



# Mawddach Valley trail



The Mawddach trail winds gently along a disused railway track – up a beautiful, steeply wooded estuarine valley from Barmouth to the heart of Meirionnydd at Dolgellau. The rich mud of the estuary is full of food for a range of birds, and the varied habitats on either side support even more.

## Directions to the start of the trail

This is a linear walk that can be completed in either direction. You can join it at several points en route, using bus services, the Cambrian coast rail line or your own transport. To start in Barmouth, park in the harbour. Begin your walk by crossing the footpath on the railway bridge (there is a small toll charge). To begin your walk in Dolgellau, make your way to the car park by the rugby and football pitch. The trail starts from the far corner of the car park. You can also cycle the trail; bikes are available for hire in Dollegau or Barmouth. Another good place to join the walk is the Mawddach station car park on the south side of Barmouth railway bridge. As well as good parking, there are toilets and picnic benches. Nearer to Dolgellau, you can join from Penmaenpool Bridge on the A493. Here, there is good parking, toilets, picnic benches and the old signal box.

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## Trail information



Although a long walk (9 m/15 km), this trail is all on one level and can be completed in about four hours. The track is well-surfaced and, in some sections, suitable for disabled users.

Distance: 9 miles/15 km  
Time: 4 hours  
Grid reference (start): SH 618 156  
Explorer: OL23

## Facilities

at beginning/end of trail



Photographs  
Mawddach (The  
Photolibrary Wales)  
Heron by Mike Lane  
Otters by David Kjaer  
Red breasted merganser by  
Mike Lane  
(all rspb-images.com)

Look out for...



## The route

- 1** Start the trail in Barmouth by crossing the railway bridge at the mouth of the estuary. There are wonderful views up this steep-sided estuary from the bridge. You can often see large flocks of wading birds and admire the striking black and white plumage of oystercatchers feeding on the sand below. Look out for other sea birds, including fishing cormorants and rafts of ducks. Keep an eye out for seals, which sometimes swim up the estuary.
- 2** On the other side of the bridge, you come to Mawddach station car park. Follow the old railway line to the west, through an area of wet woodland of alder and willow. This is Arthog bog – a small RSPB nature reserve and home to many unusual plants and butterflies. In spring, it abounds with birdsong – especially that of warblers. It is a good place to look for redstarts; watch for the red tail flash as they dart away.
- 3** Continue along the trail as it opens up. There are good views to the hills on the other side. At low tide, there are large expanses of mud and sand, and many wading birds and ducks sift and probe the mud looking for food. Look out for shelducks – large, handsome ducks that are easy to spot, thanks to their bright white plumage and red chest bands. If you're lucky, in spring or autumn, you might see an osprey fishing the estuary.

- 4** The estuary narrows as you travel westwards. Eventually, you pass the George III Inn, where a well-earned rest might be in order. Just beyond the Inn is the old signal box. Stop here and look over the pool, where there are often red-breasted mergansers diving for fish, and cormorants drying their wings like prehistoric creatures. From here, you might see peregrines, dramatically diving and chasing seagulls and ducks in search of a meal.
- 5** Leave the signal box and continue along the railway line. This will take you through some of the largest reedbeds in Wales and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Listen for reed, sedge and grasshopper warblers calling from within the reeds, and look out for reed buntings singing from the tops of the stems. You might also see otters skulking through the water. An evening visit is well worthwhile in spring, as snipe perform their 'drumming' displays and barn owls hunt silently over the reedbeds.

- 6** Before crossing the A493 and continuing on the last section into Dolgellau, you will cross a bridge over the river. Watch carefully for the bright blue flash of a kingfisher, and for the nodding white bib of a dipper as it runs from rock to rock. Cross the road and follow the path next to the river into Dolgellau, arriving in the car park at the bottom end of the town.



Heron



Otters



Red-breasted merganser