

The only type of passenger trains in normal use on the Cambrian line are Class 158 two-carriage diesel railcars, built for British Rail in the early 1990s. Arriva Trains Wales has a fleet of 24 of these trains, fully refurbished internally in 2009 -11, which are also used on the Holyhead – Shrewsbury – Birmingham line. Each carriage has 70 seats.

You won't see any traditional signals alongside the line as found on other lines. The Cambrian lines are the pilot project for a new system called ERTMS in which the driver obeys instructions on a screen in the cab, connected to a computer on the train which is in communication over a mobile data network with the control centre at Machynlleth. The system 'knows' where all the trains are, and where they should meet at the passing places on the single line, and will override the driver and stop the train if necessary. Trains can pass each other only at Machynlleth, Tywyn, Barmouth, Porthmadog and Pwllheli stations, which is why you may sometimes find you have to wait for a while.

Occasional special excursion trains visit the area from destinations in England. Network Rail has three diesel locomotives equipped with the ERTMS system, which can haul main-line trains on to the Cambrian lines. In the past steam excursions have run, but at the time of writing no equipment exists to allow steam locomotives to respond to the new system, although it is hoped to develop this in future.

To check the running of your train, you can text the name of the station to 84950, which will reply with 'OK' or details of any known late running. www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk has full timetables in smartphone-friendly format and ticketing information, or phone 08457 484950.

Written by Charlie Hulme, 2013. No responsibility is taken for errors, or for problems with the train service.

Train trips from Llwyndû



Llwyndû Farmhouse Hotel is on the edge of Llanaber village, which has its own small station on the Cambrian Coast railway line, a very scenic route on which trains run to a number of the attractive towns and villages in the northern part of Cardigan Bay. Llanaber station is less than fifteen minutes' walk from the hotel; turn left at the bottom of the drive, crossing the main road with care at a safe place, and after the first few houses on the right you will see a sign marking the small path which leads down to the station. Note: this path is not really suitable for wheelchairs. The trips described below are equally valid from Barmouth station, which has good level access, if private transport or a taxi is available.

The train service is not frequent, with just a few trains each day, but they are usually quite well-timed for day trips from Llanaber. Sundays have fewer trains, so are best avoided for most of these trips. Llanaber station is a 'request stop' – to join the train raise your hand as it approaches, and buy your ticket from the conductor.

When returning to Llanaber be sure to tell the conductor, who will come through the train and check your ticket, that you are getting off at Llanaber. You'll be advised which door – usually in the centre of the train - to use as the platform at the little station is too short for all doors, even on a two-coach train, to be opened. You will find that the conductors are generally friendly and helpful.

For the times of trains, there is a timetable booklet available in the hotel, and Peter and Paula will be happy to help. If you buy a Day Return ticket from Llanaber to any of these places, you can break your outward or return journey at any intermediate station, and continue later, so long as you don't cover any section in the same direction more than once. For more complex outings, consider the Cambrian Coast Day Ranger ticket which allows unlimited travel for a day between all stations Machynlleth to Pwllheli and has a Family option for two adults and two children at a very reasonable cost. The line is part of National Rail, so if you have a Railcard it can be used to obtain the appropriate reductions.

The hotel has information on all the narrow-gauge lines we mention; check their timetables carefully as they vary by day of the week and time of year.

Places to visit

To the South

The first stop for southbound trains, after just a few minutes, is **Barmouth** (Abermaw in Welsh) a traditional resort with beach, restaurants, shops and amusements. It is also a historic place, with picturesque harbour, and old houses clinging to the hillside leading up to Dinas Oleu, the first piece of land ever owned by the National Trust, and the spectacular Panorama Walk. The Tourist Information Office, in the station building, has many leaflets about local attractions.

which has a good shopping centre and is a centre for narrow-gauge railway enthusiasts who have three different lines to choose from. Across the road from the Cambrian Coast station is the terminus of the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway, a small-scale operation which is ideal for a low-cost family visit; the fare includes a visit to the locomotive shed as well as the train ride. There is a café and bookshop.

Walk (20 minutes if not distracted by the shops) to the other end of the main street of Porthmadog to reach the Harbour station, shared by the Ffestiniog Railway to Blaenau Ffestiniog and the Welsh Highland Railway to Caernarfon. Both lines run from spring to autumn, and offer impressive trains, complete with refreshment service, and a some spectacular gradients and views. However, a return journey the full length of either added to the trip from Llanaber makes for a long day; more practical is a return trip to Tan-y-Bylch on the Ffestiniog (where it is usually possible to join a train immediately back to Porthmadog) or Beddgelert on the Welsh Highland. Timetables are available at the hotel.

Criccieth, the next stop, is a pleasant small resort with a beach, and also the castle ruins which can be visited and make a fine viewpoint.

Pwllheli, the end of the line, is a busy town with a harbour and a Wednesday market that attracts traders and customer from a wide area.

About the railway

Llanaber is served by trains of the Arriva Trains Wales company, one of the franchised National Rail companies which operate trains over the tracks owned and maintained by a public company called Network Rail. Arriva Trains Wales works closely with the Welsh Government to provide services throughout Wales.

To the North

North of Llanaber, request stops serve small villages, each of which has access to the beach as well as hill-walking possibilities. A pleasant walk from **Tal-y-Bont** follows a small river up into the hills before heading at high level towards a descent into Barmouth.



Harlech has its famous and imposing castle, which dominates the scene for miles around. One of a series built in the thirteenth century, it attracts many visitors. It is now in the care of Cadw, the Welsh equivalent of English Heritage. The small town adjoins the castle, and has cafés and gift shops.

North of Harlech are further request stops, as a view opens up across the Glaslyn estuary, with the town of Portmeirion village coming into view on the other side as the line bends around to reach Penrhyndeudraeth and Minffordd. From **Minffordd** station there is a pleasant walk of about 30 minutes to Portmeirion, a picturesque village created by the architect Clough Williams-Ellis and one of the area's major visitor attractions. The walk (allow 30 minutes) begins by turning right along the main road for a few minutes until the footpath to Portmeirion is signposted on the left-hand side at the brow of the hill. Minffordd station is also served by the Ffestiniog Railway trains between Porthmadog to Blaenau Ffestiniog.

After Minffordd, the Cambrian Coast train heads for **Porthmadog**,

Beyond Barmouth, the train crosses the Mawddach estuary on the famous Barmouth Viaduct; the railway from here south to Doveyi Junction is renowned as one of the most scenic train rides in Britain, and should not be missed. Sit on the right-hand side of the train for the best views.

Morfa Mawddach, a request stop just beyond the bridge, is the station for the Mawddach trail, a marvellous walk (or cycle) along a former rail track to Penmaenpool (where refreshments are available) and on to the old town of Dolgellau. It is also possible, on payment of a small toll at the Barmouth end, to walk across the railway bridge (on an attached footway) between Morfa Mawddach and Barmouth, a walk which is highly recommended; the walk can be continued to Llanaber by following Barmouth promenade to the far end, then continuing along the head of the beach to a footbridge which takes you to the main road near Llanaber church.

At **Fairbourne**, the next station, a miniature railway will, in summer, take you out to Penrhyn Point, opposite Barmouth, where there is a café and, at times, a small ferryboat to Barmouth Harbour.



Beyond Fairbourne the line climbs up on to the cliffs, giving passengers a wide view across Cardigan Bay, before descending to sea level again at the small town of **Tywyn**, the stop for the narrow-gauge Talyllyn Railway, the first in the UK to be preserved and run by volunteers, and a lovely ride up the valley to Dolgoch Falls and Nanat Gwernol. The Talyllyn's Wharf station is about ten minutes' walk from the main line station.

Aberdyfi (pronounced Aberdovey), the next station, serves a picturesque village which was once a thriving port, illustrated in a display at the visitor centre. The village is a few minutes' walk from the station (look for the path on the right-hand side of the station approach) and has a sea front with small shops, cafés and pubs. There is also a walk up to a viewpoint. At the far end of the village is a path which runs along the shore from the Penhelig Gardens to a point known as Picnic Island. A station called Penhelig, near the gardens, is a request stop where visitors can join the train to return to Llanaber.



Aberdyfi

Beyond Aberdyfi, the line hugs the shore past Picnic Island before crossing the Dyfi estuary on a wooden bridge and meeting the line from Aberystwyth at **Dovey Junction**, an unusual station which has no road access. The line from Aberystwyth joins here; unfortunately the trains to and from Aberystwyth do not connect well with trains from the coast line. Ospreys nest in the Dovey Junction area, and can often be seen (in the warmer months) from the left-hand side of the train shortly after leaving the station.



Machynlleth

A few minutes later the train reaches **Machynlleth**, a market town which is worth a visit. The Wales Museum of Modern Art is in the town centre, and the Centre for Alternative Technology can be reached by bus.

The regular bus from Machynlleth to Aberystwyth will set you down at the turning for RSPB bird reserve at Ynys-Hir, about 15 minutes walk up a lane. Although some walking on the busy main road is called for. On the way the bus passes the visitor centre for the Dyfi Osprey Project; the best way to visit this is to ask the bus driver to set you down on the way back from Ynys-Hir, as there is no safe place for the bus to stop on the outbound journey.

The railway continues, among the hills via Newtown and Welshpool to Shrewsbury where the Cambrian line connects with the rest of the national railway system. You may find that a train from Pwllheli is joined to one from Aberystwyth to continue towards Shrewsbury and Birmingham.