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Gorge Walking in Waterfall Country



Mellte Gorge

PARC CENEDLAETHOL BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG

The Mellte Gorge – one of a kind

The woodland habitats in the Waterfalls area, including those along the Mellte, are of European importance. The steep valley sides in the Mellte Gorge trap humidity and produce ideal conditions for lower plants, including mosses and liverworts that are scarce or rare in Britain and Europe. The valley's ancient woodland is one of the 10 richest in Wales for humidity-demanding lower plants. These plants grow on rocks, tree trunks, logs and the woodland floor, so care is needed to avoid damaging them. Amongst these is Autumn Flapwort, which colonises fallen and standing trees and sometimes rocks in very humid places. The gorge is also important for other plants such as ferns, including delicate 'Filmy Ferns', uncommon Hawkweeds which grow in rock crevices and Marsh Hawk's-beard, which grows on damp banks by the river.

Gorge Walking Code of Conduct

Following this code will minimise environmental disturbance within this protected site.

Brief your groups

- When participants understand the fragile nature and protected status of the gorge, damage can be avoided as individuals assume a personal responsibility for protecting the area.
- Be sure to brief every group, including any parents, teachers or observers not actively participating.
- The Countryside Council for Wales has produced a short DVD on gorge walking; if possible offer your group the chance to see it before visiting the area.

Keep to footpaths and the agreed access points and routes as shown on the map.

- The agreed access routes and access points can accommodate groups of different abilities, and also take account of different water levels - high and low.
- Ensure you know which access point to use and avoid using any that are not shown on the map.
- Do not create new routes and access points.
- Groups should follow unsurfaced paths in single file to avoid widening pathways.

Stay in the watercourse

- By keeping in the water flow you will ensure that you and your group are doing least damage. However, avoid moss / vegetation-covered rocks, boulders and tree bases within and by rivers, or any vegetation away from agreed routes and access points.
- Keep away from the marked sensitive areas (red hatching).
- The entire gorge environment is very sensitive to disturbance and continued use of some areas prevents recovery. This is why most of the gorge is marked on the map as sensitive. Avoid conducting activities, group briefings and breaks in these sensitive areas. Break stops and group briefings can be particularly damaging as it concentrates damage from feet into one area. Therefore please conduct briefings in the car park.





Gorge Walking in Waterfall Country

Waterfall Country has become an increasingly popular place to visit over recent years. This has resulted in much wear and tear to the natural fabric of the woodlands, waterfalls and gorges. Gorge walking is mostly undertaken away from the footpaths and therefore adds significant pressure on the wildlife of the area. A programme of footpath repairs is helping with erosion but the **Code of Conduct** overleaf addresses the impacts of gorge walking in the Mellte area. This code of conduct, along with the related training and resources, is in place to ensure that providers of adventurous activities within the Mellte Gorge are using the site in the most environmentally sustainable way.

In order to use the Mellte gorge for gorge-walking and all other adventurous activities you must:

- be leading on behalf of a SWOAPG member organisation or join as an individual member
- all leaders must attend training on the Mellte Code of Conduct.
- be signed up to the Concordat (see below)
- adhere to the Code of Conduct (see overleaf)
- adhere to the maximum daily group size limits (see FAQ below).

Gorge Users not having taken these steps will not have permission to use the site and may therefore find their insurance is invalidated.

Please also note the following:

- Planned Rope-work, such as Abseiling, Tyrolean Crossings, is not permitted in the gorge.
- The Nedd-fechan, Hepste and Pyrdin are strictly out of bounds for adventurous activities.
- Organisations delivering Gorge Walking in the River Mellte must also hold a current AALA License covering Gorge Walking at this site, hold an equivalent inspection scheme License, such as Adventuremark, or have been observed using the site in an appropriate and safe manner by an independent Technical Advisor selected by NRW (Natural Resources Wales) and BBNPA - the majority landowners.

For further details see www.swoapg.org.uk or email swoapg@gmail.com

Frequently Asked Questions

Who owns the land in and around the Mellte gorge?

The National Park Authority owns the land on the western bank of the Mellte from the bridge above Sgwd Clun-Gwyn down to Sgwd y Pannwr. The majority of the remaining land is owned by NRW.

What are my access rights in relation to leading gorge-walking groups?

While much of the site is designated Open Access land, this only allows for general public access on foot, not commercial or otherwise organised activities. Private land may not be fenced or marked but there is no right of access to these areas. Organised groups can gain permission to operate in the area from NRW and BBNPA through agreement with the Waterfalls Area Activity Concordat.

What happens if I don't adhere to the concordat and code of conduct?

The law treats damage to Sites of Special Scientific Interest seriously. Third parties may be liable of fines (of up to £20,000) if they knowingly, intentionally or recklessly damage the special features of SSSI. Owners and occupiers may be subject to similar fines if they do not consult NRW about their intention to undertake activities that result in damage to the special features.

How will the code of conduct and concordat be enforced?

In order for the Mellte gorge to remain open for gorge-walking activities the site must show improvement, therefore we hope that the code and concordat will be largely self-policing.

What are the daily limits on group size?

Maximum group size (excluding instructors) is 16. The maximum daily limit for any one business is 48.

When using Loonies Leap area which code of conduct applies?

Those starting their gorge-walking day at Clun Gwyn should adhere to the Mellte code whilst groups starting their day at Craig y Ddinas should adhere to the Sychryd code.

SWOAPG South Wales Environmental Charter

What is the Environmental Charter?

The Environmental charter is a commitment from activity and education centres for the sustainable use of the Brecon Beacons National Park and SWOAPG South Wales operating area. All members of SWOAPG make this commitment and work with Landowners and Environmental Organisations to keep the Charter relevant and effective in conserving all the outdoor venues they use.

Most of the areas we use as providers are privately owned, and the SWOAPG Environmental Charter encourages groups to show respect and consideration for local residents and other users, as well as citizenship, to the activity sites that are visited.

SWOAPG Members:

- Recognise that their use of the natural environment carries with it a responsibility to encourage those in their care to learn something of the countryside's special qualities and the ways in which it can be looked after.
- Make a commitment to good practice for the sustainable use of the countryside.
- Always carry out activities in a manner which maintains good relationships.

As associate members of SWOAPG, the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Natural Resources Wales:

- Recognise that support, care and enthusiasm for the Brecon Beacons National Park and South Wales Outdoor Recreation venues can be generated by outdoor activities, undertaken within the terms of this Environmental Charter.
- Will consent with members of the Environmental Charter Group over the management and policy development on all issues, within the framework of this Charter.

The Concordat

Organised groups can gain permission to operate in the area from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) through agreement with the Waterfalls Area Activity Concordat.

As much of the area in and around the gorges is legally protected for the high quality and rarity of its habitats, activity groups must follow a simple Code of Conduct to minimise the environmental impact of a visit. Compliance with the Code is a requirement of being permitted to access the site.

This Concordat and the accompanying Code of Conduct and guidelines were developed between representatives of Outdoor Activity Providers and BBNPA and NRW working collaboratively.

Outdoor Providers wishing to use the Mellte for Gorge Walking are required to first join SWOAPG, then attend the Code of Conduct training and finally sign-up to the Concordat to enable them to use the site with Landowner permission. If you are already signed up to the Concordat as a result of the Sychryd Code then you will just need to attend Code of Conduct training for the Mellte.

This agreement and collaborative approach to environmentally sustainable use of a SSSI and SAC by Activity Providers is unique in the UK and is a template for what can be achieved by working together.



For more information, please visit the National Park Authority & Fforest Fawr Geopark websites:

www.breconbeacons.org www.fforestfawrgeopark.org.uk

