

**CYCLING LÔN LAS CYMRU**



#### **About the Author**

After years of road running and mountaineering had wreaked havoc with his knees, Richard Barrett returned to long-distance cycling in his fifties when he bought himself a classic British-made touring bike. Now in his sixties, he rides a hand-made bike from one of the great British frame makers that have appeared in recent years. Combined with walking, cycling allows him to continue his love affair with the more mountainous parts of the UK which he first visited as a teenager.

He spent his career in marketing in a number of multinational organisations in the UK and abroad, but he now lives in West Cheshire and rides two or three times a week with groups on both sides of the border.

#### **Other Cicerone guides by the author**

*Cycling in the Hebrides*

*Cycling in the Lake District*

*The Hebridean Way*

*Walking on Harris and Lewis*

## **CYCLING LÔN LAS CYMRU**

**250 MILES THROUGH THE HEART OF WALES  
ON TRAFFIC-FREE PATHS AND QUIET ROADS**

**by Richard Barrett**

**CICERONE**

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,  
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL  
[www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk)

© Richard Barrett 2018  
First edition 2018  
ISBN: 978 1 85284 987 0

Printed in China on behalf of Latitude Press Ltd.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.



Route mapping by Lovell Johns [www.lovelljohns.com](http://www.lovelljohns.com)

© Crown copyright 2018 OS PU100012932.

NASA relief data courtesy of ESRI

### Dedication

*This book is dedicated to those stalwarts who lobby for better facilities for cyclists and give up their time to maintain Sustrans routes in their neighbourhood.*

### Acknowledgements

My thanks to Jonathan and Joe Williams of Cicerone for commissioning this book and in so doing introducing me to wonderful bits of the country I had never previously visited. I should also like to thank Sian, Verity, Stephanie and the production team, who once again made the process such a pleasure.

### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/987/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/987/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

**Register your book:** To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk).

## CONTENTS

Map key . . . . .	6
Route summary table . . . . .	7
Overview map . . . . .	8–9
Ride planner from Cardiff . . . . .	10
Ride planner from Chepstow . . . . .	11
Suggested schedule summary from Cardiff . . . . .	12
Suggested schedule summary from Chepstow . . . . .	13

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	15
Why Lôn Las Cymru? . . . . .	17
How tough is it? . . . . .	18
Which direction to ride? . . . . .	18
Selecting a schedule . . . . .	18
Getting there . . . . .	19
First and last nights . . . . .	23
When to ride . . . . .	24
Accommodation . . . . .	24
Baggage transfer . . . . .	24
What to take . . . . .	25
Preparing your bike . . . . .	25
Eating . . . . .	27
Phones and Wi-Fi . . . . .	28
Emergencies . . . . .	29
Waymarking . . . . .	29
Maps . . . . .	29
Using this guide . . . . .	29

<b>LÔN LAS CYMRU</b> . . . . .	31
Stage 1 Cardiff to Glasbury . . . . .	32
Stage 1a Chepstow to Glasbury . . . . .	49
Stage 2 Glasbury to Llanidloes . . . . .	64
Stage 3 Llanidloes to Dolgellau . . . . .	74
Stage 4 Dolgellau to Caernarfon . . . . .	84
Stage 5 Caernarfon to Holyhead . . . . .	103

Front cover: Parked up at my preferred ending – South Stack Lighthouse (Stage 5)

<b>Appendix A</b>	Cycle shops . . . . .	114
<b>Appendix B</b>	Accommodation. . . . .	116
<b>Appendix C</b>	Useful contacts. . . . .	119
<b>Appendix D</b>	What to take. . . . .	121
<b>Appendix E</b>	Welsh words and pronunciation. . . . .	122
<b>Appendix F</b>	Selected additional reading . . . . .	124

### Symbols used on route maps

	route		hostel
	alternative route		bike shop
	start point		railway station
	finish point		Tourist Information Centre
	alternative start point		castle or fort
	alternative finish point		priory
	route direction		point of interest
	steep ascent or descent		distance marker in miles
	very steep ascent or descent		

### GPX files

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/987/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/987/GPX).

Route maps are at a scale of 1:200,000. All other maps, including town maps, vary. Please refer to the scale on the map.

## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Stage	Start	End	Distance (miles/km)	Ascent (m)	Time (hrs at 10mph/ 16kph + 400m/hr)	Page
1	Cardiff	Glasbury	70/112	1200	10–11	32
1a (Alt start)	Chepstow	Glasbury	57/91	1500	9–10	49
2	Glasbury	Llanidloes	48/77	1000	7–8	64
3	Llanidloes	Dolgellau	39/62	1200	7–8	74
4	Dolgellau	Caernarfon	60/96	1100	9–10	84
5	Caernarfon	Holyhead	38/61	500	5–6	103
<b>Total</b>			<b>255/408</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>38–43</b>	
<b>Total (Alt start)</b>			<b>242/387</b>	<b>5300</b>	<b>37–42</b>	

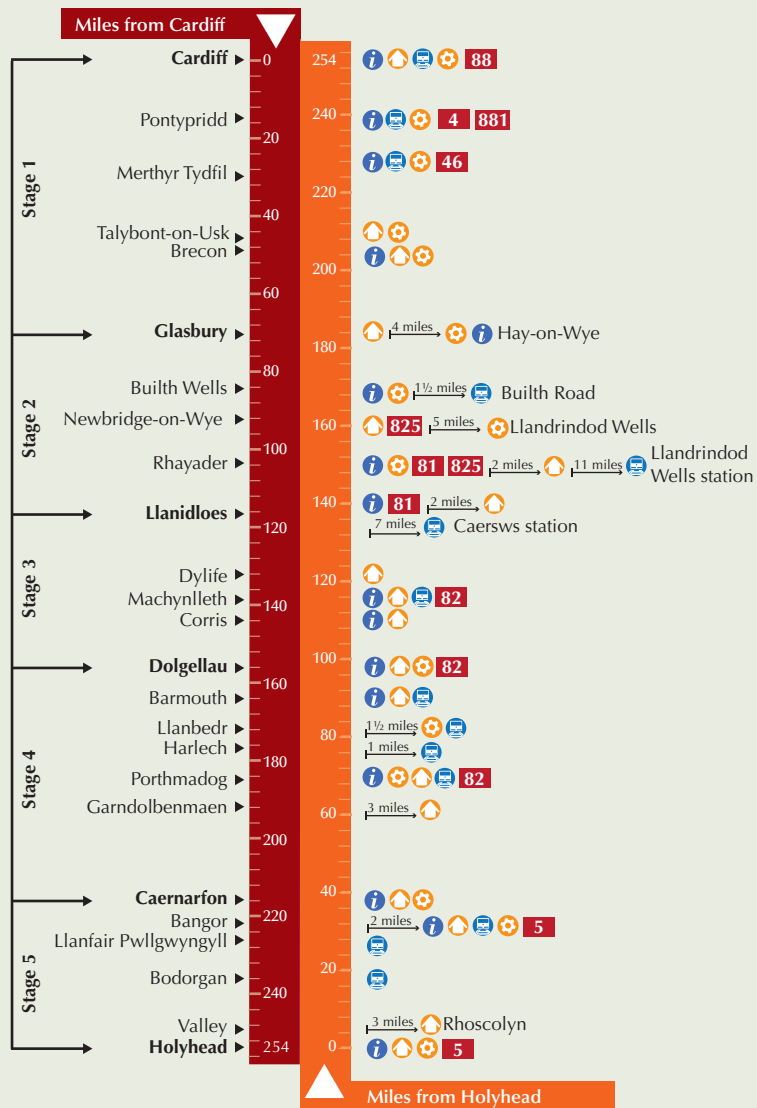
*The Brecon Beacons from the north (Stage 1)*





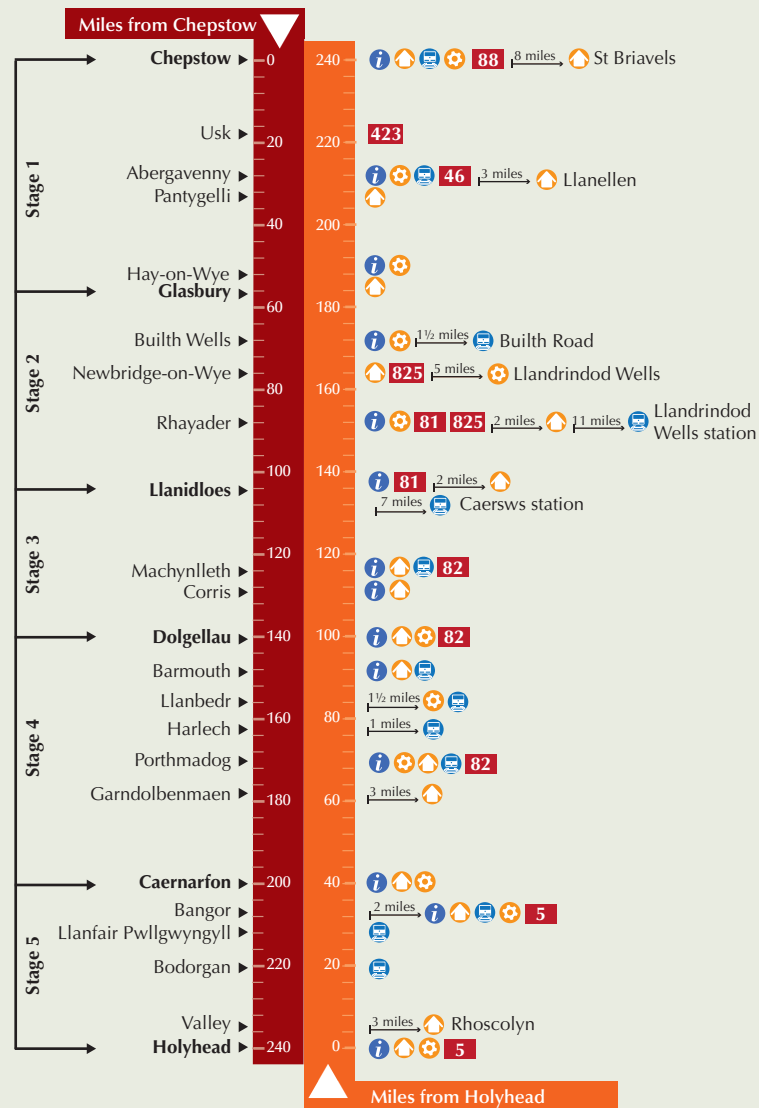


## Ride planner from Cardiff



Tourist information Hostel Rail station Cycle shop 88 NCR link

## Ride planner from Chepstow



Tourist information Hostel Rail station Cycle shop 88 NCR link

## Suggested schedule summary from Cardiff

Miles from Cardiff	4 DAYS	5 DAYS	6 DAYS	7 DAYS
<b>Cardiff</b> ▶ 0				
Pontypridd ▶ 20				
Merthyr Tydfil ▶ 40	Cardiff to Glasbury 70 miles 10–11hr 1200m ascent	Cardiff to Glasbury 70 miles 10–11hr 1200m ascent	Cardiff to Talybon-on-Usk 49 miles 6–7hr 800m ascent	Cardiff to Talybon-on-Usk 49 miles 6–7hr 800m ascent
Talybon-on-Usk Brecon ▶ 60			Talybon on Usk to Newbridge-on-Wye	Talybon on Usk to Builth Wells
<b>Glasbury</b> ▶ 80			43 miles 6–7hr 700m ascent	37 miles 5–6hr 700m ascent
Builth Wells ▶ 100	Glasbury to Llandiloes 48 miles 7–8hr 1000m ascent	Glasbury to Llandiloes 48 miles 7–8hr 1000m ascent		Builth Wells to Llandiloes 31 miles 5–6hr 800m ascent
Newbridge-on-Wye ▶ 120			Newbridge-on-Wye to Machynlleth 47 miles 7–8hr 1200m ascent	Llandiloes to Dolgellau 39 miles 7–8hr 1200m ascent
Rhayader ▶ 140	Llandiloes to Harlech 59 miles 10–11hr 1600m ascent	Llandiloes to Dolgellau 39 miles 7–8hr 1200m ascent	Machynlleth to Harlech 37 miles 6–7hr 1100m ascent	Dolgellau to Porthmadog 33 miles 5–6hr 800m ascent
<b>Dolgellau</b> ▶ 160			Harlech to Caernarfon 41 miles 6–7hr 900m ascent	Portmadog to Caernarfon 28 miles 3–4hr 400m ascent
Barmouth ▶ 180		Dolgellau to Caernarfon 60 miles 9–10hr 1300m ascent		
Llanbedr Harlech ▶ 200				
Porthmadog ▶ 220				
Garndolbenmaen ▶ 240				
<b>Caernarfon</b> ▶ 254	Harlech to Holyhead 78 miles 11–12hr 1400m ascent	Caernarfon to Holyhead 38 miles 5–6hr 500m ascent	Caernarfon to Holyhead 38 miles 5–6hr 500m ascent	Caernarfon to Holyhead 38 miles 5–6hr 500m ascent
Bangor ▶				
Llanfair Pwllgwyngyll ▶				
Bodorgan ▶				
Valley ▶				
<b>Holyhead</b> ▶				

## Suggested schedule summary from Chepstow

Miles from Chepstow	4 DAYS	5 DAYS	6 DAYS	7 DAYS
<b>Chepstow</b> ▶ 0				
Usk ▶ 20				
Abergavenny ▶ 40	Chepstow to Glasbury 57 miles 9–10hr 1500m ascent	Chepstow to Glasbury 57 miles 9–10hr 1500m ascent	Chepstow to Hay-on-Wye 52 miles 8–9hr 1400m ascent	Chepstow to Abergavenny 30 miles 5–6hr 800m ascent
Pantgelli ▶ 60				Abergavenny to Newbridge-on-Wye
Hay-on-Wye ▶ 80			Hay-on-Wye to Rhayader 38 miles 6–7hr 800m ascent	50 miles 7–8hr 1100m ascent
<b>Glasbury</b> ▶ 100				
Builth Wells ▶ 120	Glasbury to Machynlleth 71 miles 11–12hr 1600m ascent	Glasbury to Llandiloes 48 miles 7–8hr 1000m ascent		Newbridge-on-Wye to Llandiloes 24 miles 4–5hr 700m ascent
Newbridge-on-Wye ▶ 140		Llandiloes to Dolgellau 39 miles 7–8hr 1200m ascent	Rhayader to Corris 44 miles 7–8hr 1100m ascent	Llandiloes to Dolgellau 39 miles 7–8hr 1200m ascent
Rhayader ▶ 160				
<b>Llandiloes</b> ▶ 180				
Machynlleth ▶ 200				
Corris ▶ 220				
<b>Dolgellau</b> ▶ 240				
Barmouth ▶ 254				
Llanbedr ▶				
Harlech ▶				
Porthmadog ▶				
Garndolbenmaen ▶				
<b>Caernarfon</b> ▶				
Bangor ▶				
Llanfair Pwllgwyngyll ▶				
Bodorgan ▶				
Valley ▶				
<b>Holyhead</b> ▶				





Ornate gate in Llansantffraed-Cwmdeuddwr at the start of the Elan Valley cycleway which is briefly shared by Lôn Las Cymru (Stage 2)

## INTRODUCTION



Looking north along Talybont Reservoir (Stage 1)

Lôn Las Cymru runs from Cardiff or Chepstow to Holyhead, passing through the heart of Wales. Translating loosely as Wales' Green Lane, it is the preeminent cycle route in Wales, passing through lush countryside, and following quiet lanes and former railway lines.

The route from Cardiff is just over 250 miles (400km) or, from the alternative start in Chepstow, it is just over 240 miles (390km). It passes through the Brecon Beacons National Park and Snowdonia National Park and over the Black Mountains, the Brecon Beacons, and the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales taking in some of the most stunning and diverse landscapes in the British Isles.

Crossing the mountains requires a good level of fitness but should not trouble the average rider on an average bike as the gradients are mostly gentle. The panoramic views from the top of the Gospel Pass, Bryn Y Fedwen and Moel Goedog make the climbs worth the effort too. The scenery on the flatter sections is equally stunning, especially up Wye Valley and along the quiet lanes on Anglesey.

Travelling through such wonderful countryside by bike is hugely satisfying both for those who want to cover the miles quickly and those preferring a more leisurely pace to watch wildlife and explore attractions along the way. There are plenty of pretty villages and interesting towns where you can

## STAGE 1

### Cardiff to Glasbury

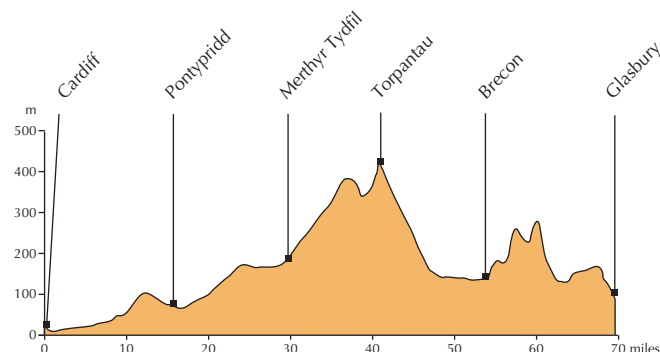
<b>Start</b>	Sustrans marker post in front of the Wales Millennium Centre (ST 192 746)
<b>Finish</b>	Glasbury Bridge (SO 180 393)
<b>Distance</b>	70 miles (112km)
<b>Ascent</b>	1200m
<b>Time</b>	10–11hrs
<b>OS maps</b>	OS Landranger 160, 161, 170 and 171
<b>Refreshments</b>	Until Merthyr Tydfil you are never far from a shop or café although you will probably need to leave the route to find one. After that there is 20 miles with nothing near the route until you get near to Brecon and then another 9 miles with nothing until you get to Talgarth.
<b>Accommodation</b>	Plenty of accommodation of all types in Cardiff, Brecon and Glasbury.

This stage goes through the capital and up the Taff Valley following the largely traffic-free Taff Trail before climbing through the gap between the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains. There is a long easy descent into Brecon followed by a few miles of undulating hills before dropping down to meet the River Wye at Glasbury.

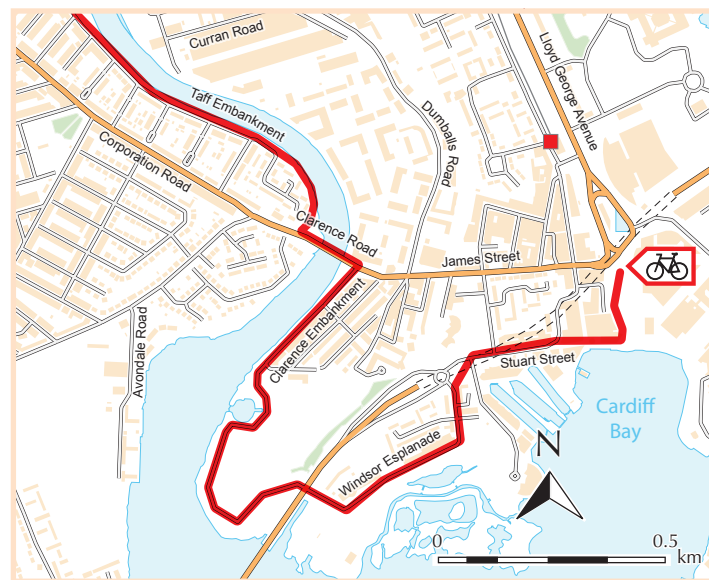
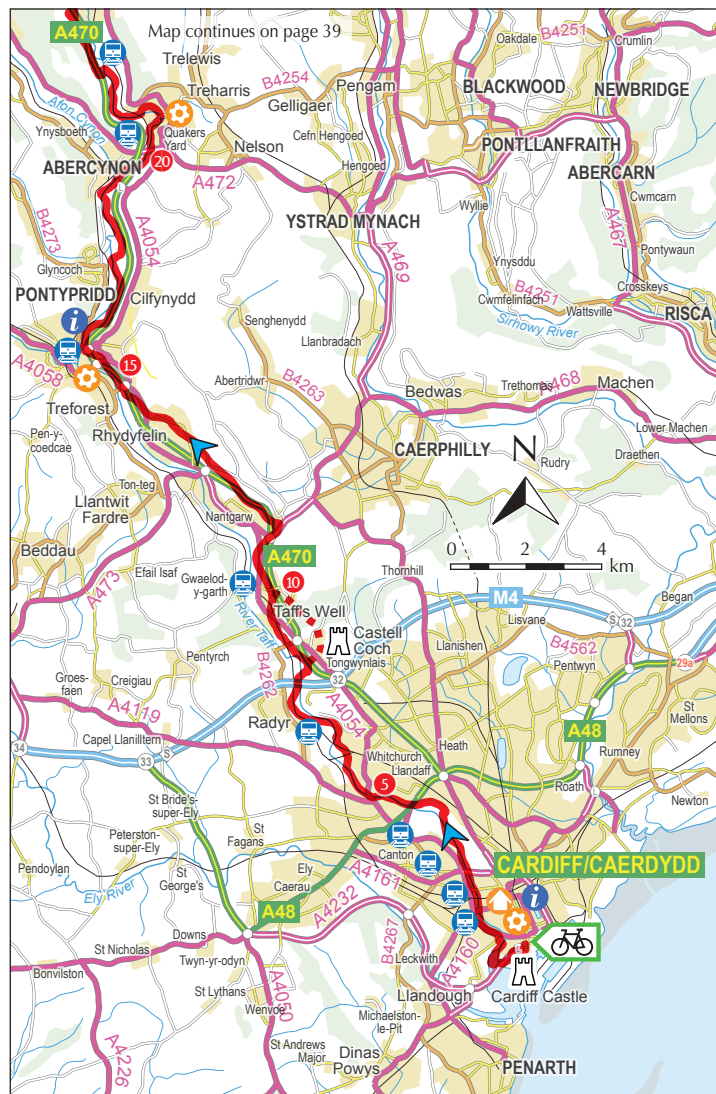
The impressive **Wales Millennium Centre** (Canolfan Mileniwm Cymru), designed to express ‘Welshness’, incorporates materials that have played an important role in the history of Wales, such as slate, copper and steel. It is clad in slate from various quarries including those at Corris near the route of Lôn Las Cymru. The centre’s main feature, the bronze coloured dome, is steel treated with an oxide of copper – both metals that were once economically important to South Wales. If you venture inside the building you can see how the principal internal spaces make extensive use of native hardwoods from renewable woodland in Mid Wales through which we will be riding.

Inscribed across the front of the dome are two poetic lines by the Welsh poet Gwyneth Lewis, one in Welsh and one in English. The one in Welsh reads ‘Creu gwir fel gwyr o ffwrnais awen’ (Creating truth like glass from inspiration’s furnace) and was inspired in part by the furnaces from Wales’s industrial heritage. The one in English reads ‘In these stones horizons sing’ and reflects both the traditional importance of the sea for exporting Welsh goods and the role of the building being a space for celebrating the very best of Welsh and other cultures.

*The impressive steel and copper front of the Wales Millennium Centre*







► From the Sustrans marker post, head across Mermaid Quay to the seafront and follow the shared-use path along Stuart Street, Dudley Street, Windsor Terrace, Windsor Esplanade and through the tunnel under the A4232 into Hamadryad Park. Ride through the park and

Although the Taff Trail follows the same route as National Cycle Route 8 until Brecon, both appear to have their own start points albeit only a few metres apart.



The sustrans marker post in Roald Dahl Plaz, Cardiff Bay

## THE SCOTTISH CONNECTION

*Medieval re-enactment in front of the original Norman keep inside Cardiff Castle*

Having left Cardiff where being Welsh is celebrated in the arts, sport and everyday life, it's perhaps safe to suggest that none of this would have happened without one particular Scottish family that the Welsh themselves still hold dear to their hearts. For centuries, the Earls of Bute had lived quietly on the island in the Firth of Clyde from which they took their title. All that changed in 1766 when the 4th Earl, and 1st Marquess, married the Honourable Charlotte Jane Windsor, who bought Cardiff Castle and large ancestral estates in South Wales into the family.

In 1801, Cardiff had population of 1870 making it only the twenty-fifth largest town in Wales, well behind Merthyr Tydfil and Swansea. John Crichton-Stuart (1793–1848), the 2nd Marquess of Bute, soon changed its fortunes when he exploited his mineral reserves and developed the docks and transport connections. Cardiff soon became the main port for exports of coal and iron from the Valleys and the city's population grew at a rate of nearly 80 per cent per decade between 1840 and 1870. The 2nd Marquess's investments paid off handsomely and he would later be known as 'the creator of modern Cardiff'. By the 1881 census, Cardiff had become the largest town in Wales. It became a city in 1905 and the capital in 1955.

His son, the 3rd Marquess of Bute (1847–1900), gained an inheritance that reportedly made him the richest man in the world. During his relatively

short life he used his wealth to pursue his passions, which included medievalism and architecture, renovating and expanding both Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch, which are two of the finest examples of the late Victorian era Gothic Revival. The Marquess's patronage was also extensive and there is a park and many streets named after the family showing just how highly esteemed the name Bute is in the city.

along Clarence Embankment. Keep to the shared-use path and turn left along Clarence Road, crossing the River Taff for the first time. Once over the bridge, cross at the pedestrian crossing and follow Taff Embankment, Taff's Mead Embankment, Fitzhamon Embankment and Coldstream Embankment for 2 miles using pelican crossings to cross main roads.

The busy city centre with its famous landmarks such as Cardiff Arms Park and Cardiff Castle lies across the river. For the moment this bank is decidedly residential. Continue cycling past sports clubs and through Pontcanna Fields before crossing Blackweir Bridge to follow the route on the opposite bank through the northern end of Bute Park. The route sticks close to the River Taff for the next 4 miles. Then after passing first under the M40 motorway and shortly afterwards the A470 Cardiff to Glan Conwy Trunk Road, it moves away from the river through **Tongwynlais** (9/61 miles). At the end of Iron Bridge Road, turn left on to the A4054 Merthyr Road and follow it through the centre to join a shared-use path once beyond its boundary. ►

The roads ahead are busy so stick to the shared-use path and designated crossings to navigate first the roundabout and then Cardiff Road before turning right into Taffs Well. Continue northwards using the shared-use path. Then, just before a mini-roundabout, cross at a blue fingerpost and follow the path alongside the opposite carriageway and over the **A470**. After 1½ miles of traffic-free cycling on what was clearly once a railway, cross the A468 dual carriageway in **Nantgarw** using the pelican crossing. Then follow signs around the corner into

To visit Castell Coch turn right up Mill Road in the centre of Tongwynlais and follow signs to the castle. Continue on this loop to re-join the main route just before Nantgarw.

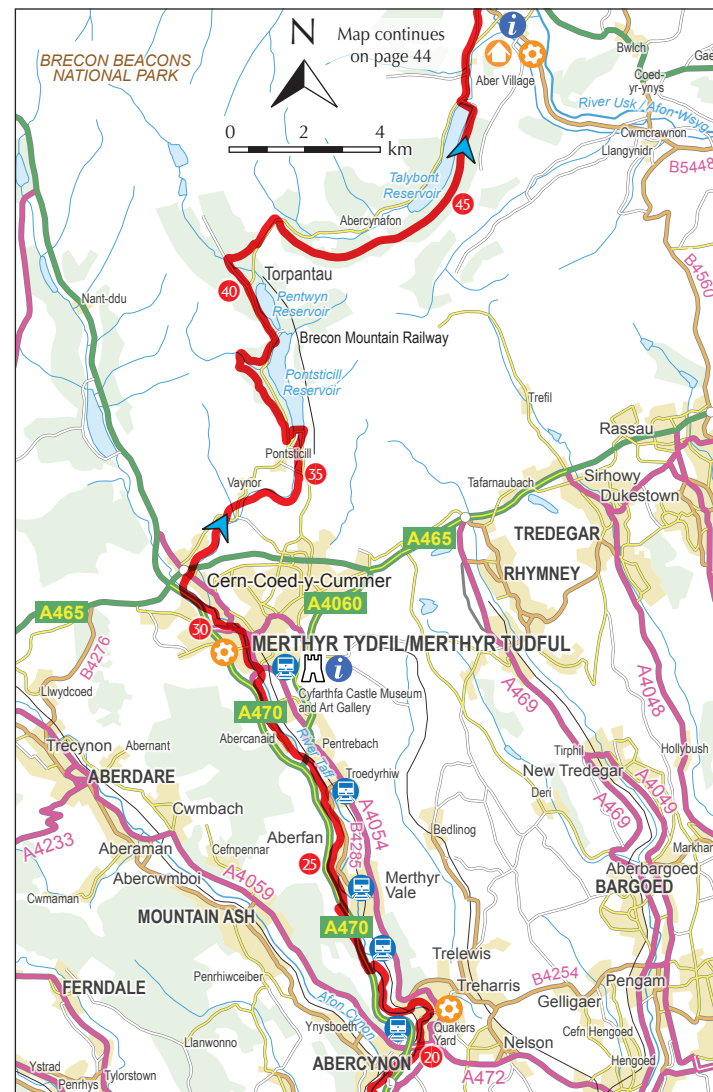
Heol-y-Dderwen and then turn immediately right into Heol-y-Gors to re-join the track of the old railway.

Enjoy the next 5 miles of easy cycling with nothing other than a couple of minor roads to cross and a few access barriers to squeeze through. Once back on the road near the University of South Wales Glyntaff Campus, join the shared-use path, cross the roundabout and ride down Cemetery Road before crossing to the shared-use path alongside Pentrebach Road. Eventually the path becomes too narrow for cycling and you will need to resort to the road. After ½ mile turn left into Ynysangharad Road. At its end, a brown sign shows there is a busy roundabout to negotiate so turn left to pick up a shared-use path and use the designated crossings to get first to the north end of Ynysangharad Park and then across to shops on the north side of the A4223. ◀ Turn left into West Street at the end of the shops, then quickly right in South Street and subsequently into Middle Street and Bonvilston Road. At its end turn left along Coedpenmaen Road where once again the route follows the course of the old railway.

To visit the centre of Pontypridd follow Bridge Street downhill and cross the River Taff.

The fortunes of **Pontypridd** (16/54 miles) were inextricably tied to the coal and iron industries. Its position at the junction of three valleys made it an important location for the transportation of coal from the Rhondda Valley and iron from Merthyr Tydfil and its railway platform is thought to have once been the longest in the world during its heyday with trains passing through every two or three minutes. Since the decline of heavy industry, Pontypridd, in common with many other nearby towns, faces the overwhelming challenge of finding new industries to replace those that, for a century and half, provided employment for many thousands of people.

It is traffic-free cycling for the next 3 miles to **Abercynon** (19/51 miles) where the route emerges at a blue fingerpost. Ride along Martins Terrace and turn left on to the A4275 in front of The Navigation Inn and then





This lane – Tramway  
Road Side –  
commemorates  
Richard Trevithick  
who ran the first  
steam locomotive  
along tracks here on  
21 February 1804.

quickly right by the fire station once again following the route along the course of the old railway. Within ½ mile, the route passes first under the A470 then shortly afterwards the A472. Continue up this narrow lane that circles around an islet in the River Taff called **Quakers Yard** where a community of dissenters buried their dead in the 17th century. ◀

The 200 metres beyond the railway viaduct can be muddy if it has rained. At its end, turn left past Pontygwaith Farm, which sometimes operates as a café, and cross the Grade II listed bridge over the River Taff that featured as a location in an episode of the BBC's 'Merlin'. Climb steeply uphill, dismount and walk through the gloomy tunnel under the **A470** turning sharply right soon after you emerge. A mile further on, pass under the A470 again and turn sharply left following the route along the hillside behind **Aberfan** (25/45 miles).

The majority of colliery spoil heaps along the Taff Valley have been flattened and landscaped. However, their disappearance will never erase memories of the **Aberfan disaster** that occurred on 21 October 1966 when a spoil heap collapsed and engulfed the school and neighbouring houses killing 116 children and 28 adults. The white arches in Bryntaf Cemetery on the hillside above the trail mark the graves of children who lost their lives in the disaster.

Continue northwards, crossing minor roads that occasionally snake up the hillside and pass under the A4060 and through the village of **Abercanaid**. Follow the path around the perimeter of a retail park on the outskirts of **Merthyr Tydfil**, passing under the A4102 and through the town's college campus. Cross the River Taff and turn immediately left towards Cefn-Coed-y-Cymmer along a shared-use path. Follow this path alongside the river then cross to Bethesda Street using the designated crossing on the corner. Turn left along Bethesda Street and go over the River Taff and then Cyfarthfa Road at the designated

crossing. Two hundred metres further on, turn right into an unnamed road and follow signs down towards the river.

Follow the shared-use path, across the waste ground where Cyfarthfa Ironworks once stood, then a mile later over the Cefn Coed Viaduct across the river.

### CYFARTHFA IRONWORKS



The massive archway across the waste ground bridges the gap in a bank of six iron furnaces built in the 1880s. They are all that remains of Cyfarthfa Ironworks (1765–1926), which, at its peak in the early 19th century, was a leading supplier of iron, cannon and cannon balls to the British Navy, employing thousands of workers.

Like much industry in South Wales, they were started by an outsider, Anthony Bacon (1716–1786), a Cumbrian by birth who eventually partnered with Richard Crawshay (1739–1810), a London iron merchant who had previously acted as Bacon's agent for supplying iron cannon to the Board of Ordnance. In the early 19th century, the output of Cyfarthfa was so critical to the success of the war effort that Horatio Nelson paid a personal visit to the works in 1802 and the immensely wealthy Crawshay family incorporated a pile of cannonballs in its crest. Subsequent Crawshays built Cyfarthfa Castle high above the town on the opposite bank of the River Taff which today houses the town's museum and art gallery. If you wish to visit it continue to follow Lôn Las Cymru northwards for a mile to Cefn-Coed-y-Cummer and then follow the brown tourist signs to the castle.

Turn right along High Street in **Cefn-Coed-y-Cyummer** and quickly left in Old Drill Hall Road. At its end, follow the shared-use path to the left of St John the Baptist Church and then ride for three traffic and junction-free miles alongside Taf Fechan (the little Taff) to emerge on a minor road in **Pontsticill** (35/35 miles). Turn left, cycle downhill passing under the railway bridge before turning left across the 110ft-high embankment of the **Pontsticill Reservoir** that since its completion in 1927 has been holding back 3400 million gallons of water.

The narrow-gauge **Brecon Mountain Railway** runs up the reservoir's eastern side along part of the route of the former standard gauge Brecon and Merthyr Railway. The railway, which was officially opened in 1863, was always financially stretched but struggled until 1962 when it was axed during the Beeching cuts.

At present, the railway terminates at Torpantau at the northern end of the Pentwyn Reservoir which lies beyond the Pontsticill Reservoir to the north. The terminus is just short of the southern entrance to the 610m-long Torpantau Tunnel, which at an elevation of 400m above sea level was the highest standard gauge tunnel in regular use anywhere in Great Britain. The trustees of the Brecon Mountain Railway have an ambition to extend their line through the tunnel. However its poor condition would make restoration costly.

You can enjoy a 3-mile ride on the railway with your bike from Pontsticill station to Torpantau re-joining Lôn Las Cymru when you disembark. For timetables and fares, see [www.bmr.wales](http://www.bmr.wales).

Follow the road left at the end of the embankment. After 275 metres turn right towards Talybont-on-Usk, and then after another 275 metres, turn left and follow the trail through the Taf Fechan Forest. ◀ At the end of the trail, turn left along the undulating road along the western shore of the **Pentwyn Reservoir** which was constructed

between 1858 and 1862 to supply clean water for Merthyr Tydfil which had suffered from repeated cholera epidemics. ▶

After 1½ miles, turn right immediately after crossing the Taff Fechan river and ride uphill past the picnic site. Turn left along the road at the end of this short trail, cross the cattle grid and continue climbing up and over the col at **Torpantau**. Descend for 450 metres, then turn right following marker signs into a conifer plantation. Enjoy this trail which runs downhill above the Talybont Reservoir for the next 5 miles giving fine views of the Brecon Beacons across the valley.

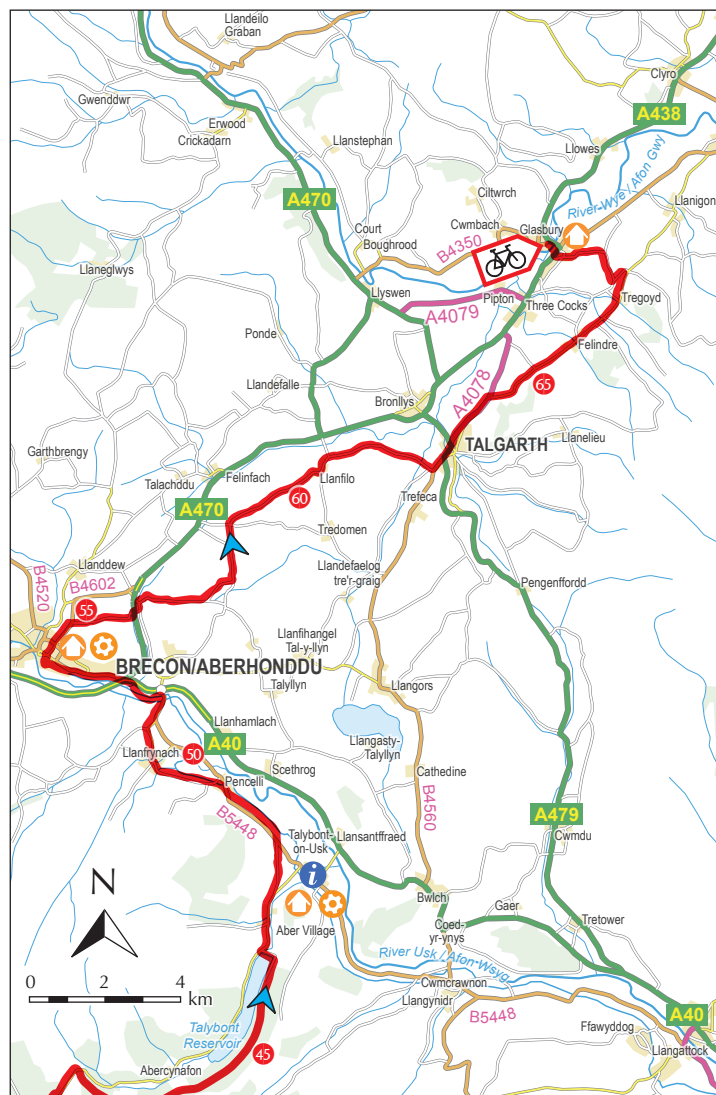
Cross the embankment at the northern end of **Talybont Reservoir**, turn right towards Brecon and enjoy another 2 miles of downhill cycling. Shortly after **Aber Village** turn left towards Llanfrynach and continue downhill to meet the B4558 at Cross Oak (48/22 miles). Turn left towards Llanfrynach and then a mile later just as you enter **Pencelli**, turn left towards Plas Pencelli. Turn left at the junction by the church in **Llanfrynach** then continue until once again meeting B4558. Turn left

During the 1849 cholera outbreak there were over 1000 deaths in one month alone.

*Looking west towards the Brecon Beacons from the track above Talybont Reservoir*



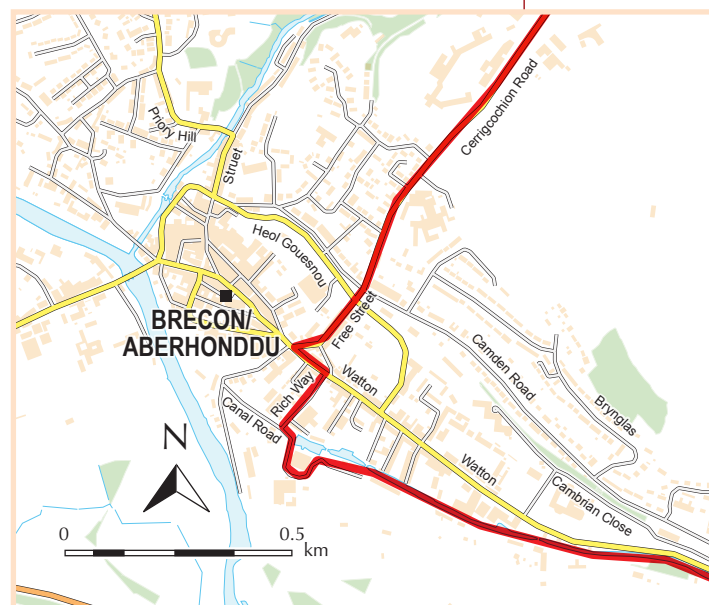
The tarmac surface soon becomes gravel but is mostly well drained.



towards Brecon, then  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile later after first crossing the River Usk, turn left to follow the towpath alongside the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal all the way to **Brecon** (55/15 miles).

Near the end of the canal, leave the towpath and follow route signs along Canal Road and around Theatr Brycheiniog. Then turn right at the mini-roundabout in Rich Way and left at its end along Watton. Filter into the middle lane as you reach the Brecon Museum and Art Gallery and turn right into Free Street. Cross the ring road at the traffic lights and ride up Cerrigcochion Road for  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile before turning right at the roundabout after the town's leisure centre and then immediately left into a narrow lane.

**Brecon** is a thriving little town that probably became established due to it being one of the few





places where the river could be forded. Its Welsh name – Aberhonddu – is derived from the River Honddu, which meets the River Usk near the town centre. The Normans built a castle on the hill and defensive walls around the town, but they were largely destroyed during the English Civil War. Once Brecknockshire was absorbed into Powys in 1974, Brecon lost its status as county town but remains a thriving community with an important cattle market and plenty to entertain the large influx of tourists who flock into the area. Their numbers are boosted in early August when the town hosts the internationally acclaimed Brecon Jazz Festival. See [www.breconjazz.org](http://www.breconjazz.org) for details.

Brecon lies at the north of the Brecon Beacons National Park. The park was established in 1957 and covers 519 square miles. It stretches from Llandeilo in the west to Hay-on-Wye in the north-east and Pontypool in the southeast.

Turn left a mile later after passing through the tunnel under the A470, then right 200 metres later. Turn right again at the next junction and then a mile later turn left; all of these turns are indicated by route markers. Turn left at the end of this lane in front of an isolated house whose owners enjoy fine views of the Black Mountains. There is no route marker at this junction for those riding northwards but look back once past Drostre Nature Reserve to see one for those riding south.

After ½ mile turn right into a narrow lane near a green agricultural building. Again the route marker at this junction is temporarily absent perhaps because it was attached to a telephone pole that has been recently replaced. Go straight across the next junction, where route signs reappear and climb up the steep, south-western slope of Penyrallt before descending to **Llanfilo** (61/9 miles).

Follow the road around the well-preserved church that is dedicated to a local saint named Bilo and ride down through the village before turning right towards



Talgarth. Turn left on to the B4560 and then after 200 metres join the shared-use path. You can either stick to this path alongside the busy A470, before turning right towards Three Cocks or follow signs through the Talgarth town centre which has a working watermill and a 14th-century defensive tower house.

In the fifth century **Talgarth** was the residence of Brychan, an Irish born prince who married Marchel, a Welsh heiress to become the King of Brycheiniog from which Brecon gets its name. According to legend, Brychan was married three times and fathered 22 sons and 24 daughters including Bilo to whom the church at Llanfilo is dedicated.

Follow the shared-use path that runs alongside the **A4078** for a mile outside the village then turn right towards Felindre. Ride through **Felindre** and the hamlet of **Tregoyd** a mile further on until you come to a prominent blue fingerpost at a crossroads where NCR8 and NCR42 intersect. Turn left, following markers for NCR8

*The well-preserved Norman and medieval church in Llanfilo viewed through the lychgate*

towards Glasbury. After the bend, turn right again. Then after  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile bear left. A mile later, turn right at the cross-roads in Tyruched. Once you meet the **A438**, cross to the shared-use path on the opposite carriageway and turn right to **Glasbury**.

#### NORTH TO SOUTH

If riding north to south stock up on food in Brecon ready for the 25 miles to Merthyr Tydfil and use the NCR8 extension from Cardiff Bay to the station if you are taking the train.

## STAGE 1A

### *Chepstow to Glasbury*

<b>Start</b>	Chepstow Old Bridge (ST 536 944)
<b>Finish</b>	Glasbury Bridge (SO 180 393)
<b>Distance</b>	57 miles (91km)
<b>Ascent</b>	1500m
<b>Time</b>	9–10hrs
<b>OS maps</b>	OS Landranger 161, 162 and 171
<b>Refreshments</b>	Chepstow, Shirenewton, Usk, Abergavenny, Llananthony, Hay-on-Wye and Glasbury.
<b>Accommodation</b>	Hostels only in Chepstow, near Abergavenny and in Glasbury but a good selection of B&Bs and hotels in the major centres.

Once you leave Chepstow you are immediately on quiet lanes through what remains of the ancient Wentwood before dropping down to follow the River Usk northwards to the pleasant market town of Abergavenny. Beyond that comes the delightful Vale of Ewyas, which culminates in a short climb through the Gospel Pass – the highest in Wales – that gives breath-taking views northwards into central Wales and the English Marches. After an enjoyable descent through the literary town of Hay-on-Wye, it is easy riding to Glasbury.

**Chepstow** gets its name from the Old English *chepe stowe*, meaning a market place or trading place, and during the Middle Ages it was a major centre for importing wine from Europe and exporting timber from nearby woodlands. As the larger ports of Cardiff, Swansea and Bristol became more prominent in the early 19th century, Chepstow's importance diminished. However, its picturesque location at the mouth of the River Wye meant trade was replaced with tourism which remains an important part of the town's economy today. Old Wye