

Over 60 bird species, 20 species of butterfly and 27 of the British Isles 34 native tree species have been spotted along the Plas Farm trail.



Depending on the season, stock may be grazing the fields along the walk. The cattle are of varying beef breeds including Charolais, Welsh Black, Hereford, Belgian Blue and Limousin. The herd of cows is run with a bull that will produce a mix of cross bred calves that are reared on the farm until they are sold for the beef market.

The flock of sheep that graze Plas Farm include native Welsh Mountain varieties and cross breeds. Try and spot a Welsh Badger Face during your walk – most amusing. The sheep with a brownish collar are the local Glamorgan Welsh type. Others are crossed with Cheviot from the Scottish borders or the English Suffolk to produce heavier lambs that are born in spring between March and May and are reared on the farm.



The two-hour walk is of moderate grade, involves a gentle ascent through woods and fields to about 800 feet before an easy descent along tarmac lanes back to the farmyard, which is at approximately 500 feet. The walk may be extended by making an attempt on the summit of Mynydd Marchywel (1,371 feet) from the uppermost boundary of Plas Farm. Some areas may be muddy and there are stiles to cross. Remember to take a camera and a pair of binoculars! The walk is generally suitable for all age groups.

'Small Dreams in a Sleepy Valley' is a book that accompanies the walk, weaving together amazing facts and amusing anecdotes inspired by Plas Farm and what can be seen from within its ancient boundaries.



Plas Farm is a 120 acre working sheep and beef farm on the west facing slopes of Mynydd Marchywel in South Wales. It was originally the home farm of the historic Plas Cilybebyll Estate which has a recorded history back to the early 1400s. Renowned for its natural beauty, the River Clydach flows through its heart. Since 1957 it has been farmed by the Bowen family, whose ancestors have farmed the hillsides for centuries.



Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages, Plas Farm, Cilybebyll, Pontardawe, Swansea, SA8 3JQ, Wales, UK  
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# Plas Farm Trail



The Plas Farm Trail is a circular walk for guests staying at Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages in South Wales.

It meanders from the doorstep of the farm's holiday cottages towards the summit of Mynydd Marchywel and back. En route, mountain streams are followed, stiles negotiated, bluebell woodlands explored and lazy green fields traversed.

What you see and what you hear will depend on the season but the panoramic views will always be there - the Swansea Valley, Swansea Bay, the Bristol Channel and England beyond, Brecon Beacons National Park and on a clear day, Narnia.

Access for Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages guests at any time. Access for community walking groups by prior appointment. Please contact enquiries@walescottages.com

## Plas Farm Trail



Violet



During World War Two, a resistance network of highly trained volunteers prepared to be Britain's last ditch line of defence against Nazi invasion. Churchill's 'secret army' consisted of patrols of 4 to 8 men who operated from hidden underground bases across the UK, including one discovered at Plas Farm.

- Key**
- Trail route
  - Plas Farm boundary
  - Start of trail



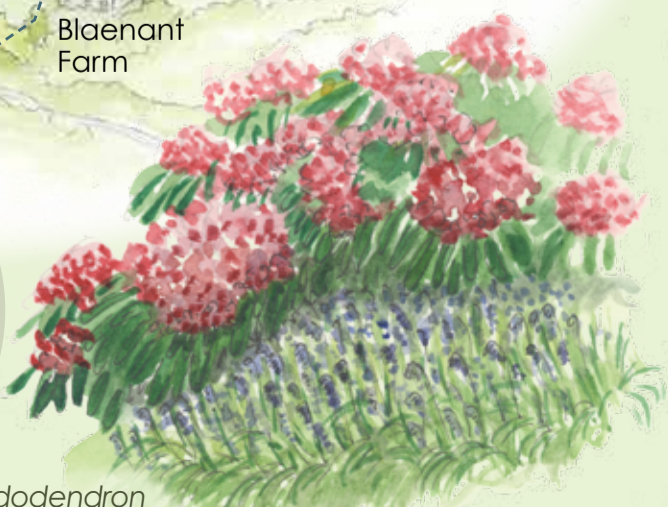
The Welsh names for some of Plas Farm's wildlife are often wonderfully descriptive e.g. The Jay is Sgrech Y Coed or "Screech of the Woods", the Dragonfly is Gwas y Neidr or "The Snake's Servant", Lesser Celandine is Llygad Ebrill or "April's Eye" and the Goldfinch is Teiliwr Llundain or "The London Tailor"



Dipper



A 1578 Queen Elizabeth I Sixpence was found here. Shakespeare was a teenager. Sir Francis Drake was circumnavigating the globe and Plas Farm had never seen a potato.



Rhododendron



The walk starts on your holiday cottage doorstep. Before taking your first step, try and spot a Welsh poppy. - Europe's only native poppy grows wild around the farm buildings.



Welsh poppy

Cross the old bridge into the farmyard, stopping to look for trout in the freshwater below and if you're lucky, you may witness the disappearing act of a dipper. Bear left along the farm track. With the River Clydach on one side and mixed woodland on the other, you will soon pass the weir and outdoor privy on your left. You will hear it before seeing it (the weir that is).

The track divides opposite the old school house and bakery (now a dwelling). Turn right and follow the road uphill, keeping the river on your left-hand side. Across the river valley you will see a small shed for capturing spring water. The road eventually turns right and continues towards a Christmas tree plantation. To your right is a magnificent Lucombe oak that towers above the landscape, keeping watch over farmyard proceedings.



Bluebell

About 100 yards along on your left, is the entrance to the bluebell woodland. Go through the gate and bear left. As you follow the path into the woods you'll pass a secret underground hideout, built by the British Resistance Movement during World War II. Now listed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument those who hid here were members of the world's first resistance organization to be established in advance of an anticipated invasion.

The path continues to meander through the trees, home to woodland birds such as the green woodpecker, nuthatch and treecreeper. You may see a speckled wood butterfly, dancing in a shaft of sunlight to attract a female flying high in the canopy overhead. Look around you at the oak trees, as amazing as they are silent, home and dinner to almost 500 different insect species, an acorn den to the shy jay with a hundred-a-day habit, a provider of firewood to guests and a seat to sit on for dreamers.



Reed bunting

At the river's edge, there was once a wooden summerhouse. Listen hard and you can hear the laughs and shrieks of the landed gentry as they frolic streamside in their Jane Austen world of yesteryear. N.B. It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a visitor in possession of a good sense of adventure must exercise caution near the river.

Go through the wooden gate at the edge of the woodland, turn right and follow the farm road uphill until you reach a marshy rush-laden field. Take time to enjoy this wetland habitat where you may spot birds such as the grasshopper warbler, reed bunting and wild flowers such as tormentil and devil's bit scabious. This field is also a great place to spot butterflies - ringlet, orange tip, small skipper and large skipper have all been spotted here.

You will also start to notice mountain trees amongst the oaks that border the fields. Look out for the beautiful red berried rowan (or mountain ash), crab apples and you will even pass a wild damson tree.



Devil's bit scabious

Orange tip butterfly

As you walk along the road, look to your right. The first landmark to come into view is the TV transmitter atop of Craig Alltwen, followed by the largest building on the horizon - the UK's Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency. You will also begin to enjoy your first views of Pontardawe and the Swansea Valley. The spire of St. Peter's Church and the Golf Club, high on the hill that overlooks Pontardawe are obvious landmarks.

The road turns sharply to the left and becomes steeper. Some 20 yards short of Blaenant farmyard, take the stone steps on your left hand side up into a grassy field. Continue uphill, passing Blaenant Farm on your right. Continue through a gateway into a larger field, just uphill of the farm and follow the field boundary which curves to your left. This is the uppermost boundary of Plas Farm, where farmland meets the barren mountainous moorland and it is a great place to acquaint yourself with mountain birds like the wheatear and linnet. Listen for the enchanting song of the skylark as it leads you away from its nest - ushering you along the mountainside trail and back from whence you came. You may also hear the 'tchack-tchack' of a stonechat or the eerie calls of a buzzard soaring on the mountain thermals. The abundance of gullible meadow pipits on the hillside make it a great place for hearing the cuckoo, its guilty secret known only to you, it and the mountain.



Skylark

The scars of coal mining are prominent on the mountainside - both opencast and drift mines. You may also spot several metal birds and their contrails as Plas Farm lies beneath the main flight path from London to the United States.

The Swansea Valley fills your western field of vision in panoramic fashion - from the barren peaks of the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north to the deep blue waters of Swansea Bay in the south. Close your eyes and you can hear the creaking and scraping of a giant ice age glacier etching the Swansea Valley into the South Wales landscape. Then again, it could be your knees about to give. There is good phone signal at all points of the walk.

[THE UPPER BOUNDARY OF PLAS FARM HAS SERVED AS 'BASE CAMP' FOR MANY ATTEMPTS AT THE SUMMIT OF MYNNYD MARCHYWEL (1,371 FT) WHICH IS MARKED BY THREE PREHISTORIC FUNERARY AND RITUAL STONE CIRCLES. YOU WILL NEED TO ZIGZAG ALONG THE FORESTRY ROADS ATOP THE MOUNTAIN TO FIND THEM.]

When you realise that you are no longer walking uphill, you've reached the highest point of Plas Farm. The top of the bank is a great vantage point. Look towards the coast. You'll see the M4 motorway sweeping around the bay and entering Port Talbot. Follow the coast around to Swansea and see the famous Mumbles headland. The land on the southern horizon is Devon in England. The town of Ifracombe, is easily identified at night when its characteristic terraces of white-washed houses and grand Victorian villas appear as a street lit map on the horizon.

In late summer, charms of goldfinches and aristocratic butterflies such as the red admiral, painted lady and peacock flutter amongst the thistle heads that grow in patches on this field. Many lepidopterists consider the peacock butterfly to be the most beautiful in the world with its false eyes mimicking an owl's face. It also provides us with a fantastic excuse for any nettles you may have seen at Plas Farm. It eats them for breakfast.



Peacock butterfly

Broad buckler fern



The walk continues along this boundary fence and descends to meet the very upper reaches of the River Clydach. Follow the river downstream through small areas of woodland.

Polytrichum moss



Common lizard

In winter, the grazed stands of birch are Tolkiensque with mosses and lichens from other worlds. You will pass a field of tussocky grass - a great place to find lizards basking in the summer sun. You will reach the farm road near to where you exited the bluebell woodland.

Turn right along the road and cross the River Clydach over the cattle grid. Stop to find the initials WJ 1975 on the wall. Look for the grey wagtail, a beautiful bird that breeds along this stretch of upland stream. Continue along the road, bearing left.



Grey wagtail

You will cross another mountain stream before the road climbs to meet a tarmac mountain road. Bear left and follow the road downhill, keeping the mossy stone wall on your left. The views of the woodland and river valley are good and in late spring you will see spectacular varieties of rhododendron, imported exotics planted by the Victorian gentry as an expression of wealth, social prominence and extravagant lifestyle. The deep shades of red, varying hues of mauve, pink and white are a sight to behold. Behind the wall, betwixt two pine trees, are two gravestones - one marked Satan 1909 and the other Pat 1910. Every year, a single daffodil grows in front of Pat but not Satan. Perhaps they were pets? Stop running when you reach Cilybebyll Cross. At the crossroads turn left.

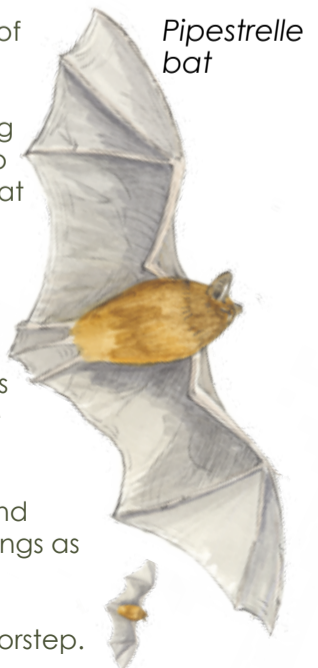


Rhododendron

[AT THIS POINT ON THE PLAS FARM TRAIL INSTEAD OF TURNING LEFT YOU MAY CHOOSE TO GO STRAIGHT AHEAD AND VISIT THE HAMLET OF CILYBEBYLL AND IT'S ANCIENT CHURCH OR TURN RIGHT FOR MORE VIEWS OF THE SWANSEA VALLEY.]

Turn left and continue along Church Road. Pause at one of the gateways on your left to enjoy views across Plas Farm's historic parkland with the hard sandstone escarpment known as Mynydd Marchywel (Hywel's Stallion) providing a striking backdrop. Many of the wonderful varieties of trees planted at Plas Farm over the centuries may be seen from this point making it one of the best places to enjoy the autumn colours at Plas Farm.

Upon reaching The Lodge and old milk churn stand turn left through the white pillars and onto Plas Farm's driveway. Bear right at the fork. On summer evenings look out for bats catching insects around the trees and above the farmyard buildings as you return to the point at which you started - your holiday cottage doorstep.



Pipistrelle bat