

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

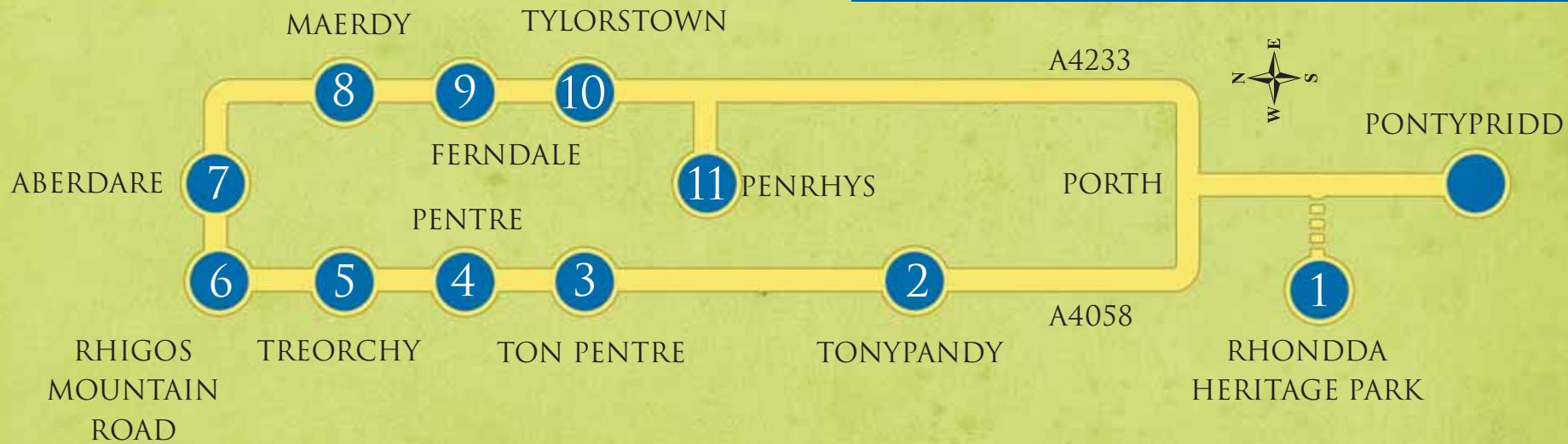
# HERITAGE TRAILS

TOUR 3

## THE RHONDDA VALLEYS



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## SUMMARY

The Rhondda is one of the most famous names in Wales, home of world-renowned male voice choirs, brass bands and a proud coal-mining heritage. It is also a place of natural beauty with forest and hillside overlooking the valley communities of terraced housing that in places cling precipitously to the hillsides. This is a full day tour if incorporated with a (minimum 2 hour) visit to Rhondda Heritage Park. It will enable the visitor to gain a full appreciation of the Rhondda valleys, their history, built heritage, community and scenic beauty.

## TOUR 3 - ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Head North along the A470 from the M4 and Cardiff until reaching its junction with the A4058 at Pontypridd. Follow the signs for A4058 Rhondda Valleys and brown tourist signs for Rhondda Heritage Park. Passing Pontypridd's long railway station on our left (once the longest in Britain) we pass through two sets of traffic lights to a large traffic light controlled roundabout. Keep in straight on lanes heading for A4058 Rhondda Valleys.

The Rhondda valley narrows at this point and rail, road and river compete for space in the valley floor. As the Valley widens out we enter Hopkinstown and pass Capel Rhondda where in 1904 was the first performance of the hymn 'Cwm Rhondda' written by John Hughes. 'Cwm Rhondda' (with the immortal line 'Bread of Heaven,- feed me till I want no more') is one of the most famous hymns in the world, sung in Wales with equal fervour at both religious services and rugby internationals. Beyond the chapel the valley narrows again and note the 'Hetty' pit winding house on the right as we head up the valley. This is one of the reminders of the mining past of the Rhondda when once 52 pits were active in the two valleys making it the most intensely mined area in the world. The scars of this industry have now largely disappeared and these valleys are green again.

Soon you will see in front of you the winding gear and chimney of Rhondda Heritage Park (formerly the Lewis Merthyr

Colliery) and you may wish to take some time to drop in to the Visitor Centre here. Follow the brown tourist signs turning left at a roundabout off the A4058 with the Heritage Park Hotel on your left.

A visit to the Park helps to give an appreciation of the history of the area and particularly the activity of mining and the communities that were created in the valleys.

To immerse yourself completely in the heritage this area has to offer, take a full tour of the facilities (led by ex-miner guides). For a complete visit you will need to take a good two hours and there is a café and gift shop. Public tours leave at specific times and to plan this in to your day phone 01443 682036 or visit [www.rhonddaheritagepark.com](http://www.rhonddaheritagepark.com) for further details.

Leave the Rhondda Heritage Park and turn right out of the car park to return to the roundabout on the A4058. Take the first exit and head up the valley by- passing the town of Porth to our right. Here was located the Thomas and Evans Welsh Hills Works,- the home of 'Corona' fizzy soft drinks. The old buildings are now a recording studio called appropriately 'The Pop Factory'.

Continue straight on at two sets of traffic lights and then reach a roundabout where take the second exit following A4058 Treorchy and Tonypandy. Note the impressive Porth Bridge to the right.

Our route now enters the Rhondda Fawr, the larger and broader of the two Rhondda Valleys. Continue along the A4058 heading for Treorchy, keeping straight ahead (2nd exits) at the next two roundabouts. After the second roundabout we shortly approach a junction signed Tonypandy to the left and 'superstore' to the right. Those wishing to stop briefly to view two landmarks should turn right to park up briefly in the superstore car park.

We are now on the edge of the town of Tonypandy, which became famous in 1910 when riots occurred following a dispute between mine workers and the owners of the Cambrian Combine collieries. The Army were sent in to support the police and the strike and dispute lasted into 2011 and is seen as a landmark in industrial relations and the fight for a living wage.

The riots will be commemorated by a Blue Plaque on the 'Powerhouse', located opposite the ASDA superstore car park. This (now derelict) building was a focal point of the riots. It is hoped that restoration will eventually take place to return the building to use as a visitor and business centre.

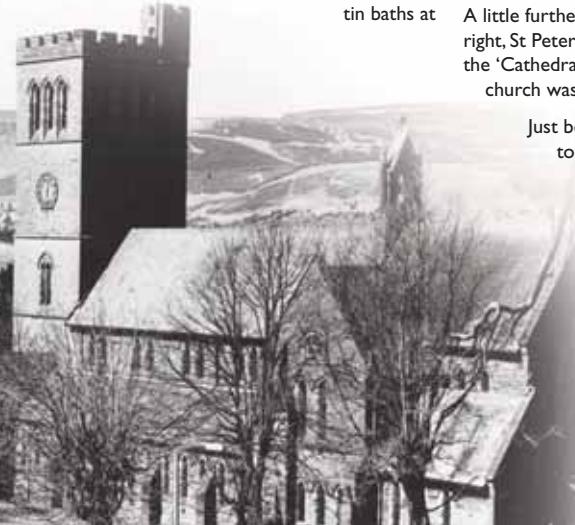
It is worth a stop here also to look at the statue of the Miner and His Family created by artist Robert Thomas which is located near to the superstore car park.

For those wishing to explore this area further, there is a heritage trail in Tonypandy that can be followed and gives an insight into the rich history of this town. For Blue Plaque aficionados, there is one to actor Donald Houston at 10 Thomas Street CF40 2AH.



## TOUR 3 - ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Our driving route now turns right out of the superstore car park through traffic lights and to another set where the road bends right, where continue straight on passing Llwynypia rail station on the left. Continue to the next set of traffic lights where turn left following the signs to Ystrad and Treorchy to rejoin the A4058 to continue up the valley passing rows of typical terraced housing for 3 kms. Eventually, the railway line runs close to and parallel with the road and, at a set of lights at Ton Pentre rail station, it is possible to turn left to explore the village of Ton Pentre where two more Blue Plaques have been placed. At 73 Bailey Street a Plaque to Elizabeth Andrews, who once lived here, commemorates the life of a woman who fought for the rights of women and of the working man. A leading light in the Labour Party she campaigned tirelessly and was instrumental in getting pithead baths installed to lessen the load on women who had to boil water and fill tin baths at



home so that their mining husbands and sons could get clean after a day's work underground.

Also in Ton Pentre in Partridge Street is a plaque for Cory Band, one of the leading Brass bands in the world and World Champions in 2009.

We rejoin the A4058 and continue into Pentre. Two detours can be made here to visit plaques.

The first is located downhill to our left and is one for sports fans. The home of Jimmy Murphy is at 43 Treharne Street. Murphy was assistant manager of Manchester United at the time of the Munich air disaster when, amongst others, a number of young soccer stars died from the emerging 'Busby Babes' team. Jimmy Murphy is credited with rescuing the club at that time, taking over from manager Matt Busby while he recovered in hospital from the crash. Murphy also managed Wales' soccer team to its only World Cup finals in 1958.

A little further up the valley we can see to our right, St Peter's Church. Often referred to as the 'Cathedral of the Rhondda' this Victorian church was completed in 1890.

Just beyond the church a quick detour to the right up the steep St Stephen's Avenue takes us to the Blue Plaque marking the former home of William Abraham at number 19. Also known as 'Mabon' he was the first MP for the Rhondda from 1885 until his death in 1922. A central figure in the Tonypandy Riots dispute he was an imposing figure in the area.

Continuing on our journey north along the A4058 we enter Treorchy and on our right see the 'Red Cow' public house, - the Blue Plaque here marks the site where the world famous Treorchy Male Choir formed in 1883. Treorchy is also home to the Park and Dare Theatre which was built with donations from the miners at the 'Park' and the 'Dare' mines which were major employers locally. Another famous brass band – the Park and Dare, shares its name with the theatre.

Soon after the Red Cow we reach a set of traffic lights where the A4058 joins the A4061. Here continue straight on following the signs for Treherbert and Hirwaun. Heading still further north we enter the village of Treherbert and then continue on the A4061 and start the long climb towards the Rhigos Mountain, noting to our left the steep hillsides above the villages of Blaenrhondda and Blaencwm. At the top of the pass there are fine views over the

surrounding hillsides and spectacular views north of the Brecon Beacons. To the left is Craig y Llyn which drops sheer into the waters of Lyn Fawr in which were discovered two Celtic cauldrons and iron implements, some of the oldest archaeological finds in Britain, now on display in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff.

As we descend the Rhigos Mountain road onto the saddle of high land between the Cynon and Neath valleys we pass the site of Tower Colliery, which finally closed in 2008 and was the last working deep coal mine in South Wales.

Eventually after a long straight piece of road we reach a roundabout where turn right (3rd exit) signed A465 Neath & Merthyr Tydfil. After approx. 1km we now reach a large roundabout on the A465 Trunk Road where turn right (3rd exit) to head east in the direction of Merthyr Tydfil.



# TOUR 3 - ROUTE DESCRIPTION



Continue along the A465 dual carriageway until the next roundabout, where take the 3rd exit heading now for A4059 Aberdare. Continue now and at the next roundabout take the left lane as you approach and turn left for A4059 Cardiff & Aberdare. At the next two roundabouts go straight on following A4059 Cardiff. At the next roundabout, shortly after passing a Tesco superstore on the right, take the 2nd exit following A4233 Aberdare Town Centre. At the next roundabout take the first exit and then at the next turn left for A4233 Town Centre and Maerdy. Shortly enter the Town centre one way system taking a left hand bend into Canon Street .

PLEASE SEE TOUR 2 IN THIS BROCHURE FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT ABERDARE.

Continue along Canon Street and soon the road forks. Take the right hand fork following the A4233 for Maerdy and then immediately after a set of pedestrian traffic lights carefully take up the left hand lane to be in position to take a left turn for A4233 Maerdy. The road ahead now rises steeply and eventually negotiates hairpin bends before we reach a high moorland road with once again fine views over the Brecon Beacons and down the Cynon Valley. Well worth a photo stop at one of the pull in areas after the hairpin bends.

Continue across the mountain until we descend steeply with views to the right of the Rhondda Fach valley towards the village of Maerdy; at 1100 feet one of the highest in Wales.

## OPTIONAL DETOUR

As we reach the bottom of the descent to cross the Rhondda Fach river, a turn right (just past the Maerdy signs) to detour a mile or so up a road will lead us initially past some factory units before going through the lower of two gates where it becomes a narrow lane. This adventurous road passes old mine workings of the former Maerdy Colliery and eventually to a Blue Plaque on a wall marking, above this spot, the site of a medieval castle, - Castell Nos dating from c.1240. This place reminds us that there was a long history in South Wales prior to the industrial revolution and this castle mound was



the site of a Welsh castle resonant of the struggles for control of Wales between the invading Normans and their descendants and the ancient Welsh tribes. Proceed uphill a short distance from this point to turn at the Lluest Wen reservoir dam. The water in this picturesque lake is used to supply the communities below and is a peaceful and beautiful spot.

Retrace your steps to the A4233 road where we descended from the mountain road from

Aberdare and turn right and then soon left at a T junction to head down the Rhondda Fach valley to Ferndale.

Ferndale is located in a narrow part of the Rhondda Fach and if you wish, park up and stretch your legs to view the information board on the 'Strand' – next to the main bus stop. In nearby Greenwood Park, there are memorials to two major pit disasters which in 1867 and again in 1869 killed a total of 231 men and boys, devastating for a small valley community.

Ferndale's most famous son is probably the actor Sir Stanley Baker; there is a plaque on the house where he was born although this is tucked away down side streets at 32 Albany Street.

One of Rhondda's famous choirs, – Morlais is from this part of the valley and they practice in the Morlais Hall opposite the information board located by the main bus stop in the Strand. It is intended to have a living museum of music and song here and, at the time of writing it is anticipated this will be open from November 2010. Visitors may wish to enquire about it and the latest information can be found on the website [www.cor-meibion-morlais.org](http://www.cor-meibion-morlais.org)

Continuing further south along the valley and after passing a left turn for the Leisure Centre, we reach Tylorstown. Keeping an eye to our left see a Blue Plaque for Pendyrys Male Choir on the modern flats on East Road, - previously the site of Ebenezer Chapel where the choir was founded in 1924.

## TOUR 3 - ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Tylorstown is also where world flyweight boxing champion Jimmy Wilde (1892 – 1969) once lived and a short way down East Road from the Pendyrys Choir plaque is Tylorstown Working Men's Club and Institute where he once trained, a plaque is on the wall. The 'Tylorstown Terror' fought an incredible 152 fights, winning 137 and 99 of those by a knockout. Many regard him as the greatest flyweight boxer ever.

Continue to a traffic roundabout and turn right (3rd exit) up the B4512 for a short detour to one more spectacular view at Penrhys. We continue up the hill to a roundabout and at this high point take the first exit to park in the small car park to see St Mary's Well. Here we can see both the Rhondda Fach and the Rhondda Fawr valleys and spectacular views south towards the Bristol Channel and Exmoor, way distant in England.

The statue at this spot of 'Our Lady of Penrhys' was re-erected in 1953 having been 'cast down' in 1538 during the reformation and it marks the site of medieval pilgrimage of great importance.

On the hill below stands the 'Little Church' housing St Mary's Well, a chalybeate spring once thought to offer miraculous cures for arthritis and other ailments.

Our tour ends here.  
Return now back  
down the hill to  
Tylorstown  
roundabout, where  
turn right (3rd exit)  
and follow the A4233  
back to Porth and  
then join the A4058  
to our starting point  
at Pontypridd.

