Using former railways in South Wales as cycleways

John Palmer
Framework

• Establishment of Sustrans the sustainable transport charity in 1977 and National Cycle Network (NCN) vision. Role of sister company Railway Paths Ltd in land assembly and land management.

• Development of National Cycle Network in Wales – key landmarks

  1. Millennium Commission Grants programme
  2. EU ERDF Grants and Valleys tourism development
  3. Celtic Trail NCN core route development across South Wales
  4. Partnerships with local Authorities and Welsh Government
  5. Partnerships with Regional Transport consortia – Sewta and SWITCH
  7. Ongoing improvements, interpretation and maintenance work
Funding Partnership for Valleys Cycle Network
Afan Valley Trail NCN 887
Old Station Cymmer
Afan Valley Trail
Pontrhydfen Bont Fawr aqueduct and viaduct.
John Reynolds 1824
Afan Valley – Rhondda Tunnel 1890 plaque
– feasibility study for reopening as a cycleway being commissioned
Bath Twin tunnels exemplar reopening project by Sustrans and partners
Afon Lwyd Trail NCN 492
Cwmbran – Blaenavon leaflet
Garndiffaith Viaduct
John Gardner 1878
Afon Lwyd Trail NCN 492
Coed y Cric bridges over Monmouth and Brecon Canal
Afon Lwyd Trail NCN 492
Big Arch overbridge – entrance to British ironworks
Afon Lwyd Trail NCN 492
British ironworks plan 1880
Largest manufacturer of railway rails in the world
Afon Lwyd trail NCN 492
Varteg Road overbridge
Party of Railway Ramblers
Clydach Gorge NCN 46
Quarry, limeworks and viaduct – Blaenavon World Heritage Site
interpretation panel
Clydach Gorge NCN46
Darren-felin quarries and disused LMS railway line
Clydach Gorge NCN 46
Darren-felin – cycle route through National Nature Reserve
Clydach Gorge NCN46
Govilon cycle route
Former LMS rail bridge overbridge Monmouth & Brecon Canal
Garw Valley – NCN884
Route alongside colliery railway
Ebbw Valley – NCN 465 Cycleway
Guardian of the Valleys sculpture at Nine Bells colliery site
Ebbw Valley – NCN 4 Bassaleg Viaduct, George Overton 1826
Oldest in use on an operational railway
Sustrans Volunteer Rangers
Ebbw Valley – NCN 466
Llanhilleth
Start of large retaining wall
Heads of the Valleys – NCN 46
Nine Arches Viaduct Tredegar
John Gardiner 1864
Heads of the Valleys – NCN 8
Nine Mile Bank descent to Talybont
Rhondda Fach Trail – NCN 881
Tylorstown
Rhondda Fach Trail – NCN 881 Porth with new road bridge
Rhymney Valley – NCN4
Bedwas Colliery and tips c1950
Rhymney Valley – NCN 4
Bedwas Colliery site reclaimed with cycleway
Sirhowy Valley – NCN47
Hengoed Viaduct – Charles Liddell 1857
Sirhowy Valley – NCN47
Hengoed Viaduct restored 2000
Sirhowy Valley – NCN47
Hengoed Viaduct
Wheel O Drams sculpture
by Andy Hazell
Taff Trail – Penydarren Tramroad 1804
Original 4’ 2” inches gauge stone anchorage blocks
Taff Trail NCN 8
Penydarren Tramroad, Pontygwaith Bridge 1802
Taff trail – NCN 8 Merthyr
Rhydycar Bridge 1853 Brunel, Vale of Neath railway
NCN 8 Merthyr Cefn Coed Viaduct
16 arches
Alexander Sutherland & Henry Conybeare 1867
Websites

• sustrans.org.uk

• railwaypaths.org.uk
Conclusions:

Disused railways and tramway routes have provided an excellent basis for the creation of a close network of approx. 116km shared use surfaced paths for walkers and cyclists in the South Wales valleys probably unrivalled elsewhere in the UK.

There is still scope for a number of improvements especially the creation of missing links and avoidance of heavily trafficked roads and crossings.

There is considerable potential for more on-site, electronic and published multi-lingual interpretation material to reflect the European importance of industrial heritage along these routes.