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Stay on the forestry road until you reach the open area with curved stone walls (4. above). At this point you can either follow the same tramway footpath that you used to come up the valley or go straight on down the forestry road until you reach a bridleway dropping down the valley side on your right.

Links: Part way down the forest road there is a bridleway on your left hand side which leads up to Braich-y-cymmer Farm and then over to Pontycymmer.

Follow the forestry track which leads back along the opposite side of the valley. Look out for another old sheepfold in the woods to the east of this track. When you reach a larger forestry road turn right at the stone

Links: Approximately 800m to the north of the gorge there is a public footpath which is more accessible. The alternative way to reach this path is to follow the bridleway at Nant Cwm-du up on to the forestry road and then follow the ridge north.

for picking insects out from between pine needles. You may see Buzzards or Ravens flying high overhead and even the rarer Goshawk.

8 **Gorge:** It is an undisturbed area which has become a haven for wildlife and walkers are discouraged from accessing the gorge. Look out for those birds that enjoy living in conifer forests – the crossbill has specially adapted beak to help remove seeds from cones while the Goldcrest's thin beak is ideally suited

Turn right and walk gradually down hill to the resting place at the south end of the gorge. Follow the path down to the water course and cross at the stepping stones.

7 **Viewpoint:** the steep climb to the highest point on the walk gives fine views across this part of the valley. You can see the curved walls of a resting place/picnic stop down by the stream. Above this and to the left is a steep rock face partially obscured by fallen trees, this is the south end of the gorge. Just below the rock face the remnants of a sheepfold can be seen, cleverly sited in a sheltered spot. Before the conifers were planted the upper stretches of the valley were farmed and there were a number of these sheepfolds (small walled enclosures) in the valley.

Return to the main path and continue for another 250m before the path becomes steeper. Follow this steep section up to where it meets an overgrown path on the left.

6 **Waterfall:** As you approach the stream you will see that the conifers have been felled. The young trees which have been planted are native broadleaved species which will encourage more wildlife and improve the appearance of the forest.

CHOICE! After approximately 800m there is a waymarker on the right hand side pointing down a path which leads to a viewing point for one of the waterfalls on the Garw Fechan – take this path to have a closer look at the stream.

are Sitka Spruce, Lodgepole Pine

5 **Forestry:** The Forestry Commission now National Resources Wales was set up by the government in 1919 to ensure the country had a strategic reserve of timber following the problems encountered during the First World War when, Britain had difficulties meeting the wartime demands for timber. The Garw Fechan planting did not start to the late 1940s with much of

LINKS: The route up the valley side at this point is a bridleway and following this route will take you up on to the forestry road which then follows the high ground between the Garw Fechan and the Llynfi Valley. This route gives access to longer walks along the ridges.

When you come to a path junction bear right along forestry track which follows the contour along the valley side. Continue along the permissive path on the forestry track through an area of Scots Pine trees.

Continue up the hill for 600m to the first hairpin bend in the forestry road. Leave the main road and cross an open area with a bank to your left and a steep stream valley (Nant Cwm-du) to your right.

1850/1950, by A.H. Williams

Except from 'A Short History of the Garw Valley –

After the coal had been cut it was loaded into shallow flat bottom boats which were towed out to the main tunnel. These boats carried approximately thirty hundred weights which was quite a load in those days, usually the coal had to be carried in "curling boxes" or sacks which at the most could only be used for one hundred weights. When the distance from the canal to the coalface became too great for easy working or safety reasons, the old channel was drained and filled in and a new one was cut near the face. I have mentioned this method because it is unique in my experience throughout the Welsh coalfield.

Drainage of surplus water was often a problem in mines and at the Garwfechan Colliery, which was quite a big level the water was used in a very ingenious way to help in the transport of the coal. When the coalface had been opened up on either side of the main tunnel it measured about two hundred yards in a straight line, at right angles to the main roadway. A channel about one yard wide and eighteen inches deep was cut in the bed rock, along the length of the face. In the first instance this channel was about four feet away from the face of the coal to enable the colliers to cut it.

4 **Garwfechan Colliery:** This open space is the site of Garwfechan Colliery. It appears to have been short-lived, shown on the 1900 OS edition but as disused by 1921. The valley sides were peppered with coal levels and air shafts, all feeding coal to the head of the tramway in this open area. This area was later used as a public car park within the forest – giving access to a picnic area and to walk along the forest tracks and rights of way. The low walls are good habitat for native reptiles including lizards.

When you reach a curved stone wall in a more open area follow the path along the streamside to the point where it crosses a forestry road. Turn left on to the forestry road and cross the bridge over the Garw Fechan.

3 **The Swimming Pond:** In the 1950s and 60s an ice cream van used to follow this track to get to a swimming pond which was built on the Garw Fechan in the area to your left. The place was full of people on a hot summer's day. The pond's dam was wide enough for a horse and cart and families travelled from neighbouring valleys to picnic, swim and pick bilberries. The pond has since been removed.

Advice and Information

The going can be steep and may be wet and slippery in places with some stiles to climb. Remember to wear suitable clothes and good shoes/boots and take food and drink with you and be prepared to get fit! Always follow the Countryside Code. When you are walking on minor roads keep to the right and make use of verges whenever you can.

It should be easy to follow the route using the map and instructions inside this leaflet. When walking the route try and look out for the Walk logo that will be situated on stiles, gates and posts along the route. Directional way marks with arrows will assist you as to which direction to walk in once you are on a public right of way. We also recommend you refer to the OS Explorer Map 166 Rhondda and Merthyr Tydfil.

For further information about this walk, to pass on your comments and suggestions or to report any practical problems on any of the paths please contact the Rights of Way Section, Communities Directorate, Civic Offices, Bridgend County Borough Council, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB (Telephone **01656 642553** or **01656 642593**) or by e-mail at **rightsofway@bridgend.gov.uk**



Last coal train out of the Garw valley

Countryside Code

RESPECT PROTECT ENJOY

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

Follow the Countryside Code wherever you go. You will get the best out of the countryside and help to maintain it now and for the future.



Top of Garw Fechan looking south

Public Transport

For further information on bus times and service numbers telephone Bridgend County Borough Council's, Public Transport Section on **01656 642559** or the Traveline on **0871 200 22 33** **www.traveline.info**

Car Parking

There is parking provision at the following:

- Limited on street parking in Pont-y-Rhyl



Visitor Information

For advice on where to stay, places to eat and things to do: please contact **01656 815338** email **touristinformation@bridgend.gov.uk** or alternatively visit **www.bridgendbites.com**

For further general information about the Bridgend area you can visit **www.bridgend.gov.uk**

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following for helping to either prepare the walk and text.

- Garw Heritage Society, particularly: A Short History of the Garw Valley – 1850/1950 by A.H. Williams – August 1950
- Gordon Farmer
- Gerald Jarvis
- Cover photo supplied by John Finch - ©John Finch

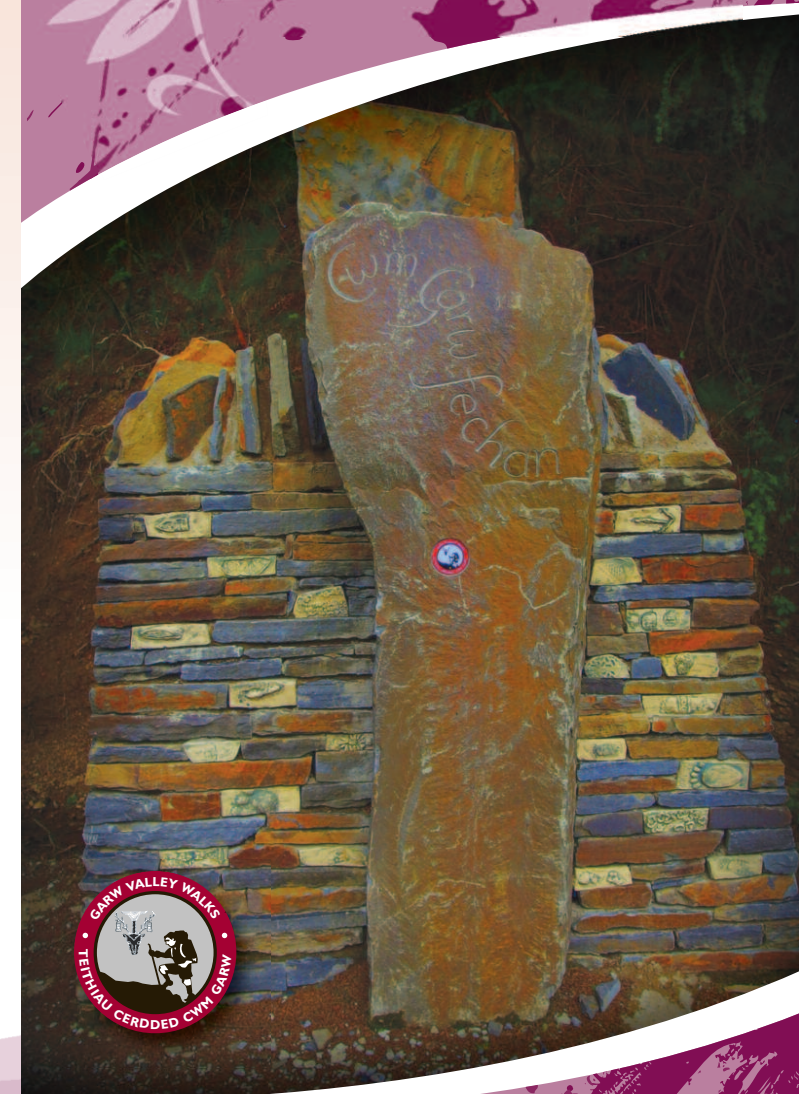


The Valleys
Heart and Soul of Wales



Y Cymoedd
Calon ac Enaid Cymru

Garw Valley Walk 4



Up to 6 km (3 1/4 miles)

Garw Valley Walk 4

Up to 6 km (3¼ miles)
2 to 2½ Hours

This leaflet describes a circular walk starting and ending at the Braich-y-cymmer in Pont-y-rhyl. The walk leads you northwest through Cwm Garw Fechan, a tributary of the Garw river. It offers a sheltered and shorter route compared to some other Garw Valley Walks and will suit a wide range of abilities. There are good links to other rights of way for those who wish to explore further and walk up on to the surrounding hills. The whole route is approximately 6 kms taking about 2 hours to complete, allow a bit more time if you wish to rest and take in the views of the valley. The route uses a combination of public footpaths, bridleways, maintainable highway and permissive paths along forest roads. Most of the route is located on land managed by Forestry Commission Wales.

For convenience the directions below are written with the Braich-y-cymmer as the starting point. You could, however, equally start from any point along the route, and if traveling the opposite way, simply reverse the directions.

The Garw Valley is a former coal-mining community nestled between the hillsides of the Ogmore & Llynfi Valleys. Cwm Garw Fechan is a separate and distinct valley between the Garw and Llynfi Valleys and joins the Garw River at Pont-y-rhyl. All of these valleys comprise the highland area of Bridgend County Borough and rise steeply to the north.

Cwm Garw Fechan's woodlands are a tranquil area with an abundance of wildlife. The conifers have attracted certain birds which have adapted especially to make the most of these trees. These include the Crossbill, Goldcrest, Red Poll and Goshawk. Salmon, Trout and Sewin breed in the stream, Adders have been seen on open ground and dragonflies are attracted to small ponds in the woodland.

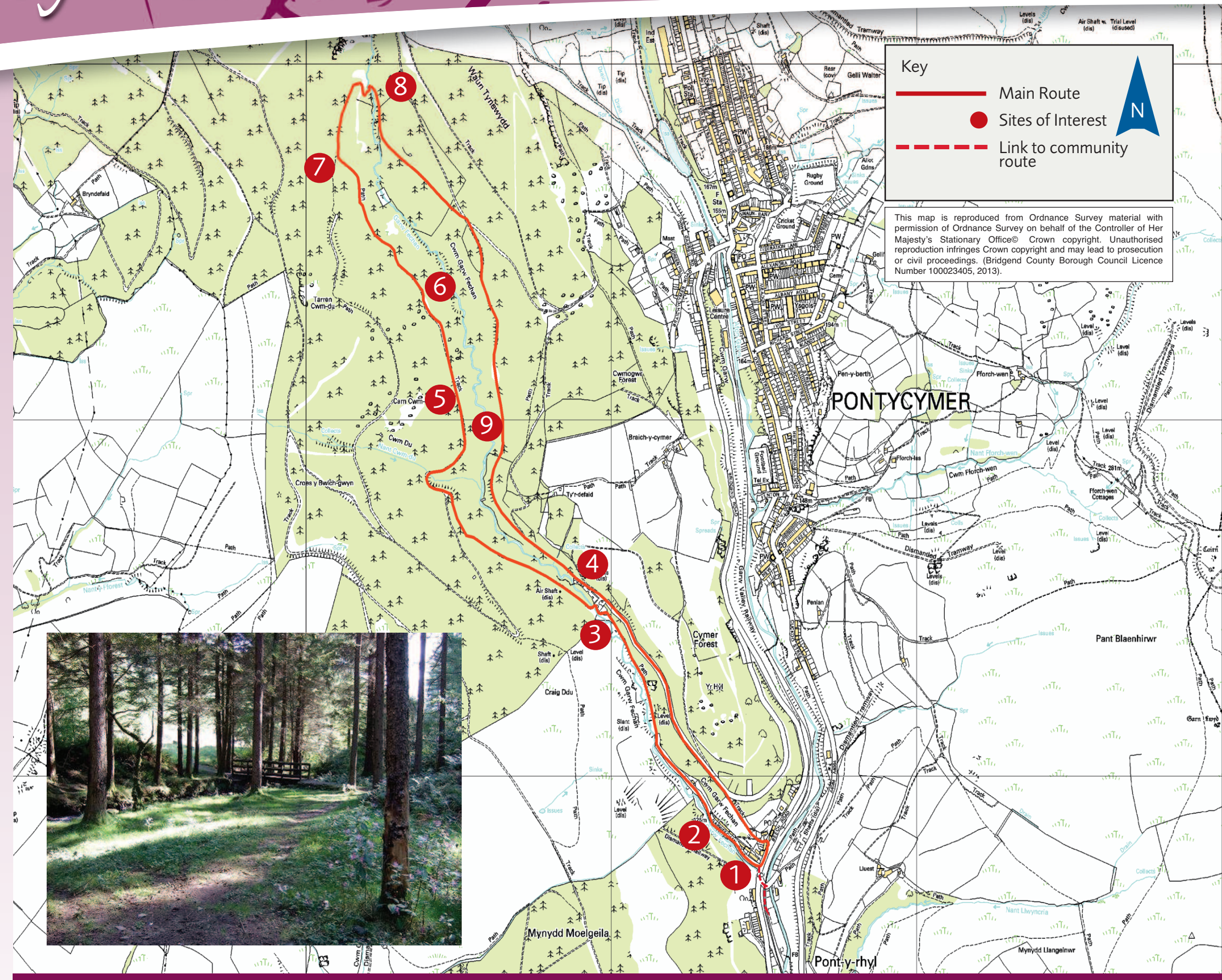
Waymakers & Geology:

The route of Garw Valley Walk 4 is marked with stone waymarkers which are made up of pairs of upright stones with stone walling 'flowing' through the gap between the stones. These waymarkers represent the rocky gorge to be found further upstream in Cwm Garw Fechan, and the waterfalls which are a feature of the river. You will see the Walk logo and arrows showing the route on each of the waymarkers.

The artwork to be seen on the waymarkers was produced by school children in 2012 from Ffaldau Primary School in Pontcymmer and Tynyrheol Primary School in Llangeinor. The public artist, Nigel Talbot, worked with the school children and explored ideas around the flora and fauna of the area and fossils of the future.



Stone waymarker



DIRECTIONS:

From the Braich-y-cymmer walk northwest up Garw Fechan Road which is to the left hand side of the pub

1 Pont-Y-Rhyl. The village of Pont-y-rhyl expanded at the end of the 19th Century when deep coal mines were sunk in the valley. The nearest deep mine was Lluest Colliery on the opposite side of the Garw Valley. There was a school in the village, church and chapel, shops and a railway station.

At this time the Braich-y-cymmer pub was known as the Garw Junction Hotel because of its proximity to the railway station. These railway lines were used to transport coal rather than passengers and miners would walk miles both above and below ground to reach the coal face. It was an offence, and extremely dangerous, to try and hitch a lift on the coal trains.

LINKS:

There is a community route following the line of an old railway between Bryngarw Country Park and Blaengarw which can be accessed from Pont-y-rhyl by crossing the road outside the Braich-y-cymmer, turning right over the river bridge and then left down a lane.

2 Garw Fechan Road. The first miners came from the neighbouring valleys to sink trial Levels in the sides of the mountain. These Levels looked like rabbit holes in the mountain side each with its "droppings" of slag and rock at the entrance. The steep slopes on your left are partially covered in a thin layer of colliery spoil from such levels.

It is difficult for plants to grow on the steep spoil but one which has established is the Rhododendron, an evergreen and invasive species introduced to Britain around 1763 as a garden plant. Two more alien species that can be seen along the streamside are Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. All 3 of these plants are aggressive colonisers which reduce the biodiversity of an area by out-competing other plants and animals.



Forestry track

Garw Fechan footbridge



Follow this road past the end of the terraced row of houses and continue on the public footpath through the entrance gate to No 18 Garw Fechan Road. There is a pedestrian gate for walkers to use if the main gate is shut. The path follows the route of an old tramway to Garw Fechan Colliery.

Follow the track past the house and outbuildings, keeping the stream on your left. When you come to a bridge over the Garw Fechan, approximately 150m after the house, do not cross but stay on the same track. Go through the kissing gate which is flanked by stone walls.