



23 Nantlle vale (Dyffryn Nantlle): Short Introduction



Nantlle vale is one of the three great slate quarrying areas of North Wales.....each used different techniques to extract the slate, which has resulted in markedly different topographical characteristics in each area; the reason is the varying formation of the slate beds in the surrounding rocks..... here they have a steep, near-vertical dip and outcrop on the valley floor.....leading to the characteristic landscape of deep pits (twllau), now frequently flooded.....

.....A 3 ft 6 in gauge horse-drawn tramway carrying slate from the pits ran down to the old L&NWR branch terminus station at Talysarn until as late as 1965: the course of this can be seen.....in some places tunneling under the front gardens of the adjacent houses. This line was the sole remaining portion of the 3 ft 6 in gauge Nantlle Railway of 1828, established to expedite the transport of slate from the quarries to the port of Caernarfon, to which it originally ran..... the section west of Talysarn was later taken over by standard gauge railway companies.....

.....Directly ahead can be seen the vast 600 ft deep pit of the Dorothea Slate Quarry....a path leads down from here to the grandest relic of the Nantlle Vale quarries, the Dorothea pumping engine. This is a Cornish beam engine with 68 inch diameter cylinder, built by Holman brothers of Camborne in 1904, which used to keep the great main pit dry..... towering above us is a vast dry-walled slate-slab bastion on the edge of the slate tips which once supported another cableway system.....


.....The Nantlle Tramway curves round the back of Talysarn Hall, with its stable block adjacent. This was a small mansion standing beside the former main road, predating the quarry workings but later almost engulfed by them. The entrance to a tunnel on an abandoned alignment of the tramway can be seen on the left..... Here is an old stable block for the horses working the tramway.....there are remains of a small cast-iron waterwheel once used to power chaff cutting equipment within.

Pen-yr-Orsedd was the last quarry in North Wales where aerial-ropeway systems or “Blondins” could be seen at work.....the only other access to the pit, for workmen, was by the traditional vertical wooden ladders fixed to the rock face.....the next level down contains the workshops complex, entered through gates into a small courtyard; adjacent is a large old dressing mill, once powered by a big centrally situated waterwheel whose wheel pit and operating platform can be seen.....the beautifully carved quarry war memorial depicting scenes in the quarry and at the battlefield at the time of the First World War was rescued from here and is now located in Nantlle village.....

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.....Beyond the quarrymen's cottages, the slate-strewn landscape ends abruptly; the upper part of the valley was instead worked for copper and lead.....two waterwheel pits will be found by the riverbank not far from the road, and mark the site of the ore-dressing mills. Some of the adits on the hillside above can still be entered.....a chute leads into an upper building used for crushing, and the mill building below has a waterwheel pit.....

.....further extensive slate workings will be seen on the south side, these being an isolated group not connected to the Nantlle Tramway. They may be easily explored and contain some buildings and other features of interest.



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