

Key Information

The 'Mon and Brec' is one of Britain's prettiest canals. This section winds through the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Blaenavon World Heritage Site, providing tranquil countryside and industrial heritage. With no portages it's a stress-free trip along a picturesque waterway.

Start: Gilwern Wharf NP7 0EL
Finish/turning point: South Sebastopol Moorings NP44 1FT
Portages: 0
Time: 4–8.5 hours
Distance: 16.5 miles (one-way)
OS Map: Explorer OL13 Brecon Beacons National Park (east) & OS152 Newport & Pontypool



For more information scan the QR code or visit:
bit.ly/3E2gO0z



There is no parking at the end of this section so you will need to decide where to finish your trip. There are various access points along the canal so you can tailor the journey to suit you; whether that's one-way or return.

Paddlecraft launch points have been installed at some of the access points 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. These make it easy to adapt or shorten this trail.

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.

1. Park at Gilwern Wharf, which has free parking alongside the canal and a launch point (10m to water, gravel/turf surface) (the car park is locked overnight; no overnight parking, the times are displayed in the car park). There are pubs, cafés, shops, public toilets (accessible) and a public car park in the centre of Gilwern (700m, towpath/pavement). Launch and head east, under bridge 104. Paddle past the pretty Castle Narrowboats building on the right, around a surprisingly tight bend and under bridge 103.

Immediately after bridge 103 is The Towpath Inn, with a beer garden alongside the canal (concrete/turf edge). There is access to the village here (200m, pavement).

2. Paddle along the canal, with the village dropping below you on the left, until you reach a dog-leg bend (unusual for a canal!), which takes you under a modern concrete bridge carrying the A465 (Heads of the Valley Rd). This next stretch is fairly noisy, ugly and (fortunately!) short. Paddle between the embankment and the road and onto bridge 101, where the canal moves away from the road and into a more pleasant tree-lined stretch.

3. Llanwenarth House is the impressive building on the right, which bridge 100 leads to. This is a passable liftbridge (no longer in use) and is the lowest bridge on the canal.

The section from here to Govilon offers scenic views across the valley to the hills beyond.



4. The large Blaenavon World Heritage Site sign marks the edge of Govilon, with an information board and bench alongside. The canal forms the northeast boundary of the site and played a significant role in our industrial heritage.

After the sign paddle over the small aqueduct. On the left is a steep set of steps which leads down to Govilon. The village has a shop and a couple of pubs which can be accessed from these steps or a path further along (120m, steps/road, turf/concrete edge).

The canal curves to the left, with a weir on the outside of the bend, and continues to bridge 98, where the towpath crosses to the right bank. The village can be accessed from here, it's a little further than the previous access point but has no steps (200m, tarmac path/road, turf/concrete edge).

This is the centre of the village and the houses sit close to the edge of the canal. Govilon Boat Club is on the left (situated in the old wharf buildings).

5. Beyond bridge 96 is a beautiful beech forest on the right. The towpath crosses back to the left over the bridge. The canal takes a wandering route between the trees, which soften the sound of the road in the valley below.

6. The section to bridge 95 is very picturesque; it cuts high above the valley, winding through dense woodland, with glimpses of the valley and houses below. The incredibly quaint Boathouse and Wharfingers Cottage are hidden in one of these bends; remnants of Llanfoist Wharf. Llanfoist village is beyond the trees on the left, but not easily accessed (500m).

7. The canal continues its scenic journey between wooded banks, contouring around the side of the valley. This is another very pretty stretch of the canal.

8. At bridge 88 the trees begin to give way to fields, with moorings on the right. The view starts to open up; over the fields and to the hills on the right and across the valley floor on the left.

Paddle under bridge 86 and past the weir on the right.

9. After bridge 84 there's a launch point on the left. This can be used as a drop-off/pick-up point; there is a small dirt pull-in next to the canal (10m to canal, dirt/turf).

10. Continue along the meandering course through tree-lined fields to bridge 80. The canal begins to feel less remote, with the occasional picturesque house on the bank or farmhouse across the field.

11. Just before bridge 76 there's a launch point on the left, with an adjacent CRT car park (Lapstone Bridge) (free, 10m to canal, dirt/turf). This is an alternative start/finish point.

12. After bridge 75 the moorings on the right indicate that Goytre Wharf isn't far. It's hard to miss ... with a large marina, café, toilets (accessible), picnic area, visitor centre and parking. There is a small jetty in front of the café (50m, tarmac) or, if it's busy, paddle on and follow the bank round to a slipway. It's a little further but might be an easier and quieter get-out (150m, tarmac/grass). The wharf can be busy so put your paddlecraft out of the way of walkers etc. There is lots to do here, with wildlife, walks, canoe hire, lime kilns and a Visitor Information Centre. This is an alternative start/finish point (pay and display, accessible bays) (150m tarmac, grass).

13. Paddle on towards bridge 72. Just before the bridge, on the left, is a launch point. This can be used as a drop-off/pick-up point; there are a couple of dirt laybys on the right of the bridge (Park-y-Brain Lane). (Access: 50m, dirt/tarmac, gate.) There is a lane next to the launch point, however, this is private access so please do not park there.

14. Continue to bridge 62, along another scenic section with old-growth trees reaching over the water and views across the fields to the hills beyond.

Bridge 62 is the closest access point to the small village of Mamhilad and The Star Inn. Get out on the right, on either side of the bridge (150m, sloping track and narrow road, turf/hard edge, gate).



Tree-lined tranquility near Mamhilad



Looking back towards Goytre Wharf

- 15.** Paddle on to bridge 56, past houses and farms; this is a rural and tranquil stretch of water. After bridge 56 the buildings become more frequent, with gardens running down to the canal with houses half hidden in the trees above. This is the edge of Pontypool. The canal retains its scenic nature, even though the town presses in on either side.
- 16.** Directly after bridge 52 is Pontymoile Basin and The Boat Yard café. There is a picnic area and public toilets (varied opening times). The easiest place to get out is after the bridge on the right; there is a slipway at the back of the basin (20m to café/toilets, concrete/grass). This is also an alternative start/finish point; there's a car park for café customers and also parking on the road alongside the car park (75m to car park, concrete/grass). The section below Pontymoile is navigable, however, as it has less traffic it can be a little more overgrown than the section above Pontymoile. Paddle under bridge 51A, which carries the A472, with a marina on the right after it. The scenery varies with tree-lined banks, gardens running down to the water's edge and house windows almost at eye level! This makes it an interesting and diverse section.
- 17.** About 350m after bridge 49 The Open Hearth pub is on the left. It faces the canal, with picnic benches along the towpath (10m, grass/tarmac, turf/timber edge). The pub has a large car park behind, so could be an alternative start/finish point for customers (30m, 6 steps, tarmac). The section from The Open Hearth to bridge 47 passes through Sebastopol, with houses backing onto the canal, with the occasional stretch of trees or shrubs. From below bridge 47 the canal is managed by Torfaen Council, all the way to Malpas.
- 18.** Bridge 46 is the site of a new development; just beyond the bridge there are moorings on the right. This marks the end of the section; turn round and paddle back to your chosen finish/exit point.



Approaching bridge 79

Photo: Pete Catterall Photography



Pontymoile Basin

Photo: Pete Catterall Photography

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 majority of the canal (Brecon to Sebastopol) is owned and managed by the Canal & River Trust (CRT), with a dedicated group of volunteers working on preservation and restoration projects. Torfaen County Borough Council manage the section from Sebastopol to Malpas and are undertaking work to restore the complete length within the borough.

Apart from the remains of the wharfs and lime kilns there is little evidence of what a busy industrial waterway this used to be. Goytre Wharf provides a fascinating insight into the history of the canal and with a visitor centre and café, it is definitely worth visiting.

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 and moorhens!

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 & River Trust and Torfaen Council; paddlers are required 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](#).