Llanberis Storyboard of Development

1. The area was originally an estuary for a huge river which drained mainland Europe. Muds were deposited in deep layers. The mudstone was compacted and baked by metamorphic processes turning it into slate. Around 2 million years ago the area was covered by deep ice and glacial erosion scoured high upland plateau into the deep U shaped valleys and high jagged mountains that the area is famous for.

2. Slate had always been quarried in small quantities on the mountain slopes above Llanberis. But in 1809 mass production of slate began. Dinorwic slate quarry opened up the slopes of the mountain Elidir Fawr. By the 1890s quarry production was at its peak and the quarry employed 3000 men. Llanberis village was built to house and service the quarry workers.

3. Around the mid to late 1800s tourists began to visit Snowdonia. The early tourists were mainly interested in being guided up mountains mainly to study the botany and rare plants. As there were no paths, local guides were needed. William Williams, the boot boy at the Victoria hotel claimed to have guided over 2500 people up Snowdon over twenty years. In April 1896 a railway was opened running from the village of Llanberis all the way to the summit of England and Wales’ highest mountain, Snowdon. It was built by 300 Irishmen in only 72 days. The second descent was rather eventful with the train coming off the track and plunging down a ravine.

4. In the twentieth Century demand for the more expensive, good quality Welsh slate began to dwindle. By the 1930s the Glyn Ronwy quarry on the west shores of Llyn Padarn had closed and the Dinorwig quarry was struggling. By 1969 the Dinorwig quarry was bankrupt and ceased production. The whole site was abandoned. The old buildings and structures fell into disrepair.

5. In the 1980s the quarries were discovered by a new breed of extreme rock climbers, the Slateheads who pioneered new extreme routes on the old quarry faces. This brought in more climbers to the area from throughout the UK and several famous landmarks became infamous such as the Pete’s Eats café. The area became a climbing community.

6. Llanberis has tried hard to remarket itself. The Dinorwig quarry is now the site of the National Slate Museum and the Padarn Country Park. The Dinorwig quarry became the site of the second HEP pump-storage scheme in the UK and opened a visitor centre, Electric Mountain. At present there are several applications to turn the old Glyn Ronwy quarry into a futuristic tourist leisure facility such as an indoor ski run or a mountain bike trail with chair lifts to the top of the hill.