

Dyffryn Arms (Bessies), Pontfaen

Gwaun Valley woods and fields around Pontfaen, on the way to Bessies, 3.3 miles

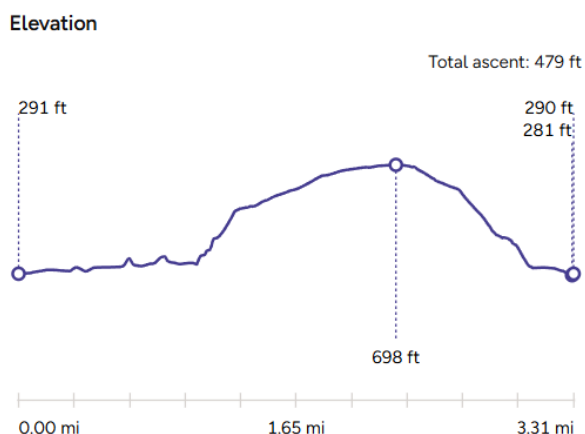
OVERVIEW

I'll be honest about this one: the walk is something of a token gesture, wrapped around a pub that would justify the trip on its own!

Every entry on this site needs a walk to go with it, and the Gwaun Valley — steep-sided, thickly wooded, and one of the prettiest folds in the Pembrokeshire landscape — offers far more route options than most places, for every taste and ability. I've simply picked a straightforward 3.5 miles that climbs the wooded slopes on either side of the valley while keeping Bessie's close for most of it.

The route sets out on a level, well-marked path through the woodland of Allt Pontfaen, before continuing into the neighbouring Allt Cwm-du. From there it crosses the Afon Gwaun itself and climbs the opposite side of the valley through Allt Pen-Gegin-Uchaf, gaining just enough height to look across the valley for views of the Preseli Hills and its Golden Road.

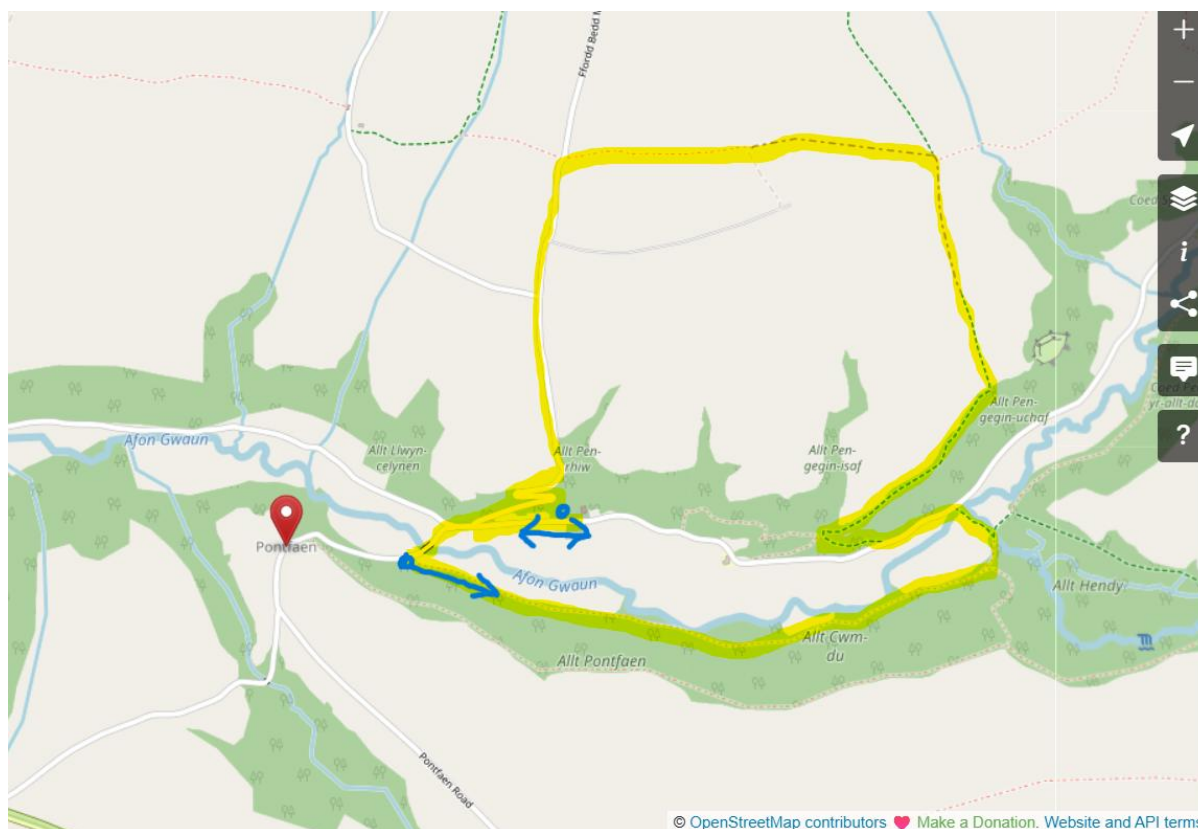
There are many shorter or longer and more challenging walks throughout the Gwaun Valley, including routes exploring the Preseli hills and the coast. This walk has a simpler purpose: to enjoy one of Pembrokeshire's most beautiful valleys before settling down for a pint in a pub unlike almost any other.



Start/Finish	At the parking area of Allt Pontfaen woods, just before crossing the bridge over the Afon Gwaun in the direction of the Dyffryn Arms.			
Parking	Allt Pontfaen has sufficient car parking for 4-5 cars. The lane is wider a little further up the hill near St Brynach's Church, and offers potential parking there if needed.			
Grid Reference	SN 037 339 for the Allt Pontfaen parking area			
What3Words	///sport.yachting.florists for the Allt Pontfaen parking area.			
Distance	3.3 miles / 5.3 km	Time	1.5 hrs	Ascent 480 ft / 150 m
Paths/Terrain	Woodland walking for a lot of the way, sometimes wet under foot. Field margins, sometimes without a cleared path. Farm tracks and tarmac drives and lanes. Some gates, no stiles.			
Difficulty	Moderate. Some steep climbs up and down in the second half. The route can easily be shortened: the first section is about 1 mile on a			

	level woodland path. Once you've crossed the Afon Gwaun and joined the road, follow it back to the Dyffryn Arms, a little less than a mile along for a circular level walk of c.2 miles in total.
Public Transport	The Fflecsi bus service might run part way along the Fishguard to Maenclochog road and drop off close to Pontfaen.
Toilets	Only at the Dyffryn Arms
Other Pubs Nearby	The Ship at Lower Town, Fishguard. The Sailors' Safety at Pwll Gwaelod; in Rosebush is Tafarn Sinc, another 'must visit' pub. In Cardigan, The Castle Inn is terrific.

DIRECTIONS



1. The walk begins in the small car park at Pembrokeshire National Park's Allt Pontfaen. Initially, follow the trail's woodland path that's marked within the parking area. It runs on this same side of the River Gwaun. The second section of the walk crosses the river to climb out of the valley on the other side.
2. The route from the car park continues on a generally level path through trees. Sections will be muddy after rain, though 'stepping stones' are in position to assist in the susceptible areas.
3. There are options to turn off the path, but continue until the path starts to drop down to the left, to the side of a farm building on the left.

4. Before the path reaches a footbridge, take the wooden gate into the field on the left. Drop down some steps and aim for another wooden footpath gate slightly to the left. Then follow the driveway towards the quiet road through the valley.
5. Crossing the River Gwaun, head left, now on the other side of the valley, to join the road. After 50 metres, take the bridleway footpath leading uphill on your right into the woods, via an old wooden gate, leaving the road below you on the left.
6. This clear wooded path rises uphill through old oaks, beech, hazel and holly, continuing steeply as it rounds a bend before eventually levelling out to follow a fence line at the top of the valley. It becomes more of a grassy track here, narrowing, with vegetation either side.
7. Arrive at a wooden footpath gate into a field, and go straight ahead up the field boundary on the left. Leave the field and continue straight ahead towards Pen-Gegin Usaf Farm.
8. Pass through a metal gate into the farmyard and continue straight on past the farmhouse, making your way to the farm's gravel driveway on the other side of the farmyard.
9. At the top of the lane, cross a cattle grid to join a tarmac drive. Follow this straight ahead until the drive bends to the left, and the tarmac ends. Look for the footpath sign through a gate into a field in the corner ahead of you.
10. Pass through the gate and follow the field boundary on the left. This is the direction of travel through fields ahead, until you enter a lane via a farm gate. However, the route is a little tricky, as it shares its line with the field boundary that's planted tight to the hedge, so crops are damaged as walkers find their way along the edge of the field. One field transition requires a clamber over bounders.
11. Once on the lane, turn left and continue all the way back to the valley floor. It's narrow in some spots, and very steep in places with some 'switch back' bends close to the bottom. It's a quiet lane though so there shouldn't be much if any traffic.
12. Turn left for the visit to the Dyffryn Arms. Turn right to cross the bridge back to the car park.

NOTES - Bessie's, the valley, and its own calendar

The Dyffryn Arms' fabric is recognised as being of genuine national importance — CAMRA lists its interior among the small handful of British pubs whose layout and fittings survive essentially untouched from an earlier era of what a "public house" originally meant, and it's one of only two pubs left in Wales still serving cask beer purely by jug through a hatch, the other being the Cresselly Arms at Cresswell Quay.

Its reputation reaches well beyond Pembrokeshire.

It's been picked out in national guidebooks as one of Wales's essential places to visit, and tributes poured in from well beyond the valley when Bessie Davies died — one visitor called it, without any qualification at all, the greatest pub not only in Wales, not only in the UK, but in the world.

What comes through in almost every account isn't reverence so much as plain personal warmth: people recalling being made to feel like old friends on a first visit, and Bessie herself, well into her eighties, still lighting the fire and asking after the lives of everyone who came through the door. Her own verdict on her beer, delivered with the dry wit regulars clearly adored her for: "I've got lovely beer here, proper beer. Not these other pubs — those drinks are 60 per cent fizz."

The valley the pub sits in has its own small act of quiet defiance, too.

Cwm Gwaun is one of the very few pockets of Britain that never fully gave up the old Julian calendar when the rest of the country adopted the Gregorian one in 1752 — locals still mark Hen Galan, the "Old New Year," on the 13th of January rather than the 1st, with children going house to house singing for calennig the way they might once have done everywhere. The celebrations proper begin the evening before, and they begin, fittingly, right here at the Dyffryn Arms.

A valley that quietly kept its own calendar, gathering at the one pub that quietly kept its own way of pouring a pint — it's hard to find a tidier match between a place and the pub at its centre.