

Pontypool to Blaenavon Railway Path



The Route

Distance: 9 miles/14.5 km

Terrain: mixed terrain with a gentle ascent

Maps: NN4B Celtic Trail East map and RB61 Celtic Trail Official Guide - both £6.99 from Sustrans

OS maps: Landranger 161/171, Explorer OL13/152

Family-friendly ride

Discover the industrial heritage of south Wales with this stunning traffic-free cycle route from Pontypool through Abersychan to Blaenavon.

If you're coming from Pontypool train station turn right onto a quiet road, before turning left onto the main road for about 500 metres. Take a left turn onto National Route 49 alongside the canal, looking out for the left turn off onto National Route 492.

Whilst on the canal path, you can make a lovely lunch stop at the barge café at Pontymoile Basin, or enjoy a picnic on the grass with views of Junction toll house, a low stone bridge and moored canal boats. Both make perfect pit stops to build up your energy for the ride ahead.

The path starts to ascend as it heads north from Pontypool through Abersychan to Blaenavon, soon entering a long stretch of lovely broadleaf woodland, with dramatic views to the east across the valley of Afon

Llwyd. You'll see plenty of wildlife along the way; look out for tiny ponies and flocks of sheep huddled up to the fences. With a gentle climb of over 650 feet (200 metres) to Blaenavon it's obvious that the trip back down to Pontypool will be an easier ride!

If you catch a glimpse of steam in the distance, you're nearing

Blaenavon's heritage railway. The line was closed to passengers in 1941, though the section from Blaenavon to Pontypool was used for transporting coal from Big Pit and other local mines until 1980. Take a break, lock up your bike and travel back in time on one of their original steam locomotives.

The route ends brilliantly at Big Pit National Coal Museum. This magnificent mining museum is well worth the trip. Original features, like the Pithead Baths, bring life at the coalface vividly into focus. Go 300 feet underground with a real miner and see what life was like for the thousands of men (and pit ponies) who worked there.

From here you can also detour into Blaenavon, now a World Heritage Site, which played a significant part in the Industrial Revolution. The town became the home of mine owners and workers at the ironworks and colliery when first established. Many of the schools, shops and chapels built in those early days are still standing today. The town contains 17 listed buildings, including Blaenavon ironworks, one of the best

preserved examples of 18th-century ironworks in Western Europe. Built in 1788, the ironworks reached their zenith in the 1820s.

Journey back the way you came, but this time, downhill!

Find out more about this and many other traffic-free routes throughout Wales:
www.routes2ride.org.uk/wales

Or why not buy the Sustrans map of the area at: www.sustransshop.co.uk

