

BARMOUTH: PANORAMA WALK

Ref No	PG (Gd) 26 (GWY)
OS Map	124
Grid Ref	SH 626 164
Former County	Gwynedd
Unitary Authority	Gwynedd
Community Council	Barmouth
Designations	Snowdonia National Park (part)
Site Evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading Well made and well preserved late Victorian footpath created to take advantage of the dramatic natural scenery around Barmouth; superb views.

Type of Site Footpath, designed to allow appreciation of 'spectacular natural scenery, and formerly incorporating tea room and 'pleasure grounds'.

Main Phases of Construction Turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Panorama Walk consists now of a relatively short length of footpath leading up to a viewpoint just east of Barmouth, which branches southwards off an unclassified road (not usable by vehicles) linking Pont Glandwr, on the A496 coast road to the north-east, with a minor road from Barmouth to the west. The viewpoint can thus be reached from either direction. The minor road, running north-east from the town, now only leads to some farms in the hills, but is probably an old route, as is the unclassified road which forms part of the walk. The unclassified road is maintained by Gwynedd Council, and the footpath to the viewpoint by the Snowdonia National Park authority. Both are well used by walkers.

The original footpath, which divided and petered out once the higher ground to the south was reached, is difficult to follow in that area, and was clearly not carefully constructed there in the same way as it was lower down. Use was probably much the same as today, with people wandering at will over the heathland and outcrops when they had reached the higher ground.

The history of Panorama Walk is not well known, but the Revd. Fred Ricketts, who was very active in promoting and developing Barmouth as a seaside resort in the early years of this century, is said to have laid out the 'pleasure grounds' near the cafe, and may have been instrumental in the development of the walk. The route is, however, based on older roads and

footpaths. It is a well constructed path designed to make an area with superb picturesque views accessible to most people.

The unclassified road and the path leading to the viewpoint are both shown on the 2-in. manuscript map for the 1-in. Ordnance Survey 1st edition, made in 1819. As it offers such picturesque views, the route may well have been used in the eighteenth century, but the levelling, surface and steps of the footpath probably date from the late nineteenth century, as part of the improvements being made to increase the attractions of Barmouth. What changes, if any, were made to the unclassified road at this time is unknown. It was probably already levelled into the slope and had some sort of surface, so changes may have been minimal.

Panorama Walk is named on the second edition Ordnance Survey 25-in. map (1901), and on this map too a small building appears at the point where the footpath to the viewpoint branches off, suggesting that a tea room was already present. The levelled site of this building can still be seen, and nearby are the foundations of another, clearly later, building, on the other side of the path.

Local people remember this later building as a tea room and shop; in the 1920s and 30s, when the cafe was run by Huw Puw, supplies were carried up on foot. Photographs in the county archives, from a period earlier than this, judging by the clothes, show the building as a very poorly-constructed shack, although the waitress was extremely well turned out in long black dress and white pinafore. This shack was on the site of the later building, not the larger, earlier one, which seems therefore to have been short-lived. A more permanent building may have eventually replaced the shack, as local memory states that the cafe, which does not appear to have reopened after the Second World War, was demolished in the 1960s due to vandalism and to deter squatters, and it is hard to believe the insubstantial building in the photographs would still have been standing by that time.

The area was known as 'Panorama Pleasure Grounds', and there was a view from the tea room, as well as higher up, although there is no record of there being actual gardens. Any planting must have been ephemeral as there is nothing on the site today which does not appear to be natural (apart from a few conifers on the knoll behind the site of the tea room). However, the young woodland which now clothes the site obviously post-dates the period of the walk's greatest popularity, and before it became established there would have been spectacular views over the estuary along almost the whole length of the path from the tea room to the high viewpoint. Now the woodland extends over the hillside both above and below the site of the tea room, and to obtain a good prospect one must go further along the path towards the viewpoint. There are intermediate points which offer views over the estuary, but the best panorama is from the top of a rocky crag at the end of the path, whence one can see further to the south and west, and this high point must always have offered the best views. There are now no traces of seats near the tea room site (the photographs show wooden benches outside the shack).

The entrance to the path from the minor road from Barmouth is through an iron gate, painted dark green, hung on stone-built posts. This carries a sign with the name of the walk, and gives access to the western part of the unclassified road. Where the footpath leaves the unclassified

road there is a similar but more decorative dark green iron gate, again with a sign, but hung without gateposts in the wall of the road, through which the gateway gives access.

The unclassified road, north of the point where the path to the viewpoint branches off, is walled for most of its length and has a hard, stony surface about 3 m wide; the rest of the route, to the south-west, is unfenced but is about 2 m wide, levelled into the slope and revetted with dry-stone walling where necessary. The surface is mostly grassy, with a short stretch of tarmac at the western end and some remains of gravel in places.

The footpath to the viewpoint has slab steps in the steeper parts, and elsewhere the surface is grassy or stony, with some coarse gravel on the first, almost level, stretch. It is around 1.5 - 2 m wide at first, but becomes much narrower as it gets higher and steeper. The relatively level first part has stones set on edge in diagonal lines across it to aid drainage. Both this part of the path and the south-west section of the unclassified road are occasionally cut into the bedrock.

From the first flight of steps on the footpath there is a narrow, unsurfaced path leading off slightly westwards, which offers an alternative route to the viewpoint avoiding most of the steps. Although this does not seem to be a made path in the same way as the main route, it is shown on the 1901 map. There is a large cairn of stones beside it, in an odd place - not on a high point or where it can be seen, but in a concealed dip.

Steps are only found on the path beyond the tea room site, where it becomes steeper and narrower. They are generally fairly roughly made, each step a single irregular slab, though some are rock-cut, notably a short flight down off the outcrop which forms the viewpoint. Despite their rough appearance, the steps are well constructed and have mostly survived in good condition.

Occasional small alcoves cut back into the bank on the upper side of the path (one now with an oak tree thirty or forty years old in the middle of it, and another with a little dry-stone walling in the back) may have been made to accommodate these. Alternatively, they could be small quarries used to obtain the stone for revetting, or even have served both purposes. A few seats remain, one not far above the tea room site and two together higher up; they are made of stone slabs and set on the ground, not in alcoves.

The woodland on either side of the path to the viewpoint, from the tea room site onwards, is relatively young and appears to be natural, having established itself since the use of the 'pleasure grounds' area ceased. It consists mostly of oak, with some rowan and sycamore. However, on the knoll above the tea room site there are some conifers, so it is perhaps possible that other planted trees have been cleared.

Either side of the northern part of the unclassified road there is older, planted deciduous woodland interspersed with fields, which forms part of the Glan-y-Mawddach estate.

The western part of the unclassified road, leading from the minor road from Barmouth, is through open country, basically grassland with some bracken, trees and scrub. After the footpath

leaves the woods and comes out to the higher ground with the viewpoint there is heath vegetation, with a little bracken at first, then heather, gorse, bilberry and grasses.

Sources

Primary

Information from Mrs Ann Williams, Mr Morris and Gwynedd Council Tourism and Highways departments

Collection of photographs and postcards in the County Archives, Caernarfon