On the moorland, as well as the ubiquitous bracken and areas of bilberry (locally called whinberry), there are several species of heather: cross-leaved heath, ling and bell heather.

5. LIMESTONE QUARRY

Pits around the quarry are some of the older lead mines that were probably worked by the Romans who then exported the lead via Deva (Chester). Records of medieval mining exist from 1286, and in 1391 the survey of the Lordship of Bromfield and Yale showed mining rents and regulations. While lead mining continued further down the valley with deeper and deeper shafts being dug, lime works were started here in the mid-19th century. A variety of kilns were built; the largest being the enormous Hoffman kilns of 1868, holding 120 tons of stone. Limestone was crushed and burnt to make lime for fertiliser and building. During the latter part of the 20th century the quarry produced 300,000 tonnes of limestone each year, mainly for roadbuilding.

In 1964 came the discovery of a unique series of limestone caves 'Ogof Dyadd Byrof' where nine insect species were discovered as fossils. The area where it lies, to the northeast of the quarry, is now protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest but, for now at least, large scale quarrying has ceased.

6. RUABON MOUNTAIN

Ty Hir (long house) is passed on the walk and this gives a clue to the farming methods employed on the moorland. A long house in medieval times would house humans at one end and their animals, downhill to prevent build up of dung, at the other. Hafod (summer dwelling) on the World's End Road is another name that shows farming methods. In a system of 'transhumance', animals were grazed on the moors in summer while in winter the animals and the shepherds would move down to the valleys. For the sheep this still happens. The farmers around the mountain have common grazing rights; each year they get together to drive and sort the sheep for lower fields.

Grouse shooting also takes place on the mountain but a sharp decline in red grouse has meant that less game has been shot in recent years. Nevertheless the heather is still managed for grouse. This means cutting and burning strips of heather so that new green shoots appear. Although the mountain is now an open access area you are advised to keep to the well-used paths and not use the wide

newly-cut strips, which are dead ends. A variety of other birdlife can be seen on the walk, and the 12 mile route passes a small mountain lake, ideal for birdwatching. An RSPB guide calls the area around World's End one of the most outstanding and rewarding birdwatching areas in the country.

Adders also live on the mountain, perhaps another reason to keep to clear paths where your feet, and any sunbathing snakes, are visible.

All the mountain routes reach good viewpoints looking east where, on a good day, the panorama includes, from north to south: Chester; the wedge-shaped Helsby Hill near Frodsham; the radar dish at Jodrell Bank; the massive aerial on Wildboarclough in the Peak District; the Wrekin; and further south the Stiperstones.

7. STONE CROSS MEMORIAL

The longest route passes a horizontal stone cross that marks the scene of a WW2 plane crash (a Bristol Beaufighter with a Polish pilot). War records show, only too clearly, the grim death toll of young inexperienced pilots on this mountain, with four Spitfires and nine other crashes. Allied wartime activity on the mountain included building the World's End - Minera road by American servicemen and the installation of searchlights. On 29th August 1940 the Germans jettisoned bombs on the mountain range: the fire that followed enveloped 28 square miles of moorland. Two days later the smoke caused discomfort in Wrexham and the following week it had reached Manchester. It is estimated that over 2000 bombs were dropped here during the war: some of the remaining craters can be seen on the walk.

8. THE MANOR HOUSE, WORLDS END

In the early 1990s the manor house 'Plas Ucha' (high hall) was restored and the public road diverted to give the occupants privacy. There are many legends about this mysterious house including the tale that Owain, the son of Cadwgan, Prince of Powys, abducted Nest, the wife of Gerald de Windsor - the Norman lord of Pembroke Castle, and hid her here; Owain was ambushed and killed by her enraged husband in 1116. It is also said that Elizabeth I had an illegitimate child here in 1563.

In the Civil War, Colonel John Jones owned the house. He was later executed for the regicide of Charles I. George Borrow, writing *Wild Wales* in the late 19th century, visited the house when it was owned by Thomas Jones, a barrister who encouraged the legends. In the 1930s the house was used as a shooting lodge, with over 100 beaters walking here to start work at 8am for seven shillings a day (a considerable amount during the Depression). Churchill, Ribbentrop and Goering came here to shoot grouse on the moor. A few years later the house was damaged by incendiary bombs dropped on the mountain while these sportsmen commanded the armies of Europe, shooting at each other in the Second World War.

Before the war the road ended here: to visitors it seemed like the end of the world - hence the name.

E-mail your thoughts on this walk to rightsofway@wrexham.gov.uk
Public Rights of Way, Environment Department, Wrexham County Borough Council, Chester Street, Wrexham, LL13 8BG