

Sunday 10 January 2016: Fourteen Locks Newport

Following in the footsteps of Derek Brockway, the BBC Weatherman, 14 Lower Wye Ramblers set out from the Fourteen Locks Visitors Centre, Rogerstone, Newport on a damp January morning to follow the canal towpath as it descended through the locks. This hardy group of ramblers were expecting to find a lot of mud and surface water en route in the light of the recent amount of rainfall, although this did not deter them, and unfortunately, they were not disappointed!

The walk started on a branch of the Monmouthshire Canal that was built primarily to transport coal and iron from the valleys down to Newport. The series of locks, also known as the Cefn Flight, was completed in 1799 and was one of the most ingenious pieces of canal engineering. However, the coming of the railways made the canal redundant as a means of trade, and after 1935, this stretch of the canal fell into disrepair. Recently, a Millennium Project between Newport City Council and the Canals Trust has seen much of it cleared and restored, and it now offers facilities for walking, cycling, and dog walking, amongst others.

At lock 11, we turned off the towpath and headed up to Ridgeway in All-ty-ryn, where a coffee stop gave us the opportunity to take in the spectacular views north towards the tree-covered hills of Mynydd Machen and Twmbarlwm and east over Cwmbran. You could understand why this beauty spot was nicknamed "Little Switzerland".

After a well-earned rest, we descended through the Allt-yr-yn Nature Reserve, passing between two ponds which were once an outdoor swimming pool (the Lido) that was very popular with the people of Newport between the 1930s and 1960s. We then encountered the M4 underpass, which was flooded with more than a foot of water, but luckily those wearing wellies managed to wade through. The walk then took us across fields and past the clubhouse of the Tredegar Park Golf course on to the last easy stretch back to the visitor centre on a tarmac road that passed the two Ynsfro reservoirs.