

SNOWDONIA SLATE TRAIL
SURVEY REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS
2024



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Wedi ei ariannu gan
Llywodraeth y DU

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1. Background to the Snowdonia Slate Trail

The Snowdonia Slate Trail / Llwybr Llechi Eryri is an 83 mile (134Km) long circular route that celebrates Snowdonia National Parks beauty and explores its slate heritage and culture. The Trail starts at Bangor and ends in Bethesda in the Ogwen valley, the home of the slate industry's Great Strike in 1900-03. It passes through a diverse landscape and whilst there are some hills and open tops, it does not summit mountains but instead meanders its way from settlement to settlement via a variety of route and terrain types and can be enjoyed in sections as well as walked as a long-distance route.

It is waymarked along its full length with a distinct named logo disc, while short parts of it run in conjunction with other promoted routes (e.g. North Wales Pilgrims Way). It is a distinct route very much of its own though, taking in a lot of interesting internationally recognised slate landscapes as much of the route is within a designated World Heritage Site since 2021, and passing important historical quarries such as Penrhyn, Dinorwig, Dorothea, Ffestiniog and others.

The Trail is still relatively new having officially opened in late 2017. It is a broadly circular route starting in Bangor, heading to Bethesda and then following a circuit that can be completed in both directions via numerous key village and towns, finishing back in Bethesda. It is split into 7 different sections as listed below and if walked as a whole, the route takes between 6-8 days to complete. A map of the route is shown on the next page

2. Sections of the Trail and National Trail Standards

1. Bangor To Bethesda
2. Bethesda to Llanberis
3. Llanberis to Beddgelert
4. Beddgelert to Llan Ffestiniog
5. Llan Ffestiniog to Penmachno
6. Penmachno to Capel Curig
7. Capel Curig to Bethesda

The Trail has a website at www.snowdoniaslatetrail.org and also has a guidebook (2nd edition) by Aled Owen with clear, large-scale mapping and a good level of detail, an overview leaflet and passport stamp facility.

Overview map of the Trail



The Snowdonia Slate Trail has been reviewed against National Trail Standards and key information on those standards is outlined below:

In Wales there are three National Trails plus the Wales Coast Path. These are Glyndwr's Way, Offa's Dyke Path and Pembrokeshire Coast Path. All of these three trails are very well established and have been in existence for a very long time. The National Trail Quality Standards are there to ensure that these promoted long distance routes meet various high standards and to ensure consistency.

In Wales, the Quality Standards for National Trails and the Wales Coast Path Handbook produced by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) dated 2016 outlines 6 key quality standard areas that need to be assessed for routes to meet National Trail Standards. A copy of the Handbook can be found at **Appendix 1a**. In brief, the quality standards fall under the following six headings:

- Surface and Surroundings
- Furniture and Other Structures
- Information
- Navigation
- Links and Access Points
- Route Alignment

In comparison, England has a National Trails document called "The New Deal" Management of National Trails in England, dated April 2013, which was produced by Natural England and is a more strategic level document compared to the Wales Handbook which goes into more detail on specific structure, information and expectations. The England document focuses on management principles under the headings of:

- **Experience** - The trails should be managed in a way which allows as many people as possible to enjoy a wide variety of walking and riding experiences along National Trails and through the English landscape.
- **Enhancement** - Constant improvements should be made to the trail and its associated routes. It should contribute to the enhancement of the landscape, nature and historic features within the trail corridor.
- **Engagement** - Build and sustain a community of interest in caring for the trail and the landscape through which it passes.
- **Economy** - The trails should create opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the use of the trails. -

A copy of the England "The New Deal" document can be viewed at **Appendix 1b**. This document is also broad and ambitious, aimed at providing a menu for long term development and investment and whilst focusing on consistency with minimum standards, eg Key Performance Indicators, of all National Trails, it provides scope for local flexibility on how the Standards are achieved and there is

also focus on integration of Trails in supporting the local economy and encouraging local input.

3. Scope of Report

Birchill Access Consultancy Ltd was commissioned to undertake a ground survey of the route in early 2024 and to report its findings in a report with a specific remit to comment on the following matters to assist in any future application for National Trail status:

- Research the requirements for establishing National Trails. In Wales, those standards are contained in Natural Resources Wales' "Handbook of Quality Standards for National Trails in Wales." The report should also consider Natural England's "The New deal; Management of National Trails in England from April 2013 (NE426)" and any other relevant guidance. These standards are outlined in more detail in Section 6 of this report and the full documents attached at **Appendix 1**.
- Travel the entire route and carry out the detailed survey of the Trail, its condition, its shortcomings, its furniture and the like.
- Include comments on two short alternative options described as (i) Yr Ocar, south of Bethesda and (ii) a second option out of Llanberis.
- Report on actions for the Tanygrisiau to Blaenau Ffestiniog school section.
- Provide guidance and proposals for development, monitoring, maintenance and marketing.
- Produce a fully illustrated report detailing the improvements required and the cost of those improvements. The report should include photos of issues that need addressing with detailed grid references, together with a clear itemised list of what needs to be done to address those issues and bring the Trail in line with National Trail standards.
- Identify precise lengths which require regular maintenance and clearance, such as areas of bracken.

4. Survey of the Trail

A survey of the Trail commenced at end of March and was completed in April 2024. A particularly wet winter preceded the survey so ground conditions were wet, particularly on the first sections. A very large number of photos of the entire route has been taken and sent to Snowdonia Slate Trail Trust although photos of any key issues or structures have been highlighted and mentioned in this report and linked to Appendices of photos at the end of this report. The Survey was undertaken with National Trail Standards in mind so comments on each section whilst mentioning any

general issues also review matters such as road walking, structure types, bins, seating, toilets, interpretation etc.

5. Survey Findings

Sections 1 & 2 : Bangor to Bethesda to Llanberis

- This section of the Trail was good in terms of waymarking with nearly all gates/structures having the logoed Snowdonia Slate Trail waymark discs with fingerposts and waymark posts at key junctions, along with reassurance discs on telegraph poles etc. noted on longer sections. The trail was easy to follow by just following waymarks and map reading. The guidebook description was very helpful and accurate.
- We were unable to survey the first section of just less than 1Km out of Porth Penrhyn as it was blocked at the underpass bridge whilst they were carrying out works on steel bridges across the river (**see Appendix 2, Photo 3 & 4**). However, from then on, access was fine. We understood from the Trust that this section of the Trail is a well-maintained cycle path, so we anticipate no issues here.
- The route section includes mostly kissing gate structures, especially along the first half of the route, together with a few footbridges of different lengths. The majority of kissing gates are of a half slate / half metal construction with the slate being in keeping with local heritage (**see Appendix 2, Photos 33-37**). It was noted that there are some newer metal kissing gates further along this section (**see Appendix 2, Photo 72**). Only a few wooden gates and 1 ladder stile were encountered en route with no other stiles of any type. Some of the kissing gates were a bit tight to get through but reasonable. There were just a few steps on the route, the longest section being as the Trail drops down to Bethesda from Rachub (**see Appendix 2, Photo 78**)
- In terms of Trail infrastructure, 2 or 3 bins were noted on this section. Some interpretation boards on the slate industry can be seen, e.g. at Bethesda next to the metal Snowdonia Slate Trail bench, and also at Llanberis Slate Museum, together with a small notice on the bridge just south of Bethesda. Public toilets can also be found in the towns of Bangor, Bethesda and Llanberis. (**see Appendix 2, Photo 82, 83, 184,**)
- Some wet sections were encountered but nothing serious or impassable, the worst being the sections mentioned in the guidebook on the open moor over Gwaen Gynfi south of Bethesda for approx. 800m around Grid Ref: SH60499,69021 (**see Appendix 2, Photos 106, 113,114,115**). There was also a short narrow rather wet section that needed overhead vegetation clearance and tree clearance nearer the start of this section just north of the

main road northwest of Pentre'r Felin between Bangor and Halfway Bridge at Grid Ref: SH 59863, 7002) (**See Appendix 2, Photos 23 & 24**). This section will require regular maintenance.

- Of particular heritage value was noted the slate and iron stile at Grid Ref: SH 60099,63354 at the southern end of the route crossing Gwaen Gynfi.
- The road section climbing from Bethesda to Gwaen Gynfi was rather long and steep but acceptable. We note the Snowdonia Slate Trail Trust as made an application to register the section to the west through Yr Ocar woods as a Public Right of Way. This footpath passes ponds and waterfalls together with attractive slate fencing so this would be good to avoid some road walking if the application is successful. (**See discussion about alternative routes at Section 7**)
- Given this is the start of the Trail, it would definitely be improved by an information board at the start at Porth Penrhyn as would be expected of a promoted trail and would also be helpful to users. The slate history bilingual boards in the middle of Bethesda give a lot of history but could be enhanced by an overall board showing the whole route. A Snowdonia Slate Trail information board could also be added next to existing boards outside Llanberis Slate Museum which already has information on nearby footpaths/walks.
- As the section was walked before Easter, Caffi Coed y Brenin, Bethesda and Lodge Dinorwig bunkhouse were both closed meaning one couldn't get their passport stamped. It is assumed, however, that most people would walk the Trail from Easter onwards, at which point these venues are more likely to be open. The guidebook does highlight this type of issue.

- **Section 3: Llanberis to Beddgelert**

- There is generally good waymarking throughout on this section at key junctions and on structures, although not all, but easy to follow. One minor improvement by additional signage could be made to address an issue which is mentioned in the guidebook about not going through a kissing gate above Dorothea quarry at Grid Ref: SH 50371 54287 but skirting around fencing on a narrow path before dropping down through the quarry. It is felt that the roundel on the gate nearby is a bit misleading and walkers may find themselves having to retrace their steps. It is recommended that a waymarker post is set separate from the gate to make sure people follow the correct route to the side of the fencing, so they don't go through the gate onto the tarmac. (**See Appendix 3, Photo 101**).
- There is a lack of interpretation boards on this section. An interpretation board in Llanberis somewhere i.e. outside slate museum, would be useful. There are boards inside the Llanberis Slate Museum, but they are not obvious

and rather hidden near the café inside the complex so anyone not visiting the museum would not see them. Small boards in Rhyd Ddu and Beddgelert might be good too.

- At least five benches were noted en route but most of these were on the last section from Rhyd Ddu to Beddgelert on the multiuser section known as Lôn Gwyrfai (**eg, See Appendix 3, Photo 153 & also 116 Nantlle bench**). The section from Rhyd Ddu is of high standard already and up to National Trail standard. Bins in the villages were noted, as well as several “*be responsible and take your litter home*” signs as one heads out of Llanberis at the start of the trail. Toilets are available at Llanberis, Rhyd Ddu and Beddgelert.
- Most structures on this route section are good i.e. wicket gates, kissing gates, bridges and ladder stiles, although as with the first section of the route, some gates were little tight, but none were poor. A beautiful ornate metal style gate was also noticed as the route leaves Rhyd Ddu (**See. Appendix 3, Photo 144**)
- All bridges and most of the few stiles had anti-skid on but at least two ladder stiles as the route heads up steeply from Waunfawr around Grid Ref: SH52222 58511 through woodland could do with ant-skid (**See Appendix 3, Photos 62 & 63**). A third ladder stile and wooden frame as one heads up out of wood at the highest elevation here is also a bit precarious at Grid Ref: SH52076 58385 (**See Appendix 3, Photo 65**). Although the ladder stile itself is satisfactory, there is then only a railing on wobbly rocks to balance on at high elevation with a drop one side, so something safer and more accessible is required here.
- There were two particularly wet sections on the route which need some surface and remedial works:
 - Just before Waunfawr an approximate 200m stretch across small enclosures is heavily poached by livestock/horses, and is very wet as small streams intersect from different angles and some culverts appeared overflowing or blocked around Grid Ref: SH 53143 59387 (**See Appendix 3, Photos 43 & 49**)
 - As one heads east from the farm out of Nantlle either side of Grid Ref: SH 51814,52804, this low-lying track is fairly muddy for a very long stretch of at least 800m along the valley well beyond the farm, although the track is clearly used by farm machinery/livestock too. (**See Appendix 3, Photos 24 & 27**)
- **Section 4: Beddgelert to Llan Ffestiniog**
- The first section out of Beddgelert is a lovely riverside path with a drop to the river in a couple of places, but it is, on the whole, a very well-made path. The structures all seem to be in good order to Aberglaslyn, with just one bridge

slat missing from one of the bridges (approx. GR: SH59564648 **see photo at Appendix 4, Photo 12**). However, it is worth noting that these bridges have clearly seen some TLC as there are a number of newer slats which are clearly replacements. The path is a mix of gravel/hardcore and rock, with just a couple of rocky steps to pass, but nothing unreasonable for a footpath in an area such as this. It's a beautiful section of the route but maybe as well as the note in the guidebook, a small sign/map is needed after it crosses the railway line just to warn people of this and that there is an alternative path going under the footbridge by the railway to go up to the road which can be used in times of flood. Obviously being on road has its dangers too as this is a busy narrow road.

- Waymarking on the route is good as usual and all key junctions are covered, with just a few places where minor improvements could be made:
 - ii) Approx 30m after heading upslope leaving Croesor mine, the Trail could do with one low level reassurance post (SH 65851, 45544) to make sure people continue on the correct route and don't veer off onto other faint paths which are too low or high. Some path users in poorer weather conditions might like the reassurance, otherwise there is good waymarking on the top of this hill section which is reassuring.
 - (iv) After the A496, where route goes through the car scrap yard, efforts have been made to waymark this section but there are a lot of vehicles parked en route and it's not the most scenic. Looking at the OS map, it may be possible to cut out road walking and using the earlier footpath, crossing the road and along another footpath to cut across avoiding most of yard. This section through the scrap yard needs reappraisal on the ground to see if there is a better alternative. The waymarking where the route heads north out of the yard to Blaenau at SH 69377 45292 is also unclear so a post on the track would be good here as the current waymarking is set back. For photo of the scrap car yard (**See Appendix 4, Photo 102**)
- There were some fairly wet sections on this route, not surprising given the amount of rain, and these sections are all referred to in the guidebook. The worst and longest section of approx. 1km is between Nantmor and Croesor around Grid Ref: SH 62176,45227(**See Appendix 4, Photos 45 & 50**). Nothing is impassable but this section needs monitoring if footfall increases to ensure no lasting damage to surrounding sensitive land as it appears to get churned up by farmers quad bikes and therefore walkers walk around making it wider. Some surface work improvements would be good idea.
- Structures consist of a mix of gates, stiles and bridges, all in good condition and with anti-skid on nearly all stiles. At the first stile encountered before dropping down to the A496 between Tanygrisiau and Blaenau Ffestiniog . both structure and the fence it is attached to are rather wobbly (**See Appendix 4, Photo 99**) but, otherwise, all structures are good including some newer kissing gates.

- Public toilets are present in Nantmor, Beddgelert and Ffestiniog but other services are limited with no interpretation of route. There is quite a bit of interpretation of the slate industry in Ffestiniog though, including views of old large slate tips and the mountain bike trail runs.
- A number of bins and seats were noted en route in the villages of Beddgelert, Tanygrisiau and Ffestiniog. On the day of the survey, Lakeside café by Tanygrisiau Reservoir was shut although it was noted there is an interpretation board for Cwmorthin but no mention of the Snowdonia Slate Trail.
- There had been comments about dog mess around the scrap yard at Tanygrisiau, but no problem was seen during the survey.

• **Section 5: Llan Ffestiniog to Penmachno**

- This section is very varied, from gorges to open mountain remote hills and woodland paths. Generally, this section is in good condition, relatively easy to follow and well waymarked.
- The first 2km section from Llan Ffestiniog is very good with lots of gates but the path is narrow in places, especially in the Ceunant Cynfal Nature reserve, although not a lot can be done about this. **(See Appendix 5, Photo 13).** There is also one fallen tree across route at Grid Ref: SH 70716,41030 (See **Appendix 5, Photo 14**)
- There were a few more fallen trees across the path in the Cwm Cynfal area at western end of the route before it crosses first main footbridge in the valley at Grid Ref: SH 72067,41041 **(Appendix 5, Photo 22).**
- There is a mix of structures from gates, stiles and bridges on this section. The route has more stiles in the middle section though and although some are ladder stiles some are standard wooden or stone stiles that could be replaced with gates. Many of existing stiles do not have anti-skid on.
- The Trail could do with small footbridge or slab crossing just past the dam at Llyn Morwynion over the outflow stream with clearer waymarker at this point at Grid Ref: SH 73266,42264. **(Appendix 5, Photo 39)**
- Waymarking is generally good with all key junctions covered and most structures have discs attached, although as stated in guidebook, there is less signage through the SSSI and on the remote section around Carreg y Fran before heading downhill to the road to Manod quarry. A review of whether a few more discs could be discreetly placed is recommended.

- The route is generally off road but with the worse section being the long uphill tarmac road climb to Manod quarry. However, due to the boggy terrain, and the landowner's wishes, there is not much alternative.
- There are some wet areas on this section which can be bypassed by leaving the Public Right of Way, so some improvement work is recommended here.
- The last section from Cwm Penmachno to Penmachno is very good with noticeable new metal gates and good waymarking. In Cwm Penmachno itself there is a picnic bench beside the bus shelter where the route descends off the hill at the south side of the village. Also, the village has an interesting Heritage Room with information on the local quarry history.
- There are seats and bins in Llan Ffestiniog as well as seats in the forest section between Cwm Penmachno and Penmachno. There is a pub at Llan Ffestiniog where this section starts and public toilets at Penmachno along with a pub, bunkhouse and a small village shop. No interpretation boards or information about slate industry heritage were noted on this section though.

• **Section 6: Penmachno to Capel Curig**

- This is a very pleasant section of the Trail and is relatively easy to follow and well waymarked. The few issues around Ty Hyll west of Betws y Coed onwards are mentioned below.
- There is a mix of stiles, gates and plenty of bridges on the route but all are in good condition, although a number of standard stiles could be replaced with self-closing pedestrian gates, eg as the Trail leaves Penmachno, the ladder stile hung over fence at Grid Ref: SH 78982,81129 could be replaced with a gate (**Appendix 6, Photo 4**). In other places there are stiles next to gates, but all those gates are easy to open.
- There are a number of stream crossings on this section which are fine in spring/summertime but long term could do with small footbridges or large stepping stones, so it is recommended to keep this under review e.g. approx. 1km north of Penmachno is the first place which could do with a small footbridge at Grid Ref: SH 78970, 51150 (**Appendix 6, Photo 6**)
- There are some road sections including the steep climb from Ty Hyll but overall, most of the route is off road with no real alternatives to the road sections.
- There is good waymarking at all key road junctions and en route but it could do with a reassurance marker just past the picnic benches at (**SH 78781 56737**) on the river section between Betws y Coed and Ty Hyll to make

people keep to the river when the path splits to avoid them going inland too much.

- At the time of the survey there was flood damage immediately before the steps going up to Ty Hyll with highways barriers blocking the route (although moveable), and uneven stones between stile and steps – This will be easily remedied by the local authority. ((**See Appendix 6, Photos 50 & 51**)
- There are a few issues on the section between Ty Hyll after the steep road climb north of Glyn Farm (i) Fallen finger post lying on ground on path where it joins the forestry track at **SH 74546 57851 NW of Glyn Farm (Appendix 6, Photo 60)** (ii) Ladder stile very wobbly and not fixed to ground just hung over unstable folded corrugated panel with poor fencing either side. This can be negotiated but is not a good standard and it would be better with new fencing and self-closing gates NE of Glyn Farm at **SH 75271 57809.(Appendix 6, Photo 58)** (iii) the path in the woodland section is washed out and deeply rutted but dry. One section is bad for about 150 m just North of Glyn Farm. **SH 74762 57884 (Appendix 6, Photo 64)**
- There are good services en route with benches, bins, seating, toilets and cafes at regular intervals, so the Trail is very integrated into local communities eg Betws y Coed and Capel Curig. There is a lack of any interpretation regarding the Trail or slate history though.

- **Section 7: Capel Curig to Bethesda**

- This is an easy and very good section of the overall Trail. The slate heritage themed metal bench and information boards in Bethesda provide a nice finish to the Trail as well. (**See Appendix 7, Photo 57**)
- No major issues were seen with this section of the Trail which is already up to good standard on the whole. Surfaces are good and wide in most places, while structures and waymarking are good throughout and up to National Trail standards. (Just one issue is mentioned below around Llyn Ogwen)
- The route links in well to Idwal Cottage in the middle of the section, and bins, toilets and seating are available at Capel Curig, Ogwen and Bethesda.
- There are interesting interpretation boards at the far end about Penrhyn quarry where the Trail joins Lon Las Ogwen before dropping down to the finish at Bethesda where, again, there are information boards on slate history. (**See Appendix 7, Photo 43**)
- The worst part of this section is an approximately 350 m stretch around the northern edge of Llyn Ogwen on the rougher ground which is wet and uneven

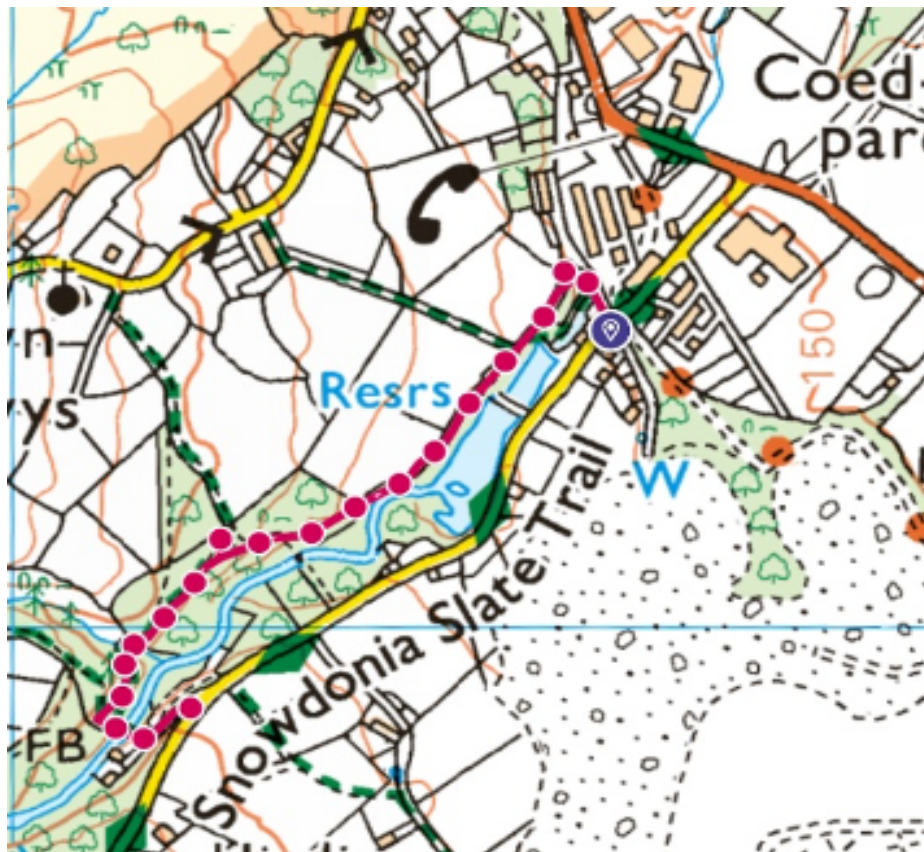
in many places around Grid Ref: SH 66109,60756 (**Appendix 7, Photo 30 & 32**). Some works could be undertaken here to improve the surface, particularly at the middle section.

6. Alternative Routes on the Trail

Two alternative routes to the existing Trail were presented to us to review and are discussed in more detail below. In summary both would need practical works to open up as alternatives, especially the Llanberis option. Yr Ocar option south of Bethesda would be a much nicer route off road but may also need some minor works. This is not an existing Public Right of Way and it is currently subject to legal processes to change its designation to a Public Right of Way.

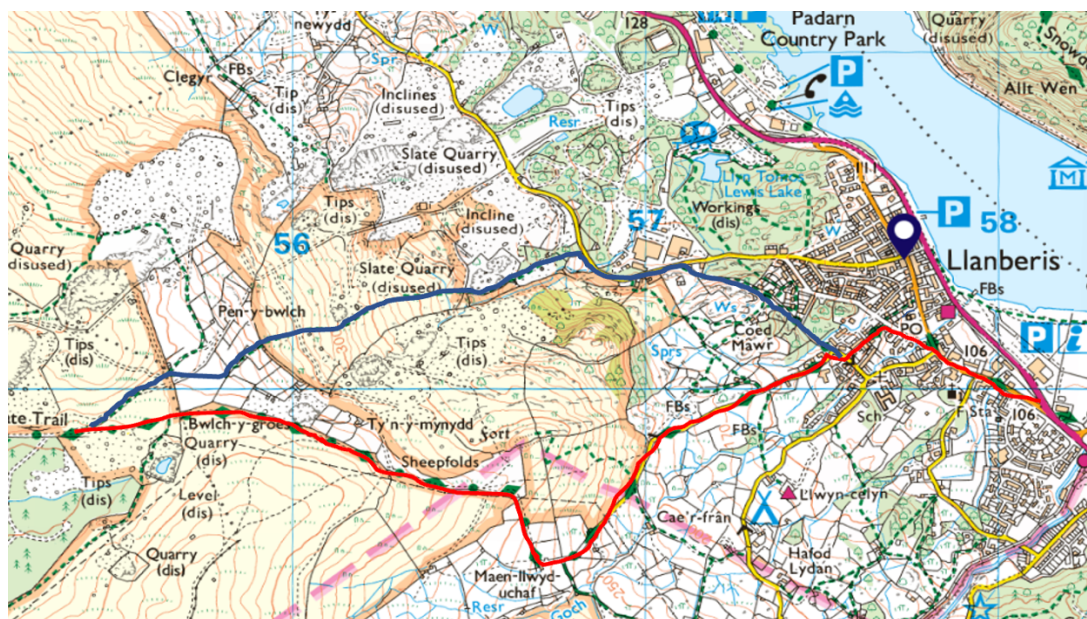
(i) Yr Ocar alternative, south of Bethesda

This alternative route just south of Bethesda at the start of a long up hill road section is much more pleasant, running alongside the river with slate fencing. It is also subject to a Definitive Map Modification Order application based on evidence of historic use. Whether this application is successful is to be awaited, but nonetheless it is a much more attractive route than the road section which is the start of a longish uphill stretch. Photos of this section of the route can be viewed at **Appendix 8a**. Details of improvement works required are outline in **Appendix 9**.



(ii) Llanberis alternative

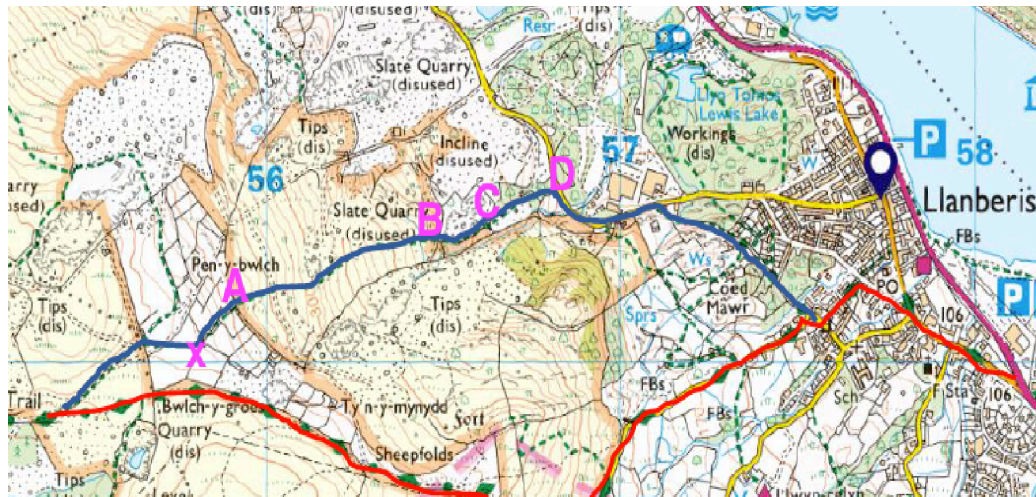
A suggested alternative route to the existing Trail section heading west out of Llanberis running north of the existing route has been examined and is marked in a solid blue line on the map below. The current route is marked in a solid red line to the south of the blue line. The alternative runs along an existing public footpath.



This alternative has quite a few issues that would need to be resolved to make it a suitable alternative. With reference to the map below with points marked on it the following issues have been noted.

Just southwest of Point A the route is blocked by a stone wall and fence marked at Point X but on the ground, it appears walkers have carried on south to a gate that joins the Trail albeit not a legal footpath. Point A at the time of survey had a gate made from a couple of hurdles, tied together, so that it couldn't be opened and had to be climbed/jumped over. However, on a second visit, these had been moved and opened but it clearly needs a more permanent structure. At Point B there is ladder a stile with a broken bottom rung. Between Points B-C there is a short, exposed section very close to a deep drop into to a disused quarry pit that would need protective fencing or a slight diversion away. About 200m section west of Point B is wet and tends to be wet/boggy all year round. Point C is the location of the fallen down fence. The path is on the opposite side to what's marked here too. Photos of the alternative and issues are at **Appendix 8b**.

Whilst this alternative section out of Llanberis clearly has quite a few issues that would need to be addressed to make it safe and bring it up to National Trail Standards, it does significantly reduce road walking. It would remove 1 mile of road walking and another 1 mile of hard-core surfaced track walking on a section of the existing Trail. It thereby significantly reduces hard surface walking and makes the route more interesting, taking in more sights of the local slate heritage including a former settlement.



7. How Snowdonia Slate Trail meets National Trail Standards

The Snowdonia Slate Trail is already an established waymarked route and we believe that, whilst it is not yet up to National Trail Standards in its entirety, with some practical improvements on the ground outlined in Section 8 below along with recommendations on development, monitoring, long term maintenance and improved marketing, the Trail could fully meet the Standards.

(i) How the Trail already meets in part National Trail Standards

- Generally, the Trail follows Least Restrictive Access principles of gap, gate, stile principle as the Trail already has fair few gaps and gates but there is room for improvement as it is estimated that at least 30% of boundary crossings are stiles.
- Surfaces and surroundings are 99% unobstructed and readily passable by users.
- Most of the route is off road (approx. 80%); most road sections are short apart from four longer or tricky sections and a few minor short road sections which are detailed below.

- No serious litter or dog mess is noticed. However, hotspots like Llanberis / Tanygrisiau might need monitoring. Already responsible signs are in place to encourage good practice. Bins are in place in all key settlements.
- Structures eg stiles, gates, bridges, are all accessible and mostly in good condition with only a few structures needing improving or replacing.
- Fingerposts and waymark posts are all of high specification and in good condition with clearly logoed Snowdonia Slate Trail waymark discs. These would need to be some upgrades if the Trail became a National Trail, such as including National Trail logos and place names on fingerposts. eg Bethesda to Llanberis, x miles.
- There is reasonably good seating provision throughout the Trail, especially in key towns and villages, although there is scope for few more on longer sections.
- There is a comprehensive 2nd Edition Guidebook published in 2022 with maps, and leaflet for the Trail have already been distributed to key tourist places etc. Also, a passport system is already in place so one can collect stamps and a medal on completion of the full Trail.
- Some existing links with public transport are available eg buses and trains, with information easily available online, on the Snowdonia Slate Trail website and in the guidebook.
- The bilingual Snowdonia Slate Trail website is already up and running with comprehensive information on the Trail and other matters such as the history of area, accommodation etc. Also, there are existing Facebook, Instagram and X pages.
- Some interpretation boards are already in situ although there is room for improvement, especially at the start of the Trail where nothing exists

(ii) *Areas of improvement required to meet National Trail Standards*

Necessary

- There are six longer sections where the Trail runs along a road that need reviewing and road sections minimising:

- (i) South of Bethesda - 1 mile stretch from Yr Ocar to Mynydd Llandegai: pursuing the alternative through Yr Ocar woods will shorten this section and make it more pleasant
 - (ii) 1 mile stretch west of Llanberis where the Trail follows the North Wales Pilgrims Way - review the works required on alternative discussed earlier in report
 - (iii) Between Nantmor and Croesor villages south of Beddgelert there is also about just over 1km of minor road walking, some of it steeply uphill although there is little alternative, and the road itself is quiet and pleasant.
 - (iv) Half mile dangerous road section north of Penmachno on B4406 - needs safety investigation as to whether a pedestrian footpath could be provided, maybe in the adjacent field, as is the case on many Lake District roads at an estimated cost of around £30K.
 - (v) 1 mile section up hill to Manod Quarries northeast of Llan Ffestiniog – there is little alternative to this very lightly traffic lane. This lane is exceedingly quiet and no work is required here.
 - (vi) 2.7 mile road section along the Ogwen Valley from Idwal. However, there is no easy obvious alternative as this is a steep sided valley with flat bottom albeit the road section is very quiet as very lightly trafficked.
- There is a need to review wheelchair and other types of access for off-road sections which should be as widely available as possible. A separate access audit might suggest upgrade of some sections.
 - Regular clearance of minor obstructions, e.g. fallen trees, is mentioned in Section 5. In addition, bracken /overgrown vegetation clearance of 1km or shorter sections is required over approx. 5km of the Trail.
 - Various wet sections outlined in Section 5 under Survey Findings need some remedial works and monitoring, particularly section over Gwaen Gynfi south of Bethesda and the Migneint after leaving the road at the cattle grid.
 - Poorer quality or unsafe stiles mentioned in Section 5 should be improved or replaced with gates where possible with landowner discussion.
 - Whilst fingerposts, posts and waymarks are all good, new signage would be required if the Trail became a National Trail to include the National Trail logo.
 - Whilst there are no specific Snowdonia Slate Trail Interpretation boards currently, this would be essential. Information Board

consistency would be needed throughout Trail, importantly at the start and end in Bangor and Bethesda. A further approximately eight smaller boards along the route at key settlements /points of interest would be important to aid users and give them better knowledge of the route and history independent of the guidebook

- The website should be kept up to date with an on-line reporting and monitoring system in place at suitable intervals eg QR code readers on bridges, suitable structures and interpretation boards. The website could then be used by walkers to submit feedback reports on the Trail to aid maintenance.
- For long terms certainty and clarity, the route should be entirely on permanent public rights of access. At least 2 sections of the existing Trail are on permissive routes, eg approx. 0.5 km around Conwy Falls between Penmachno and Betws y Coed, and approx. 50m down from Lon Las Ogwen approaching Bethesda at end of route which is under discussion with the landowner.

Desirable

- Where possible, standard existing (non-ladder stiles) need to be replaced with self-closing pedestrian gates. Ladder stiles mostly cross stone walls but there is a need to assess all as many could be replaced with gates, where the stone wall is in good condition.
- Monitoring system for litter /dog mess should be instigated and regular emptying of bins should be carried out in liaison with the councils.
- A few more seats should be considered, e.g. between Betws and Capel Curig and somewhere between Llan Ffestiniog and Penmachno in remoter sections.
- The guidebook and leaflets should be more widely distributed including to accommodation providers, particularly in hotspots like Beddgelert, Llanberis and Betws y Coed.

A summary of the standards and compliances or non-compliances is included on the following page.

Natural Resources Wales Quality Standards for National Trails

Standard	Snowdonia Slate Trail complies	Action
Surfaces and surroundings should be unobstructed so that they are readily passable by users.	Not throughout	Required regular clearance of undergrowth and path improvement in boggy areas
The number and length of road sections should be kept to a minimum.	Not throughout	A number of diversions and improvements recommended in the report
The amount of litter and dog mess should be kept to a minimum. wheelchair users wherever practicable and appropriate.	Complies	
The off-road sections of the routes should be as widely accessible as possible and be suitable for	Not throughout	An access audit recommended in the report
Furniture and other structures should be of high specification and be in good condition.	Complies	
Finger Posts and Waymark Posts should be of a high specification and be in good condition.	Complies	
Stiles should be replaced by less restrictive options whenever possible.	Not throughout	Replacement of stiles with self-closing gates recommended where practicable
Seats should be in good condition at all designated locations.	Complies	Report recommends further seats
Satisfactory official guidebooks should be available.	Complies	
Satisfactory summary leaflets should be available.	Complies	But not regularly distributed. See the report
Accurate public transport Information should be easily available.	Complies	See website

At least one satisfactory accommodation and services guide should be available.	Complies	See website
All routes should have a satisfactory official website.	Complies	See website
There should be interpretation / information Boards at all Key Access Points.	Does not comply	Planning permission granted for boards at Trail ends
Routes should be a satisfactory social media presence.	Complies	But could do more
Routes should be correctly recorded on current Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 maps.	Complies	
The routes should be easy to follow on the ground.	Complies	
Temporary diversions on routes should be signed and publicised appropriately.	Complies	Depend on agencies to comply
Key Access Points should be public transport accessible between Easter and the end of September.	Complies	
Key Destinations within 3km of the routes should have access connecting them with the routes.	Does not comply	Proposals for this in the pipeline
Adjoining Key Link Paths should be usable and clearly signed from the routes.	Does not comply	Proposals for this in the pipeline
The official line and the walked line should be coincident.	Complies	
The official line should be coincident with a permanent right of access.	Does not comply	Two sections use permissive paths. See the report

8. Overview of works required and estimated costings

A table of works proposed on each section of the Trail to bring it up to National Trail standards with estimated costings is included in **Appendix 9a along with basis of estimated costings at Appendix 9b..**

It should be borne in mind that the costings are estimates and include estimated material and labour costs and could be subject to variation. They are presented as a guideline to aid future maintenance and potential funding requirements.

9. Recommendations on development, monitoring, maintenance and marketing of Trail

The current Trail is still relatively new but is well waymarked and established on the ground. It is well integrated into the local communities of North Wales and has a distinct historically important nature as it passes through a World Heritage Site. It certainly could become a unique special National Trail with the right long-term funding and long-term management. More work would initially have to be done to bring the route up to a higher standard in places on the ground as itemised in **Appendix 9a.**

Below are some key recommendations for the general development of the Trail, its monitoring, maintenance and marketing with National Trail Standards in consideration:

MONITORING – monitoring of any type of promoted trail is important and we recommend

- Considering placing counters in structures or ground at key points around the Trail to monitor foot fall to aid maintenance and to be better aware of usage.
- Repeat surveys of the route by wardens would ensure any issues are picked. In addition, walking the route in reverse allows a check that all posts have discs in both directions albeit most people will walk route as described in guidebook.
- A clear feedback facility for the public to use to report any problems and save time is recommended, eg QR code readers on bridges and other structures
- Continued use of the volunteer wardens with local knowledge to help monitor issues.

MARKETING – this is essential and a key requirement of a National Trail and whilst some marketing has already been done, we recommend:

- Evaluating current places where passport stamps are available as some were not open. One could add just one or two more places that are guaranteed open eg Spar Llanberis

- More prints of leaflets and guidebooks should be distributed amongst local accommodation providers and at transport hubs with a mechanism in place to monitor and replenish supplies.
- A separate updated accommodation and transport form that can be available to download in paper and online format might be useful.

MAINTENANCE – this is also key; the route is expected to be of a very high standard and maintained as such for any promoted or National Trail standard route. We recommend:

- Investigating a sustainable community-led approach to long term maintenance of the Trail with use of volunteer wardens to assist but also set understanding between local authority, national park staff as to how the trail will be maintained and by who for what.
- Considering an approach to other National Trails managed in Wales eg Offa's Dyke, Wales Coast Path, to establish how partnerships could work between volunteers, communities, businesses and even a potential dedicated overall Snowdonia Slate Trail Officer who co-ordinates everything and is the key point of contact for public and other bodies involved in Trail management.
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10. Conclusion and Final Recommendations

From this survey we have found that the Snowdonia Slate Trail is a unique and very enjoyable circular Trail taking in some very important historic landscapes that are world renowned. The Trail links in very well to local communities as has the potential to significantly improve the economy of many small towns and villages.

In terms of it potentially becoming a National Trail, the basics of such are already in place in meeting many of the Standards and it is clear a lot of work has been put in on the ground and in marketing the trail which is clearly in use both as a multi-day trail and a route that can be walked in sections.

It is obvious various improvements as outlined in this report would need to be made but these are not unsurmountable and with committed financial resources and a clear trail management structure between various partners eg local authority, National Park, existing staff and volunteers. Some consideration would also need to be given to having a full time Trail Officer as well which is standard with other National Trails.

Costing wise it is estimated a minimum of **£500,000** would be needed to initially bring the Trail up to National Trail Standards but this would then require long term funding and management to keep the trail up to a high specification. The improvements to the existing sections of the trail requires an estimated expenditure of **£533,720** to meet National Trail Standards plus if

the 2 alternative routes at Yr Ocar and Llanberis were put in place the works required to bring these up to standard would be **£28,193** giving a grand total of **£561,913**. In addition to the costs required to bring the Trail up to standard there will be approximately **£70,000** year of ongoing costs to cover a Trail Officer, admin, marketing and day to day things like replacing waymarks.

Whilst there are already 3 National Trails in Wales and various other promoted routes, there are no circular National Trails that link key historic settlement in this way and highlight the important slate history of North Wales not just in Wales to a larger audience.