

Llangattock & Craig y Cilau



Tom Hutton
explores some of
the breathtaking
highlights of
Brecon Beacons
National Park

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early in the morning,
when the dawn sun shines
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the Usk Valley**



As well as boasting some of the best views in the whole of the Brecon Beacons National Park, the Llangattock escarpment conceals some fascinating industrial history. The towering limestone escarpment, which dominates the skyline from miles around, was quarried as far back as the early 19th century, possibly earlier, and the tracks that this walk follows were once part of a sophisticated transport network used to get the quarried stone and lime down to the Brecon & Monmouthshire Canal, near Llangattock village. The route passes close to some ruined lime kilns and the remains of an old wheel house, and it also follows the line of one of the original inclines, down which the stone would have been lowered. It's definitely best enjoyed early in the morning, when the dawn sun shines sweet warm light across the Usk Valley, lighting up the crags and adding shape and depth to the wonderful piles of spoil that line their feet.





Walk out of the car park and back down the access track to the road. Turn left and follow this along to some cottages on your left. Keep straight-ahead as the road veers around to the right, and continue past the final cottage and out onto the open hillside on a broad grassy track that was once a tram road used for carrying limestone from the quarries above. Continue easily along until some large blocks of limestone partly block the path. Look to the right and you'll make out the remains of a built-up platform.



Turn right here and descend steeply down the old incline to the corner of the wood below; here you'll see the remains of an old wheel-man's hut, and also a park-bench that offers fine views over the Usk Valley. Turn left here onto a narrow but clear path that is often covered by bracken in the summer. Follow it uphill slightly at first and then contour around the hillside, with great views ahead to the imposing cliffs of Craig y Cilau. The path then drops to the banks of a small stream that emerges from a wall on the floor of the valley.



Turn left to walk along a rough path that climbs steadily upwards, keeping the wall to your right. Continue for nearly a mile, passing the Nature Reserve sign, and then, as you divert left to pass the very obvious corner of a wall, you'll see a waymark post pointing you straight ahead. Continue for another few paces with the wall to your right, and you'll meet another waymark post – this one diverting you sharp left onto a narrow path.



The path is narrow and reasonably level to start with but it soon steepens and climbs energetically to a grassy bank with a marker post on it. Keep ahead to continue upwards until you eventually reach a good level track. This is another of the old tram roads that were used to transport the limestone from the quarries. To your right, a few hundred yards further on, is Ogof Agen Allwedd, the entrance to one of the longest cave systems in Britain. You turn left however, and follow the easy track eastwards past a sign for the Nature Reserve. Continue for a few hundred yards beyond this and then fork right on to an obvious but narrow path that leads up onto a plateau dotted with small piles of spoil.



Follow the narrow path as it undulates along with the cliffs uphill to your right. Keep right at any forks and eventually you'll find yourself on a clearer broader track that heads leftwards around the huge banks of spoil at Chwar Pant-y-Rhiw – one of the biggest quarries. Continue until a good track joins from the right; this comes through the cutting between the banks and the quarry faces. Now, at the next fork, bear left to follow a good firm track downwards to a junction of tracks, where a brief detour to the right will expose a limekiln and tumbledown quarry building. Keep ahead, still on a good track, and this will drop you back easily to the car park. ☘

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Walker's Fact File

Distance: 3¼ miles (5km), Time: 5/6 hours

Start/Finish: Main Llangattock Escarpment Car Park SO209153

Paths: Mainly clear grassy tracks and paths that cross bracken covered hillsides. Some mud.

Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer Explorer OL13 (Brecon Beacons East)

Nearest Town: Crickhowell

Tourist Information: Crickhowell TIC – tel. 01873 812105