

21 Llanberis, Snowdon and Nant Gwynant: Short Introduction



It is perhaps reasonable to suppose that the present village and tourist centre of Llanberis owes its existence, like Bethesda and Blaenau Ffestiniog, to the proximity of extensive slate quarry workings, but this is not so. Before the coming of the standard gauge Carnarvon & Llanberis railway in 1869 the only building of note here was the Royal Victoria Hotel, serving the needs of travellers visiting Dolbadarn Castle or taking the already well-established easy walking route up Snowdon.....

.....The former lakeside station of the railway from Caernarfon, (later L&NWR and LMS) still survives at (580601) but the route has been largely obliterated by the new bypass road that passes the old platform..... Further extensive slate quarries on the south side of the valley behind the town consisted of several independent concerns generally started late in the nineteenth century and working the hard grey and red rock for only 30 to 40 years.....some very rewarding views of the lakes can be gained by driving from west to east over the narrow and little used road from Cwm-y-Glo to Llanberis. This was the traditional Caernarfon – Llanberis Penygrwyd turnpike route.....

.....The Snowdon Mountain Railway still loudly announces its presence throughout the summer months; the noise of its hard working steam locomotives, echoing off the mountains for miles around. Opened as Britain's only rack railway in 1896, its construction aroused much hostility from conservationists.....

.....On the way up Snowdon further evidence of quarrying activity with prominent remains of levels and inclined planes will be seen, but these were workings not for slate but copper. The largest of them is the most rewarding to explore; the Britannia or Great Snowdon Mountain mine beside Llyn Llydaw.... The first hydroelectric power station in Wales (1908) at Cwm Dyli is prominent in the valley bottom, as are the pipes that feed it with water from this lake. The Swiss-style powerhouse still contains some of the original equipment.....

.....Another popular ascent of Snowdon is the Watkin path. Today it provides ready access to a fascinating industrial valley once busy with both copper mining and slate quarrying.....the prominent and very steep inclined plane seen from the path was part of the 2 ft gauge tramway system constructed to serve the slate quarries of the South Snowdon Co. at (613524). It may be easily followed around the hillside from the incline top to enter the workings after half a mile or so past the remains of a barracks building.....the older line is of considerable interest as stone sleeper blocks remain on the incline, spaced to give a tramway gauge of about 4 ft.....

.....On the opposite side of the valley, the Lliwedd Bach copper mine has a collapsed 30 ft diameter waterwheel, which formerly drove the ore-crushing machinery.....the line of the lode, mined out in the form of a vertical slit in the



hillside, can easily be followed. Also to be seen are the Smithy and adit entrances with 2 ft gauge “T” section tramlines.... crushed ore was carried out on the backs of the home-going workmen and later by pack pony down the mountain path.....

.....further copper workings are at Sygun Mine, on the main road towards Beddgelert. These are now open to the public, including an underground tour, and are well worth a visit to gain more insight into this largely-vanished Gwynedd industry.....

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