The Weatherman Walking maps are intended as a guide to help you walk the route. We recommend using an OS map of the area in conjunction with this guide. Routes and conditions may have changed since this guide was written. The BBC takes no responsibility for any accident or injury that may occur while following the route. Always wear appropriate clothing and footwear and check weather conditions before heading out.
Neolithic monuments, fascinating characters and far-reaching views are the highlights of this walk in the heart of the Vale of Glamorgan. Just a stone’s throw from Cardiff yet with a much gentler pace, the rural Vale is the perfect spot to escape the city and head across fields, lanes and a secluded wood, which you’ll very possibly have to yourself! En route you can enjoy one of south Wales’ finest country gardens, see two enormous burial chambers dating back more than 5,000 years and even find out about the Vale’s connection with the American Declaration of Independence.

The circular walk starts and ends at Dyffryn Gardens, where the National Trust has kindly given permission for walkers to use the car park. The gates are locked each evening, with closing time depending on the time of year, so it’s advisable to check at http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens/ ahead of your visit.

**Directions**

Walk from the car park to the main gates and turn right, onto Dyffryn Lane. This runs for about half a mile to a T-junction; there’s no pavement so take care!

At the junction, turn right and you’ll soon come to Dyffryn village. Go round the bend, passing some houses on your left, and head over the stone bridge on the right hand side, which leads to Doghill Farm. Turn right immediately after the bridge and cross the stile into the field. Walk uphill through the field, where friendly horses and Shetland ponies will probably trot over to say hello!

Cross a stile at the top of the field and head for the telegraph pole in the middle of the second field. Continue through the wide gate into a third field and walk towards the large tree in the middle. Continue to the hedge and go through the gate or stile into the next field.
Valeways
This section of the walk is part of the Millennium Heritage Trail, a 65-mile route around the perimeter of the Vale of Glamorgan. It was created by walking charity Valeways, which maintains hundreds of miles of footpaths in the Vale and runs guided walks for all abilities. To find out more visit valeways.org.uk

The next field also runs uphill, with two metal gates to pass through. Take care to close them behind you, to prevent the animals escaping, and keep dogs on leads. Go over the stile next to a third metal gate and head towards the pylon at the top of the field. The path bears right and Tinkinswood Burial Chamber comes into view!
The trail leaves the fields behind and leads to the pretty village of St Nicholas.

Derek and Will take a look around the fascinating Tinkinswood Burial Chamber

Tinkinswood Burial Chamber (ST 0908 7336)

This Neolithic chambered cairn, now in the care of Cadw, is one of the oldest and largest prehistoric monuments in Wales. Its capstone is the biggest in Wales and weighs about 40 tons – the equivalent of five double decker buses! Built more than 5,000 years ago, the chamber’s entrance was originally bricked up and opened only for important ceremonies. It’s said that anyone who spends a night here on May Day, St John’s Day or Midwinter will die, go mad or become a poet!

The burial chamber was excavated in 1914 by John Ward, the keeper of archaeology at the National Museum of Wales. More than 900 fragments of bone – thought to belong to about 50 people – were discovered, as well as later Bronze Age and Roman artefacts.

Before leaving the burial chamber site, make sure to listen to the recorded information at the wind-up listening post at the gate!

Leave the burial chamber site and walk alongside the fence (with the chamber to your left) to the top of the field. Bear right at the hedge and cross the stile into the next field.

Cross the field to the fence in front of you and continue through the field, keeping the fence on your right, to the gate. Go through the gate and then over the stile in the hedge on the left. Continue through the next field, where another stile in the corner (under the trees) leads to Dyffryn Lane.

The trail bears left along Dyffryn Lane but, if you have time, detour a short distance to the right and to Button Ride. This attractive row of eight linked cottages was built in the 1950s and is considered one of the best examples of post-war council housing in Wales.
St Nicholas (ST 0914 7428)

St Nicholas is a chocolate-box village on the A48 with many interesting buildings and plenty of colourful characters in its history. John, Anna and Florence Cory, of the wealthy family which created Dyffryn Gardens, are buried in the churchyard of St Nicholas Church, which dates back to at least the 11th century and was valued in 1254 at £10!

At the top of Dyffryn Lane, turn right and walk alongside the A48 for a short distance, passing the old police station on the right. It was one of the earliest police stations to be built in the Vale. Take a look at the lettering on the wall!

Shortly after the police station, look out for the path between two houses. Go through the gate and follow the track to the large field (bearing slightly left). The walk goes past the pylon seen diagonally across the field but, to avoid the farmer’s crops, it’s considerate to stick to the perimeter of the field rather than marching straight through the middle!
Beyond the pylon (ST 0981 7408), head into the field to the right, keeping the hedge on your left. Follow the hedge to a stile and carry on along the edge of the next field. Soon you’ll reach Coed Nant Bran, a small wood on the other side of a wire fence.

Enter the wood via the first stile. This section can be fairly overgrown and you might need to trample down a few nettles and push back the odd stray branch or two. You might wonder if you’re on the right path, but bear with it! Ignore the yellow sign to The Downs, leading back outside the wood, and stay within the fence. The path soon widens and you can enjoy a peaceful stroll through pretty woodland.

**Coed Nant Bran** (ST 1039 7354)

Evidence of old lime kilns, used for hundreds of years to convert limestone to lime, has been found in the wood. Lime was used to fertilise the fields and as mortar to make buildings, as well as limewash to paint walls white. The limestone was brought here from a small nearby quarry, with the wood providing plenty of fuel for the kilns.

The path reaches a stile at the end of the wood and crosses into a field. Walk towards the farmhouse (Lodge House Farm, ST 1084 7357) but cross the stile on your left before reaching the house. Continue towards the farmhouse in this field, crossing another two stiles (the second is actually a ‘double’ stile) to reach a lane. Turn right past the farmhouse and carry on to the end of the lane to reach the road (ST 1111 7324).

This is St Lythans Road, leading to the village of the same name and some more interesting sights! Turn right and walk to the village. Look out for the church on the left; it’s fairly well hidden from the road but we’ll give you a clue – it’s next to the Old Rectory!
St Lythans Church (ST 1097 7295)

This beautiful church dates from the 12th century, but it’s likely this was a religious site 500 years before that! Inside is an enormous Norman font, whilst to the side of the church is a 16th century extension called the Button Chapel.

The Buttons were a wealthy family who lived at Cottrell Park near St Nicholas. A distant relative called Button Gwinnet emigrated to America and became one of the 56 men to sign the Declaration of Independence in 1776, but he was killed in a dual less than a year later!

Look for the initials ‘RB’ above the chapel door, outside. We couldn’t find out which Button this referred to... can you?

From the church, continue along St Lythans Road. The next half mile or so runs along the road and there’s no pavement, so take care and be aware of oncoming traffic.

We’re nearly back where we started, but there’s one more stop first! Behind the Dyffryn village sign is a brown sign pointing to another ancient monument in the field. That’s right – on this walk, there’s not just one Neolithic burial chamber but two!
St Lythans Burial Chamber (ST 1011 7224)

This chambered long cairn, like the one at Tinkinswood, is between 5,000 and 6,000 years old and was originally covered by an earthen mound. The three upright stones and the enormous capstone look impressive enough today, but in its day the cairn would have been about 24m long and 11m wide! Human bones and pottery were discovered here by a 19th century antiquarian and the Cadw site was excavated in 2011.

The site is called Gwal y Filiast – the Greyhound’s Kennel – and local legend says that on Midsummer’s Eve the capstone twirls around three times and the stones go down to the river to bathe!

From the burial chamber, continue along the road and you’ll soon reach the T-junction you arrived at earlier. Turn right and return to Dyffryn Gardens, where it’s time for a well-deserved spot of tea in the tearooms!

Dyffryn Gardens (ST 0966 7260)

These spectacular gardens are one of the Trust’s more recent acquisitions, taken over on a 50-year lease in 2013. A manor house has stood on the site for 1,400 years, with the current house being built in late Victorian times by John Cory, who co-founded the port of Barry and exported coal to 120 ports across the world!

One of John’s four children, Reginald, was a passionate horticulturalist and a leading figure in the Royal Horticultural Society. He designed the gardens with eminent landscaper Thomas Mawson and in 1913-14 planted thousands of dahlias. 2014 marked the dahlias’ centenary at Dyffryn and they remain a firm favourite with visitors.

As well as the beautiful gardens, factor in time at the end of your walk to look around Dyffryn House, which is being refurbished and tells the story of the Cory family. The engagement of daughter Florence was announced in the Western Mail in 1890 - only to be revoked by her parents the very next day!

After being sold by the Cory family, Dyffryn was used as a police academy, a conference hall and a dog training centre before being taken over by the National Trust!

The tearooms, next to the car park, provide welcome refreshment after a long walk. Follow in Derek’s footsteps and sample dishes made with seasonal ingredients grown at Dyffryn, including lavender cake, beetroot scones and even lily salad!