

WALK 6: LLANBADOC AND CEFN ILLA

SUMMARY	Circular walk around Llanbadoc and Cefn Ila
DISTANCE	3.5 miles
TIME	2.5 hours
MAPS	OS Map 152 Newport and Pontypool
START AT	Llanbadoc Island, Usk adjacent to St Madocs Church OS grid Ref 376001
TERRAIN	Woodland and fields with some moderate climbs. Several styles (may not be suitable for dogs)

From the car park, walk past St Madoc's church to the main road. Turn left and walk approximately 60 metres along the pavement. Turn right, to cross the main road and walk up the lane between Myrtle Villa and Ty Mawr Farm. Follow this lane uphill, past houses on your right and continue up the steep wooded footpath towards Pant-y-cwch wood.

As the path levels out the Usk Valley, with Wentwood Forest in the background can be seen to your left.

Continue on the path, along the side of the wood, through two gates to reach a field as the path begins to level out.

Follow the line of the old track, reputedly a Roman road, to the brow of the hill. As you approach the field boundary, turn left to follow the track down the field edge to the left.

Looking ahead, the Iron Age hill fort of Twm Barlwm can just be made out on the far side of Cwmbran.

Pass through a gate on this field boundary and continue downhill, passing the conifer wood of Cae-maen on your left. Bear right and walk down through the grass field to the gate onto the Usk to Coed-y-Paen road.

Turn right and shortly turn left beside the former entrance lodge to Cefn Ila. Continue on this track past the car park.

Cefn Ila is the site of the substantial country house which for several years in the mid 19th century was the home of Edward Trelawny, the writer, and friend of Byron and Shelley.

Whilst living here Trelawny wrote his reminiscences of adventures with Shelley and Byron in Greece. The property, which housed Trelawny's private library of over 1,000 volumes, was rebuilt in the 1860s. It was converted into a convalescent home in 1925 through a donation to the Pontypool and District Hospital by the local solicitor Walter Gustard, as a memorial to, his American wife, Kate.

Thousands of babies were born at Cefn Ila between 1945 and 1973 when it was a maternity hospital. The property remained unused for some time but was burned down in a mysterious fire, said by some to have been started by runaways from the nearby Borstal. The house has subsequently been razed to the ground, but the

vestiges of its impressive gardens, including several large monkey puzzle trees, remain.

Cefn Ila was purchased by Coed Cadw/Woodland Trust in 2007. Since then 72 acres of grassland are gradually being planted with a new native woodland of broad leaf, deciduous trees.

The wood was designed with the help of the local community who helped plant many trees at the site together with children from local schools. Cefn Ila Wood was the first 'Plant' woodland. This partnership initiative between the Welsh Government and the Woodland Trust has from 2008 planted a new tree for every child born or adopted in Wales.

Cefn Ila has become a haven for wildlife and a great place to walk and explore all year round. More recently Cefn Ila has received lottery funding to improve access and waymarking and the site of the old manor house and the surrounding grounds with walled garden and aboretum is being cleared and restored.

Continue on the track up hill and go left through the next gateway into the grounds of Cefn Ila following the track to the top, where moss covered stones and bricks in the undergrowth are all that remains of the mansion.

Walk to the left of the bat house, into the orchard through a kissing gate. Head across the orchard towards the bottom of the walled garden (that can be explored from here via the doorway). Continue past the garden uphill and through another kissing gate. Follow the path through the trees and turn right when meeting the next pathway. Continue up hill towards the gates.

There are wonderful views towards the Sugar Loaf on a clear day. To your left are remains of WW2 pill boxes.

Cross the farm track and go over the stile, turning diagonally right along the fence to the woodland. Go over a stile and turn right to walk beside the fence.

The recently planted trees around Cefn Ila will mature into mixed native woodland like this.

A gap in the trees gives views towards Coleg Gwent and in the distance to the Skirrid Mountain.

Continue over a stile, keeping close to the woodland through the next field and down to another stile. Walk downhill against the field boundary to a stile and gateway. Pear Tree Cottage can be seen under the trees to your right.

Climb this stile and another to the right of a second gate on the brow of the hill. Bearing left follow the path towards the pair of electricity poles in this cultivated field and continue downhill to the boundary with the wood.

Here you have a choice of directions. To reach Usk Town Bridge, climb the stile into the wood and take great care down the steep wooded path to reach another stile into the field. Stay in the field and follow the right hand boundary to join the path, passing between houses, to the A472, Usk road by the bridge. Cross the bridge to visit Usk and its amenities or walk back along the river to Llanbadoc church.

Alternatively, turn right and follow the footpath along the top of the wood, over 2 more stiles. At the far end of the third field climb another stile and follow the footpath down the side of Twyn Bell back to Llanbadoc church. Take care crossing the road as you walk back to the car park.

Alfred Russell Wallace, the naturalist and co-founder with Charles Darwin of the theory of evolution, was born at Kensington Cottage in 1823 and baptised in Llanbadoc church. A memorial stone to him is sited by the gateway into the churchyard nearest the river. His childhood memories included standing on large flat stones on the riverbank and scooping up lampreys in large saucepans and eating them for dinner!

There is a little bit of Italy and France in the churchyard. The cedar trees were planted in 1846 by Trelawny, from cones he collected from Shelley's grave in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, whilst members of the French Marquis de la Pasture family are buried in the family tomb here.