

# Margam Country Park

## Cwm Philip Trail



Waymarked ●

Distance **5.6km/3.5m**

Ease of walking

**Steep in places, only for agile**

Starting place

**Track next to the Visitor Centre,  
leading past the small stone building**



**This trail begins on the main track which leads past the wooded slopes of the Iron Age hill fort. Follow the track for 400 metres, passing between the stone building on your right and the base of the Celtic settlement to your left.**

### **The Cwm Philip trail (green) goes straight on**

A man-made waterway (leet) once supplied water by a pipeline to the castle. The leet follows the track up through the valley to where it joins the stream, The Nant Cwm Phillip. This track is also the start or finish of the Coed Morgannwg Way - a long distance walk between Margam Country Park and the Rhingos Mountain near the Brecon Beacons.

A tunnel of shrubby undergrowth eventually opens out to reveal the rhododendron masking the hill slopes on your right. If you look across the valley, splendid beech trees stand like monarchs to hold this end of the valley. Visible through the trees are the old farm buildings and fields of Cwm Maelwg, encroached upon by pine forest.

The stream flows some distance below the track, just hidden from view, with a course marked by alder trees whose roots prefer to be kept wet. During the winter months, the alder cones provide a rich source of food for mixed flocks of hungry tits and finches.

Flocks of siskin, little yellow members of the finch family, occasionally join the tits during the winter.

Tall tussock grasses growing in the valley provide excellent camouflage for wintering snipe.

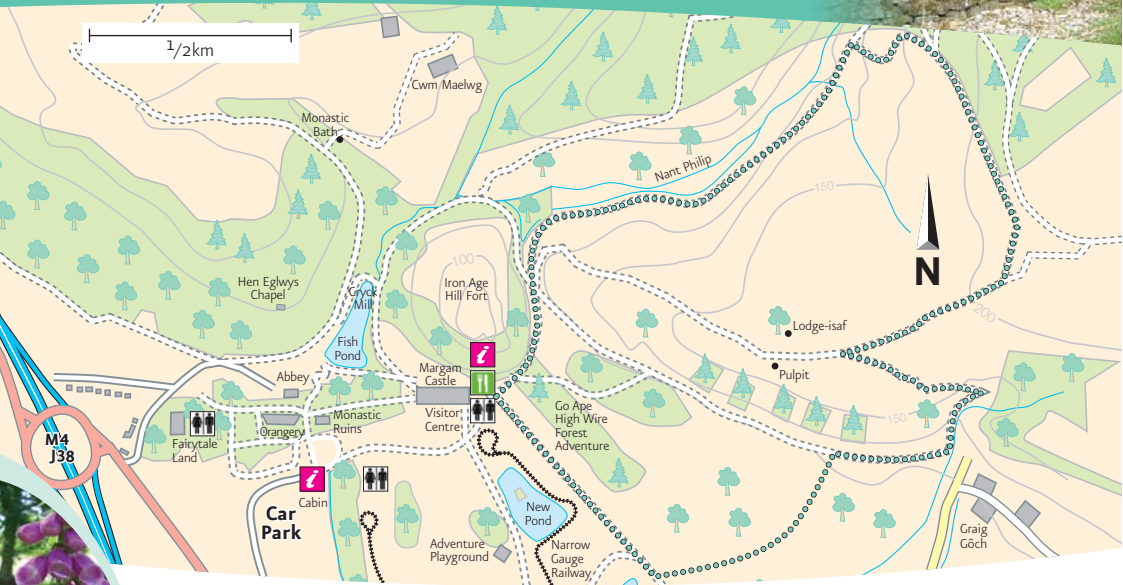
Once thickly wooded, the hillsides of Cwm Phillip were clear-felled during the early part of this century. The timber was cut at a sawmill adjacent to Nant Phillip, where it flows past the Iron Age Hill fort. Several thousand saplings of mixed broad-leaved species including oak, beech, rowan, birch, ash, and holly have been planted. Such species will provide ideal habitats and supply food for many creatures. Some of the original woodland flowers have survived the clearance of the trees and the bracked covered hillside shows off a vivid blue carpet of bluebells during the spring.

Foxgloves push up their tall spikes during the summer months, their leaves remaining green throughout the year. Beware! This plant is highly poisonous: all parts of the foxglove contain digitalin, a powerful drug.

The monks, and possibly the Celts, living at the hill fort farmed these slopes and there is evidence of a monastic grange, a small settlement. Some stonework is visible on low ground adjacent to the stream. Ridges running straight down the hillside divide one field from another. Crops may have been grown on these south facing slopes and been milled at Cryck Mill.

The hills to your right have now lost their cover of rhododendron. Old stark – looking Scots pine, remnants of the original woodland have managed to withstand the full force from winds blowing up through the valley.

# Cwm Philip Trail



With in a short distance, on the drier ground near to the stream, native trees and shrubs provide an added richness to Cwm Phillip. Seeds dropped by birds could probably explain the presence of species such as rowan, holly and hawthorn; their bright red berries are delicacies for thrushes during the autumn and winter.

The boundary wall comes into view and in the front of the gate leading into the forestry; the green way marked trail leads up the hill to your right where it will soon run parallel with the wall.

Made of sandstone from the park, this wall stands about 2 metres in height and stretches for nearly 10 kilometres to enclose the park. It is thought to have been constructed in the mid 16th century to demarcate the Mansel estate and also to keep in the newly acquired deer herd.

This wall is itself an important wildlife habitat for many forms of life. Lichens and mosses weave their intricate patterns. Ferns grow out of the clefts in the stonework, which may be occupied by various creatures, including over-wintering butterflies and their larvae. The stoat is the chief predator of these walls, wandering along to search nooks and crannies for a meal. Birds using the wall include the wren that may nest within; many birds use the wall in search of insect food as a high perch to display, proclaim territory or watch out for danger.

Still rising steeply to the highest place in the park, at about 240 metres, the trail runs close to a medieval and probably monastic settlement site. It is not readily seen from the track being near a spring that had been dammed. This farm was relatively large; archaeologists have established that there once existed three buildings and three stock-pens. A network of field patterns surrounds the site.

Eventually your trail runs down hill and leads away from the wall past the gate and pedestrian ladder to join, for a short distance, the medieval drover's road that runs through this gate. Here, there once stood a lodge, Lodge-Uchaf. The road may be traced back across the upland area of the park towards the pulpit; high banks edge part of its route. Continue along the more obvious track for 400 metres. This route may have its origins in Roman or even earlier times.

Leave the track at the way marker post to walk down the hillside into the small valley and join up with the 'Pulpit' trail, way marked in blue. Together they run down the valley past the monastic mine to reach the Craig-y-Lodge track. On your way, you will pass the small reservoir, which supplies water for Graig Goch Farm and provides an ideal breeding ground for frogs.

Follow the track back into the Park, keeping parallel with the high sandstone ridge. At a point past the quarry and below the first plantation of trees, your trail will meet up with the Craig-y-Lodge trail, way marked red. The three trails cut down across the open deer browsed grasslands towards Furzemill Lake and the main Park Road. Follow this past Newpond back to the castle.