

Top to bottom: Lady Windsor cycle path. View from the picnic spot, where the routes start. Pistyll-Goleu waterfall. Llanwonno Forest



## Weekender

# Tales of the Trails

'Llanwonno Loops' is a journey through the history of a South Wales community, not just its woods. **Gwenda Owen** is your guide



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Gwenda has a mostly traffic-free ride to get to Llanwonno from Cardiff, or can hop on a train to Pontypridd

**W**ales's valleys and the mining communities that sprung up in them have a proud history that's well worth exploring. A bike is the ideal way to do so because the valleys are great cycling country.

Tales of the Trails were created by Cycling UK in partnership with the people of Ynysybwl and Clydach Vale, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project celebrates the heritage of two South Wales valleys and inspires residents and visitors to discover more by bike.

The route described here is based around the hamlet of Llanwonno in St Gwynno Forest, just a few miles from Ynysybwl, a village that grew as a result of the Lady Windsor Colliery. Although the colliery closed in 1986, the sense of community remains strong. The residents are keen that many more people get to enjoy the stunning environment. They've even set up a small visitor centre to provide information and snacks.

We asked Cycling UK member Nic, who spends many a day exploring the forests, to devise routes that capture the best parts of them. This is the longer of his two Ynysybwl routes.



### Taff Trail

An article on the Taff Trail appeared last issue. To read it, visit [cyclinguk.org/publications](https://cyclinguk.org/publications) and log in.



## Weekend ride

## TALES OF THE TRAILS

•Name: Llanwonno Loops. •Start/finish: Picnic area NE of St Gwynno Church. •Map & guide: [cyclinguk.org/talesofthetrails](https://cyclinguk.org/talesofthetrails). •Ride length: short route 11km (8.8 miles), long 21.5km (13.4 miles). •Bike type: hardtail MTB or gravel bike. •Ride level: regular. •GPX file: [cyclinguk.org/route/tales-trails-llanwonno-forest-long-route](https://cyclinguk.org/route/tales-trails-llanwonno-forest-long-route)

# 1

## YNYSYBWL

If you want to add a few more miles to your ride, start from Ynysybwll and ride to the forest past the 'corpse road', the route used to carry coffins up to St Gwynno's Church. The Lady Windsor Cyclepath, named after the colliery, links Ynysybwll with the well known Taff Trail so it's easily reached from Pontypridd and beyond.

# 2

## Picnic spot

Long and short routes start here. Dewi Pritchard, a former pit blacksmith from Ynysybwll, spends much of his spare time mountain biking in the forest and encouraging others to join him. He says: "It's a beautiful place and ought to be explored more."

# 3

## The waterfall

Pistyll-Goleu waterfall is one of many great places to stop on the route. The Sych Nant stream flows over a sheet of rock here, to merge with the Nant Clydach. A short distance from the waterfall you can find the Victorian Cwm Clydach reservoir.

# 4

## Daerwynno Outdoor Centre

This is a community-led enterprise. If it's quiet, it's worth chatting to staff about the how the centre started. You'll also find Caban Guto here, a visitor centre with information about the area's heritage and culture.

# 5

## St Gwynno's Church

The church at Llanwonno is a medieval building. The oldest grave dates back to 1167 but the most famous is that of Guto Nyth Brân (1700-1737), one of the greatest runners of his time. Legend has it that he caught a hare chasing sheep and outran a bird in flight.

# 6

## BRYNFFYNON HOTEL

To the side of the hotel you'll find an interesting piece of sculpture commissioned to celebrate the life of legendary athlete Guto Nyth Brân. On New Years Eve, the bar empties as people attend the church, where a wreath is laid on Guto's grave by the mystery runner who starts the Nos Galan race that's held in Guto's honour.



### Clydach Vale

There are two more Tales of the Trails routes nearby, celebrating the heritage of the mining community of Tonypany. The long route is 13 miles, the short one just 2.8 miles.

[cyclinguk.org/talesofthetrails](https://cyclinguk.org/talesofthetrails)