

# Torfaen Trail

## Figure of 8 Walk

*A variety of walks  
taking in the whole of Torfaen, South East Wales*

Explore our  
Countryside

# Torfaen Trail

## Figure of 8 Walk

**T**orfaen is a beautiful area occupying the most eastern of the South Wales valleys, well known as an area that holds a warm welcome with great diversity in terms of its landscape, biodiversity, history and cultural heritage.

The landscape is certainly one of contrasts with steep sided valleys, rolling agricultural fields, heather moorland, unimproved grasslands and diverse post industrial land in the north and mid valley areas. We have ancient woodlands; interesting water bodies, such as the Afon Lwyd, Garn Lakes and the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal; wildlife; rich urban greenspace; and parkland, one famous example being Pontypool Park.

The Torfaen Trail gives you the opportunity to see this diversity first-hand. The trail is a figure of eight loop taking in the whole of the Borough, from Cwmbran in the south to Blaenavon in the north, crossing over at Pontypool which is situated in the middle of the Borough.

### Advice for Walkers

To get the most enjoyment from walking and exploring Torfaen's varied countryside, making use of an ordnance survey map is strongly recommended. The countryside can change rapidly and way-markers can easily be missed.

Ensure that you wear appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear, as some sections of the Trail could be muddy and slippery.

Please be aware that on occasion, stiles might be replaced with alternative types of barriers. Where the text refers to a stile, this might change in the future.

### Public Transport

Torfaen has a good network of public transport, and most of the start and finishing points of the sections of this Trail are located close to a bus route. To plan your journey visit [www.traveline.org.uk](http://www.traveline.org.uk).

### Tourist Information Centre

Blaenavon Tourist Information Centre provides information on days out, attractions, accommodation, activities and route planning in the area.

Tel: 01495 792615, or visit: [www.blaenavontic.com](http://www.blaenavontic.com)

For information on other circular walks in Torfaen, as well as details of the various activities in the area, visit the Countryside Services website:

[www.countryside.torfaen.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.torfaen.gov.uk)



Clay Level (because of the fireclay produced from the mine) and the expansion of the local brickworks at about this time.

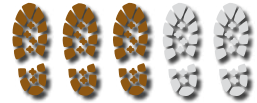
If you have a few minutes to spare, have a look around the tombstones in the graveyard. In 1870, one family by the name of Williams lost a young son of 2 years 8 months, and ten days later lost a boy of seven. The Welsh inscription on the tombstone translates, 'Do not boast of tomorrow because you do not know what will happen within the day'.



## Upper Cwmbrian to Henllys

A mountain walk passing the ruins of an ancient pilgrimage chapel

Start:	Upper Cwmbrian Road
Finish:	Henllys Way, Henllys
Parking:	On-road parking
Approximate Distance:	5 kms/3 miles
Time Allowance:	1.5 hours



Difficulty of walk - 3 (moderate)

The start of this walk takes you past what used to be a small **woollen factory** in the 1930s, which made flannel shirts for the miners. It was powered by water diverted from the Bran Brook. Some older locals still refer to this road as Factory Road, rather than by its present name of Upper Cwmbrian Road. You will also pass the site of the old brickworks. By the mid 1840s, a phenomenal 100,000 firebricks were being produced here per week.

You will head towards **Llanderfel**. Tradition has it that Derfel, (nicknamed Derfel the Strong), was one of King Arthur's knights and took part in the battle of Camlan in 540 AD.

About 200metres beyond the farm house at Llanderfel, in the field to your right, above the level of the lane, are the ruins of the small chapel of **St Derfel**. This was used by pilgrims en route from Llantarnam Abbey (a once a Cistercian Monastery) to Pen Rhys and beyond to St David's in west Wales. The chapel dates back to approximately 550AD and is





The Incline

said to have been established by St Derfel. It is one of only two chapels in Wales being dedicated to the saint. St Derfel is supposedly one of the 1,000 Celtic saints buried on Bardsey Island, North Wales.

Later on the walk you will pass a plaque giving information of **Henllys Colliery**, which was established in 1895.

Part of this section follows the line of the tramroad (The Incline) which ran from the quarry right down to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.

You will pass by **Old Row** and **New Row**, built to house workers from Henllys Colliery. The oldest date back to the 1800s. Henllys Colliery was abandoned in 1898, but later reopened. Records show that in 1900, there were only ten men employed producing black vein coal and clay; 7 below ground and 3 above.



## Henllys to Llantarnam

Following an old tram road

<b>Start:</b>	Henllys Way, Henllys
<b>Finish:</b>	Boating Lake, Cwmbran
<b>Parking:</b>	On-road parking
<b>Approximate Distance:</b>	5.5 kms/3.5 miles
<b>Time Allowance:</b>	2 hours



This route takes you through an area that has an industrial history, following, in part, the **Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal**.

This canal started life as two separate waterways: the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal and the Monmouthshire Canal. The Monmouthshire Canal Company received its Act of Parliament simultaneously with the planning of the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal. It was decided to link the two at Pontymoile. Both canals were supported by horse-drawn tram roads bringing materials such as coal, limestone and iron ore down from the hills.



You will pass by **Llantarnam Abbey**. The original abbey was founded on this site in 1175 by a Lord of Caerleon Howel ap Iorwerth. Nothing visible is left of the medieval buildings, but the house was completely rebuilt by Reginald James Blewitt in 1834-5. He was the owner of the Porthmawr Colliery at Upper Cwmbran. 'Porthmawr' and 'Magna Porta' both mean 'Great Gate'. The Abbey is presently occupied by the Sisters of St Joseph of Annecy.



Lime kilns

The **Greenhouse Public House** is along this section. Above the door is an inscription written in Welsh and translates, 'The Green House 1719. Good beer and cider for you. Come in and you shall taste it'. In 1839, the Chartists who had advanced down the Eastern Valley on their way to Newport stopped here for refreshment and Mr Blewitt MP from Llantarnam came out to talk to them and to try to deter them from continuing their march to Newport, but he was ignored. If you wish to know more about the history of the Chartist movement, there are several websites you can visit. Next to The Greenhouse is the church of **St Michael and All Angels**. In the graveyard is a restored preaching cross, the base and shaft are ancient, but the cross is much later. Also of interest, situated in the graveyard near The Greenhouse is the grave of John William Fielding, who, as Private John Williams in the South Wales Borderers, won the Victoria Cross for his part in the defence of Rorke's Drift on 22 and 23 January in the Zulu War of 1879. He died in 1937 at the age of 75 and was buried with full military honours.





## Boating Lake to Griffithstown Railway Museum

An easy walk through parklands and along the riverside

<b>Start:</b>	Boating Lake, Cwmbran
<b>Finish:</b>	Griffithstown Railway Museum
<b>Parking:</b>	Boating Lake Car Park, Cwmbran
<b>Approximate Distance:</b>	6 kms/4 miles
<b>Time Allowance:</b>	1.5-2 hours



Along this section you will cross over the **Afon Lwyd** river. The name 'Afon Lwyd' means Grey River. It was once a crystal clear river, but with the coming of industry, the water became polluted and discoloured. Its former name was 'Torfaen', meaning 'Rockbreaker' indicative of the forceful way the water rushes down the valley.

The walk takes you across **Chapel Lane**. The lane is so called because Pontrhydyrun Baptist Chapel is situated at the top of the lane. As you emerge from the footpath onto Chapel Lane, the large house you see on the opposite side is Pontrhydyrun House, former home of the Conway family, who were the owners of the Edlogan Tinplate Works, which were situated nearby. They were a deeply religious family and they financed





The Boating Lake

the building of the chapel in 1836. It is a very attractive building, built in the Greek classical style with an Ionic portico. The Conway family graves can be seen in the graveyard and the entrance to the churchyard is enhanced by a huge cedar tree. This magnificent specimen started life in Lebanon and was brought back to this country by the Conway family from a family holiday in the Holy Land.

At the **Griffithstown Railway Museum** the railway goods shed has been lovingly restored and now houses a fine collection of railway memorabilia and model railways. Griffithstown, as the surrounding area is known, has a proud railway heritage. It was named after Henry Griffiths, the first GWR stationmaster at the nearby Pontypool Road

Station.

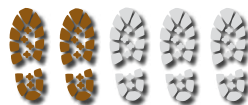
Also, in 1880, Griffithstown was the birthplace of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF).



## Griffithstown Railway Museum to Pontypool Museum

An easy walk via the cycleway, canal towpath and Pontypool Park

<b>Start:</b>	Griffithstown Railway Museum
<b>Finish:</b>	Pontypool Museum
<b>Parking:</b>	Griffithstown Railway Museum
<b>Approximate Distance:</b>	3kms/2miles
<b>Time Allowance:</b>	1–1.5 hours



Difficulty of walk - 2 (easy)

This route soon reaches **Pontymoile Canal Basin** which has an attractive bridge and a toll house, Junction Cottage built in 1814. The toll house is located beside the site of the stop lock which used to regulate the waters of the Monmouthshire Canal from those of the Brecknockshire & Abergavenny Canal.



Canal tow path

The Monmouthshire Canal used to bend left to continue north west while the Brecknockshire & Abergavenny Canal heads north.

Further on, the old **fountain** at Fountain Road bears an inscription 'This fountain was erected by neighbours and friends in memory of Elizabeth Catherine wife of Alfred Addams Williams of Maesderwen who estimable qualities and godly life are worthy alike of remembrance and imitation. AD1889.

Before the railway and then the present bypass were constructed (which you will pass between the canal basin and the gates to Pontypool Park), the land below **Maesderwen** was the site of an early Quaker settlement. Elisha



Bandstand in Pontypool Park

Beadles, “an apothecary and mercer in Pontypool” was a leading member of the friends before 1700, as was a Richard Hanbury and his son Charles. The old meeting house and its burial ground is itself now buried under the road embankment.

The gates at **Pontypool Park** are a wonderful example of metal craftsmanship. The central portion was constructed in the 1720s with the side gates and piers being reconstructed in 1835.



Pontypool Park gates

They were a gift to Major John Hanbury (1664-1734) by the Duchess of Marlborough on the occasion of his second marriage.



Pontypool Museum

**Pontypool** was once a thriving town and evidence of the affluence it once enjoyed can be seen in its many fine old buildings. It prospered and grew mainly from the manufacturing of iron after Richard Hanbury bought land there in 1588. Later, Pontypool became famous

for its **Japanware**, ironware with a decorative lacquered finish, which is much sought after today.



Pontymoile Canal Basin

## Pontypool Park to Blaenavon

A strenuous climb up onto the mountain ridge, with breath-taking views

- Start: Pontypool Park Museum
- Finish: Llanover Road, Blaenavon
- Parking: Riverside Car Park, Pontypool
- Approximate Distance: 9kms/5.5 miles
- Time Allowance: 3.5 hours



**St Cadoc's Church** contains a lot of history. Legend had it that St Cattwg set to build the church, but what he put up in the day, the Devil would pull down in the night 'till at last, Cattwg made a great bell (cloch in welsh) which he rang, causing the devil to drop the stones out of his apron falling further up the mountain at Garn Clochdy (which translates as the heap stones of the belfry).

In the church yard at St Cadoc's there is a tomb bearing an inscription to the memory of William Summerfield who died March 16th 1855 aged 38 years. This gentleman kept the **Yew Tree Inn**, the pub opposite the church. He was famous in his day as he was enormously stout and at times travelled on show. Even at home, crowds flocked to visit his inn just to get a look at him. At a height of 5 foot 10, he weighed 32 stone with a waist measurement of 67 inches.



**Lasgarn Woods** is possibly so named after the bluish stone once quarried there. The woods were used for many years to supply timber for making charcoal, essential for iron making until coal became a viable substitute. (Glas = blue, carn = stone)



**The Old Packhorse Trail** dates from Medieval times. Pigs or ingots of iron would have to be transported by mule or packhorses, carrying up to 150 kgs each in panniers slung either side of their bodies. Teams of up to 100 animals may have made up a train that would have transported the metal down the valley from Blaenavon to Newport, from where it could then be transported by water.

**Capel Newydd** is the site of an old chapel, marked by a small simple iron cross. This chapel once served the valley around Blaenavon as the chapel of ease for Llanofor Church. At the time it was constructed,

possibly in the late 1500's, Blaenafon was only a small and scattered community. With the opening of the Ironworks, the chapel could not cope with the influx of worshippers and its services, being in Welsh, would not have been understood by the miners and ironworkers from England. In 1805 the Ironmasters built a new church, **St Peters**, in the centre of Blaenavon and the small chapel slowly lost its congregation and fell into disrepair. In 1860 it was abandoned and its stone was quietly robbed to repair other buildings in the area. At the end the last of its stone was used to build St Paul's church and its small alter table was installed in the new church. The site has not been completely abandoned as occasional open-air services are still held at the cross.

There is a legend that the church was built by 3 sisters who lived in Kenricks House at the Varteg. Another twist to this story is that the sisters had saved a lot of silver and decided to use this to have bells made for the church. The bells were cast in Cwmavon (one version says from the very silver the sisters had saved) and that once they were installed the bells gave out the sweetest sound that could be heard for miles around. But they were stolen and the grief-stricken benefactors died bereft of the sound of their beloved bells. There is a record that the church benefited from a grant from "Queen Anne's Bounty" in the mid 1760's, could this have started the legend? Another less fulsome legend is that the faeries danced in a ring at Capel Newydd and one day a Blaenavon man was caught up in the dance and disappeared, returning a long time after with no memory of where he had been.

# Blaenavon Community Wood to Whistle Road

A small town, once at the heart of the Industrial Revolution

- Start:** Blaenavon Community Wood, Llanover Road
- Finish:** Whistle Road, Blaenavon
- Parking:** Small parking area at the entrance to the Community Woods
- Approximate Distance:** 5.5 kms/3.4 miles
- Time Allowance:** 2 5-3 hours



The town of **Blaenavon** contains a wealth of history and interesting buildings.

You will pass an old schoolroom (Once Hawkins Corn Stores) which is constructed of original rubble stone with dressed stone quoins and slate roof. It was a later addition to Moriah Chapel on Broad Street.

**Blaenavon Evangelical Moriah Chapel** was opened in 1888 and is a Grade II Listed Building.

Along **Broad Street** are some well-preserved 19th century shops, Nos 15-19. They are Grade II Listed Buildings.



Blaenavon Ironworks

The **Horeb Baptist Chapel** opened in 1863 and is Listed Grade II. The chapel's design is unusual because it was built along the lines of an industrial engine house. Inside is particularly beautiful and worth a visit. Adjacent to Horeb Chapel is the War Memorial, built in 1931 in the art deco style, and the **Workmen's Hall and Institute**, built in 1894, both Listed Grade II. Interestingly, the Institute was built using subscriptions raised from the workmen themselves.

**St Peter's Church**, built by Samuel Hopkins and Thomas Hill in 1805 to replace the tiny Capel Newydd on the Llanover Road. The church has



Capel Newydd

many interesting features, including a unique cast iron font as well as iron topped "chest tombs" in

the graveyard. Next to the church is what was the school founded by Sarah Hopkins in 1816, one of the first examples of industrialists using their private wealth to provide their workers children with an education. During the chartist uprisings the school was used as a barracks for "Redcoats". The school now houses the **Blaenavon Heritage Centre**.





## Whistle Road – To Pentre Piod

A long energetic stretch up and over the Coity Mountain

<b>Start:</b>	Whistle Inn, Blaenavon
<b>Finish:</b>	Pentre Piod
<b>Parking:</b>	Whistle Road Car Park
<b>Approximate Distance:</b>	15 kms/9 miles
<b>Time Allowance:</b>	4-5 hours

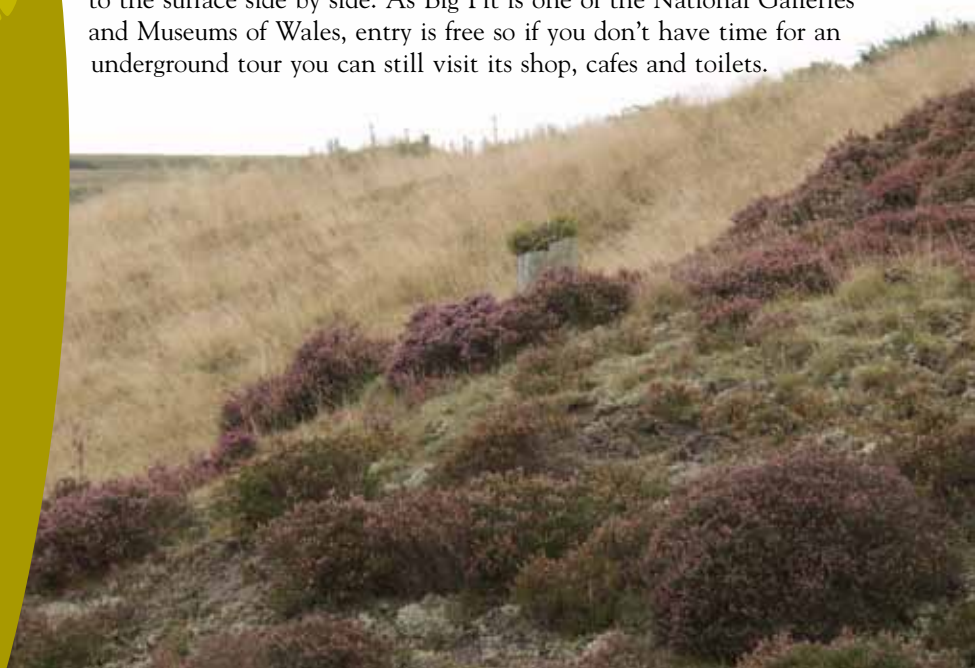


Difficulty of walk - 5 (strenuous)

The **Whistle Inn** has a fantastic collection of miner's lamps and also warranted a mention by Alexander Cordell. Above the Whistle Inn, on the slopes of the Coity Mountain and also over towards Waunavon, there were often brutal bare knuckle fights held away from the prying eyes of the authorities. These long and gruelling fights were a way for some to subsidise their often poor wages, the large "purses" for winning outweighing the risk of sustaining a handicap or death from a devastating blow.

**Waun Mary Gunter Farm** dates back to the 17th century. Mary was a member of one of the influential catholic landowning families of old Monmouthshire who continued to follow the catholic faith after the reformation. Secret services were held in a hidden chapel at Gunter Mansion in Abergavenny. A priest regularly hidden by the Gunters' was later executed at Usk in 1678.

You will pass by the **Big Pit**, which was so called because of its elliptical shaft sunk in the 1860's which allowed for two drams of coal to be lifted to the surface side by side. As Big Pit is one of the National Galleries and Museums of Wales, entry is free so if you don't have time for an underground tour you can still visit its shop, cafes and toilets.





Big Pit

The houses at **Forgeside** are built in “rows”. These are a fine example of purpose built workers houses, though now only rows C to E are left. The old forge building is a redbrick structure that was erected in the 1920’s and housed the machinery required for the forgeside complex to produce its own electricity. The **Forgeside Ironworks** were constructed in the early 1860’s to replace those in Garnddyrys and Blaenavon town as the land was “Freehold” so the Blaenavon Company did not need to pay ground rent to the Lords of Abergavenny. The site was also on more open ground, which at last allowed for expansion and it was also close to the “new” LNWR line that ran from Brynmawr, through Pontypool and onto Newport. The new site had blast and puddling furnaces,

rolling mills and a new tyre mill that produced wheels for rail stock. By the 1880’s, the works were hailed as the most modern and advanced ironworks in the world. By 1938, however, it had become so expensive to import raw materials, the works were closed. But the tradition of forging and rolling in the area does not end there as **Doncaster’s** took over the old tyre mill and press shops in the 1950’s and started forging and rolling alloy rings. Doncaster rings were used to build the jet engines that propelled the Concord aeroplanes. A sample of their rings has been incorporated into a sculpture and seating area at the Varteg Road end of the community. At the corner of C Row and Forge Road to your left and up a little drive, through the railings you can see **Coity House** (also known as White House), built in the 1860’s by the Blaenavon Iron and Steel Company for their works manager. Up until 1990 it was then used by Doncaster’s as a general administration building. Vacant now, it is a grade II listed building.

On the Coity Mountain is the “**Dog Stone**”, an Iron memorial to Carlo “A celebrated Setter, the property of H M Kennard Esq. of Crumlin Hall,



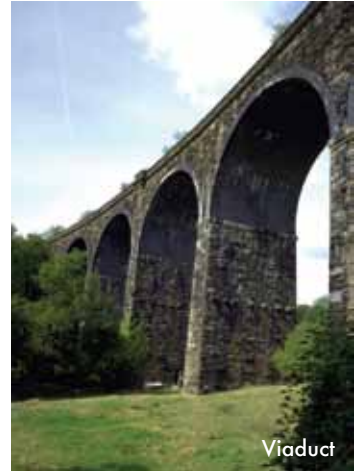
© Wales Tourist Board

accidentally shot August 12th 1864". Mr Kennard was on a shooting party organised by the Blaenavon Company when his beloved dog was killed. He ordered the dog be buried where it fell and had the memorial cast in the ironworks before it was hauled up the mountain by ponies and erected over the grave. Two other Kennard dogs, "Billy" and "Bones" have stone markers, found in the grounds of Ty Mawr, Blaenafon.

**Graig Ddu Farm** is now some stone ruins. This farm was also once a pub and allegedly a pack horse station. This may be a good place to stop if you have brought refreshments as it has good views of Abersychan and plenty of stone to sit on. (Abersychan comes from the welsh Aber=confluence and sych=dry. This is because the Cwmsychan brook would run dry in the summer, or even disappear underground to reappear further down the valley).

Look out across the valley at Abersychan below you and you will see an impressive **Viaduct** crossing a small valley. The engineer John Gardiner built this in the 1870's to carry the LNWR railway line that went from Brynmawr to Blaenafon linking with the GWR railway at Pontypool. (This is the line you crossed by the Whistle Inn). In 1912 the lines were opened to passenger services as well as for mineral trains, making it easier for miners and other workers to travel up and down the valley. This service ceased in 1941 and the last mineral train left Blaenavon's Big Pit in 1981. The track was taken up but the line is now part of a leisure and cycle route that extends the length of Torfaen.

Turn to look down the valley below to the site of the **Abersychan Iron Works** (also known as the British). These works opened in the 1820's and by 1830 the works were in full operation, consisting of six blast furnaces, puddling furnaces, forges, rolling mills and collieries supplying all the coal required by the works. Initially, the finished iron bars and rails would have been hauled by horse drawn trams down the valley to the canal at Pontnewynydd; latterly the Ebbw Vale Company installed a railroad that connected the works with the "new" mineral line. The introduction of steel rails in 1869 led to the collapse of many ironworks and in 1876, the Abersychan/British works were closed and dismantled.



## Pentre Piod Road – Pontypool Park and Leisure Centre

A short stretch along the cycle route and through the town of Pontypool

Start:	Pentre Piod Road
Finish:	Pontypool Park Leisure Centre
Parking:	Park on the highway
Approximate Distance:	4.2 kms/2.6 miles
Time Allowance:	1.5 hours



Difficulty of walk - 1 (very easy)

As well as the thriving Japanware trade, **Pontypool** had one of the earliest printing presses (the fourth installed in Wales). Established in 1740 it seemed to produce mostly ecclesiastical pamphlets. One of the first was an “answer of the Rev. Mr Whitfield to a letter of the Bishop of London” and was “A choice drop of honey from the Rock of Christ; or a short word of advice to saints and sinners now translated into welsh for the assistance of the Welsh. Pontypool. Printed in the new printing press in the year 1740”. The press only appears to have operated for two years, a press not appearing again until the mid nineteenth century.

“**Pont ap Howell**” is the bridge depicted in the George Street mural and legend has it that a supposed cleric called Howell ap Dafydd tussled with the devil during the construction of this bridge.



Pontypool Park

## 9: Pentre Piod Road to Pontypool Park

**Pontypool Park House**, once the residence of the Hanburys and is now St Alban's Comprehensive Roman Catholic School. The school was founded, originally as a girl's convent, by French nuns in 1914. It was extended and turned into a secondary school in the 1950's and became a comprehensive in the 1980's.



The grounds of **Pontypool Park** were once a deer park for the Squires of Pontypool (the Hanburys) which evolved over the years into parkland with gardens and follies. In 1920, the last squire of Pontypool, John Capel Hanbury, transferred ownership of the 158 acre park to the Urban District Council in a grand ceremony that saw the ceremonial unlocking of the park gates with a golden key, which proclaimed the park the 'Peoples Park'.

The first **ironworks** in Pontypool were founded in this park around the early 15th century. The Hanbury family took over the works in the 1570's and Pontymoile may be considered as the first place in Wales where ironworks of any importance were established. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, the manager of the works, Thomas Cooke, perfected (some reference say he invented) the art of making tin plates, a process where iron was rolled into thin sheets, made into cylinders and then plated in tin.

You may have noticed that most of Pontypool is crammed onto the very steep slopes of the valley. This is because the Hanburys' purchased the more level areas of around Pontymoile which they later used to build the family home and to lay out their park and gardens, leaving only the narrow strip of land on one side of the Afon Llywd and the steep hillsides for the town to expand.



Pontypool Park

# Torfaen Trail

## Figure of 8 Walk

This 35 mile route takes in the whole of Torfaen, from Cwmbran in the south, through Pontypool to Blaenavon in the north. It has been broken down into nine linear sections, which vary in distance from 2 miles to 9 miles. Walkers of all ages and abilities will find something to suit them, from an enjoyable stroll to the full 35 mile challenge!

This scenic walk takes in ancient woodlands; forestry; country lanes and open mountain top.

The main starting point for this trail is the car park at Pontypool Leisure Centre. Here there is plenty of parking, a cafe and toilets.



Difficulty of walks - 1 to 5 out of 5 (very easy to strenuous)

Os hoffech gopi o'r ffurflen yn Gymroeg, cysylltwch a'r Gwasanaethau Cefn Gwlad Torfaen