



Possibly named after 'Elen of the Hosts', a Mabinogion heroine, the Sarn Helen was an important Roman road in Wales, a major imperial thoroughfare on the edge of the Roman world. It ran the length of Wales linking Roman ports, military installations and other settlements from Neath (Nidum) in the south to Caernarfon (Segontium) in the north. A section of this road, connecting the ports at Neath and Coelbren, traverses the ridge of Hirfynydd where walkers can follow in the sandaled footsteps of Roman soldiers of the 1st century AD. Walk up from Aberdulais to the ruins of Llety'r Ael Fach. Look back and enjoy the view of Neath and Swansea bay (including Devon when clear). Gain more height and note the dry stone walling. Badly damaged in parts yet still impressive, this extended feature appears to date from the late 19th century. Further along St Illtyd's Way crosses the track. Then note an enclosure (often called a 'Signalling Station', although lines of sight are very limited). Probably Roman, this site is now overgrown after excavation in 1986-7. On again to where a track leads off to prehistoric Carn Cornel. Then to more open country and a stile giving access to a second enclosure. Now savour the striking panoramas when moving on to Clwydi Banwen.

**Helen of the roads,  
The mountain ways of Wales  
And the Mabinogion tales  
Is one of the true gods.**

(From Roads by Edward Thomas)

designed by Design Communication Matrix 01639 895 694 www.design-matrix.co.uk



Special Thanks to  
**Cwm Dulais  
Historical Society**

and all the dedicated individuals involved  
in the production of this leaflet.



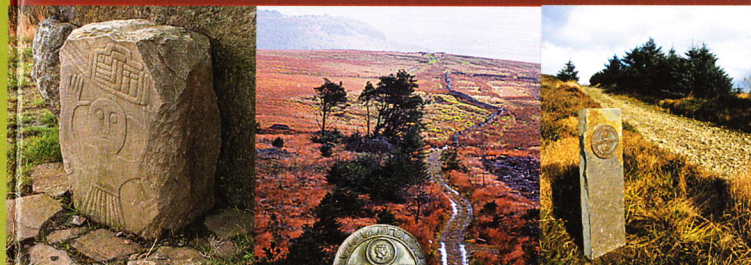
Dulais Valley Partnership, Old Telephone Exchange,  
Brynhyfryd Terrace, Seven Sisters, Neath SA10 9BA  
Tel: 01639 701880 Fax: 01639 701126

E-Mail: [dvp@dulaivalley.org.uk](mailto:dvp@dulaivalley.org.uk)  
Web: [www.dulaivalley.org.uk](http://www.dulaivalley.org.uk)



**Sarn Helen**

**A Journey through time**





Spend a while here. Enjoy the view, looking out to Coelbren Fort (or Banwen Caer, as locals have it) and Pen y Fan beyond. Nearby are replicas of the so-called 'Gnoll Stones' (inscribed 6th century Romano-British Macaritin (Maen Dau Llygaid yr Uch) stone, & c 10th century Hirfynydd stone or Kilted Figure), set up in the general area of their original location. Don't miss the nearby plaque, naming the peaks of the Brecon Beacons skyline. Descend to the terraced houses of Roman Road, Banwen. Close by, the Dove Workshop & Community University of the Valleys provides an innovative range of educational facilities. Nearer to the inter-valley A4109 is Tafarn y Banwen, where (so legend has it) St Patrick was born. Beyond the A4109 and to the east of Camnant Road there is evidence of a huge Roman Marching Camp of some 35 acres. Straight ahead is Coelbren Fort. Built in the 70s AD, the fort is 5.2 acres in size, sufficient to hold a garrison of at least 500 men and cavalry. Whilst of considerable interest, visitors are asked to respect the fact that there is no right of access to this Scheduled Site (on which crops may be growing). The Sarn Helen continues north-east, to a fort near Brecon (Y Caer) and then Caernarfon (Segontium).



Artist's impression of fort on site.

# Sarn Helen