A guide to The Upper Usk Valley
Sennybridge, Defynnog, Crai & Trecastle
THE UPPER USK VALLEY

A wonderfully rural area in the less populated part of the Brecon Beacons National Park offering a wide range of walking and cycling routes along a network of ancient tracks with stunning views across to the Black Mountain and the central Beacons. The area is rich in wildlife - red kites are never far away, the rivers boast salmon and trout, and the lucky can spot kingfishers and otters. The name Upper Usk Valley describes an area which includes four main villages and several hamlets. It is an ideal place to stay with a wide variety of accommodation, and many activities and places of outstanding natural beauty within easy reach.

CRAI
A small friendly community with a beautiful reservoir and stunning mountain views at the head of the Swansea Valley

DEFYNNOG
A historic village that was once the main settlement of the area and is home to the ancient Defynnog Yew

SENNYBRIDGE
The main village of the area spread along the banks of the Usk with an active sheep market, shops and amenities

TRECASTLE
Historically important with a Roman road, drover heritage, Agincourt links and Usk Reservoir Dark Sky area

HAMLETS IN THE AREA

WALKS

A WELSH WELCOME

WILDLIFE & LANDSCAPE

LOCAL CHURCHES

ACTIVITIES & ATTRACTIONS

FOOD, DRINK & SHOPPING

WHERE TO STAY

TRANSPORT & LOCAL INFO
When arriving at what is now the centre of the village of Crai you could ask yourself why the village has developed in such an isolated place? There is nothing in the village to give you an indication of its origins, now there are just a dozen or so houses clustered around the Neuadd y Plwyf and a building which obviously used to house the post office.

The original parish of Llanilud, Crai covered most of the Great Forest of Brecknock, one of the hunting grounds of Bernard of Neufmarché. Over time the estate became the property of the Crown and at the start of the c19th, was sold to fund the Napoleonic wars. The land was purchased by John Christie, an indigo merchant who went on to develop the Brecon Forest Tramway between 1821 and 1825. This carried lime and later all manner of building materials up and down the valley from Castell Du in Sennybridge to Swansea. Lime was delivered to local farmers along the way who used it to improve their land. The estate was later sold to the McTurk family from Scotland whose descendants still own and run Cnewr Estate.

The tramway was to be the forerunner of the Brecon to Neath Railway built by John Dickson which ran from 1863 until the 1960’s. This railway had a great effect on Crai as it led to the demolition, removal and rebuilding of the Church in 1883 and the construction of the village centre we see today. The bungalow in the centre marks the site of the station and the buildings at right angles to this were the post office, shop and feed merchants. There are many stories about the railway: how it was used by men and women in the
fields at harvest time to tell the time, the family from Beiligwern took eggs to Neath by train every Wednesday. They would deliver them around the houses before buying flannel shirts and enjoying a meal of faggots in a café at the market before returning home and how pork was smuggled down the valleys during the war when fresh meat was at a premium.

Crai has two places of worship and both were re-built during the 19th century. Travelling ministers had visited Llwyneaudd Farm for many years and it was on this land that the first chapel was built in 1808; it was extended in 1846 when a gallery was built, and in 1899 the Horeb Chapel we see today was constructed with the old one being converted into a vestry for week-night services and Sunday school. A schoolroom, ‘Ysgoldy’, was built some distance from the chapel in Felin Crai and was erected in order that worshippers from that end of the valley could more easily attend mid-week services and Sunday school. Today this is a private garage.

Also in Felin Crai we can see the remains of a grist mill. This was used by farmers to have grain ground for their own use. Once the corn had been threshed some would be kept to feed the stock and some went to the mill to be ground into flour, oatmeal and barley meal. This mill is believed to have been in use until the start of the 20th century.

The village school was built across what is now the A4067 and was open until the mid 1980’s, now a private home. Another school was also in existence during the building of Crai Reservoir between 1898 and 1906 which was specifically for children of labourers employed in the construction who lived in a temporary village on site. The railway was used to bring materials and machinery to build the 28 metre dam by making a siding for this purpose. Nothing remains of this settlement, however if you look carefully above the reservoir you may spot the remnants of the rabbit warrens that were built to produce good quality skins and for meat.
Start at the Church of St Cynog, dating mainly from the C14th with a little of the north wall dating from the C11th. The font, unique in Wales, has both Runic and Lombardic inscriptions and the bell-tower houses 6 bells with the oldest dating from 1686, and there is a Romano-Celtic stone in the porch. Follow the path behind the church towards the gated entrance in the far corner to the North. Pause to admire The Defynnog Yew to the left of the path, believed to be 5,600 years old and with a girth of 38 feet (11.6 meters) is potentially one of the oldest trees in Europe. The tree has separated over time to look like being two trees, and has a rare “golden bough”. A fascinating leaflet about The Yew is available at selected places locally.

Through the gate, the Old Yew Tree pub (formerly The Lion Inn) is estimated to be over 300 years old. Turn right onto the main road, passing 19th century workers’ cottages known as Church Row built for Penpont Estate. Opposite is one of three blacksmiths forges that were in the village and working until the mid 20th century. Behind this is an old quarry beneath the tall trees.

Cross the road and bear right uphill. This is where The Bull (also later known as The Temperance Hotel) used to stand. Continuing along Bull Terrace you will pass the old Police Station & Courthouse that still has the original police cells. Turn left at the junction passing The Old Postie (second building on left) onwards the original site of the post office.

A short diversion uphill to the left takes in the recently decommissioned Calvanistic Methodist Trinity Chapel with fine views down the valley. From the main road, cross over to Stone Street. Several properties here were demolished for road improvements, including almshouses, carpenters, The Curriers’ Arms and a nail factory. Walk downhill. Where the lane splits was the site of the Tabernacle Chapel.

Here you follow the cobbled path downhill, turning right at the bottom, bearing left at Mill House, where the manager of the corn mill lived. Beyond this lay the site of a wool factory, the owner of which lived in Factory House. The next building The Nook, was the Tanners’ yard. Each of these three industries had its own waterwheel run by the mill chase. Inset to the wall
of The Nook you will see one of the last remaining water tap plates, being the public water supply before the introduction of private plumbing. Ty Glanyrafon, over 500yrs old, on your right, was originally built as a coaching inn, but has also functioned as a Baptist Chapel and undertakers in its time. Walk up to the bridge and you will see the remains of the old bridge. On the far river bank, steps used to go down to the river where the village washing was done, and at one stage baptisms were carried out. This was also the site of a Weslyan Methodist Chapel. Across the road to the distance, half way up the hill, the routes of the tramways and railways that were dismantled in the 1970’s can still be seen as horizontal hedge lines.

Walk back towards the church, passing the Tanners Arms Pub which was originally 3 workers’ cottages built for the Tannery in the C19th. Turn right up the hill and you will find the Welsh Rarebit Centre Café & Sweetings Bakery which is in the Old School building, used 1626-1947 but the current building dating from C19th. Return down the hill, cross the road and return to the church. You pass a fine row of Georgian terraced houses before returning to the church via the pretty Lychgate.
Start point - central car park. The Neath and Brecon Railway was opened in 1866 and the station was called Defynnog as Sennybridge was virtually non-existent then. The station building is now a house and the community hall has been built on the site. There were sidings to the south, Dickson Saw Mills, the former West Brecon Line Farmers’ Association complex and Thomas Sawmills.

There were a number of small businesses on the incline from the station including a stonecutter, saddlers, smithy, agricultural goods merchant, butter and poultry market. It was also a market place for stock supplementing the existing Defynnog and Trecastle traditional fairs.

In front of the Usk and Railway pub (built c 1870) stood a small stone building which was a newsagent’s shop with a weighbridge and petrol pump. To the rear of the pub stood a picnic shed which was used as the HQ and marshalling point for the local Home Guard in WW2. Turning left up the slope, you see a single property which had a bakehouse to the rear. The following building, Salem Chapel (now the Welsh Shearing Centre) was built in 1918 as an offshoot of Tabernacle Congregational Chapel Defynnog (now demolished). The large building on the left was the former Penybont Farmhouse, this became The Station Masters house, recently a vet’s surgery and now a shop.

James Dickson was the main railway contractor, hence the old timber yard’s name, now Forest Sawmills. The present Sennybridge Show field is still known as Dickson’s Meadows. Next is Ty Agored, built post war as a grocery shop. It was converted into a Police Station on the closure of 1844 Defynnog station and courthouse. Turning right downhill, the livestock market was established in 1906. On the lefthand corner as you move onto the A40 main road stands the Market Hall, built in 1877-1878 as a market house for dairy and poultry products and it remained in use until the new hall was built.

Turn left onto the road and before The Red Lion you will see a track leading down behind the pub to the river Usk with a ford across as well as an early bridge. This was the line of
the main road via Beilibedw, out by Ynysyrwyddfa and onwards to Trecastle.

Follow Mill Row left into the Brown family coal yard which was once the site of another former sawmill. On this site, Elston’s of Brecon set up a water-generated electricity station, a real innovation of the time. Back on the main road, opposite, The Abercamlais Arms was formerly the Victoria Temperance Hotel, with an attached Reading Room established in 1889 as a library and reading room as part of the Temperance Movement. Interestingly, dour Scottish Presbyterians (JPs who acted as the licensing authority) closed a number of local hostelries by not renewing their licences, closing pubs including The Shepherd Arms in Crai, the Storey Arms at the foot of Pen Y Fan, The Bull in Libanus and The Sun in Heol Senni.

Cross the bridge along the A40 and on the left see Castle House, once known as The Rock and Castle. To the rear was a complex of craft workshops as well as a candle factory and Pontsenni Brewery & Malt House. Next is Manchester House, recently Massochi’s shop and cafe with attached bakery. After, Baptist Sion Chapel was built in 1859. Opposite is the recently renamed Mancerddwen, formerly The Coach and Horses. The annexe to the house was the armoury for the local unit of the Brecknock Volunteers who had a firing range at Cwmllwymog. Facing the Castle FarmRoadisMilestoneCottage which was traditionally the water bailiff’s dwelling.

Turn left towards Castle Farm, formerly Tir Y Castell. It is possible to see the remains of a stone enclosure castle on the rise to your left. Its history is uncertain but it was possibly started soon after 1262 as Llewellyn Fawr’s (Llewellyn The Great’s) “new castle above Brecon”. It was certainly in the hands of Einion Sais (who had a castle near Penpont and was a descendent of Bleddyn ap Maenarch, last Prince of Brycheiniog) by 1271 when he was found dating letters from “Rhyd Y Briw” near to which the castle stands. Looking across to the right, Glansenien the detached house is built on the site of a former iron and copper foundry.
Trecastle or Trecastell is one of the longest established villages in the Brecon Beacons area. Trecastle (“the town of the castle”) is named after Castle Tump (Trecastle Motte), an early 11th century Norman motte-and-bailey fortification built by Bernard de Neufmarché and designed to protect Brecon from attack from the west. Despite this purpose, the area continued to be threatened, with Edward I of England spending three days in Trecastle quelling a revolt in 1295. The motte or ‘Castle Tump’ is clearly visible at the east of the village.

These were not the first defences in the area; the Romans established overnight and marching camps, Y Pigwym, on Mynydd Trecastell, the vast plateau southwest of the village which surrounds the Usk Reservoir, and the Roman Road is a scenic walk still between Trecastle & Llandovery. The history is brought to life with a downloadable tour www.breconbeacons.org/walking-with-romans-app

St David’s Church in Llywel is a C6th site, has Ogam stones displayed from ancient times and it also was the site of the Trecastle Stone which is in the British Museum.

From around the 12th century, the Bishop of St Davids owned the land to the west of the Login river and Trecastle was used as a staging post en route to the Priory in Brecon. Leader of the Welsh archers at Agincourt, Watkin Lloyd was born and lived in Trecastle and 9 other Trecastle/Llywel men joined him in battle. There is a short commemorative Agincourt Trail starting from The Hall.

Trecastle remained an important coaching stop on the route from Gloucester to Llandovery, and by the 19th century Trecastle had eight annual fairs, its own gasworks, two schools, a grain mill, two smithies, sixteen shops and numerous pubs. Between 1830 and 1914, Trecastle and Llywel (1 mile to the west) are said to have had two of the most important woollen mills in Brecknockshire.

Trecastle was famous in the last century, for a murder that was even reported in The Times! David Lewis was murdered close to The Toll Gate Cottage by Thomas Thomas on 6th December 1844 and after being found guilty was hung in Brecon on
Thursday April 9th 1845 in front a crowd of 12,000 people.

During the Second World War, the Epynt Mountain, north of Trecastle, was cleared of its 220 inhabitants by the Ministry of Defence in order to establish a training area. This area is regularly used for rally driving and recently hosted the World Rally Championships.

In 1955 the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh officially opened the Usk Reservoir, which provides water to Swansea. Surrounding the reservoir, forestry and open moorland provide ample opportunity to explore.

In 2014, the Usk Reservoir became one of the newest Dark Sky Discovery Sites within the Brecon Beacons International Dark Skies Reserve, and the Upper Usk Valley area is noted as being as one of the best places in the UK to view stars without light pollution. There is a very accessible path around the Reservoir which is a great cycling & walking route and is home to wildlife a wide variety of wildlife and offers scenic views of the Black Mountain.
Hamlets in the Upper Usk Valley area

The Upper Usk Valley area offers many scenic walks, cycle routes and bridleways for all abilities, and there are opportunities to walk between the settlements, or take the day to really see each area. Please ensure you take sufficient food and drink, have a good OS map with compass, and keep your dog on a lead. If relying on public transport, please check bus times before leaving as they can be fairly infrequent and do not cover all routes.

Pentrefelin (due north of Sennybridge)
The hamlet sits on the Cilieni brook. Soar Chapel was built in 1823 and rebuilt in 1881 in the simple Gothic style. The old schoolhouse is now in private use. Working sheepdog sales are held every spring and autumn with some expert dogs fetching high prices.

Pentrebach (due north of Pentrefelin)
The public house and redundant chapel are the two most notable buildings in the village. The Shoemakers Arms first opened as a public house in 1865 and was originally called the Railway Tavern, opened to serve those working on a railway line from Llangammarch Wells to Defynnog. The ghost of the intended line can be seen through the fields south of Pentrebach. The project was abandoned in 1871 and the Railway Tavern probably closed at this time. It reopened in 1896 and in recent years has been bought by the community and run by a tenant. Beili Du Chapel was first built in 1800 and rebuilt in 1868. It is a grade II listed building. It has a stable and room at one end for visiting preachers.

Llandeilo’r Fân (due north of Pentrebach)
Once populated with numerous farms, the area north of the hamlet was cleared in 1940 by the MOD displacing 219 people and abandoning farms, a school and a chapel. The church (of 8th C origins & rebuilt in 1873) is dedicated to St Teilo, and is situated near the confluence of the Mawen and Eithrim brooks. Llandeilo’r Fân is a good starting point for the Epynt Way, a 90km circular path around the MOD ranges.

Cwm Camlais - 3 miles due west of Defynnog
This was a small castle, also known at times as Camlais, Maescar, Blaencamlais, or Defynoch Castle. Very little of its structure now remains, but enough to show that its rocky motte supported a round tower, and that the only outer defence was a counterscarp bank. Apart from a reference that it was destroyed in 1265 (and apparently never repaired), the history of Cwm Camlais is uncertain, but may have been a hunting lodge in the Forest of Brecon. The hamlet has the lovely Sardis Chapel that lies within the pretty wooded valley.

Heol Senni - 5 miles SW of Defynnog
A hamlet in the valley of the Afon Senni just north of the Fforest Fawr section of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Its name reflects the position near the crossing of the river which was, and to some extent still is, an important link between Brecon and the upper Swansea Valley (or Tawe valley), with scenic views driving towards the Waterfalls area and impressive standing stone Maen Ilia.
WALKS - there are fantastic walks throughout the Upper Usk Valley & here are a small selection. Please keep dogs on leads, park considerately and follow the Countryside Code. Try our suggested walks, or take part of the Beacons Way www.breconbeacons.org/beacons-way or the Epynt Way www.epyntway.org with miles of walking, cycling and bridle routes.

A WALK AROUND CRAI

CRAI VALLEY & BELFONT FORESTRY LOOP  8 km (5m)
2 1/2 hours - medium difficulty with some small hills & muddy ground. Some long views with an area of dense forest. Please keep dogs on leads.

Park by Crai Village Hall, taking care not to block any access. Take the lane due North, pass St Illid’s Church and take the 1st turning left downhill. Cut the corner towards Horeb Chapel and go right, taking the green lane past Madog Barn. Continue on the path to Onenfawr, take the lane left uphill and go through the hamlet of Belfont. The road turns sharply left, pass the beginning of the forestry area and look for the access path into the trees on your left. Walk to the first main cross path and turn left. Cross 3 main paths and take the forth to your left, turning left again at the edge of the forest area, and follow until you see the footpath away from the trees due south. Turn left at the stream and join the lane at Llwyn-on. Follow back, forking left downhill and take the footpath to the back of Crai Village Hall.
A WALK FROM DEFYNNOG
There is a free car park in the village centre on the A4215 just off the main A4067 Sennybridge to Swansea road.

BRYCHGOED CHAPEL AND TWYN Y GAER HILL FORT
8km (5m) 2 1/2 hours medium difficulty with some steep inclines and mud. Great views.

Walk along the A4067 main road past The Tanners Arms. Go over the bridge and take next road left (Glannau Senni). Continue past houses, and turn right up the open field following the bridleway. At the top gate, bear right & immediately left then keep going uphill following the markers through several gates. When it levels off you can walk along the ridge with the path passing below the hill fort earthworks. When you reach the lane, you will see Brychgeod Chapel straight ahead. Should you wish to extend the walk, keep straight ahead and you will reach the Senni quarry with remnants of its industrial past. Although circular walks are more satisfying, the walk back the same route offers the best views and is a lovely way to experience views of the area but you can turn retrace your steps from the chapel and turn right downhill, taking the hedge-lined track to the left at the bottom of the hill before the river & follow the track back to Glannau Senni.
A WALK AROUND SENNYBRIDGE

7.2km(4.5m)  2 hours 30 mins  Easy to moderate, on mainly quiet roads & one muddy section.  Start at the central Sennybridge Car Park.

Drop down to main road, turning left below the Usk & Railway Inn. After 400m turn left before the River Senni bridge by a small row of houses. Bear right on lane & go through the small gate left of the coal yard. Follow the path by the River, passing below the course of the old Neath and Brecon Railway which closed in 1962. Keep right, go through the football field. Behind the clubhouse, turn right on the lane. Continue for approx 2km & turn right direction Trecastle. Go over the picturesque Pantyscallog Bridge (built 1762) with fine falls on the River Usk & continue to the A40 road. Turn right crossing with care, taking the bridleway that leads off left into the woods. This may be muddy but then emerges onto a pleasant wide grassy track that then merges with a lane that continues past Sennybridge Army Camp. When you reach the river, take the fenced track to the left along the river bank, cross the scenic Llwyncyntefin Bridge. Turn right when you reach the A40 to return to the start.
A WALK AROUND TRECASCADE

WALK 1: LLYWEL, BRONYDD AND TURNPIKE ROUTE  length 8km  3 1/2 Hrs
Mostly easy walking but some inclines and can be very wet in areas after heavy rain.

Park at the lay-by to the West of Trecastle (P1). Take path over the road opposite the antiques centre heading north past the Vicarage and along the old track (may be wet) before turning left and heading towards Llywel. Keep straight and take the path behind the cottages to reach Llywel Church. After visiting the churchyard, return the same way but take the lane forking left uphill going past Bronydd Mawr Farm before turning right on the bridleway as you start to descend into the valley. The route now crosses fields so please keep to the path. As you reach the old track on a steep downhill, you can divert left to the Turnpike Cottage (the highest point on the A40 road), then retrace your steps and return to Trecastle walking straight and then turning left back to the village.
Croeso i Gymru – Welcome to Wales!

Wales is a land of history and mythology, its mountains, valley, waterfalls, lakes and coastline all steeped in legend. Britain’s oldest prose literature is the Mabinogion, a collection of Celtic folklore and myth written down in the 12th and 13th centuries in the Welsh language, full of royals and romance, conflict and comedy. Wales is known as a Land of Song – and it’s not just our wonderful male voice choirs! The musical reputation is largely thanks to the tradition of the ‘Eisteddfod’. This is a gathering where poets, singers, dancers and musicians compete. Often, the winning poet is awarded a chair for their efforts. There are Eisteddfodau at a local, regional and national level, and even an International Eisteddfod held annually in Llangollen.

The Welsh language is one of the oldest in Europe, and is descended from the language once spoken throughout Britain. However, the word ‘Welsh’ itself comes from an Anglo-Saxon term, meaning ‘foreign speech’! So we prefer the native word – Cymraeg. Cymraeg is spoken by around 19% of the population of Wales, or around 562,000 people.

Many of the place names you’ll see around you are Welsh, and these tend to be very descriptive. ‘Trecastell’ for example, means ‘the town of the castle’. ‘Pontsenni’ – the bridge over the river Senni. Look out for words in the list opposite in towns, villages and farms as you travel around!

If you’d like to try a bit of Cymraeg, here are a few words you could use:

Bore da
[
ˌbɔrɛ ˈdɑː
] English pronunciation: ‘bore-rare dar’
Good morning!

Shw mae!
[
ˈʃuːmaɪ
] English pronunciation: ‘shoo – my’ How are you?
This can also used as a greeting instead of ‘helô/bore da’.
Diolch
[djɔlχ] English pronunciation: ‘dee-all + ch’ – the ch is sounded as in the Scottish word ‘loch’
Thank you

Hwyl Fawr
[hʊi̯l vau̯r] English pronunciation: ‘who-will vawrr’
Goodbye

1         2        3     4         5                    6                 7              8       9      10
un      dau    tri      pedwar      pump                chwech           saith        wyth       naw      deg
een    die     tree   ped-wah    as in pimple    ch+wear+ch   sigh-th     oy-th       now      derg

**Place Names**
aber – mouth of the river
bach/fach – small
cae – field
castell – castle
coed – trees
cwm – valley
fan – summit/peak

hen – old
llan – church
mawr – big
nant – stream
pentre – village
pont – bridge
tre(f) – town
ty - house
NATURE & LANDSCAPE

The Upper Usk Valley is not only visually beautiful, but it also contains animals, plants, insects and fossils of great interest. For this reason there are a number of protected areas here, including sites of ‘Special Area of Conservation’ (SAC), ‘Special Scientific Interest’ (SSSI) and a ‘National Nature Reserve’. Visitors will notice the bluebells in Spring, heath spotted orchids in grassland, at the end of June and shoulder-high plants and flowers in water meadows along the Senni river in the Summer. Purple saxifrage Saxifraga oppositifolia, a rare Alpine plant, can be found in higher parts of the valleys.

Higher areas are unimproved grassland grazed by Welsh mountain sheep and small numbers of Welsh mountain ponies. Many mammals live here, including foxes, badgers and otters. It is common to hear ravens calling and buzzards mewing above the woodland. Red kites nest high up in large trees and some Ring Ouzels breed in the upper parts of the Senni valley with migrant birds pausing here and pass through the area: swallows, sand martins and house martins are sometimes seen with accompanying hobbies. Many species of raptor have been seen here, and 95 species of birds have been recorded in a nature study in the 10 km square with the Senni Valley at its centre.

The ‘Great Forest of Brecknock’ extends, now in name only, along the south-west side of the upper Senni Valley. This was a Medieval Royal hunting forest in the control of the local Sheriff. Red deer are sometimes seen in coverts, but hunting them ended in the 1820s when the land was sold by the Crown. It is said that the proceeds went to fund the buildings along Lower Regent Street in London. Ash, alder, bird cherry and oak are the commonest trees in the woodland and hedgerows. Hawthorne and blackthorn edge the fields with white blossom in
Spring, beginning in the lower fields and in succession up the hillsides. The Upper Usk Valley is a spawning site for brook trout, salmon, and rarer species such as lampreys and bullheads and it is protected under European law along with the rest of the Usk and its tributaries. Dippers and grey heron are often seen along the Usk and Senni rivers. The wild mountains and hidden valleys form a large part of the Fforest Fawr Geopark - the result of nearly 500 million years of Earth history. This fascinating area contains evidence of ancient seas, mountain building and sea level and climate change scattered across a landscape that was shaped by the last Ice Age.

For more information, please visit www.brecknockwildlifetrust.org.uk
www.fforestfawrgeopark.org.uk & www.breconbeacons.org

Dark Sky Discovery & Stargazing

Centrally placed within the Brecon Beacons International Dark Sky Reserve, the Upper Usk Valley boasts two of the very darkest areas in the whole of the UK, with some of the highest quality dark skies in the whole of the UK. Dark Sky Discovery Sites, which can be accessed by anyone, are located in Crai and at the Usk Reservoir. These sites attract stargazers from near and far and many accommodation providers in the UUV area supply stargazing equipment for their guests to use. A further benefit which the lack of light pollution brings to this area is the abundance of nocturnal wildlife which thrive under our dark skies. Barn Owls, bats, badgers, foxes, hedgehogs and many more rely on dark nights to hunt their prey and are easily seen in the area.
Fly Fishing the Upper Usk Valley

The Usk and its tributaries provide some of the most iconic upland trout fishing in the UK. It is also possible to fish for salmon and sea trout and there is fishing too on the Usk and Crai reservoirs. The Usk is regularly stocked with rainbow trout and so is the best bet if one is aiming to catch fish for the table. Release of all wild brown trout caught is actively encouraged. Unlike the Wye, Grayling are not found here. Anglers must also have a current rod licence: www.gov.uk/fishing-licences

Rod licences can be obtained from Sennybridge (or any other) Post Office. The majority of the beats on the Usk and Wye catchments can only be booked through the Wye and Usk Foundation: www.wyeuskfoundation.org

There are 5 beats on the upper Usk river. Prices for a day’s fishing range from £15 to £25 (2017 pricing). If not already booked for that day, evening tickets starting at 5 pm can be obtained half price. Trout can only be caught by fly fishing.

There are also beats on the ‘Wild Stream’ tributaries of the Upper Usk catchment. 3 beats on the Crai, 2 on the Cilieni, one each on the Senni and the Bran. These are cheaper to book than the beats on the Usk and are located in beautiful out of the way places, although the fishing can be tough and the fish are usually small.

For fishing the Usk reservoir there is a ticket machine located on western side of the dam wall of the Usk reservoir. The western end of the reservoir is fly fishing only. Details can be found on www.wyeuskfoundation.org

The Crai reservoir is an unstocked wild brown trout fishery. Currently it is not possible to book. Fishing is by fly only and the season starts on the later date of April 1st. There is an honesty box located on the road leading to the reservoir to leave fees in an envelope with car registration details.
Churches in the Upper Usk Valley area

The Parishes of Blaenwysg and Dan yr Epynt comprise 14 widespread individual churches situated in this sparsely populated area. 11 of these churches are within the Upper Usk Valley.

St Cynog’s, Defynnog
Open every day. The present church dates from the 14th to 16th centuries with some stonework from the 11th century. There is a very interesting font which bears a Runic inscription along with some fine German stained glass & a Romano-Celtic stone in the porch.

St David’s, Llywel
Considered to be late 15thC. Internally there is an early medieval stone and the cast of another, a significantly early font and the village stocks.

St Ilid’s, Crai
In 1883 the present church was built as Crai became a parish in its own right. The church is of simple design having a porch, nave and chancel with an apsidal sanctuary.

St Mary’s, Traeanglas
Consecrated in 1889 having been built in the Gothic style with Forest stone dressings to a design by architect Mr. J.B. Fowler. The chancel and vestry were added in 1903.

St Teilo’s, Llandeilo’r Fan
Believed to have been established around 540AD, the present church is of simple construction in stone with a lovely hammer-beam roof & a small bell-tower. There also remains part of the original rood screen. The present church appears to date from the 15thC & was altered in 1875.

Rhydybriw Chapel of Ease.
This Victorian chapel is located within Sennybridge Camp. The present chapel dates from around 1860. Open 24 hrs but must be accessed via the main guard house for permission.

St. David’s, Trallong
With inscriptions in Ogam script & Latin dating AD500, this largely medieval building was rebuilt in 1861.

St. Michael’s, Llanfihangel Nantbran
Most likely of Tudor origins and substantially rebuilt in 1882, next to the Nant Bran river at the top of a beautiful valley.

Bettws, Penpont
Originally a medieval chapel of ease, this is a beautiful church in the grounds of Penpont House, reconstructed in 1789 then again in 1864 by Sir George Gilbert Scott.

For services and info please visit www.parish.churchinwales.org.uk
Activities & Things to Do

Aside from the abundance of natural beauty in the Upper Usk Valley area that is free to enjoy by everyone, there are also many activities, attractions and places to visit within easy reach. Head down the Swansea Valley to the Showcaves for a family day out, enjoy rainy days with walks in the Waterfalls area or visit the Red Kite Feeding Centre on the Black Mountain. There are also many activity providers where you can choose from caving, climbing, canoeing & cycling to more unusual adventures like Sheep Trekking! Visit www.breconbeacons.org for a range of accredited providers.

LOCAL ACTIVITY COMPANIES

Good Day Out www.gooddayout.co.uk 01874 749092
Take a sheep or a pig for a walk in the Upper Usk Valley

Expeditions Wales www.expeditionswales.co.uk 07791 739025
Outdoor activities & walks

Rough Edge www.roughedgeadventure.com 01874 638263
Outdoor activities & walks

Brecon Beacons Safaris 01874 636845
Local guided tours in a 4x4 vehicle

CYCLING, MOUNTAIN BIKING & CANOEING

The Upper Usk Valley is the central part of the National Park cycling route which goes from Llandeilo to Abergavenny. You can find the full route at www.breconbeacons.org/cycleacrossthebeacons and there are also three Mountain Biking routes in the area with maps available from www.breconbeacons.org online shop. Please take care cycling on country roads and bridleways, closing gates and staying to the tracks, and always pass horses slowly and carefully. Canoeing is possible on the River Usk with an access point behind the Red Lion pub in Sennybridge. www.wyeuskfoundation.org
Eating, Drinking & Shopping

FOOD & DRINK

The Tanners Arms  www.tannersarmspub.com  01874 638032
The International Welsh Rarebit Centre  www.therarebitcentre.com  01874 636843
Sweetings Artisan Bakery  01874 636843
The Old Yew Tree  (open Aug 2017)  01874 638200
The Usk & Railway Inn  www.uskandrailwayinn.com  01874 636101
The White House Inn  www.whitehousecountryinn.co.uk  01874 636396
The Red Lion  01874 636265
Abercamlais Arms  01874 638978
Glanusk Services Cafe & Takeaway  01874 636267
The Shoemakers Arms (Pentrebach)  01874 636508
Usk Reservoir Tea Garden, Cwmwysg (opening 2018)  01874 636773
Castle Coaching Inn  www.castle-coaching-inn.co.uk  01874 636354
Tafarn y Garreg (Glyntawe)  www.tafarnygarreg.co.uk  01639 731415
Gwyn Arms (Glyntawe)  01639 730310
Changing Seasons Cafe, Craig y Nos Country Park(Penycae)  01639 731498
Craig y Nos Castle (Penycae)  www.craigynoscastle.com  01639 731167

SHOPPING & SERVICES

Post Office & General Store  01874 636236
Glanusk Service Station & Store  01874 636267
Sennybridge Service Station & Store  01874 636557
Sennybridge Trading Company  01874 636497
Camp Shop  01874 638145
Penpont Farm Shop - summer only  01874 636202
Trecastle Antiques Centre & Kingdom of Rust  01874 638007
Sleeping

**Accommodation - CRAI**

- Aberhyddnant Cottages (SC)
  - www.abercottages.com 01874 636797
- Madog Barn (SC)
  - www.madogfechan.co.uk 01874 636740
- Stargazers Retreat (SC)
  - www.stargazersretreat.co.uk 07787 054089
- Cnewr Estate (SC)
  - www.cnewrestate.co.uk 07538 190831
- Crai Valley Eco Lodges (SC)
  - www.craivalleyecolodges.co.uk 01874 638973
- Onnen Fawr (SC, GL)
  - www.onnenfawr.co.uk 01874 638973
- Happy Horse Cottages (SC)
  - www.happyhorsecottage.com 01874 636754
- Llanilid Cottages (SC)
  - www.llanilidcottages.co.uk 01874 636238

**Accommodation - Defynnog**

- The Tanners Arms (B&B)
  - www.tannersarmspub.com 01874 638032
- The Old Yew Tree (B&B) open August 2017
- Blaencar Farm (B&B)
  - www.blaencar.co.uk 01874 636610
- Trephilip Farm (B&B)
  - www.trephilipfarmbandb.co.uk 01874 636747
- Old Factory House (SC)
  - www.breconcottages.com 01874 636289
- Llwynystffilin Farm (CA)
  - 01874 636767

**Accommodation - Sennybridge**

- The Usk & Railway Inn (B&B)
  - www.uskandrailwayinn.com 01874 636101
- The White House Inn (B&B)
  - www.whitehousecountryinn.co.uk 01874 636396
- Castle Lodge (B&B)
  - www.castlelodgewales.co.uk 01874 638187
- Gilfach Farm Cottage & Log Cabin (SC, GL)
  - www.gilfach.wales 07770 851299
- Glynderi Cottage (SC)
  - www.glyndericottage.co.uk 01874 636878
- Pantyscallog House (SC)
  - 07592 261390
- Tyn y Coed Cottage (SC)
  - www.tynycoed-cottage.co.uk 07738 103837
- Bailea Cottage (SC)
  - www.breconselfcatering.co.uk 01874 636373

**Accommodation - Trecastle**

- Old Sunday School Room (SC)
  - www.sundayschoolroomtrecastle.co.uk 01874 636433
- Castle Coaching Inn (B&B)
  - www.castle-coaching-inn.co.uk 01874 636354
- Derwen Deg (B&B)
  - www.derwen-deg.co.uk 01874 636293
- Ynysmarchog Bunkhouse (SC)
  - www.bunkhousewales.com 01874 638000
- Llwyny cor Cottage (SC)
  - www.breconaccommodation.co.uk 01874 638031
- Ynysfaen Campsite (CA, GL)
  - www.campingatynysfaen.co.uk 01874 636436

**Accommodation - Nearby**

- Maeswalter (Heol Senni) (B&B, SC)
  - www.maeswalter.co.uk 01874 636629
- Llwyn Llwyd Cottage (Aberiscir) (SC)
  - www.holidayinbrecon.co.uk 07860 581466
- Penpont Estate, Trallong (SC, CA)
  - www.penpont.com 01874 636202
- Dan Yr Ogof Showcaves, Penycae (SC, CA)
  - www.showcaves.co.uk 01639 730284
- Craig y Nos Castle, Penycae (B&B, SC)
  - www.craigynoscastle.com 01639 731167
- Pentre, Penycae (B&B, SC)
  - www.pentrestables.co.uk 01639 730639
- Tafarn y Garreg, Penycae (CA, GL)
  - www.tafarnygarreg.co.uk 01639 731415

*Key: Self-catered = SC  Bed & Breakfast = B&B  Camping = CA  Glamping = GL*
LOCAL ANNUAL EVENTS

SENNYBRIDGE SHOW  1st Saturday in September
One of the largest shows in S. Wales with livestock and produce plus events all day

TRECASTLE SHOW  3rd Saturday in September
A rural family event with many sheep & craft classes, dog show and fun for children

There are frequent community-led events at the local village halls to which all are welcome - please see local noticeboards for information.

LOCAL INFO

Nearest hospital is Brecon with 24 hr A&E for minor injuries (no X-Ray at night), or Abergavenny / Merthyr Tydfil / Morriston for serious injuries. Sennybridge Doctor’s Surgery 01874 636559, Linked to Brecon Surgery 01874 622121

General shops and petrol stations are in Sennybridge with nearest supermarkets, amenities and a leisure centre in Brecon

Closest railway stations are Llandovery, Neath, Abergavenny & Merthyr Tydfil
There are buses on some routes 7 days a week, but check timetables for frequency.
Please visit www.traveline-cymru.info for timetables. Sennybridge also has a local taxi service 07708 589140. Central postcode for Sennybridge is LD3 8SF.

All content was created for the Upper Usk Valley Rural Alliance © 2017 with contributions from Menter Brycheiniog a Maesyfed, Glyn Powell, Liz Matthews, Sue Snook, Myra Griffiths and members of the UUV group and BBNPA. Welsh Women painting by Karin Mear. Photographs by Carole Gledhill, Nicola Matthews, John Adams. Other images & layout by Little Bird Creative.

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www.upperuskvalley.co.uk

If you have any comments or would like to be included, please email upperuskvalley@outlook.com
Join our group of local enthusiasts who are committed to helping the Upper Usk Valley area remain a place of outstanding beauty whilst encouraging visitors and businesses to the area and making it a vibrant place to live. upperuskvalley@outlook.com