

Key Information

Paddle one of Britain's prettiest canals; the 'Mon and Brec'. The canal meanders through the beautiful, wooded Usk Valley, past cosy villages and industrial relics. This section is located within the Brecon Beacons National Park and has great views of the distinctive mountain range.

Start: Brecon Basin LD3 7EW
Finish: Gilwern Wharf NP7 0EL
Portages: 9 (locks & liftbridges)
1 tunnel (lighting & navigation rules)
Time: 5.5–10 hours
Distance: 18.5 miles (one-way)
OS Map: Explorer OL12 & OL13 Brecon Beacons National Park west & east



For more information scan the QR code or visit:
bit.ly/3jn1unv



This section has 1 flight of locks, 3 individual locks and 5 liftbridges which require portaging. These range from 10m to 250m so, depending on your route and craft, you may need to pack your trolley! The canal can be busy with narrowboats in the warmer months. The route can be adapted/shortened.

There is one tunnel which requires a forward-facing bright light or head torch and a personal flotation device with whistle attached (Canal & River Trust requirement). Before entering the tunnel secure your light and check the tunnel is clear of other craft (two-way navigation).

There is a towpath along this section, which has been restored in most parts to a wide gravel/hard surfaced track. However, some sections can be muddy.

Paddlecraft launch points have been installed at some of the portages and car parks; these are 2m sections of the canal edge which have been covered with rubber matting, to protect paddlers, paddlecraft and the canal! Some of these can be used as drop off/pick up points as they are next to a road and have access for 1 or 2 vehicles.

1. Park in public car park behind Theatr Brycheiniog (pay and display, accessible bays, 75m to canal). Launch either in front of the cottages at the top of the basin (10 steps, wide concrete path, stone edge with wooden board), or from the concrete ramp at the bottom of the basin, in front of the theatre (stone edge). It is possible to unload in a layby near the ramp (at the side of the theatre). There is a café at the front of the theatre and public toilets within the theatre (accessible, usually open 10am-5pm).

Paddle east out of the basin, under bridge 167, and between the pretty houses that line the canal.

2. Bridge 164A carries the A40 over the canal. Beyond this the canal moves away from the road and closer to the River Usk (Afon Wysg). This section of canal is peaceful and scenic, with beautiful old growth trees dipping down to the water. The views across the valley to the Brecon Beacons are stunning; there are benches and viewpoints which take in the best of the scenery. Look out for the 'weir' on the right, which allows excess water to run into the stream below (a regular feature on the canal).

3. Brynich Lock is the next major feature. Portage right using the launch point (50m, across road with 2 gates, gravel/tarmac), with another launch point at the bottom of the lock.

4. The canal then turns right and crosses the Usk via the Brynich Aqueduct, which has great views along the river below.

5. At bridge 162 the towpath crosses to the left-hand side. From here the landscape begins to open up, and around bridge 160 there are some great views of the Brecon Beacons. Continue past Cambrian Cruisers Marina on the right (just above bridge 159).

6. After bridge 158 there is a launch point on the left. This can be used as a drop-off/pick-up point; there is a small layby on the road above (B4558). (Access: 20m, sloping, gravel/dirt, gate.) Continue along this quiet tree-lined stretch, which has a small aqueduct and lots of friendly ducks!

7. Moored boats on the right signal the approach of Pencelli Court Farm and its liftbridge (155). If it's lowered portage left using the towpath (20m, turf/gravel path, stone/timber edge, 2 gates).

8. About 100m after the lift bridge there is a launch point and concrete slipway on the right. There is a small public car park here (free) and this is an alternative start/finish point. (Access: 10m, gravel/dirt.)

9. Bridge 154 is immediately after and marks the outskirts of the small village of Pencelli. The village pub, The Royal Oak, backs onto the left bank and its beer garden can be easily accessed from the canal (10m, turf/gravel, concrete edge).

After bridge 153 the canal curves round to the right following what was the moat of Pencelli Castle, now nothing more than a motte/mound and home to a caravan and camping park (right-hand side).

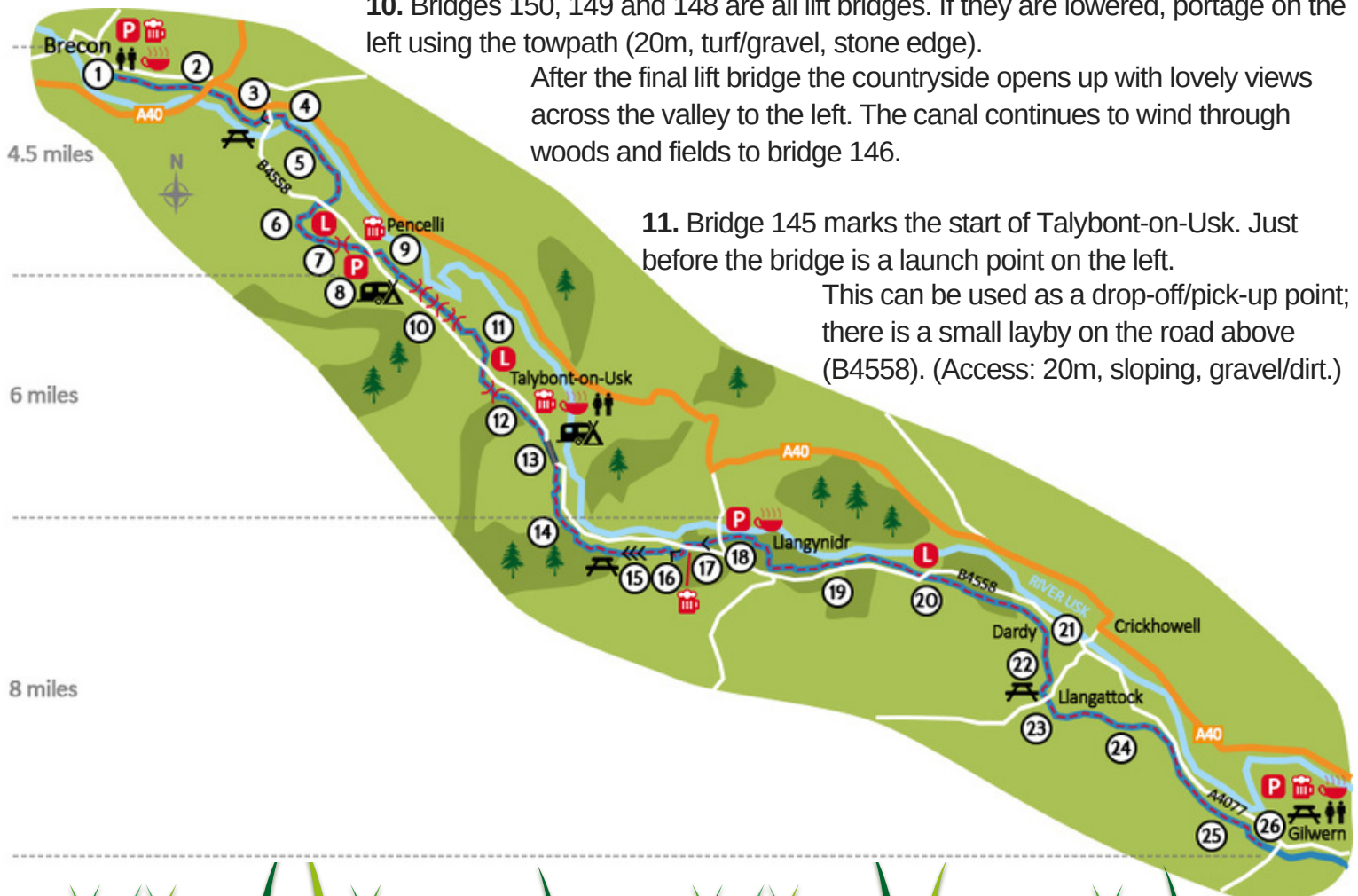
Continue through picturesque countryside with brief views between the trees and shrubs.

10. Bridges 150, 149 and 148 are all lift bridges. If they are lowered, portage on the left using the towpath (20m, turf/gravel, stone edge).

After the final lift bridge the countryside opens up with lovely views across the valley to the left. The canal continues to wind through woods and fields to bridge 146.

11. Bridge 145 marks the start of Talybont-on-Usk. Just before the bridge is a launch point on the left.

This can be used as a drop-off/pick-up point; there is a small layby on the road above (B4558). (Access: 20m, sloping, gravel/dirt.)



12. Bridge 144 is another lift bridge: portage left along the towpath and across the road (40m, sloping, turf/concrete, turf/concrete edge). Next to where you launch back onto the canal is a sloping gravel path down to the village, which has a café and shop (to the right, 70m), public toilets (£1, accessible) (to the left, 150m), and campsite (Talybont Farm Camping). There are a couple of pubs too; these are best accessed from the canal as they back onto the towpath (The Star Inn and The White Hart). Both have outdoor seating and can be accessed down short sloping paths from the towpath (20m).

The canal takes an elevated path above the village, past the pubs and under two large water pipes that run from Talybont reservoir to Newport.

On the right is a wall of impressive arched stone structures; these are a bank of lime kilns (c1815). A handy info board and replica wagon on the left gives an insight into their history.

13. A pleasant tree-lined section carries you to Ashford Tunnel (343m). You can paddle through the tunnel, however, you must have a forward-facing bright light or head torch and a personal flotation device with whistle attached (Canal & River Trust requirement). Before entering the tunnel secure your light and check the tunnel is clear of other craft (two-way navigation).

14. After the tunnel the canal continues to wind through the trees, with glimpses across the valley to the left. Continue to bridge 135.

15. After bridge 135 are a flight of locks; these are the first three Llangynidr Locks (66, 67 and 68) in a pretty woodland setting with picnic benches above the top lock (66). Portage all three locks on the left using the wide gravel towpath, which is steep in places (downhill). (Portage: 250m, turf/concrete edge).

16. The canal continues for 350m to the fourth lock (65), with the handsome stone buildings of Country Craft Narrowboats and CRT alongside. Portage on the left using the sloping (downhill) towpath (60m, turf/gravel path, stone/timber edge above, launch point below).

Paddle on under bridge 133 and past the Coach and Horses pub on the right. This can be accessed just before the bridge on the left. Get out next to the wooden gate, go through this and walk along the road, over the bridge, to the pub (70m, gravel/tarmac, turf/stone edge, gate).

17. 100m after the bridge is the fifth and final lock (64). Portage on the left using the sloping (downhill) towpath (60m, turf/gravel path, stone/timber edge).

18. Continue past the houses to bridge 131. There is a launch point on the left with small parking area (free) alongside (B4560). This is the best access for Lower Llangynidr village which has a shop and café (220m, tarmac road/pavement). This can also be used as an alternative start/finish point.

19. After the village the canal cuts a river-like meandering path between the trees. On a still day you can hear the rush of the River Usk in the valley below. Or it could be sound of the weir between bridges 129 and 128! This is another incredibly picturesque stretch of canal.

20. After bridge 122 there is a launch point on the left. This can be used as a drop-off/pick-up point; there is a small layby next to the canal (Cwm Crawn Rd). (Access: 10m, gravel/dirt.)

The canal then continues through another scenic tree-lined section, with the Usk close by.

21. After bridge 118 is the hamlet of Dardy. Continue past Dardy, enjoying the views to the left, and on towards Llangattock village.

22. The canal takes a series of sharp bends, with moorings on the right. After these are the impressive stone arches of the Llangattock lime kilns (c1815). These can be explored, and there's a lofty picnic area on top of them (accessed by a rough, steep track). Because of the moored boats getting out can be tricky – there are a set of steps on the right, at the end of the lime kilns, which could provide the easiest get-out. If not you'll have to pick the best spot between the boats. If there's no access on the right, paddle under the bridge and get out on the left. Head up the path and onto the road, cross the bridge and head to the kilns (100m, gravel/tarmac, turf/stone edge). The road in the opposite direction leads into the village, which is pretty but quite sprawling; the two pubs are at the far side of the village (1km).

23. Paddle on, past Beacon Park Boats Marina on the right and onto bridge 113. Before bridge 113, on the left, is a giant redwood tree. It's hard to miss!

24. Continue past fields and between the trees to bridge 110 and Herons Rest Marina. After bridge 110 the canal loses some of its meander and takes a straighter line to bridge 105.

25. Bridge 105 marks the start of the village of Gilwern, with houses on the left.

26. About 50m before bridge 104 there is a picnic area and car park on the left and lime kilns on the right. This is Gilwern Wharf and the end of the trip. The picnic area has a launch point (10m, grass). The car park is free and has a launch point (10m, grass/gravel) but is locked overnight (no overnight parking, the times are displayed in the car park).

If you'd like to finish with some refreshments, you can carry on for another 500m to bridge 103 (and then paddle back to the car park when you're fully refreshed). Immediately after the bridge is The Towpath Inn, with a beer garden alongside the canal (concrete/turf edge). This is also the easiest place access to the village, which has pubs, cafés, shops and public toilets (accessible) all in the centre of the village (200m, pavement, follow Main Road down the hill).



Brecon Basin

Photo: Pete Catterall Photography



Paddlesport launch point

The Mon and Brec is an extraordinary example of contour canal engineering, cutting into the hillside for much of its course. This means fewer locks and gives it a river-like, meandering course, which adds to its charm.

Today the 35-mile navigable section of the Mon and Brec runs from Brecon to Cwmbran. However, it originally ran from Brecon to Newport and was built in the early 1800's to carry coal, iron and limestone.

Competition from the railways saw it go into steady decline; by 1915 transport had all but ceased. The canal was abandoned in 1962. During the 20th century various parts were filled in for road construction.

The canal was about to be lost for good, however, campaigning by canal enthusiasts secured its future and in 1968 restoration work began. Today the canal from Brecon through Gilwern to Sebastopol is owned and managed by the Canal & River Trust (CRT), with a dedicated group of volunteers working on preservation and restoration projects.

Apart from the remains of the wharfs and lime kilns there is little evidence of what a busy industrial waterway this used to be. There are interpretation panels dotted along the length of the canal, which provide fascinating insights into the history of the canal and surrounding area.

Once an industrial artery, the canal is now a green corridor, supporting wildlife such as water voles, newts, otters and kingfishers. And lots of very friendly ducks!

The canal can be busy with powered boats; please keep to the sides when passing them and be considerate towards other waterway users. Follow the CRT guidelines for a safe and enjoyable trip: bit.ly/3BTbHz7

Further information can be found at the following websites:

www.canoewales.com

www.britishcanoeing.org.uk

www.gopaddling.info

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk



Safety and Licences

We want you to enjoy a safe trip, so here are a few tips for staying safe and paddling responsibly.

Paddle Safe. Be prepared and take the right kit:

- Wear a correctly sized buoyancy aid
- Mobile phone – in a waterproof case
- Whistle – to attract attention in case of emergency
- Map and/or route description
- Appropriate clothing for the weather conditions + spares in a dry bag
- Food, drink & suncream!

Paddle Responsibly. Respect the natural environment and other users:

- Respect other waterway users #sharethespace
- Be environmentally aware, minimise your impact
- Ensure you have the correct licence if required
- Observe navigational rules – keep right and give other users space
- Check, Clean, Dry after every trip!

Licences: The waterway in this trail is managed by the Canal and River Trust and requires paddlers to hold a licence. If you are an existing Canoe Wales (or British Canoeing) member the good news is that your membership includes an annual licence for the waterway covered within this trail – please ensure you take your membership card with you on the water as this acts as your licence, if stopped with no licence, you will be at risk of being fined. For more information on Canoe Wales membership please click [here](#).