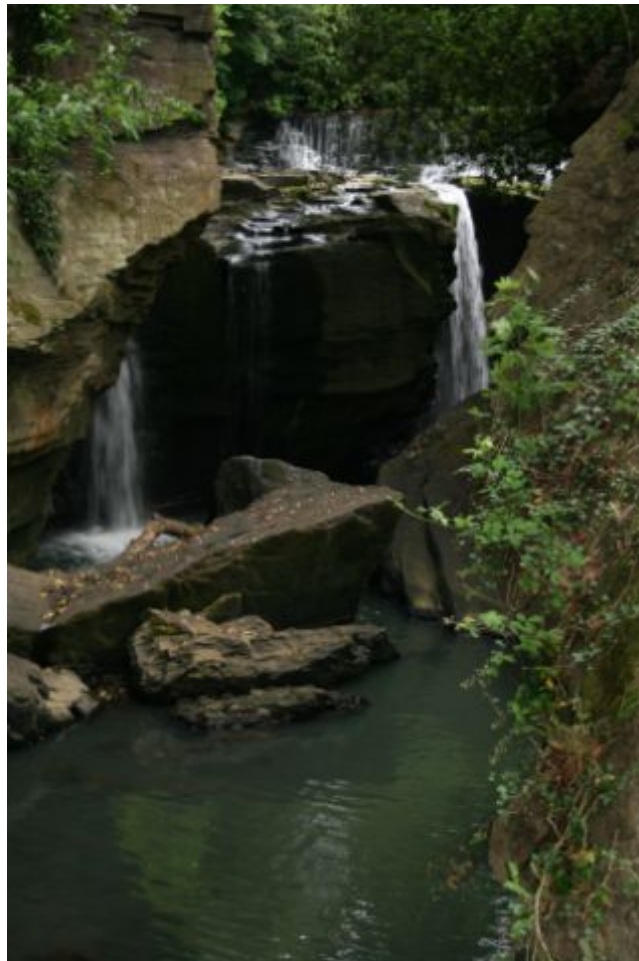


ABERDULAIS

Aberdulais is a small village just north of Neath which in itself has little to attract the casual visitor but Aberdulais Falls and the Aberdulais Basin nevertheless offers two features that are indeed well worth a visit.

The falls lie on the western side of the Neath River tucked away in a small ravine, and there is a charge for entry as they are in the care of the National Trust. They lie on the River Dulais just above the point where it enters the Neath, a confluence which gives this place its name - "Aber" being Welsh for "the mouth of". Although still a place of considerable natural beauty today the falls were, so we are told, even more awesome in appearance in the 18th century when they were the subject of a watercolour painting by the renowned artist JMW Turner who visited them in 1795. The large corn mill featured in this painting was not in fact the earliest industrial development at the site for early in the previous century it had replaced an iron smelter originally founded in 1584 which was reputedly the first such development in Wales.



The mill which stood there in Turner's day drew upon the falls to power its waterwheel, and Turner's genius gives to it a warm and romantic quality which somewhat softens its stark industrial reality*. In his day the waters cascaded

* An enlarged reproduction of the original is displayed in the visitor centre at the site.

freely either side of a massive rock but in the 1830s a tinplate works was constructed below the falls and explosives were used to alter them so as to make more effective use of their water power. It was an act of industrial vandalism condemned at the time and regretted ever since.



The cascade we see today is therefore a mix of the natural and the man-made, and continues to provide power in the form of a waterwheel generating electricity. This has been erected by the Trust amidst the ruins of the tinplate works which it acquired and excavated in 1981, and is reputedly the largest power-generating waterwheel in Europe, providing electricity for all the amenities on site with any surplus being supplied to the National Grid.



Parking for the site is provided by a lay-by and small car park alongside the main road outside it's gates. The ruins illustrating the industrial past are well laid out with an interpretative guide available at the entrance complex which boasts a gift shop, toilets and café.

Across the Neath River from the falls lies the Aberdulais Basin, a wharf at the junction of the Neath and Tennant Canals which, incidentally, offers a spectacular view of the confluence of the Dulais and Neath rivers and the squat aqueduct which carries the Tennant canal across the latter.



The Neath Canal connecting Glynneath to Melyncrythan, Neath, was opened in 1795 and extended in stages down to a dock at Briton Ferry by 1847. The Tennant was opened in 1824 and offered an alternative outlet for the industrial produce of the Neath Valley at Swansea. In recent years the basin, along with other sections of the Neath canal, have been restored to a fully operational state, and ambitious plans have been mooted to make both waterways fully operational and link them to the Swansea Valley Canal which is also undergoing a restoration programme. Although technically practicable, whether such a feat is practicable only time will tell.



Whilst there are ample car parking facilities at the basin, and entry is free, be warned that the short access road (when I last visited) was in a deplorable state of repair and needs to be negotiated with care.

