



### Birds of the South Wales Valleys

(all images courtesy of RSPB)

From **Golden Plovers** on moorland, **Ravens** nesting on rock faces and **Dippers** diving in the rivers the Valleys are home to a wealth of bird life due their huge diversity of habitats.

Open upland habitats provide a home for waders such as the **Lapwing**, **Curlew** and **Golden Plover** which although they look as if they should be by the sea, head to these upland habitats each year to breed.

Another wader, the common **Sandpiper**, is most likely encountered along upland rivers and reservoirs. During the spring and autumn evenings you may glimpse the buoyant flight of a **Short-eared owl** on migration. **Whinchat** and particularly **Stonechat**, with a call like pebbles being struck together, are fast becoming familiar sights and sounds of the South Wales Valleys.



Golden Plover



Nightjar



Dipper

All UK wild birds, their nests, eggs and young are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) with additional protection for species listed under Schedule 1. However, so long as you exercise caution and maintain a respectful distance from active nests, both climbers and birds can happily coexist.



Raven



Meanwhile the forests of the area provide ideal habitat for other species. **Goshawks** patrol the coniferous woodlands, and a lucky observer may glimpse the extremely scarce **Honey buzzard**.

In clear felled areas or open woodland glades the “churr” of **Nightjars** may also be heard as dusk falls.

Looking like a blackbird with a white bib, the **Ring Ouzel** can sometimes be seen on the scree slopes and crags of the Valleys. This increasingly scarce summer migrant exchanges the uplands of Wales for the warmer climates of the of Wales for the warmer climates of the Mediterranean and North Africa during the winter months. The crags of the Valleys also provide nesting sites for iconic species such as the **Raven** and **Peregrine**. By far our fastest aerial predator, a hunting **Peregrine** in full flow is an awesome sight.



Ley's Whitebeam (*Sorbus leyana*)

### Some of the special plants of the South Wales Valleys

The cliffs of South Wales can provide important habitats for a number of rare endemic plants such as **Whitebeams** and **Hawkeeds**. **Whitebeams** are related to apples and pears, they are typically shrubs with red berries and leaves which have white hairs underneath (hence the name whitebeam!)

The tree genus Sorbus which contains the **Whitebeams**, rowans & wild service trees, can arguably lay claim to some of the rarest species of trees. For example the **Ley's whitebeam** (*Sorbus leyana*), currently has only 17 specimens growing in the UK and all of those can only be found growing wild near Merthyr Tydfil, in South Wales!

**Hawkweeds** are herbaceous plants which look like dandelions with yellow flowering heads, but with simpler leaves and multiple heads on each branch. Hawkweeds and relatives are frequently found on rockfaces, but there are many different varieties and some are in fact national and even international rarities. **Chalice hawkweed**, and **Limestone hawkweed** are amongst our specialities.



Hawkweed (*Hieracium*)



Wilson's Filmy Fern (*Hymenophyllaceae*)

In fact, there is life even down in the damp shady crevices of the local sandstone quarries, many of these crags are home to uncommon ferns, such as the **Parsley fern**, **Filmy fern** and **Limestone green spleenwort**, and various forbs (herbs).

With care, and by only selecting open, bare rockfaces, and not removing insitu vegetation etc, the impact of climbing can be minimised. Climbers can actually help conservation agencies by identifying species, restoring habitats and helping to protect our wonderful environment by supporting the BMC's work, and taking part in local crag clean ups and habitat management.

When approaching cliff faces, please ensure you only use dedicated existing paths and trails. Approach with care and consideration as popular spots are experiencing increased levels of use and subsequent ground erosion and trampling of vegetation along the base of many crags in the area.



### Inland South Wales - The coalfields and valleys

Covering an area of around 600 square miles and home to over a million people, the South Wales Valleys are a rich and varied landscape with plenty to offer the rock climber. The region has been shaped by its industrial and cultural heritage, which exploited the South Wales coalfield and its rich mineral deposits. It is this unique interaction between humans and geology which has shaped the environment we see today.

Rock climbing offers a unique perspective of habitats that are normally by human activities, and for this reason, cliff faces are often a final refuge for rare plants and animals. Generally the most important areas for nature conservation are the vegetated and water areas of cliffs, usually north facing and quite often the dank and slippery slopes.

However a few of the more popular areas such as Dinas Rock are also significant in their own right as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) which are



However a few of the more popular areas such as Dinas Rock are also significant in their own right as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) which are protected at the European Level, and as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) under UK law. Additionally there is a whole plethora of legislation and guidance that govern the outdoors. From a climbers perspective the CRoW (Countryside Rights of Way) Act 2000 and the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 are probably two of the most important.

It is actually an offence to intentionally uproot ANY plant from the wild without permission from the owner/occupier. Cleaning routes can cause damage to sensitive flora and fauna. So if in doubt please contact the BMC and/or your local conservation groups, before embarking on any crag clean ups or bushing of new lines. Please leave those wire brushes at home, mosses and lichens can actually be rare and threatened. For more info on environmental legislation please visit The Countryside Council for Wales website [www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk)

### NESTING BIRDS

The BMC's Regional Access Database lists all known access restrictions for crags so please always check there before visiting new areas. Traditionally climbers have always had an excellent reputation for respecting nesting restrictions, but we also have a part to play in ensuring others do the same. With recent cases of illegal egg taking in South Wales, the BMC and CCW ask all climbers to report any unusual behaviour to their local Wildlife Crime Police Officer and significant sightings of species to their local CCW office (0845 1306229)

### RAD (Regional Access Database)

The RAD is the 'one-stop-shop' for all the access and conservation info. you need - from nesting restrictions, to conservation advice or preferred parking spots. It can be found on the Access & Conservation page of the BMC website and a quick check before setting off could save you wasted time and effort.

Check it at [www.thebmc.co.uk/bmccrag/](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/bmccrag/)

The RAD works like a simple web search engine - type in the name of a crag or area you want and it will list all relevant climbing sites. From here click on the crag name for the access and conservation advice.

Recent upgrades to the RAD have included the ability to search for the most commonly viewed sites, the most recently updated sites and extra information showing CRoW access status, group use advice or new route sensitivity. We have also added a whole host of new crags - why not check it out before you climb?

### Best practice guide to climbing in the South Wales Valleys

1. **Take care not to damage crag flora, no vegetation removal or adding of new bolts without the landowner permission.**
2. **Check access restrictions on BMC Regional Access Database and the South Wales Guidebook Wiki.**
3. **Adhere to the negotiated bird nesting restrictions, annually updated and available to download from the BMC website.**
4. **If you experience obvious 'alarm calling' birds - retreat from the area.**
5. **Avoid walking or disturbing scree slopes, and scree holes when possible, and always access cliff faces via existing paths to maximise ground erosion and trampling flora.**
6. **Put rucksacks on exposed rock surfaces (rather than on vegetation) - this considerably reduces ground erosion at popular sites.**
7. **'Go before you go' - if 'nature calls' make sure the waste is buried, toilet paper bagged and removed.**
8. **Take home all litter (even other people's)**
9. **Observe the 'Countryside Code' - available from CCW website [www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk).**
10. **Above all enjoy the wonderful natural environment in South Wales and do your part in protecting and caring for it.**



Generally, there is little conflict between rock climbing and conservation interests. However, there are exceptions where nest on the crags or rare cliff plants are found. These are usually covered by voluntary agreements and seasonal nesting restrictions to avoid the unpalatable alternative of bans, or legal proceedings if disturbance was proven to have occurred. The countryside Council for Wales, whilst responsible for the protection of SSSI sites, SAC's etc also recognise the importance of the South Wales Valleys for recreation and will continue to work closely with the BMC, Forestry Commission and other Stakeholders to ensure a workable balance between recreation and conservation interests.

**RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY** Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. You should be aware of and accept these risks, and be responsible for your own actions and involvement.

#### To contact the BMC:

British Mountaineering Council  
177-179 Burton Road  
Manchester  
M20 2BB  
0161 445 61111  
[access@thebmc.co.uk](mailto:access@thebmc.co.uk)

BMC Wales Office  
Siabod Cottage  
Capel Curig  
Betws y Coed  
Conwy  
LL24 0ES  
01690 720124  
[elfyn@thebmc.co.uk](mailto:elfyn@thebmc.co.uk)



GREEN GUIDE

### Useful websites

- British Mountaineering Council [www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk)
- The Countryside Council for Wales [www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk)
- The Forestry Commission Wales [www.forestry.gov.uk/wales](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/wales)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)
- Environment Agency Wales [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)
- South Wales Valleys Official Visitor Guide [www.thevalleys.co.uk](http://www.thevalleys.co.uk)
- South Wales Mountaineering Club [www.southwalesmountaineering.org.uk](http://www.southwalesmountaineering.org.uk)
- South Wales Bolt Fund [www.southwalesboltfund.co.uk](http://www.southwalesboltfund.co.uk)
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)

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Rock Bristles (*Seligeria acutifolia*)

### The Limestone & Sandstone Mosses & Liverworts of South Wales

The limestone at Craig y Ddinas is one of the most important sites for **Mosses** and **Liverworts** in South Wales, with well over 250 species recorded from here and the nearby Waterfalls area. Many are widespread in Britain, but some are restricted to a few places on the Carboniferous Limestone of Wales and northern England For example, the 5-6 mm tall **Rock-bristles** (*Seligeria acutifolia*, *S. donniana* and *S. pusilla*) grow only in recesses where there is a constant seepage of water and could easily be scraped off by careless feet or hands.

Most **Rock-bristles** are well away from current popular climbing routes, especially on the north side of Craig y Ddinas. Larger mosses, like the yellowy-green limestone speciality **Rambling Tail-moss** (*Anomodon viticulosus*), festoon limestone faces and give the woodland its amazingly mossy appearance. **MacKay's Pouncewort** (*Marchesinia mackaili*). is restricted to dry limestone outcrops and looks almost like black graffiti. Please treat this site's **Mosses** and **Liverworts** with care and respect - stop and look at their different colours and leaf shapes,



Pouncewort (*Marchesinia*)



Greater Whipwort (*Bazzania trilobata*)

or see how the appearance of a patch changes on dry and damp days - and avoid setting up new routes on really mossy crags.

Sandstone crag mosses tend to be more subdued in colour than those on limestone (see Craig y Ddinas). **White Earwort** (*Diplophyllum albicans*) and **Slender Mouse-tail Moss** (*Isoetes myosuroides*) may cover large areas on shady crags, and **Hoar-mosses** (*Racomitrium species*) with white leaf tips to reflect away sunlight, often grow on exposed outcrops or boulders. Sandstone crags in lowland Wales support rather few rare mosses, but scree below them is often an important habitat, where liverworts like **Greater whipwort** (*Bazzania trilobata*) may lurk in dark holes.

**REMEMBER:** Please do not clean off vegetation without first establishing what it is, leave those wire brushes at home! If in doubt consult with local BMC, CCW or FCW officers who will be more than happy to help!

## THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS GREEN CLIMBING GUIDE ACCESS, CONSERVATION & ENVIRONMENT







# THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS GREEN CLIMBING GUIDE



## ACCESS AND CONSERVATION

The wonderful landscape of the South Wales Valleys offers many opportunities for enjoying the great outdoors. From climbing to caving, mountain biking to horse riding, paragliding to canoeing, there is always something exciting and challenging to do.

This guide is intended to help climbers and hill walkers understand and learn more about the region's important flora, fauna, and geology. The Best Practice guidelines within this leaflet outline practical ways that climbers and hill walkers can help in protecting our shared natural heritage and continue to contribute towards its favorable conservation. We've even included a couple of free topos so you can take this guide to the crags when you're out and about.

The inclusion in this leaflet of a crag or routes upon it does not mean that any members of the public has a right of access to the crag or the right to climb upon it.

Remember to regularly check the BMC's Regional Access Database [www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk) for up to date access restrictions for any crag in England and Wales. The South Wales Mountaineering Club's Guidebook Wikki is a relative goldmine of information on the area's crags and routes, so be sure to pay it a visit for more information.

Please support the local bolt fund who work tirelessly to maintain the area's bolts and anchors [www.southwalesboltfund.co.uk](http://www.southwalesboltfund.co.uk)



### Bwa Maen (Dinas Rock)



Dinas Rock (Craig-Y-Dinas)  
There are very few places in South Wales where geological upheavals of the past are more strikingly displayed than along the course of the River Sychryd. The main gorge has been carved out from weakness exposed along the Dinas Fault (Neath Disturbance)



### Amazing Geology in South Wales - Criag-Y-Dinas (Dinas Rock)

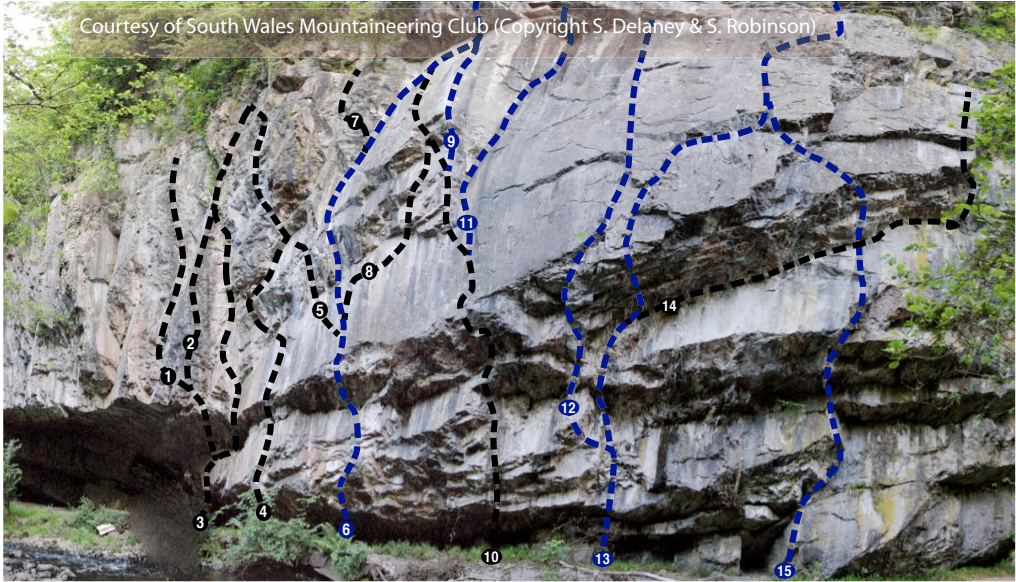
Formed by the collisions of continents, the spectacular cliff of Bwa Maen, near Pontneddfechan, has been restored to its former glory by recent work undertaken by the Countryside Council for Wales.

At the end of the Forestry Commission Wales all ability trail leading from the Craig-Y-Ddinas car park (NGR SN 911 079), the huge overhanging cliff face of Bwa Maen provides a spectacular backdrop for gorge walking and rock climbing, as well as providing striking scenery for the many walkers to enjoy as they stroll along the banks of the Afon Sychryd up to the adjacent waterfalls. Unfortunately, whilst the site is well used by those researching or studing geology, most of the general public will be unaware of the story of immense power and turmoil

hidden in the rocks above them. These giant slabs of Carboniferous limestone have been tilted and folded as they were pushed and torn during an ancient mountain building episode known as the Variscan Orogeny. A result of the collision f two continents, this mountain building event is responsible for the giant arch shaped rock (anticline) that is Bwa Maen.

Next time yo're strolling along the banks of the Sychryd, or hanging ogg your latest project, take a moment to look up and marvel at the legacy of continents colliding 300 million years ago. This area is part of the wider Fforest Fawr Geopark; to learn more about the area's rich geological history why not visit: [www.breaconbeacons.org/fforestfawr](http://www.breaconbeacons.org/fforestfawr)

### Dinas Rock (Craig-y-Dinas)



#### Dinas Rock - Main Cliff

- |                                |                          |                               |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Bloody Sports Climbers 8a   | 7. Berlin 7a+            | 13. Sharp Cereal Professor 7b |
| 2. H1N1 8a                     | 8. Still Life 7b+        | 14. Muchas Maracas 7c         |
| 3. Subversive Body Pumping 7b+ | 9. Outta Time 7c         | 15. Harlem 7b+                |
| 4. Dynasty 8a                  | 10. Chives of Freedom 7c |                               |
| 5. Hayabusa 7c+                | 11. The Big Time E6 6c   |                               |
| 6. Berlin Extension 7b+        | 12. Crock of Gold 7c     |                               |

This site is home to some of the country's best routes, ranging from easy slabs to desperate overhanging test pieces, there's something for everyone!

The easier routes and bouldering are accessed along the gorge, and the main cliff is further upstream (boulder hop up the river once the end of path is reached)

Please remember this gorge is extremely important in terms of nature conservation, and must be preserved. Keep a low profile, take all rubbish home, avoid leaving gear insitu and do not remove vegetation.



### Tirpentwys - Pontypool



- |  |                             |                               |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Shrew 5                             | 11. Lundy Boy 6b            | 21. Diamond Dog 6b            |
| 2. Yank My Chain 4                     | 12. Supertramp 6c+          | 22. The Chimney Finish 6a     |
| 3. Paw Me 4+                           | 13. Strawberry Jam 7b+      | 23. Flakes and Chips 6c       |
| 4. By Default 5                        | 14. The Cragmeister 6b      | 24. Ledges and Braces 5       |
| 5. The Brown Dirt Cowboy 6a+           | 15. Rocky 6a                | 25. Fledgling 6a+             |
| 6. Where there's much there's brass 6a | 16. The Tactless Teacher 6b | 26. The Yolks On You          |
| 7. Mucky Ducky 6a+                     | 17. Hail Mary 7a            | 27. You've Had Your Chicks 6b |
| 8. Lets Get Down and Dirty 6b+         | 18. Twisted Logic 6b+       | 28. Crumlin Towards England 5 |
| 9. Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap 6b+     | 19. Leading Edge 6a         | 29. Crumlin at the Seams 6a   |
| 10. Choosey Suzie 6b+                  | 20. Mental Mantles 6a       | 30. Crumlin at the Edges 6a   |



Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are inportnat places for both people and wildlife, they usually have locally significant wildlife and/or geological features, and are generally managed by the local authority.

This particular LNR, located near Pontypool in Torfaen, was once an old colliery and refuse tip, has undergone significant environmental improvements and is now home to an abundance of flora and fauna. Once in the reserve, there is also a lovely little sports crag, offering a wealth of well bolted and excellent pitches on compact sandstone.

ROCK TYPES	LIMESTONE	SANDSTONE	MUDSTONE	MINERALS
	The limestone in the Valleys is largely from the Carboniferous period, formed from crushed marine animals that lived in warm tropical seas over 300 million years ago!	The sandstone of South Wales ranges from moderately soft and crumbly to hard and crystalline. It should be avoided when wet due to its friable nature!	Whilst not ideal for climbing, the presence of mudstone is brilliant for seeing all kinds of plant fossils, and indicating deposition during swampy periods!	South Wales has been shaped by the wealth of its mineral resources. The silica mines at Dinas were at the forefront of British Firebrick production!

A brief topo has been provided above, but please check with the BMC, and local clubs for up to date information and restrictions.

To access, take the A4043 and turn into the Pontnewydd Industrial Estate. Turn left on to Estate road and then on to Plas y Coed Road (by the pub), then on to Pantygasseg Road. On the right hand side is a small car park by the reserve, once in the reserve, some 200-300m up on the right hand side lies the crag. Whilst usually locked the carpark can be accessed by joining Torfaen's Countyside Key Holder Scheme.

To find out more about the LNR at Tirpentwys, and/or the Countryside Key Holder Scheme pease contact Torfaen CB Council's Ecologist (Steve Williams) on 01633 648034