

Castell Coch



Surveying the landscape from the top of Craig yr Allt

From [Castell Coch](#), the walk follows the [Taff Trail](#)'s high-level route across the wooded slopes of [Fforest-fawr](#). A level section along a former railway line is followed by a steep, zigzagging climb on to the narrow ridge of [Craig yr Allt](#). The remainder of the walk comprises a varied mix of lanes, field paths and woodland trails. Highlights include the peaceful wooded valley of Cwm Nofydd and the bird's-eye view of Cardiff from Rhiwbina Hill.

Fact file

Distance: 6.9 miles / 11.1 km

Height gain: 452 metres

Start/finish: Free car park at Castell Coch (ST 131 826). Be aware of the car park closing time if walking into the evening – there is on-street parking in Tongwynlais if needed.

Map: [OS Explorer 151 Cardiff & Bridgend](#)

Viewranger: Click [here](#) for an interactive map.

Refreshments/facilities: There are toilets and a cafe inside Castell Coch, while about halfway around the walk is the popular [Black Cock Inn](#).

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The fairytale Castell Coch in winter

It is unclear whether the original twelfth-century earthwork at Castell Coch ('red castle') was built by the Normans to protect territorial gains around Cardiff or by the Welsh to combat Norman influence in upland Glamorgan. The castle was undoubtedly in Norman hands by the late thirteenth century, when the powerful Marcher lord [Gilbert de Clare](#) added three stone towers to the old mound. These survived the brief reign of [Llywelyn ap Gruffudd](#), but only a few decades later (1316) were attacked and badly damaged in a revolt by [Llywelyn Bren](#). The damage was never repaired and de Clare's castle was left to slowly decay.

All changed in 1871, when the Marquess of Bute, [John Crichton-Stuart](#), commissioned architect [William Burges](#) to rebuild Castell Coch (the pair were already engaged in rebuilding [Cardiff Castle](#)). There was little left of de Clare's medieval castle, but Burges was nevertheless careful to follow plans for the original structure where known. The castle's most striking features, however, are the product of his imagination: the variation in the height of the towers, for instance, and the steeply pitched angle of their roofs. The end result is both a splendid example of nineteenth-century [Gothic Revival architecture](#) and every child's fantasy of a fairy-tale castle.

The walk

1. From your parking place, walk up the hill to the castle entrance. Turn right and cross the top of the car park to an information board about Fforest-fawr. Join a gravel path by the board (part of the Taff Trail) and climb steeply through woodland to a T-junction with a forestry track. Turn left and contour around the hill. As the track swings right, start to descend.
2. At the bottom of the hill, bear right through a green metal squeeze barrier and join a level gravel path along what was once a branch of the Barry Railway (the former railway line is now part of the Taff Trail). Continue northwards for a further 1.5 km or so until an open area with a picnic bench is reached (there is a good view across Taff Vale to [Garth Hill](#) from here).

3. Just beyond the picnic area, where the Taff Trail snakes around some old bridge abutments, bear right over a stile displaying a Glamorgan Ridgeway Walk marker. Stick to the main path, climbing Craig yr Allt in a series of zigzags, until a final left turn takes you on to the line of the ridge. Shortly after the path levels out, fork left and climb to the rocky crag marking the hill's summit. (In bad weather, you may prefer to continue along the lower path to the right, which provides a pleasant contouring route along the southern slopes of the hill.)



Looking across to Garth Hill with Taff's Well in the valley below

4. From the summit, keep ahead along the line of the ridge. Ignore a wide path curving sharp right just after a double telegraph pole and continue ahead on to a narrow, possibly slippery path. This eventually drops right to a T-junction with a clear path (the alternative lower route mentioned above). Turn left and follow the track down to a gate and a junction with a lane.

5. Turn left along the lane and descend to a T-junction with a wider road opposite Blackbrook House. Turn right and follow this road carefully for about 500 metres to a T-junction opposite the Black Cock Inn.

6. Cross into the car park and bear left to a stile behind the pub. Turn right and walk up the right-hand edge of two fields to a junction with a track. Cross straight over and follow the right-hand edge of a third field towards a stone barn directly ahead.

7. With the barn immediately in front of you, use a footbridge to cross a small stream on the right. Bear left in the next field, up to a gate visible at the top edge of the field (looking back from here, there is an excellent view of Craig yr Allt). Beyond the gate, the right of way splits. Leaving the promoted '[Escape to ...](#)' route, bear right across a rough field and pick up a worn path running uphill along the far field boundary.

8. In the top corner of the field, a marker post points the way ahead into woodland. Descend along the left-hand edge of trees to a wooden gate and swing right into a more open, grassy area. Do not enter the field ahead, but bear back to the left, towards a metal kissing gate. Continue downhill through scrubby woodland to a junction with a good-quality vehicle track (the ruins of Cefncarnau-fawr are a short distance to the left).

9. Turn right along the track, climbing initially and then descending through woodland. About 700 metres after joining the track, you will pass two neighbouring houses on the right. Opposite the second of these, look out for a partially concealed marker post on the left. Turn sharp left here and join a woodland path descending diagonally left into Cwm Nofydd.

10. Reach a T-junction with a path near the bottom of the valley and turn right. This new path passes to the right of a pylon and begins to climb back up the slope of the valley. After about 200 metres, turn sharp left on to a path (unsigned at the time of writing) that drops back into the valley to a path junction not far from the pylon passed earlier. Bear right and follow the path across a field to a junction with a gravel track.

11. Keep ahead along the track for close to a kilometre. The track eventually leaves the valley, bearing right and climbing to a junction with a road (Rhiwbina Hill). Turn right and climb for about 150 metres, as far as a house on the right called Forest Lodge.

12. Opposite the house, turn left on to a woodland path running along the edge of the trees (not the footpath signposted across the field on the left). At a fork in the path a short distance ahead, take the main, right-hand path away from the woodland edge. Drop to another junction, this time waymarked, and follow the yellow arrow ahead. Descend more steeply to another split in the route. This time, bear slightly left, between two fence posts. The path again draws close to the left-hand woodland edge, which is followed steeply downhill to a T-junction with a clear level path.

13. Turn left along the path, which runs parallel to a stream and road. At a footbridge, cross the stream (Nant y Fforest) to a junction with the road. Cross carefully to a footpath opposite and climb through woodland. Pass to the right of buildings and climb a short, steep section to a cross-path.

14. Keep straight ahead along the waymarked path and continue round the side of a small valley. The path then curves left, up a series of shallow steps, to a junction with a wider cross-path (marked with arrows for two promoted forest walks). Turn left and descend along a clear woodland trail, which emerges at the bottom of the drive to Castell Coch. Turn right and follow the drive back up the hill towards the car park and castle.