



# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE

When undertaking these walks 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](http://www.naturalresources.wales/countrysidecode)



**THE DRAMATIC  
HEART OF WALES**

Neath Port Talbot

[dramaticheart.wales](http://dramaticheart.wales)

## THE ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE TRAIL

**Start point:** Neath Castle, Castle View, Neath Town Centre

**Length:** 5-6 miles (short), 10 - 11 miles (long)

**Duration:** 2 hours (short), 3 - 4 hours (long)

**Parking:** Multi-storey car park accessed from Prince of Wales Drive

**Food and Refreshments:** There are a wide variety of places to eat and drink in Neath Town Centre along with a wide range of shops. Public Toilets are available at the Bus Station at Victoria Gardens.

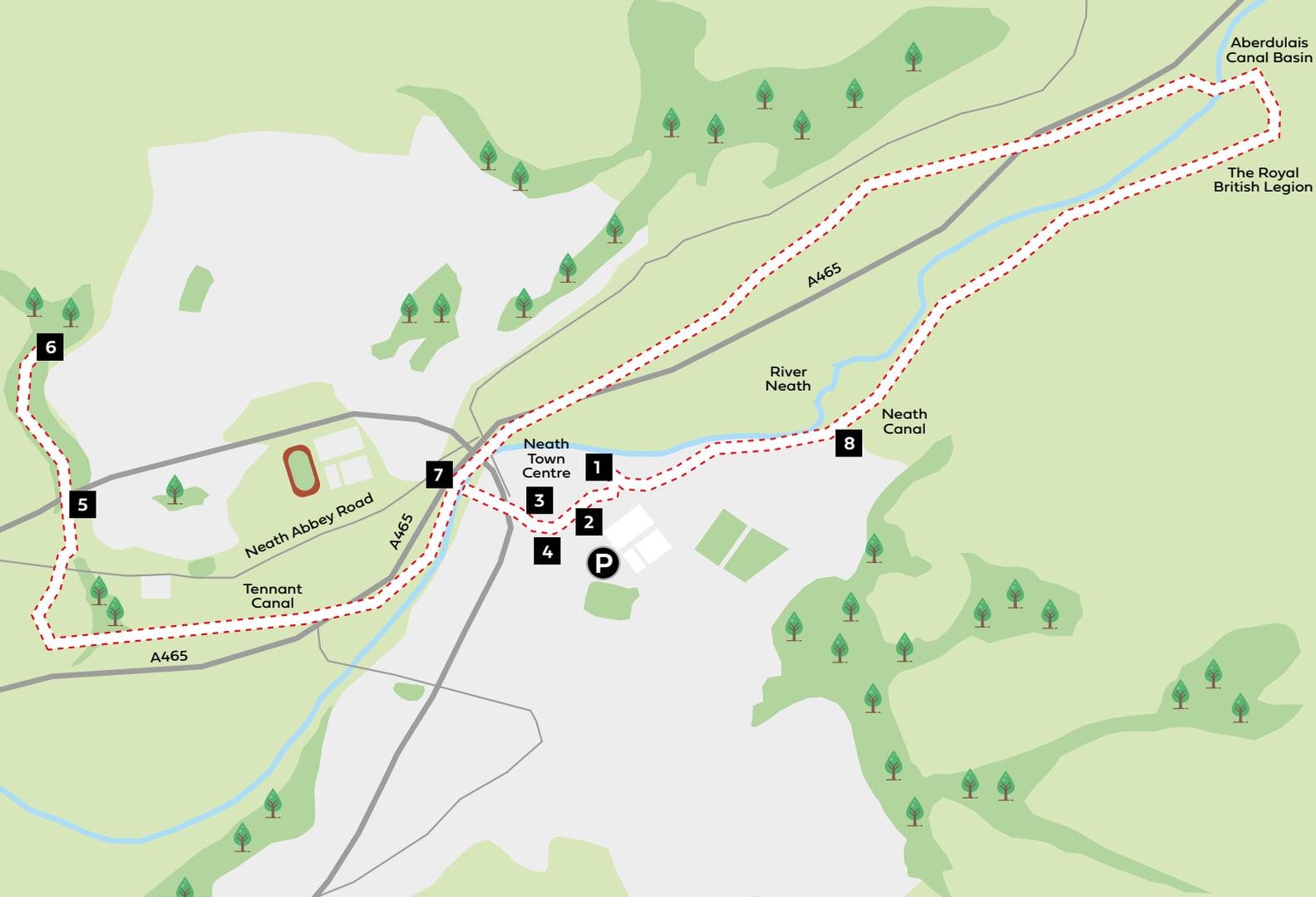
Alfred Russel Wallace was one of Britain's greatest naturalists, and was known as a great explorer, collector, author, philosopher, anthropologist and spiritualist. His most famous discovery was that of evolution; co-publishing the theory of evolution by natural selection with Charles Darwin in 1858.

But where did it all begin? Wallace spent a mere 5 years of his life in Neath, however it was an important time and one he believed to be the turning point in his life.

Wallace would later attribute his stay in Neath to the development of his fascination and knowledge of nature and the natural world. The Alfred Russel Wallace Trail allows you to follow in these famous footsteps and see the landscape that inspired him.

Wallace himself said, *'I cannot call to mind a single valley that in the same extent of country comprises so much beautiful and picturesque scenery, and so many interesting special features, as the Vale of Neath.'*





# ROUTE

Starting on Castle View, take a few minutes to wander around the Neath Castle grounds **1**.

Once ready to depart, turn right onto Castle Street. As the road starts to bend to the left, turn right into the alley way that brings you out into a small courtyard area with a church. Here you can see the Mechanics Institute **2**, a building still in use today. Follow the road to the end and here you pass Neath Town Hall **3**, a building where Alfred Russell Wallace gave numerous scientific lectures.

As you join New Street **4**, take a moment to look around, as this was the street where Wallace had lodgings during his second return to Neath. Cut through from New Street to Croft Road and turn right and begin heading away from Neath. Turn left under the railway track onto Bridge Street and cross the River Neath (taking the right hand path). Here you take a left and follow the Tennant Canal tow path along the canal. Follow the Tow path until you reach a cross roads, take a right onto Monastery Road and you will very soon see Neath Abbey **5** these substantial ruins remain some of the most impressive in Wales.

Continue on Monastery road until you reach the roundabout, turn right and cross over immediately. A small cut through alongside the Motor garage will take you past Neath Abbey Ironworks **6**, follow the track further into the woods and along the river to find the spot where Alfred Russell Wallace taught himself to swim.

From here you can either continue to explore the woods or turn back along the same track. Once you reach Bridge Street on your return journey, you can choose to head back into Neath to finish the walk, or take the long route along Tennant Canal and returning on Neath Canal back into Neath. If you choose to go on, follow the tow path along the canal, criss-crossing the newer A465 by-pass road until you reach the Royal British Legion building, turn right, then left and follow the Neath Canal track alongside the Calor Gas Centre all the way back to Neath. Keep an eye out for the Church of St Illtyd **8** on the opposite side of the canal as you walk.

# POINTS OF INTEREST

## 1 Neath Castle

Neath Castle was one of the minor Norman castles in the Lordship of Glamorgan. The location was chosen as a strategic spot guarding the river crossing. The main surviving feature of the castle is the great twin-towered gatehouse on its west side, a remnant of the most recent phase of the 250 year history. The original castle, built in the 12th Century by Robert, Earl of Gloucester was regularly attacked, and was rebuilt in the early 13th Century. It is thought that materials from the original castle were used in the construction of nearby Neath Abbey. Further attacks damaged the castle and it was once again rebuilt in the 14th century.

## 2 Mechanic's Institute

The Mechanic's Institute in Neath was formed in 1843 to provide working men with education in elementary and technical subjects. The Mechanic's Institute started with a library and various resources such as maps and globes and held its classes all at the Town Hall. However due to its popularity the original Institute became too small and a new building was necessary.

Mr William Jevons from Cwmgwrach Iron Works co-founded the Mechanic's Institute and was a driving force in the creation of a purpose built building. The Mechanic's Institute asked Wallace to design the new building, his plans were accepted. The building included a library, reading room and class room, it was soon completed at a cost of £550 and opened here on Church Place in 1847.

## 3 Neath Town Hall

During both his residences in Neath Wallace taught lectures at the Town Hall and Mechanic's Institute on a Friday evening. Wallace taught the subjects of Geology, Geography, Astronomy and Science. At first Wallace was reluctant to lecture but with a bit of persuasion from Mr William Jevons who owned the Cwmgwarch Venallt Iron Works he gave in and started to teach the basics of science, including physics. The Town Hall is a grade two listed building located on the same street as the Mechanic's Institute.

## 4 New Street Lodgings

Wallace's brother William died suddenly in 1845 forcing Wallace to return to Neath to finalise William's business affairs. Wallace continued with the surveying business and took lodgings with a photographer called Thomas Sims on New Street.

Thomas Sims eventually became Wallace's brother in law, marrying his younger sister Frances in 1849.

## 5 Neath Abbey

Neath Abbey was founded by the knight Sir Richard de Grenville in 1130, and by the 13th century was one of Wales's wealthiest abbeys.

Neath Abbey was home to approximately 50 monks with many more staff who worked on the outlying abbey estate tending to animals and crops.

The abbey didn't escape the Industrial Revolution however, by the 1730s the abbey had become a copper smelting plant with furnaces, workshops and workers' dwellings. The industrial debris was cleared away in the early 20th century and its ruins are still considered one of the most impressive monastic remains in South Wales.



# POINTS OF INTEREST

## 6 Neath Abbey Iron Works

Samuel Osgood had drawn the 1830 map of the Neath Abbey estate and then in 1832 a map on the wider area of Neath. He also worked for Joseph Tregelles Price the manager at the Neath Abbey Iron Works.

Tramlines would run past the front of Wallace's dwelling to the Neath Abbey Iron Works, where a few years later, Wallace's younger brother John found employment.

The cottage that Wallace and his brother moved to was basic to say the least and to their dismay was covered in bedbugs. This was soon resolved by Wallace's brother William who made it his mission to rid the house of these pesky bugs. Wallace and his brother lodged with Samuel Osgood until 1843. Unable to find enough work, Wallace left Neath to find employment in London and then took a teaching post in Leicester. In Leicester Wallace met fellow amateur naturalist Henry Walter Bates who was to become a great friend, colleague and influence on Wallace's scientific fascination.

## 7 Neath and Tenant Canals

Whilst living at Llantwit Cottage Wallace's brother John became determined to build a small boat giving them access to Swansea via the Neath and Tennant Canals.

John was a carpenter by trade and he built a small lightweight boat, light enough to carry and to hold two to three people. One day Wallace and his brother persuaded their mother to travel to Swansea with them on the boat which ended with them getting their feet wet and their mother refusing to take any more boat trips with the brothers.

## 8 The Church of St Illtyd

The ancient Welsh Church of Llan Illtyd, also known as Llantwit Church or St Illtyd's Church, is situated on the left bank of the River Neath. The original church was built by St Illtyd, an early Welsh Saint and ex-Knight who was one of the teachers of the Celtic Saints in pre-Norman times. The church originally constructed from wood, was later rebuilt with stone during the Norman period.

