



CYCLING
CLIMBS OF THE
**DRAGON
RIDE 2026**

THE ROADS THAT MAKE THE EVENT

BY SIMON WARREN



Welcome to your exclusive guide to the climbs of the 2026 Dragon Ride where you'll find insight into the 10 key ascents that shape this great event. Obviously, unless you've signed up to ride the full 300 kilometres of the *Dragon Devil* then you'll not manage to tick off all ten on your day out and let's face it, 300 kilometres is a long way for any rider. The opportunity to ride the one and only Devil's Staircase though, is a challenge many will not be able to resist.

The 'Staircase' is etched into British cycling folk law having found fame and notoriety via its inclusion on the parcours of the Milk Race many years ago. There's some grainy footage on Youtube that's well worth checking out if you like scenes of powerful Russians grinding impossibly big gears up 25% slopes. Not to mention 1980's cars being pushed uphill by hordes of spectators as they stutter to a halt on the vicious slopes. Along with Sugar Loaf Hill it is reserved only for the toughest entrants but this doesn't mean there aren't plenty of fantastic climbs on the more manageable routes, far from it. The Dragon Ride takes in the best South Wales has to offer, and featuring on the *Medio Fondo* the *Gran Fondo* and *Dragon Devil* is what could be described as the event's signature hill, the Devil's Elbow.

You know instantly that anything labeled 'Devil' is going to present a challenge and the Elbow certainly does.

Climbing gently through the valley on the narrowest of roads through the gnarled scenery, it's hard not to gulp when you see the final bends come into view. Ramping up the first right hand hairpin you better get yourself ready for some serious time in the pain cave. You've got to give this one all you have, if not to top the leaderboard or post a good time on Strava but just to beat your mates. The added impetus an officially timed section gives is not to be underestimated and it will spur you on to dig as deep as you can. If you're riding the *Medio Fondo* then this marks the end



of the true giants of the route but if you're having a crack at the *Gran Fondo* then one of my all time favourite climbs awaits you, Black Mountain. It's not a mountain by Alpine standards but it's just about as close as it gets in Britain

with its long seven kilometre length, and those fabulous bends further up. Turning right at its midway point, crossing a small stream, it picks its way up the hill side to reveal stunning views that just get better and better the further you rise.

Before all this of course, and featuring on all four routes is the double whammy of The Bwlch and Rhigos. With three routes to the top of The Bwlch you're spoilt for choice and in fact when I rode the Dragon back in 2009 the route actually tackled two of them, from the south and west. Today you'll be just taking on the western flank though, which has the shallowest gradient but is by far the longest. Once you leave

the village of Abergwynfi behind at about midway then you're treated to the amazing sight of the road snaking round the hill in front and away into the distance. Hugging the grassy slope you ride high above the valley below then double back to see the track you've just covered beneath you. It's pure climbing heaven, never too steep but always a challenge and with stunning views. Straight after comes the climb of Rhigos, which is equally kind to your eyes but a little tougher on your legs. It's abrupt start from Treherbert will be a shock following the descent off The Bwlch and if you get too excited and hit it too hard you will pay for your efforts later on.

To finish all four routes we have Cimla Hill out of Neath and no matter which ride you've tackled depending on your experience and fitness level, this climb will be sure to hurt. But it's only hurt and you're almost at the finish, so give it everything. There's no point in being fresh for the journey home and the more you leave on the road the more calories you can consume afterwards, right?

So which ever route you have chosen to ride I hope you enjoy the climbs of south Wales, enjoy the unique character of each one, soak up the scenery they take you through and of course the challenge of beating these famous roads.



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LEGEND

UNDERSTANDING THE FACTFILE AND RATINGS

LOCATIONS

On each factfile you will see a small colour coded graphic of the four Dragon Ride routes. On that graphic, highlighted in white you will also see the location of each particular climb. You can use this to see which climb appears on which route and whereabouts on that route it appears. Only one route features all ten climbs but all four contain three of them.

TOP TIP

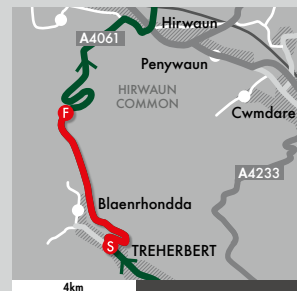
Each Factfile includes a brief tip to help you get to the top of it in the best shape, together with the climb's key statistics and of course the map to show where the climb starts and finishes. Also is the approximate time needed to ride each hill, timed over the distance marked, this time will be slow for some but fast for others, so see how you fair.

FACTFILE

TOP TIP Be ready in a small gear for the first part of the climb then as the gradient eases change up a couple of sprockets and settle into a steady rhythm.

LENGTH 6100m
 HEIGHT GAIN 289m
 AVERAGE GRADIENT 4.9%
 MAXIMUM GRADIENT 9%
 APPROX CLIMB TIME 19mins

INCLUDED ON **CYMRU CLASSIC** **MEDIO FONDO** **GRAN FONDO** **DRAGON DEVIL**



RATINGS

The climbs are all given a rating out of ten, ten being the toughest and you may notice the scores of some have changed from their appearance in my previous books. This is because I'm rating them in the context of the event, so naturally the Devil's staircase now gets a 10, instead of a nine as it had previously held. The rating is an amalgamation of gradient, length, the likely hostility of the riding conditions, and the condition of the surface.



MAP KEY

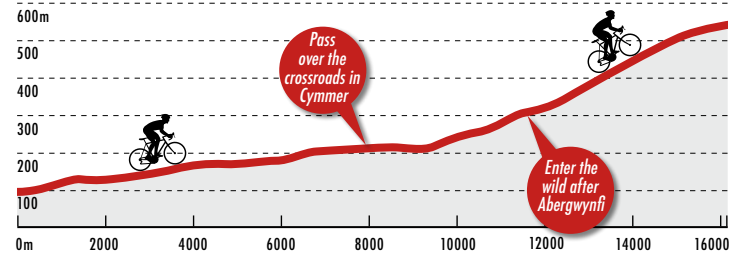
- Ride Route
- A Road
- B Road
- Minor Road
- Rail line
- Hill route
- Town
- Scale



THE BWLCH

PONTRHYDYFREN, NEATH PORT TALBOT

Of the three different routes to the top of The Bwlch, this one may be the shallowest, but it's by far the longest and arguably the most spectacular, it's also the first big challenge on all four of the day's routes. The base may be the subject of some debate but basically your progress is upwards for a solid 16 kilometers once you leave Pontrhydyfren. The lower slopes are a breeze as you negotiate a number of villages and pull your self slowly away from the congestion of the valley towards the open roads ahead. Once through the last village, Abergwynfi, here's where the scenery changes dramatically together with the pitch of the slope. Now it starts to bite and you'll want to click down a gear as in front of you the narrow road winds into the distance around the contours of the hills. Rising up to a sweeping left hand hairpin, then through right and left hand bends you reach the summit to be greeted with awesome views in all directions.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP Don't get too excited and go 'full gas' right from the bottom, remember this is just the first climb of many and also take care through the villages.

LENGTH 16100m

HEIGHT GAIN 456m

AVERAGE GRADIENT 2.8%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 20%

APPROX CLIMB TIME 40mins



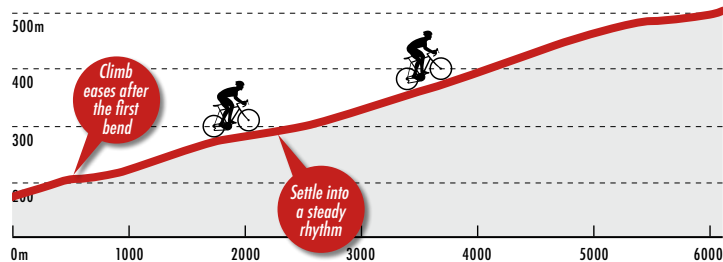
INCLUDED ON **CYMRU CLASSIC** **MEDIO FONDO** **GRAN FONDO** **DRAGON DEVIL**



RHIGOS

TREHERBERT, RHONDDA CYNON TAF

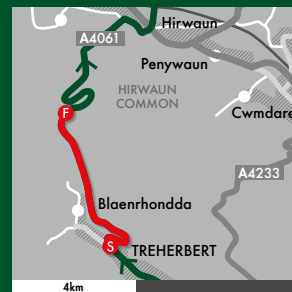
Personally I favour the northern flank of Rhigos, it has a slightly stiffer average and more luscious bends, but I don't want to talk this side down or take anything away from the challenge it presents, it's a fantastic climb. The moment you leave Treherbert the road rears up bending steep right and into the stiffest slopes of the whole test to the next tight hairpin bend. In an instant you've left the claustrophobia of the congested valley behind and you're surrounded by the rugged beauty of the Welsh hills. To your right a high rocky bank and out to your left the ever improving views out over the gorge. The course of the climb is pretty much a direct line heading north-west with little change in the pitch of the slope, just the same testing, yet not overwhelming 6% gradient. Towards the summit there's a flurry of very slight bends then after a car park entrance a final strength sapping rise to the finish and the start of the thrilling descent the other side.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP Be ready in a small gear for the first part of the climb then as the gradient eases change up a couple of sprockets and settle into a steady rhythm.

LENGTH 6100m
HEIGHT GAIN 289m
AVERAGE GRADIENT 4.9%
MAXIMUM GRADIENT 9%
APPROX CLIMB TIME 19mins



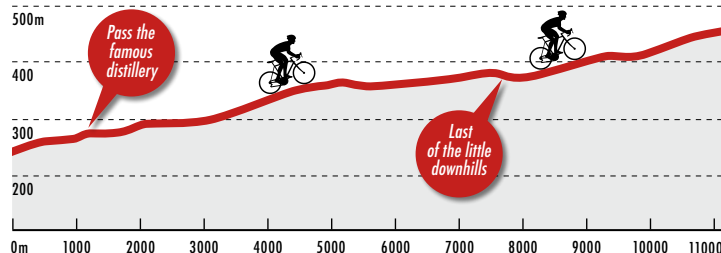
INCLUDED ON **CYMRU CLASSIC** **MEDIO FONDO** **GRAN FONDO** **DRAGON DEVIL**



PENDERYN MOOR

PENDERYN, RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The purist in me wouldn't normally class this road as a climb as such. Your trajectory is predominantly upwards and there is a difference in elevation of 250 meters between the start and finish points there are a number of little dips and drops that spoil the continuity of the ascent. Even though it's not a pure climb, I'm compelled to include it in this guide as it's without doubt one of my favourite roads in the whole of Wales. Compared to the Bwlch and Rhigos that preceded it you will find it a breeze to ride, even if the effort to cross the previous summits are weighing heavy in your legs. Rise away from Hirwaun, through Penderyn, past the distillery and head off into the void. The featureless landscape to your left is a wonder to behold as you rise, then drop then rise again before bending left and climbing consistently to the summit just shy of the Beacons Reservoir and the A470.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP Utilise the small dips on the profile to build momentum to take into the following rises which will aid your upward progress. Also if it's windy ride in a group if you can to get some shelter.

LENGTH 11000m

HEIGHT GAIN 248m

AVERAGE GRADIENT 2%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 12%

APPROX CLIMB TIME 24mins



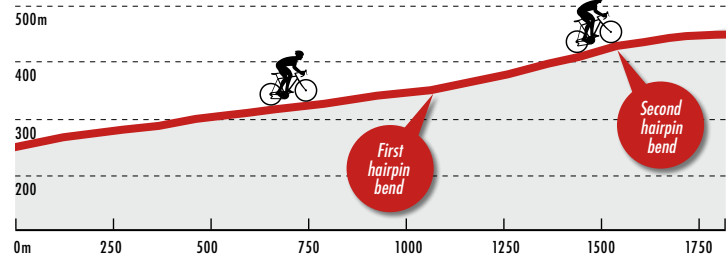
INCLUDED ON **CYMRU CLASSIC** **MEDIO FONDO** **GRAN FONDO** **DRAGON DEVIL**



THE DEVIL'S ELBOW

HEOL SENNI, BRECON BEACONS

Appearing on three of the four routes the Devil's Elbow could be called the event's signature climb. Its vicious slopes epitomising the harsh beauty of hidden Wales. With its crumbling surface and neglected rusting barriers it weaves through beautifully rugged scenery presenting one of the toughest challenges of the event. To start, leave the small village of Heol Senni, follow the river south, and begin the climb adjacent to a right-hand junction. The narrow strip of tarmac climbs and winds through twisted trees either side, easing a pinch as you cross the first of two cattle grids. You feel like you're in a truly isolated wilderness here as the road gradually climbs steeper up to two wicked hairpins: first sharp left and then sharp right, with a remorseless stretch in between them. Round the second hairpin and it eases to finish at the brow where the beauty of your surroundings will soon sooth any pain.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP Keep a steady pace until the steep bends come into view. When you arrive at the first bend ride wide to the right to minimise the gradient and conversely at the next one ride to the left.

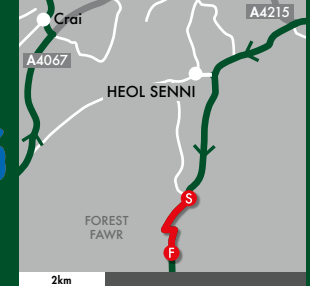
LENGTH 1825m

HEIGHT GAIN 188m

AVERAGE GRADIENT 10.3%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 17%

APPROX CLIMB TIME 11 mins



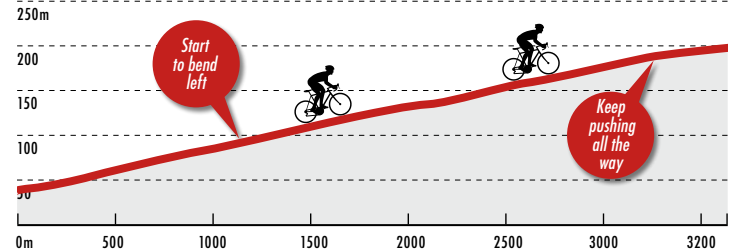
INCLUDED ON **CYMRU CLASSIC** **MEDIO FONDO** **GRAN FONDO** **DRAGON DEVIL**



GLYNNEATH HILL

GLYNNEATH, NEATH PORT TALBOT

This climb appears minor in the grand scheme of things, but underestimate it at your peril. With legs freshly battered from the combined assault of The Bwlch, Rhigos and the Devil's Elbow this road will add a further nail in their coffin. Once you've negotiated the junctions in Glynneath the road bends right then rears up to disappear into the cover of trees where, with the last house behind you the reasonably busy road, lined with thick foliage either side, settles into its solid 6% gradient. Heading in a direct straight line there's no let up in the degree of the slope, nor in the amount of trees that obscure the view you are working so hard to enjoy. At roughly half distance there's a left hand kink in the road and you enter the next long straight that will take you to the summit. Ahead almost the entirety of the remainder of the climb is in view which gives you an idea of the work needed but could also be a hefty psychological blow.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP This climb may look insignificant and short when compared to others on the route but it must still be treated with respect. Unless you can sustain a full gas effort for 3km then take it steady at the base.

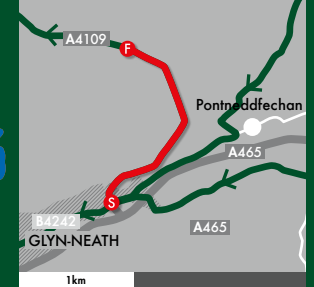
LENGTH 3200m

HEIGHT GAIN 171m

AVERAGE GRADIENT 5.4%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 13%

APPROX CLIMB TIME 12mins



INCLUDED ON **CYMRU CLASSIC** **MEDIO FONDO** **GRAN FONDO** **DRAGON DEVIL**

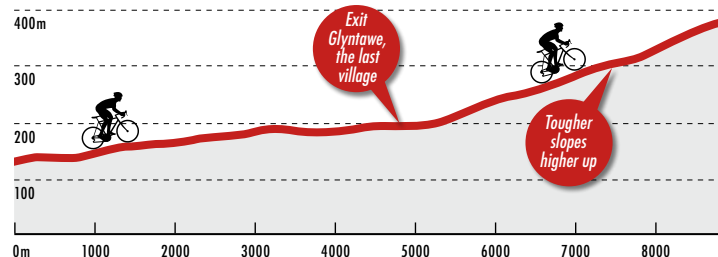




BWLCH BRYN-RHUDD

ABERCRAF, BRECKNOCKSHIRE

For those of you riding the *Gran Fondo* and the *Dragon Devil* this climb kicks off the long trek north and with the previous climb out of Glynneath still fresh in your legs it will definitely be a challenge. As you pull away from Abercraf the early slopes are very shallow as you pass from one village to another all the way to Glyntawe where the scenery begins to open up. Passing the turn to Trescastle you continue on the A4067 to traverse the Fforest Fwar, the slope now noticeably increasing in pitch. On the smooth wide road you inch up between the high valley sides that funnel you towards the summit and once you're pedalling comfortably you should be able to maintain a similar speed all the way to the end. As the road sweeps round to the right you'll notice the slight V cut in the horizon ahead, this is your goal and is reached after a couple of slight kinks in direction and an ever so slightly tougher finale.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP Take it steady through the villages on the lower slopes to save your energy for when the gradient increases higher up the climb.

LENGTH 8900m
HEIGHT GAIN 253m
AVERAGE GRADIENT 3%
MAXIMUM GRADIENT 8%
APPROX CLIMB TIME 21 mins



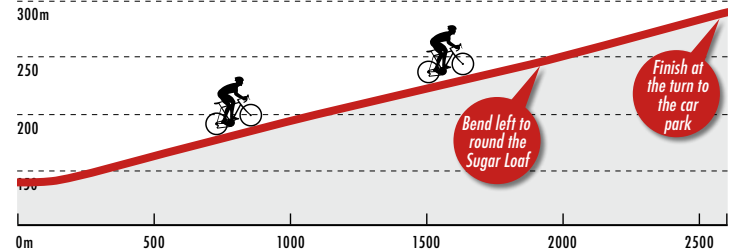
INCLUDED ON CYMRU CLASSIC MEDIO FONDO GRAN FONDO DRAGON DEVIL



SUGAR LOAF HILL

CYNGHORDY, CARMARTHENSHIRE

The name Sugar Loaf comes from the rounded cone shaped form that refined sugar was sold in up until the late 19th century and the moniker isn't unique to this hill. There are others in Wales as well as around the globe, of course most famously, Sugarloaf mountain in Rio, Brazil. Those of you brave enough to tackle the *Dragon Devil*, will, or should be, focused on your impending ascent of the mighty Devil's Staircase so would be wise to soft pedal over this lump. The slope begins to rear up just after the village of Cynghordy then assumes a steady 6% gradient just about all the way to the top. First of all heading due north then with the Sugar Loaf (you may not see the resemblance) in front of you, it bends harsh left then sweeps right. Passing between tall conifers and jagged rock faces the climb has a slightly exotic feel as you next bend right to summit adjacent to the turn for the car park.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP You'll not want to burn any matches on this climb, you're a long way from home and with the Devil's Staircase waiting for you just stick it in a small gear and soft pedal from the base to the top.

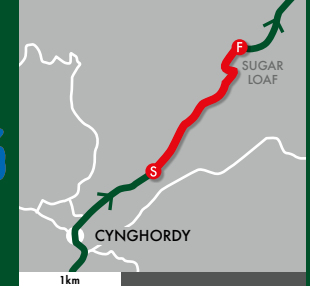
LENGTH 2600m

HEIGHT GAIN 153m

AVERAGE GRADIENT 6%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 12%

APPROX CLIMB TIME xmins



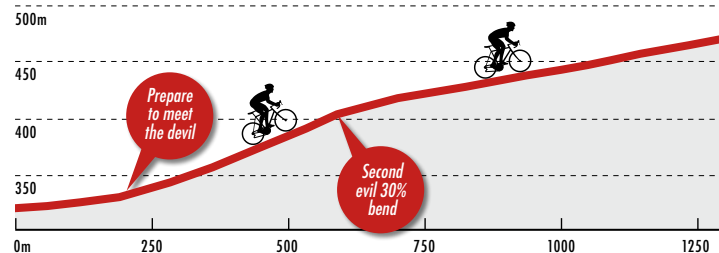
INCLUDED ON CYMRU CLASSIC MEDIO FONDO GRAN FONDO DRAGON DEVIL



DEVIL'S STAIRCASE

ABERGWESYN, POWYS

Deep in the wilderness lies a hill that needs no introduction, the Devil's Staircase, and it's the opportunity to tackle this beast what will lure many to sign up for the 300km of the *Dragon Devil*. Be warned though, this road can devour the freshest of legs, never mind those with 190 kilometres of riding in them. Leaving Abergwesyn, rising gently through the isolation you reach a couple of bridges in the rocky valley then ahead the road disappears into the trees past a weathered sign warning of the upcoming perils. Straight away the narrow surface pitches up to 25% as you grind your way into the eerie conifers to reach a left hand bend. The road levels a little here, allowing you to catch your breath, but then it's straight into the next incredibly tough stretch, which ends with a sharp almost unrideable 30% right-hand bend. After this it backs off a bit, but there's still a good distance of very tough climbing before you can finally relax.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP Hold back a touch up the first steep ramp then ride wide right round the first corner for a brief rest. Next you must commit 100% to the next vicious corner where once through you're over the worst.

LENGTH 1300m

HEIGHT GAIN 151m

AVERAGE GRADIENT 12.5%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 29%

APPROX CLIMB TIME 8mins



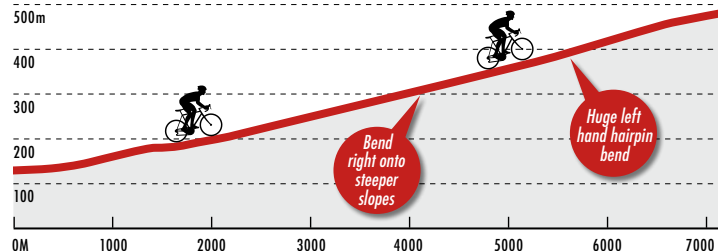
INCLUDED ON CYMRU CLASSIC MEDIO FONDO GRAN FONDO **DRAGON DEVIL**



BLACK MOUNTAIN

LLANGADOG, CARMARTHENSHIRE

Those riders who've ridden the *Gran Fondo* or the *Dragon Devil*, with their legs now well and truly battered have one more huge obstacle to conquer, Black Mountain. Just about as close to an Alpine experience as you can get in Britain you begin to climb as you pass through the small village of Pont Aber. The road begins by twisting gently upwards through trees and past farmhouses then after a long slog reaches a cattle grid where the surroundings change, becoming rugged, exposed, and wild. The gradient remains gentle until you reach a hairpin across an old stone bridge then increases. The now gradually steepening road, a little damaged in the gutter, bends left then right and through a wonderful snaking S-bend framed by two trees. Continue up to a giant left-hand hairpin and into the final stretch, bearing right onto the windswept open summit and finishing next to a small car park.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP With long stretches of steady gradient it's all about finding that comfortable pace that you can hold from the bottom to the top.

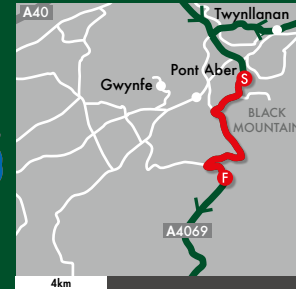
LENGTH 7100m

HEIGHT GAIN 378m

AVERAGE GRADIENT 5.3%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 17%

APPROX CLIMB TIME 25mins



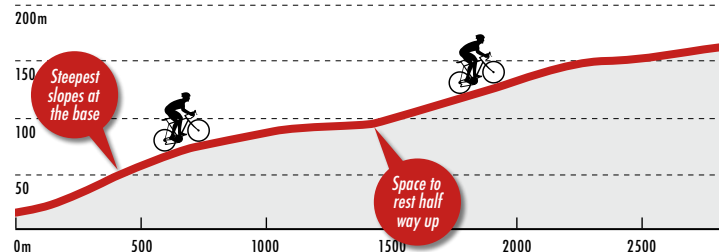
INCLUDED ON CYMRU CLASSIC MEDIO FONDO GRAN FONDO DRAGON DEVIL



CIMLA HILL

NEATH, NEATH PORT TALBOT

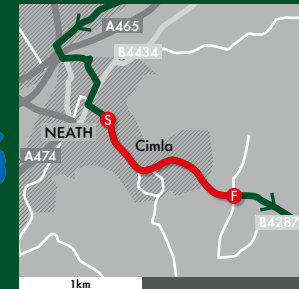
Whether you're a super fit rider who's undertaken the massive *Dragon Devil* or a novice who's tackled the *Cymru Classic* this climb awaits as your final challenge of the day. With your body in it's respective level of fatigue be prepared to toil one last time in your quest to finish your challenge and make it back to Margam Park. Climbing due east from the centre of Neath the lower slopes although far from pretty are the steepest at close to 10%, so guaranteed to hurt. Ahead the wide road arcs right through a large sweeping bend and continues to sting the legs for a while before thankfully receding as your pass through the town up to the next roundabout. Here there's a lull in the climbing as you cross the large park, a chance for you to gather yourself for the push to the summit. Leaving the open land behind it's back into the houses to grind out the second half of the climb to the slightly underwhelming summit at a small crossroads.



FACTFILE

TOP TIP This is about leaving it all on the road, one last big effort to go hard from the base, make use of the rest in the middle then push on hard to the summit.

LENGTH 2800m
HEIGHT GAIN 153m
AVERAGE GRADIENT 5.5%
MAXIMUM GRADIENT 9%
APPROX CLIMB TIME 9mins



INCLUDED ON **CYMRU CLASSIC** **MEDIO FONDO** **GRAN FONDO** **DRAGON DEVIL**



Ride them all.

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