

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS

When undertaking this walk please ensure that you are suitably prepared by following the Countryside Code which will assist you with visiting safely and keeping our environment and communities in mind. For more information go to www.naturalresources.wales/countrysidecode



**THE DRAMATIC
HEART OF WALES**

Neath Port Talbot

dramaticheart.wales

THE MONASTIC AND PULPIT TRAIL

Start point: Margam Country Park, use the track next to the Visitor Centre, leading past the small stone building

Length: 4.5 miles

Duration: 1.5 - 2 hours

Parking: Margam Country Park Car Park.

Food and Refreshments: A range of options for refreshments. Public toilet facilities are available within Margam Country Park.

There are regular historic tours available of Margam Country Park, for more information see the Margam Country Park website, tours are also available of the historic Abbey Church.

If you would like to see Margam Park's historic features close up, or enjoy some of the adventure activities or other walks available in the park further details can be found at

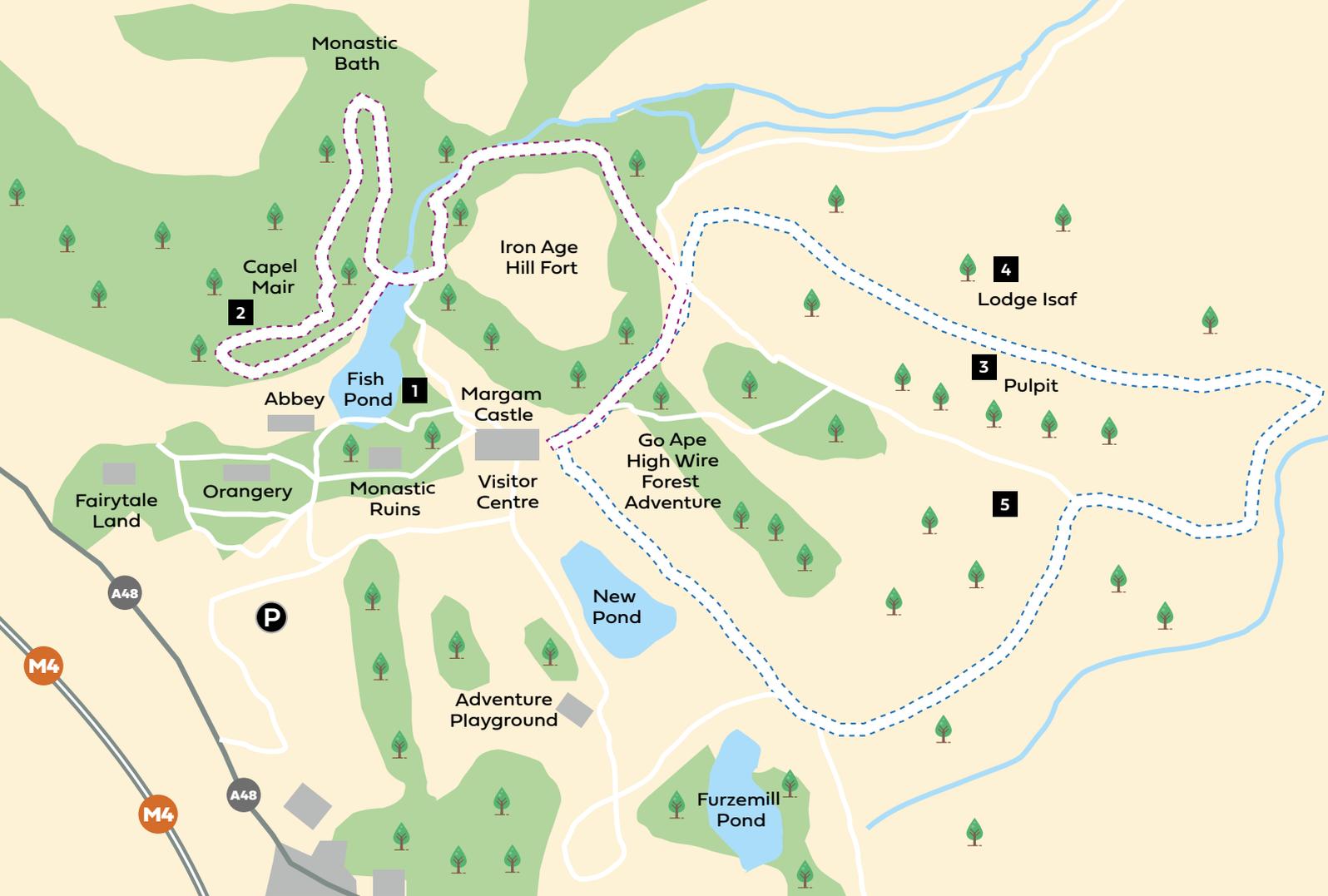
www.margamcountrypark.co.uk

On this walk you will wander through the hillsides of Mynydd Margam set in the backdrop of the historic Margam Country Park. You will see the scale of this historic landscape in all its glory whilst you walk in the footsteps of Cistercian Monks, of farmers and drovers on the walk to Capel Mair and get a birds-eye view of the estate once owned by one of Port Talbot's founding families, the Talbots.

Margam Country Park is steeped in history with features dating back to the iron-age. In the 12th Century Margam was home to an order of Cistercian Monks who built the grand Margam Abbey. The impressive ruins are located within the park grounds alongside the historic Abbey Church which remains a place of worship and the final resting place of the influential Talbot family who turned the town into an industrial powerhouse.

Christopher Rice Mansel Talbot was responsible for constructing the Tudor Gothic style mansion house (known as Margam Castle) in the 18th Century. The unfurnished castle is grade 1 listed and has some spectacular features such as the vast staircase hall and octagonal tower.





ROUTE

This trail begins on the main track right of the castle which leads past the wooded slopes of the Iron Age hillfort. Follow the track for 400 metres, passing between the stone building on your right and the base of the Celtic settlement to your left. You will see a large beech tree in the road. At this point the trail splits four ways, the trail (purple) drops down to your left. Beech, ash, oak, plane and alder line the trail. You will soon reach a stone bridge, which crosses the stream as it cascades down into the pond. Follow the track through the metal swing gate, past the copper beech and along the bank of Fishpond **1**.

Turn right up a steep tarmaced road just past the mill; your route leads along a wooded hillside. Where the road bends, there is a splendid view, to your right, of Cwm Philip valley, Margam Forest and the tree-clad hilltops with bracken covered moorland. This road leads to Crugwyllt Farm, but our route

branches off to the left, onto a path which leads across the slope to Capel Mair, the old chapel. Follow the path as it opens out on reaching the chapel **2**, what a wonderful view!

Capel Mair stands prominently on top of the hill which overlooks the Abbey Church and Orangery Grounds. From here there is a steep descent along a zigzag path down towards Fishpond. The path down from the chapel is steep so please take care. Continue along past the Fishpond back into the Park, through the swing gate and along the same track that you travelled along earlier. Once again, you will walk around the base of the hillfort, passing the ford on your journey back to the trail split.

ROUTE

From here take the second left trail (blue) it heads uphill, is rugged and steep and you will be walking upon solid sandstone in places. The track continues up the hill towards the 'pulpit' viewpoint **3** and beyond, out of the Park, towards Ton-mawr farm. Across the track from the 'Pulpit' you may just make out the site of a small dwelling place, Lodge-isaf **4**, a keeper's lodge. This would have been associated with the deer herd **5**.

From the Pulpit, 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 Graig 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.

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, where you are welcome to explore Margam Castle and the monastic ruins.



POINTS OF INTEREST

1 Fish Pond

The fish pond formed the centrepiece of Talbot's landscaped gardens. He dammed the stream, which once powered the monastic mill, and created a botanical paradise around its margins. Now it is a lovely place to sit and relax, feed the ducks, and watch visiting wildfowl gently gliding along the water's surface.

2 Capel Mair

Capel Mair was built circa 1300 by Cistercian monks for the benefit of their local community as a place for them to worship. Local farmers and lay people were not allowed in the grand Margam Abbey which was only for use by the Cistercian Order. The church was named after St Mary (Mair in Welsh), and for a time was home to a statue of the Virgin Mary visited by many as a pilgrimage. The chapel, now in ruins, shows some architectural signs from the 1500's, though likely due to rebuilding. This location offers delightful chance to explore and a stunning view of Margam Castle and the historic landscape of Margam Country Park.

Wales Coast Path

The Wales Coast path travels the length of the Welsh coastline. Signposted by bright blue and yellow way markers the path takes you on a journey of discovery. The Port Talbot stretch of the coast path takes you slightly away from the coast to a high vantage point, allowing you unobstructed views of the dramatic coastline. From this vantage point above Margam Country Park you can see the busy M4 traffic dissecting the countryside, the steel work docks and the town of Port Talbot which merge with the sea at Aberavon. Turn around and you are faced with the tranquil quiet thrum of nature in the surrounding fields and trees.

3 Pulpit

The Pulpit provides excellent views overlooking the low ground of the Park, along with views over to Devon, Somerset, The Gower Peninsular and the Glamorgan Heritage Coast. 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 by Prince Charles to celebrate the Princes Trust in Wales.

4 Lodge-isaf

Across the track from the 'Pulpit' you may just make out the site of a small dwelling place, 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.

5 The Deer Herd

The deer herd today roams freely through 500 acres of the parkland. The herd can be dated back to Norman time although references are made to deer in this area during the times of Roman occupation. The herd originally, exclusively Fallow deer has been added to and now boasts Red and the endangered Pere David deer.

