

Margam Country Park

Pulpit Trail

Waymarked ●

Distance **3.6km/2.25m**

Ease of walking

Some steep and rugged sections

Starting place

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



The steep, tree covered hillside adjacent to the castle was used by Celtic Iron Age people as a safe settlement site. They dug deep ditches and erected stout wooden stockades to encircle the hilltop, protecting themselves and their livestock from marauding tribes-people. Wisely, they cleared all the trees from the sides of their hill fort to provide an all-round view with little cover for the attacking enemy.

Now the hill is once more wooded and beautiful. Oak, beech and sweet chestnut spread their rich canopies over the ground, and in autumn dead leaves are ankle deep. Alive with insects in spring and summer, these trees provide a rich source of food for many bird species including; tits, warblers, nuthatches, treecreepers and woodpeckers. In the autumn a wealth of acorns, beechmast and chestnuts become a feast for deer, squirrel, jay, pigeon, tits, blackbirds and thrushes. Many of the older trees provide a roosting site for some of the many different species of bat that have made their home in the Park. Walk along for a couple of hundred metres to a large beech tree from beneath which the track forks.

The 'Pulpit' trail (blue) bears right

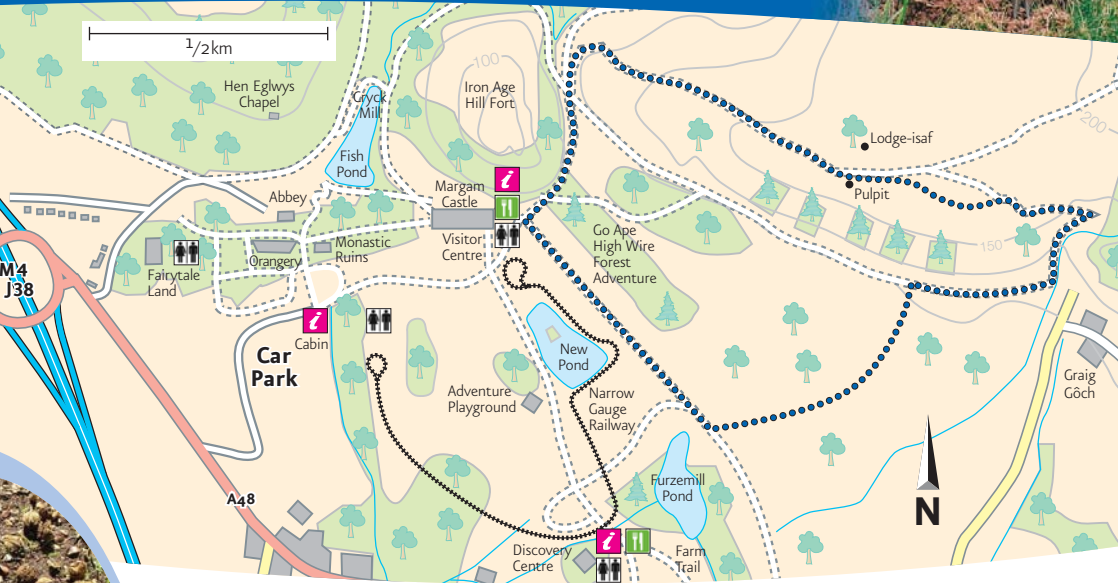
You should take the right track to the right of the tree; it heads uphill, is rugged and steep and you will be walking upon solid sandstone in places. On either side the views are

obscured by rhododendrons which provide a thick impenetrable barrier. Look out for foxes, they are sometimes seen here. Where the track bends, a small clearing on your left affords good views of Cwm Philip and the old farm across the valley at Cwm Maelwg. Further along the jungle of rhododendron becomes more scattered and the ground opens out into moorland. Coarse grasses and bracken grow here along with sweeter grasses, which are sought by the deer. Areas of long grass are a haven for snipe. A pair of snow bunting were spotted on this track one winter so keep your eyes and ears focussed!

The track continues up the hill towards the 'pulpit' viewpoint and beyond, out of the Park, towards Ton-mawr farm. This may be the oldest track in the Park; its origins may be Bronze Age. These people will have followed the path to head to the coast to fish or search for shellfish. Roman soldiers may well have modified this road, later using it to reach one of their strongholds at Brecon. Certainly the medieval monks and country folk used this road; it became a drove road to the markets and it's route can be traced to Llangwynyd near Maesteg. For safety, several farmers would combine their flocks and herds for the journey to market. Bandits, cattle thieves and sheep thieves were ruthless and were often encountered on these long journeys. Many of these tracks became deeply rutted with heavy use.

Cistercian monks were good farmers, becoming expert in rearing sheep for both wool and meat. Here, in the Park,

Pulpit Trail



monks established their own sheep granges - parcels of land divided from one another by low, straight mounds of rock and soil. These can still be seen in several places, criss-crossing the higher ground of the Park. Usually granges were associated with a group of small farm buildings that were used as stock pens. The monks, helped by lay brothers, planted cereals and root crops, helping to make the Cistercian community reasonably self-sufficient. Trading sheep or selling woollen produce, washed and spun in the woollen mills, provided an income for other essentials.

After the hard slog up the hill you will be glad of the rest at the pulpit, with its excellent views overlooking the low ground of the Park and along the coastline. Ahead, Port Talbot steelworks looms out of the vast hummocky dunes, only broken by Eglwys Nunydd reservoir and the smaller waters of Kenfig Pool. Used originally as a shooting perch, this stone-walled, circular structure overlooks the banks of Craig-y-Lodge; it is probable that some of C. R. M Talbot's famous guests were brought up here to shoot pheasant. The large stone here was unveiled recently by Prince Charles to celebrate the Princes Trust in Wales.

Across the track from the 'Pulpit' you may just make out the site of a small dwelling place, probably Lodge-isaf, a keeper's lodge. This would have been associated with the

deer herd, which was at one time confined to the higher grounds of the Park.

From here, the track heads towards the boundary wall of the Park. It drops down to your right where it meets up with the green way-marked Cwm Philip trail. Together they follow a little valley down towards Craig Goch farm. Whilst descending into this beautiful little valley notice the old mine adit on the corner of the sharp bend. It is probably monastic in origin, leading into the hillside to meet a coal seam.

This valley is rich in wildlife and a great place to sit and watch. Violets, wood sorrel, bluebells and foxgloves give a colourful show in their season. Stone chats flit from one perch to another making their characteristic "wee-chat" call as they flick their tails; these residents are joined in the summer by whinchats. The mewing of a buzzard may be heard as it wheels overhead. The sheltered valley provides a great spot for butterflies that, with wings spread out, sunbathe while resting on the dry-stone walls.

At the bottom of the valley the track follows to the right merging into a broader track that leads back into the Park. If you look up to your right at the base of the sandstone ridge, you will see the cutting of an old quarry. The building stone for the castle may have been collected here. After a short distance your trail meets up with the Craig-y-Lodge trail, way-marked red and together they cut, on a path to the left, across the open ground. This path joins the main park road near Furzemill Pond. Bear right to pass Newpond and finish back at the Visitor Centre.