

26) The Lleyn peninsula – south coast

The Afon Daron and its tributaries running generally northeast from Aberdaron could once boast no less than six or seven watermills operating in a distance of less than three miles. Of these, but one has any remains of interest; Pandy Bodwrdda (190274) which was the fulling mill serving the Elizabethan manor house of the same name, home of the Edwards family since 1749 and itself of great interest. The mill is very derelict, but retains some machinery and its 12 ft overshot wooden waterwheel.

The district eastwards around Mynydd Rhiw has been worked for a long period for iron and manganese ore. A tramway once connected Benallt Mine (222282) and nearby Nant Mine to a loading jetty on the seashore via a cable incline. This can still be traced but there is little to see apart from the mine spoil tips.

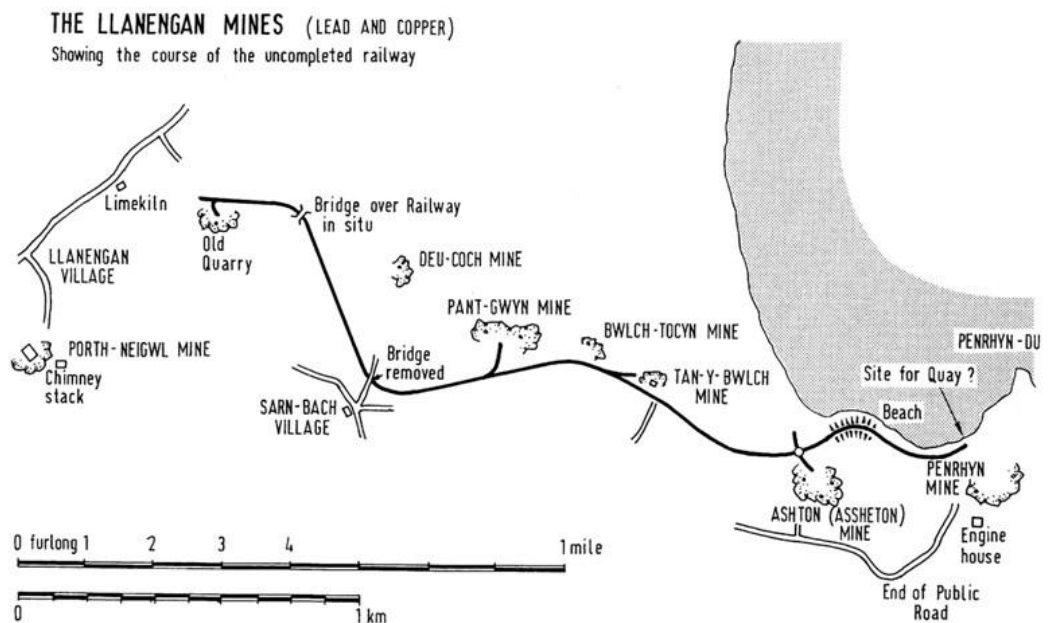
A further group of mills was situated on the Afon Horon east of Botwnnog. Melin Horon (283319) carries a stone tablet with the initials E, R A and date 1823, also the cautionary "Na Ladratta" ("no stealing"). The corn grinding machinery is intact but has for a long time been driven by a portable engine or tractor; there is no sign of the waterwheel. Saethon Factory (298327) operated as a woollen mill until 1935, but the main building is now a private house. The 15 ft diameter cast iron overshot wheel is inscribed "Durie and Davies, Aberystwyth 1870" and latterly drove an electrical generator. The leat can be followed back above the road to the companion fulling mill Pandy Saethon, now a holiday cottage, whose sunken garden was once the millpond. The nearby stone river bridge carries slate plaques "Inkermann 5th NOVR 1854" and "to LLANIESTYN MILES 1".

The prominent National Trust landmark on the summit of Foel Fawr, which is visible for miles around (306321) is often described as the remains of a windmill. More likely, it is thought to be a watchtower, one of a chain built to a similar design circa 1610 all along the North Wales coast as signalling and observation stations for shipping. Although the stone tower seems rather small for the purpose, it is nevertheless said to have been converted to a windmill and working as such circa 1810.

There is now no remaining mill machinery at Melin Cefn-Llanfair (327340) but the building is a good example of the farmhouse, barn and mill combined as one unit, once common but now rarely seen in these parts. There is a waterwheel pit on one end of the "long house".

The small peninsula of land south of Abersoch has been heavily worked for lead and copper, between Llanengan village and the sea on the eastern side. The largest and oldest copper mine was at Penrhyn-Du, thought to be of Roman origin although there is no definite evidence before 1662. In the mid-eighteenth century it was being worked by prospectors who were later to discover the rich Parys Mountain lodes in Anglesey. Mines in the Llanengan district were troubled by severe drainage problems due to the proximity of the sea, and it is thus fitting that the most interesting survival at Penrhyn Du, amongst the extensive spoil tips, is a large Cornish beam pumping engine house (at 322263, now almost completely draped in prolific vegetation). It is to be found just to the west of the cottage Penrhyn Bach.

The land on which this particular mine was situated was owned by Lord Penrhyn, but the majority of the remainder of the peninsula was the property of their neighbours the Vaynol Estate who, as with the slate quarries in the north, set up their own mines in competition here.....



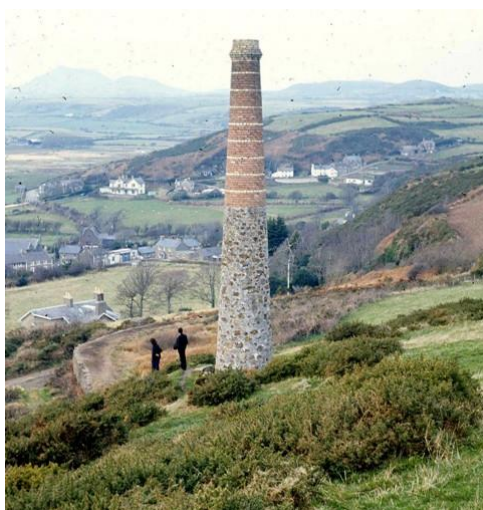
Men from Cornwall worked in the area from 1825-36; the famed John Taylor spent £10,000 on improvements to 1839 but raised a mere 20 tons of ore. Tan-y-Bwlch was the principal site worked (313267) like all the others first for copper and then for lead; the final reworking lasted from about 1870 to 1892.

Five or six mines were to be connected by a tramway running from Tan-yr-Orsedd (302270) two miles eastwards to a loading wharf on the shore near Penrhyn-Du, but very little is known about this. Apparently construction was started by one David Williams of Castell Deudraeth circa 1850 but was given up unfinished by 1853. However even today there are some very tangible features to be seen, and locals will say that the line was not only put into operation but also lasted until as late as 1880.

The overbridge at Sarn Bach has disappeared but the road-over-rail stone arch to the north of it (365268) is still in situ; picture right. East of Sarn Bach the tramway route can be followed for a considerable distance, passing the remains of several mines before turning onto the shoreline on a high stone embankment (319265). Some rails are in evidence used in the fencing but these would probably have come from the mine systems. Further details of construction are unknown, but the earthworks suggest a line of about 4 ft gauge, similar to the other contemporary Vaynol projects. No stone sleepers have been found and there is no evidence of arrangements at the seaward end of the line, so perhaps these were not completed.



Of the mines themselves, that of most interest at Porth Neigwl (295268) was never connected to the tramway. A number of ruined buildings are grouped around a shaft and surrounded by spoil tips; the most prominent feature is the tall stone and brick chimneystack.



This site suffered severe drainage problems and closed circa 1879.

Further north along the coast towards Pwllheli the industrial scene changes back to one of stone quarrying, the headland of Trwyn Llanbedrog being composed of high quality pink and grey granite. The workings of the West Quarry (330304) form the backdrop to a popular stretch of sandy beach (cars may park at the end of the rough approach track), but the more interesting Gwaith Canol (Middle workings) can only be reached by walking along the beach round the headland. The remains of a wooden jetty are first reached (335304) from which an inclined plane leads up into the workings. This part is the older section of the quarry and the rows of stone cubicles are the workplaces where men dressed the blocks of granite hewn from the cliff face behind. A 2 ft 6 in gauge tramway leads around the headland to connect with newer workings, whose more modern concrete crushing mill is situated right on the shoreline. Quarried stone was tipped in at the top of the building, and the crushed granite loaded directly into vessels below by means of the metal chutes. These quarries were probably in operation from about 1900 to 1940.

At least one tourist map of circa 1900 shows the supposed Llanengan mines tramway mentioned above apparently forming the last part of a through route from the Cambrian Railways coast line at Pwllheli. Whilst this was certainly never implemented in its entirety, it was once possible to reach the village of Llanbedrog by horse-drawn tram from the latter place. The Pwllheli & Llanbedrog tramway of 3 ft 6 in gauge was constructed in 1894 primarily to convey quarried stone for the construction of the seafront hotels at West End, Pwllheli. The quarries, tramway and developments were the work of one Solomon Andrews, a prominent businessman with building interests in Cardiff and Aberystwyth. His family owned the mansion Glynweddw Hall and in the 1920's a popular weekend excursion was to take the tram from Pwllheli to view the art collection displayed there.

The tramway was closed after sea-damage in 1927, and as the route lay mainly on sand dunes there is little to see nowadays. The stone quarry was at Crugan (341326), served by a siding off the main line. Llanbedrog once had a proper station but this has disappeared; the opposite terminus in Pwllheli was originally on the west shore esplanade with a turning triangle and car sheds (371342) but was later extended along Cardiff Road into the town.

All of the older west shore property – comprising Pwllheli's attempt to emulate such resorts as Llandudno on the north coast - was the work of the Solomon Andrews enterprise. By the ex Cambrian Railways station in the town, a horse tramcar body survives in use as an information kiosk. This did not however originate on the Llanbedrog tramway, but on another unconnected line of 2 ft 6 in gauge which ran southwards from the station along the esplanade to South Beach until 1919. The tram was one of three built in 1899 and only later sold to the Llanbedrog line, for which of course it required re-gauging. Before rescue and renovation, it was discovered in use as a chicken coup.....



A small stone quarry on Carreg-yr-Imbill (388344) was operated to provide material for the new Pwllheli harbour works opened by David Lloyd George in 1904. At this time the Cambrian Railways line terminated at the old station outside the town, where the goods yard, loco shed and 70 ft turntable are still situated (383352). The extension line to the present passenger terminus was built on land reclaimed as part of the harbour works, and the extensive timber station buildings (1907; pictures right and below) were meant to be only temporary.....



Amongst other proposals never proceeded with was an extension as a light railway to Nefyn, 6 miles to the northwest. Despite various such ideas and more recent threats of closure, Pwllheli remains the furthest-flung outpost of the Cambrian Railways system, renowned for its scenery but not its traffic density. The terminus is 110 miles along the line from Shrewsbury (via Machynlleth), now it's only link with the national network.

Until 1965 it was also possible to travel down to Pwllheli by rail from Bangor, via the LNW South Caernarvonshire line. This joined up with the Cambrian route at remote Afon Wen Junction (445372; pictures below) four miles out, where the trains had to reverse direction. Until recently this site boasted a complex of sidings, a water tower for each of the companies, a turntable right on the seashore and a terrace of railway workers' houses.....



All this has now gone bar the empty platforms, and a curious spur siding to a shed housing a platelayer's trolley (right)



However, Portmadoc station (right) remains in good order to remind us of the distinctive Cambrian Railways architecture, with decorative "fish-motifs" cast into the verandah ends.....

The first station out on the L&NWR line (434384) at Chwilog also survives as the last example of those of the Carnarvonshire Railway, built in brown brick (picture below)



Close by, there is a sawmill formerly water powered, with a 2-ft gauge tramway intact.

The line from Afon Wen to Penychain (428365) was latterly double tracked to facilitate the working of excursion trains to the adjacent Butlin's holiday camp; despite a recent reversion to the original simple layout, the special station built at the latter point is still in use.



Keith A. Jagers November 1978

Updates – February 2012

Both the corn mill and Pandy buildings at **Bodwrdda** remain derelict and ruinous; at the former some collapsed bits of the old waterwheel may still be found.

The **Nant & Benallt mines** with their connecting tramway are still well worth exploring. We clearly did not record this site very fully in our original survey, as where the tramway exits the mine levels on Mynydd Rhiw and turns onto the incline down the hillside, the winding drum still survives complete with rusty cable. Its drumhouse or support structure seems to have collapsed, leaving it half buried in the ground. A large portable engine boiler also lies upturned and rusting nearby. Only the top 1/3 of the incline can now be seen, down as far as the road crossing. From the former incline foot by Bodwyddog Farm the tramway ran alongside the public roads through Nant village, as far as the fork in the road. Here, it continues straight ahead southwards as a footpath down Nant y Gadwen to Nant mine and the seashore. At the former are several ruined buildings and the drumhouse structure (with well rusted pulleys) of a precipitous incline down the cliff face. The wooden loading jetty has gone but further rusty ironwork including wagon wheels may be found strewn around on the beach.

At **Melin Horon** the mill building survives in farm use. **Saethon Factory** survives below the roadway in commercial & residential use, but the current status of the waterwheels both here and at the nearby Pandy is not known. The parapets of **Inkerman bridge** look to have been rebuilt in recent years, perhaps as a result of an accident or widening works, and the slate plaques appear to be no longer in situ.

The **Foel Fawr** watchtower / windmill is a prominent landmark on this popular National Trust site. Melin Cefn Llanfair has been converted for residential use.

The **Penrhyn Du** mine engine house ruin survives; it is on private land but may be viewed from the nearby lane. The former tramway **overbridge** on Lon Pentre Bach north of Sarn Bach village appears to survive, although the western side has now been filled in, and the south east approach is heavily overgrown. Eastwards from Sarn Bach the former **tramway route** is a good footpath through to the coast at Penrhyn Du. The **Porth Neigwl** mine chimney stack still stands, in good condition. A splendid detailed history of the Llanengan area mines is available at:

<http://www.armchairhistory.co.uk/Lead%20mines.pdf>

Of the stone quarries, **West Quarry** has a car park and turning circle nearby on the foreshore, along which the **Gwaith Canol** workings to the east may be easily reached. The jetty here is now marked by just a few rotted wooden stumps, but the ruins of the stone workers cubicles at the top of the incline may still be seen. The former tramway around the headland is now part of the Llyn Coastal Footpath, leading to the ruined crushing mill on the easternmost protrusion of the cliffs.

There is an access road to the beach just 200 yards or so north of **Crugan** stone quarry; the former Pwllheli & Llanbedrog tramway once ran alongside this for a short stretch, but there is very limited parking at the point where it becomes a footpath only.

The Pwllheli horse **tramcar** was fully restored many years ago. In 1999 there was a proposal that it should be loaned to the Welsh Highland Railway Heritage Group for public display in their museum at Gelert's Farm, Portmadoc, but this does not appear to have been proceeded with. Presumably the tram remains in secure storage; does anyone have any further info?

The former **Carreg yr Imbill** stone quarry at Pwllheli harbour is now an extensive caravan site. The railway goods yard and 1950s concrete engine shed structure are now incorporated into an industrial estate, the large locomotive turntable having been removed for re-use on a preserved railway elsewhere. The nearby crossing-keeper's cottage remains in use.

Pwllheli station retains its original "temporary" wooden buildings in good order, but the once extensive GWR pattern platform canopy has been truncated so that only a fragment remains at the terminal end. Only the south side trackwork survives, that on the north side of the former island platform was removed to provide the station car park. The GWR signalbox remains in use.

There is nothing at all left at **Afon Wen Junction** station nowadays – just a single line of rails passes through the site. The Cambrian Railways up side platform buildings remain in use at **Portmadoc station**.

At **Chwilog** the former railway level crossing is now occupied by a roundabout, with a footpath leading off along the old trackbed to the NW, where the remains of the concrete platform survive in a recreation area. The sawmill has gone.

Penychain station remains open as an unstaffed request halt on the Cambrian Coast railway line. Its large waiting shelter on the remaining platform serves as a reminder of the huge number of passengers once arriving and departing by train on a summer Saturday in the 1950s