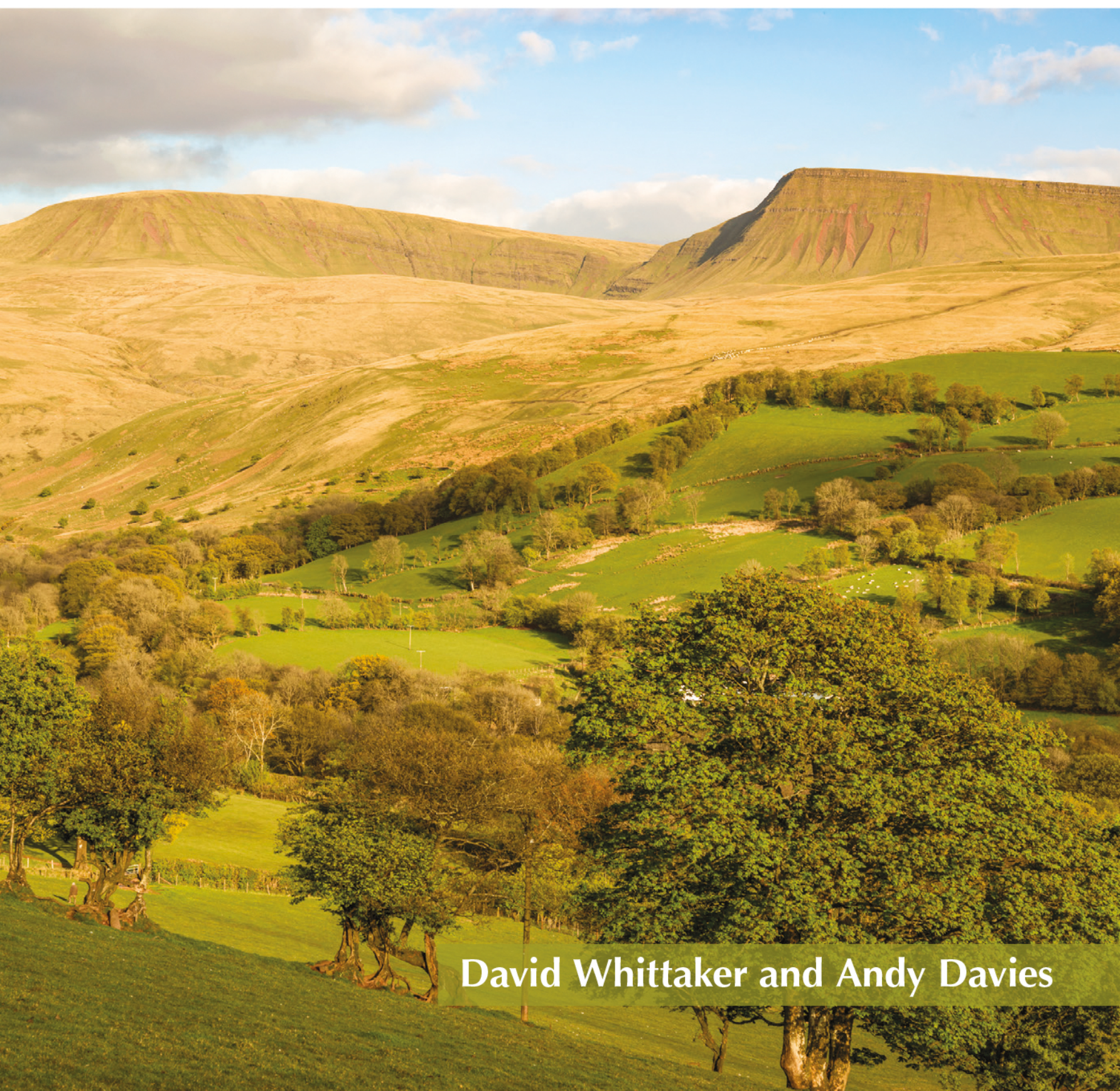


CICERONE

WALKING IN
**THE BRECON
BEACONS**

45 circular walks in the National Park



David Whittaker and Andy Davies

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45 CIRCULAR WALKS IN THE NATIONAL PARK

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by David Whittaker and Andy Davies

CICERONE

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To our families and friends who have shared this area with us and especially to Tim, David and Jean.

Front cover: The Sawdde Valley leading up to Bannau Sir Gaer, from the north-west (Walk 31)

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Sgwd Henrhyd, the tallest waterfall in South Wales with a drop of 28m (Walk 35)

Route symbols on OS map extracts

(for OS legend see printed OS maps)

- route
- alternative route
- alternative route
- start/finish point
- alternative start/finish point
- alternative start point
- route direction

Features on the overview map

- National Park
eg **BRECON BEACONS**

	>800m
	600m
	400m
	200m
	75m
	0m

SCALE: 1:50,000

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/1089/GPX.

Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. This guidebook was researched and written before the COVID-19 pandemic. While we are not aware of any significant changes to routes or facilities at the time of printing, it is likely that the current situation will give rise to more changes than would usually be expected. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1089/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

Register your book: To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at www.cicerone.co.uk.

Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The authors and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

International distress signal *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:
raise both arms
above head to
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:
raise one arm
above head, extend
other arm downward



Emergency telephone numbers

In an emergency, dial 999 and ask for 'police' and then 'mountain rescue'. Be prepared to give your location (with grid ref if possible), the nature of the accident or emergency, the name, age and gender of any casualties, the number of people in your party and your mobile number. Then stay where you are and await help.

Weather reports

www.mwis.org.uk

www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/specialist-forecasts/mountain

Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.



Cribyn from Pen y Fan (Walk 3)

INTRODUCTION



Bannau Brycheiniog from Mynydd y Llan (Walk 31)

Situated in an unspoilt area of South Wales, just north of the former coal-mining valleys, the Brecon Beacons National Park is a place of beautiful and diverse landscapes. One of three national parks in Wales, more than half of its 519 square miles are over 1000ft above sea level and it boasts a rich mixture of majestic valleys, dramatic waterfalls and high mountain peaks and ridges.

A striking feature of the park is the number of rich and varied walks that can be found in a relatively small area, so you don't have to travel great distances by car to sample the multitude of different landscapes and varied terrain on offer. The routes in this guide mainly take you to wooded gorges and upland valleys that even the locals may be unaware of. All of the 45 routes are circular

(with the exception of Walk 26, which is there-and-back) and avoid using stretches of road wherever possible.

The park falls naturally into four geographic areas. These are (from west to east): Mynydd Du (the Black Mountain), Fforest Fawr (the Great Forest), the Brecon Beacons and Y Mynyddoedd Duon (the Black Mountains). These all have different characters, making the park unique in offering such varied walking experiences.

Mynydd Du has some of the remotest upland wilderness in England and Wales. This is the area to choose when you really want to get away from it all. In contrast, Fforest Fawr, a former royal hunting ground, has both upland walks and deeply incised river gorges and waterfalls to rival any in the UK. The



Brecon Beacons are the highest summits in the park, with Pen y Fan falling just short of the 3000ft threshold. Although this area lacks the challenges of the narrow rocky ridges of the Lake District and Snowdonia, it does provide opportunities for a real mountain expedition in exciting winter conditions. Finally, the Black Mountains, on the English border, have a softer feel to them, without the coarse and rugged Welshness of Mynydd Du.

There is also a plethora of things to see and activities for visitors of all ages and tastes, making the park a great place for families to visit. Favourite attractions for children include the Dan-yr-Ogof Show Caves in the Swansea Valley, the Brecon Mountain Railway at Penderyn and the Big Pit National Coal Museum near Blaenavon. Picturesque market towns lie on the edges of the park, such as Llandovery, Brecon, Crickhowell and Abergavenny, and are also great places to explore.

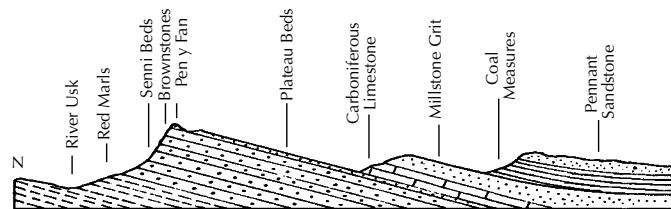
GEOLOGY OF THE BRECON BEACONS

The rocks that shape the park belong to the Old Red Sandstone and were deposited some 395–345 million years ago in the Devonian Period. Old Red Sandstone is a generic term which refers to a group of sedimentary rocks laid down by rivers flowing across coastal plains. Three distinct rock types, conglomerates, sands and muds, were formed from river gravels, sands and muds, respectively.

The area now known as South Wales lay south of the equator in latitudes typically occupied by deserts. Prior to this, much of Britain was affected by strong earth movements which caused uplift and sharp folding, resulting in a tract of upland (St George's Land) that probably extended from the Midlands through central and northern Wales and into Ireland.

Flash floods washed down red muds, sands and grits along ephemeral river channels, building an extensive

Geological cross-section of the Brecon Beacons



river floodplain. To the south was the Devonian shoreline, approximately where the Bristol Channel is now, and the warm Devonian Sea where the first fish swam. Europe at this time was drifting northward and when it crossed the equator, the semi-arid floodplains were gradually submerged beneath tropical Carboniferous seas.

The Old Red Sandstone in the Brecon Beacons can be split on geological grounds into Lower and Upper; the Middle is missing. The Lower Old Red Sandstone comprises a group of up to 850m of red marls, followed by a group of sandstones divided into two formations: the Senni Beds, some 310m of dark-green chloritic layers interbedded with red, and the Brownstones, 330m of very dark-red and purple sandstones. The steep craggy slopes are formed from these regularly bedded Brownstones.

A secondary escarpment is well developed on the northern ridges of Cefn Cwm Llwh, Bryn Teg and Cefn Cyff where the ridge drops steeply from the main scarp, flattens between 540 and 600m and then drops again, the steeper slopes beneath this being cut in the Senni Beds, which underlie the Brownstones.

The Upper Old Red Sandstone comprises three groups of rocks. The Plateau Beds are red quartzites and conglomerates up to 33m thick, which overlie the Brownstones. The summits of Corn Du and Pen y Fan are capped by an isolated outlier of some 14m of overlying, massively bedded Plateau Beds. The second group, the Grey Grits, are sandstones and conglomerates up to 60m thick and these pass laterally eastwards into the Quartz Conglomerates, which comprise red and brown sandstones, quartzites and coarse conglomerates. Further earth movements during the Middle Devonian Period uplifted South Wales, resulting in renewed erosion, creating a distinct break in the geological record, and forming the distinctive ridges and valleys that walkers enjoy today.

Earth movements

The mountain-building earth movements that took place at the base of the Old Red Sandstone and at the end of the Upper Palaeozoic have been named the Caledonian and Hercynian Periods, respectively. The Caledonian movements spanned a time interval of more than 100 million years, at least from the latest Cambrian Period to the

post-Silurian, and were responsible for the folding and faulting of rocks, resulting in geological structures aligned in a north-east to south-west direction. After these Mid-Devonian movements died away, there was little mountain building until late Carboniferous times. At the end of the Coal Measures, the Brecon Beacons were on the southern flanks of a southward-moving continent that eventually collided with a northward-moving land mass to the south. Enormous compressive forces caused the strong folding and faulting of Upper Palaeozoic rocks. The outstanding feature that resulted from these tectonic movements is the syncline of the South Wales Coalfield, and the regional southward tilt of the rocks of the Brecon Beacons originated as part of its northern limb. A major structure disrupts the northern rim of the coalfield and runs through the lower parts of Waterfall Country. This complex fault system, known as the Neath

Disturbance, grew intermittently from Dinantian times, reaching its zenith in late Carboniferous times.

Glacial origins of U-shaped valleys

The valleys were originally formed by streams cutting down through the Old Red Sandstone rocks, forming a V-shaped cross-section. For some two million years this area was in the grip of the Ice Age which ended about 12,000 years ago. Glacier ice carved out U-shaped valleys and towards the end of the Pleistocene, when climatic conditions were still sufficiently cold for significant quantities of snow to collect, many cwms (valleys) were formed.

CHANGING WOODLAND

Trees started to recolonise the Brecon Beacons after the last Ice Age around 12,000 years ago. Arctic-alpine vegetation first established itself and was then

invaded by a scrubland of dwarf birch with some juniper. Taller birches and, to a lesser extent, Scots pine, followed.

The climate continued becoming warmer and drier and, around 9000 years ago, pine and birch remained on lower hill slopes but the upland was covered in hazel, with valleys full of damp oak woodland with lime and elm. Woodland grew at much higher altitudes than it does today, up to 600m, above which grew alpine grassland.

Climatic conditions became even warmer and more humid, allowing the formation of blanket peats 7000–5000 years ago. Alder, elm and oak thrived in damp valleys. Drier conditions returned, elm disappeared and beech made its first appearance. The climate started to grow colder again but is now growing warmer once more due to global climate change. A forest pasture ecosystem developed during this period with sessile oak, ash and beech woodland interspersed with meadows. The vegetation supported a number of grazing and browsing animals that likely included auroch, European bison, red deer, horse and wild boar. These were preyed on by lynx, brown bear, wolf and wildcat. The river corridors were managed by beaver that was hunted to extinction here 400 years ago. Salmon and sea trout, known as sewin in Wales, spawned in the rivers and streams.

HUMAN IMPACT

The Brecon Beacons may appear to be a bleak and inhospitable place to live but prehistoric man is known to have settled here since Mesolithic times (Middle Stone Age c.6000bc). The climate in

Mesolithic, Neolithic (New Stone Age c.3000–1800bc) and Bronze Age times (c.1800–400bc) was much warmer and drier than today's, and the mountains were covered in oak, birch, alder and lime woodland, with an understorey of hazel and willow.

Woodland glades would have contained grasses, heathers, species of roses and various flowers. Prehistoric man fed, clothed and housed himself by hunting and gathering, and, by about 2500bc, woodland clearance and mixed farming was practised. During the very dry summer of 1976, when the water level was extremely low, many scrapers, arrowheads and knife blades were found in the Upper Neuadd reservoir.

An improvement in Britain's climate from about 4500 years ago heralded the start of the Bronze Age and was associated with the spread of agriculture into the uplands at the expense of the wildwood. This change is suggested by a gradual decline in tree pollen and an increase in plantain pollen and bracken spores in peat cores taken locally. It is also known that cereals were cultivated in the Brecon Beacons area. The climate deteriorated again from about 3000 years ago, resulting in the retreat of farming from the uplands, which led to the recovery of birch and hazel woodland. By the end of the Bronze Age, peat bogs had spread across formerly productive farmland.

The Neolithic tradition of constructing stone circles continued into the Bronze Age, followed by the construction of large drystone cairn burial mounds on the summits of Mynydd Du and Fforest Fawr. Copper tools and other unearthened objects date back to at least 4500 years



Bluebell woods near Trecastle (Walk 31)

WALK 1

Corn Du and Pen y Fan via Cwm Llwh

Start/finish	Car park in Cwm Llwh (SO 006 245)
Distance	10.75km (6.7 miles); ridge walk 12.5km (7.7 miles); valley walk 6km (3.7 miles)
Total ascent	655m (2150ft); ridge walk 725m (2380ft); valley walk 335m (1100ft)
Grade	3; ridge walk 3; valley walk 1
Max elevation	886m (2907ft); valley walk 266m (872ft)
Map	OL12 Western area

This fine route heads into the most westerly of the northern Beacons valleys and has a number of options to suit all tastes and weather conditions. The final climb to the summits is steep, as is the upper part of the descent from Pen y Fan. Route finding is straightforward in good weather, but in mist or winter conditions the ability to use a compass and map is important. Points of interest include glacial geomorphology, plants and birdlife, and waterfalls and a lake, as well as good panoramic views and archaeological features.

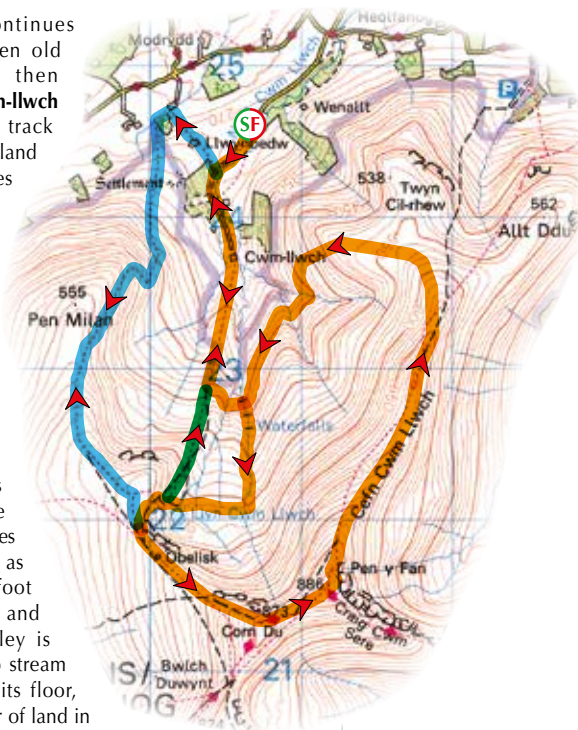
An alternative start allows an anticlockwise ridge walk, and a pleasant valley walk can be taken to a waterfall and Llyn Cwm Llwh. A shorter alternative route returns to the start from the obelisk below Corn Du, dropping down Pen Milan ridge on the west of the valley.

From here there are good views into Cwm Llwh with waterfalls in the foreground and a backdrop dominated by Corn Du straight ahead and Pen y Fan on the left.

Start at the end of the car park where there is a 'NO MOTORS' sign with the stream Nant Cwm Llwh on your left. Follow the track leading into the valley lined with beech, hawthorn, mountain ash and hazel. ◀

The woodland on the right contains the poorly preserved earthworks of an **Iron Age hill fort**, which is marked on the map as a dotted oval marked 'Settlement'. This is a small enclosure with widely spaced ramparts but its value as a hill fort is dubious as, although the land slopes away east to Nant Cwm Llwh, the land to the west and south rises gradually to the foot of Pen Milan.

The track continues southwards between old stone walls and then detours around **Cwm-llwh Cottage**. Take the track ahead up a spur of land with stream courses on either side. Cross the hill fence and drop down to the stream on your left. This is a most interesting habitat as, after the birch woodland is left behind, the banks of the stream are lined with closely grazed grassy areas where there are many different species of wildflowers, such as lousewort, bird's-foot trefoil, red bartsia and eyebright. The valley is unusual in that two stream beds have eroded its floor, leaving a raised spur of land in the centre.



Notice that the valley slopes have a high density of hawthorn trees – a notable feature of Beacons valleys. For this reason, the number of **bird species** is more typically associated with woodland than an open valley. Keep a sharp lookout for the tree pipit, green finch, redstart, wren, whinchat, yellowhammer and chaffinch. Even the great-spotted woodpecker has been recorded. Do not be surprised if you see green woodpeckers often far from trees where they feed on ants. The falls and stream bed are good places to spot grey wagtail, heron and dipper.



Cwm-llwch Cottage and sheep

GEOLOGY AND GEOMORPHOLOGY OF CWM LLWCH

Cwm Llwlch was carved by glaciers during the last ice ages but its shape is different from many of the other glacial valleys in the Beacons. The upper section is relatively flat and contains a corrie lake, Llyn Cwm Llwlch, but the gradient steepens in the middle section, where the waterfalls are found, before it eases again near Cwm-llwch Cottage. This may be due to a more resistant band of rock which is also responsible for the formation of the waterfalls. The characteristic U-shape of the glacial valley has been further modified in the middle section by two streams that have cut down into the valley floor leaving a ridge, which the main footpath follows.

Drop left down to the stream immediately after the hill fence is crossed. Continue upstream and follow the left branch when it divides. Just ahead is an impressive waterfall. The route climbs up on the right-hand side, arriving first at a small pool above the lower fall. If you prefer an easier route, walk up the hillside to the right of the lower fall.

The area is rich in **plant life**. The falls are shaded by a mixture of hawthorn, blackthorn, ash, rowan, willow and silver birch. Most of the trees are young or have grown from previously fallen trunks. Luxuriant mosses and ferns thrive on damp and wet rock faces surrounding the fall. Ferns

WALK 1 – CORN DU AND PEN Y FAN VIA CWM LLWCH

include the rare Wilson's filmy fern and bryophytes include *Ulota crispa*, *Mnium undulatum*, *Hylocomium splendens*, *Atrichum undulatum*, *Neckera pumila*, *Fissidens taxifolius*, *Philonotis fontana*, *Hyocomium armorica*, *Frullania tamarisci* and several others. Several ungrazed tall herb ledges can be seen to the left and right of the fall. Interesting vascular plant species include valerian, wild angelica, meadow sweet, *Alchemilla vulgaris*, wood avens and Welsh Poppy.

Climb up the right-hand side of the upper fall to reach a series of smaller **waterfalls** from where there are magnificent views of Corn Du. Surprisingly, from this viewpoint the flat-topped summit of Corn Du at the head of the valley falsely appears higher than its neighbour, Pen y Fan, which is on the left. When the stream starts to break up into many smaller tributaries, leave the stream and head right, striking westwards to the corrie lake of **Llyn Cwm Llwlch**. ► The Valley Walk option leaves on the right here and descends back down the obvious path to where you crossed the hill fence earlier on.

Llyn Cwm Llwlch is a good place to have a break and appreciate this special place.

Legend has it that Llyn Cwm Llwlch had an **enchanted island**, only accessible through a tunnel from the shore. The island would rise out of the water only on May Day, when visitors to the island would be presented with fairy flowers and enjoy enchanting fairy music. The flowers were so lovely that one sacrilegious visitor decided to take some away with him down the mountain. When they faded, the island disappeared below the waters and was never seen again.

GLACIAL ORIGINS OF LLYN CWM LLWCH

Llyn Cwm Llwlch is a small oligotrophic corrie lake that has a surprisingly shallow maximum depth of only 8m. The term oligotrophic means that nutrients are in poor supply and the water, therefore, remains crystal clear all year round. At first glance, Llyn Cwm Llwlch appears to have been formed by glacial ice carving out a deep basin in the solid rock, but a closer inspection reveals this is not the case. The shallowness of the lake and the hummocky mounds that surround it are

clues to its origins. The lake is situated at the head of Cwm Llwh in a spot that receives the most shade from the sun. Here one of the last remaining blocks of ice from the Ice Age lingered on. Rock fragments were plucked from the Brownstone crags above by freeze-thaw action, a process whereby water in fissures in rock freezes and expands, cracking the rock; the ice then melts, penetrating the rock even further before refreezing. These fragments tumbled over the wasting ice mass to accumulate in a ring around its edges. When the ice finally melted, a small lake dammed by the ring of moraine was left. Kettle holes are also formed through the same process.

The alternative shorter route which descends to Pen Milan leaves from here.

Take the path which leads to the right (W) up the steep slope in a zigzag, climbing steeply to the lower end of the ridge of Craig Cwm Llwh. ◀

The main route continues climbing along the edge of the ridge to **Tommy Jones' Obelisk**, a useful landmark in poor visibility. Looking back down to the left from the obelisk there is a fine view of the hummocky mounds of glacial moraine that dam the lake of Llyn Cwm Llwh.

The obelisk is a **memorial to Tommy Jones**, aged five, who died here in 1900 of exhaustion. Tommy and his father had taken a train to Brecon earlier in the day and were walking the last four miles to his grandparents' farm in Cwm Llwh. They stopped for a rest at an army camp at Login and were surprised by the arrival of Tommy's grandfather and his 13-year-old cousin who had come to meet them. While the two men greeted each other, Tommy's cousin Willie was sent ahead to the farm to let them know they would soon arrive. Tommy followed his cousin; however, perhaps being scared of the dark, he started to cry only halfway up the track. The two boys parted company and Tommy headed back towards the camp at Login. Sadly, he never arrived. His body wasn't found until 29 days later. The obelisk now serves as a useful landmark in poor visibility, marking a rapid descent route from Cefn Cwm Llwh to the safety of the valley below, ensuring that walkers today do not suffer the same fate.



Follow the ridge of Craig Cwm Llwh (SE) up the steep slope to the summit of **Corn Du**.

From here you may see buzzards, red kites, carrion crows and ravens wheeling overhead. Ravens nest nearby on the crags of Craig Cwm Sere. You will undoubtedly see or hear the meadow pipit and skylark, the commonest **birds** over hill grasslands. If you are especially observant you may see ring ouzels, as they breed in the vicinity of the crags. This area is near the limit of their British range.

The final 10m or so to the summit of Corn Du involves scrambling up the Plateau Beds, but a stepped path leading diagonally right will avoid further damage to these loose crags. An interesting path-cum-sheep-track avoids this and cuts east across the northern face of Corn Du below the crumbling cliffs to the col leading to Pen y Fan. From the top of the stepped path cross left (E) to the summit of the crags overlooking Cwm Llwh.

From the cairn follow the crags (E) and descend into the col. The path swings around (ENE) and climbs along a broad track, well marked by cairns. The final one is of Bronze Age origin and leads to the trig point on the summit of **Pen y Fan**, which at 886m (2906ft) is the highest mountain in South Wales. (For a description of the mountain see 'Geology and geomorphology of Pen y Fan', Walk 3.) ▶

Corn Du and Pen y Fan from Craig Gwaun Taf

Fforest Fawr is visible beyond Craig Cerrig-gleisiad to the west, with Swansea Bay to the south-west.

Interesting plants on the rock face include rock stonecrop, mossy saxifrage, purple saxifrage, sea campion, Wilson's filmy fern, globe flower, green spleenwort and northern bedstraw.

Scramble carefully down the crags due north of the summit cairn. Look back at the north-east face of Pen y Fan, where in early spring you can see the brilliant colours of rare Arctic-alpines. ◀ Follow the ridge of **Cefn Cwm Llwh** for about 2km.

As you scramble down from the summit, look carefully at the upper surfaces of the near horizontal Plateau Beds for **ripple marks**. These are also present on the surfaces of rocks that form the summit. They were formed in exactly the same way as the ripples you see in the sandy beds of rivers today.

Take a small path which leaves the main track and bears left (NW) towards the pile of stones at the disused quarry of Cwar Mawr (SO 018 236). From here descend west-south-west down the spur of Twyn y Dyfnant to where the hill fence meets the mountain stream gully.

Turn left at the hill fence and follow it up the valley. Cross two gullies and descend to the stream bed where the hill fence meets it on the other side. Rejoin your earlier route back to the start.

Alternative start

From the car parking area, continue along the main track into the valley of Cwm Llwh. After about 200 metres there is a wood on the right. Take the path to the right and follow this up the hill into the field. The path goes past deciduous woodland with alder trees on the left and comes to a stile near a large oak tree. Continue in a north-westerly direction, reaching a second wooden stile with a yellow waymark arrow and then head towards a renovated farmhouse at **Llwynbedw**, turning right to bypass it on your left. ◀

Skirting round the farm buildings cross a stile and the field ahead to a **house** in the trees, Clwydwaunhir. Cross a stile and walk down the left-hand side of the hawthorn hedge to a stile and stream. After crossing the stream, turn sharp left and follow the sign to Pen Milan.

Continue between holly trees, fording the stream again, and follow the track ahead to the gate with a yellow waymark arrow and the National Trust sign to Pen Milan. This is where you cross the hill fence. Head due south along an indistinct path, aiming for the left side of the spur of land

ahead, and follow the land grooves up to the crest. A slightly sunken grassy track leads diagonally up the valley side to a path through gorse and bracken.

From here look up the valley to Pen y Fan on the left and Corn Du on the right. Far over to the east is the Cefn Cwm Llwh ridge, which will be your descent route. The route drops down this ridge to Twyn y Dyfnant on its left (N) edge.

Pass a group of hawthorn trees on the left and follow the old quarry track to a point where it swings sharply back to the right at the first zigzag. Continue south between small quarry spoils and keep on the main track to a flattened area of quarry debris. From here follow the path to the cairn. ▶

Walk through peat hags to a broader section of the ridge and on to **Tommy Jones' Obelisk**, where you join the main route.

Alternative descent route

If the weather becomes unfavourable to continue to the peaks, or if you prefer a shorter route, turn north at the obelisk and follow the footpath which swings first right, left, then right again around the head of a side valley of Cwm Llwh, with steep slopes on the right. Just before the final spur of **Pen Milan**, the path changes into an old broad green quarry track. The hill vegetation comprises dwarf-shrub heath and grass heath, in which ling and bilberry are common. Purple moor grass is abundant on flatter areas.

From the cairn there are good views to the west to Craig Cerrig-gleisiad and Fan Nedd beyond.

Craig Cerrig-gleisiad from Pen Milan



The route descends to the right diagonally across the valley side. This track has obviously seen heavy use in the past and, in fact, was once used to transport Old Red Sandstone from a quarry on the left, now abandoned. The softer rock was used as road infill, whereas the harder stone was used in building.

The quarry track swings sharply right and then left, descending between grassy banks and heading due north again. The path becomes ill-defined in places but eventually the fences on either side funnel the path to a gate. Pass through the gate, ford a small stream and follow the tree-lined track to the yard with the **cottage** of Clwydwaunhir on the left.

Opposite the house are a small ford and a stile. Cross these and cut across some fields (SE) back to the start of the walk.

WALK 2

Pen y Fan via Cwm Sere

Start/finish	Cwm Gwdi car park (SO 025 248), postcode LD3 8LE
Distance	10.75km (6.7 miles); valley walk 8.25km (5.1 miles)
Total ascent	655m (2150ft); valley walk 275m (900ft)
Grade	3; valley walk 1
Max elevation	886m (2907ft); valley walk 509m (1669ft)
Map	OL12 Western area

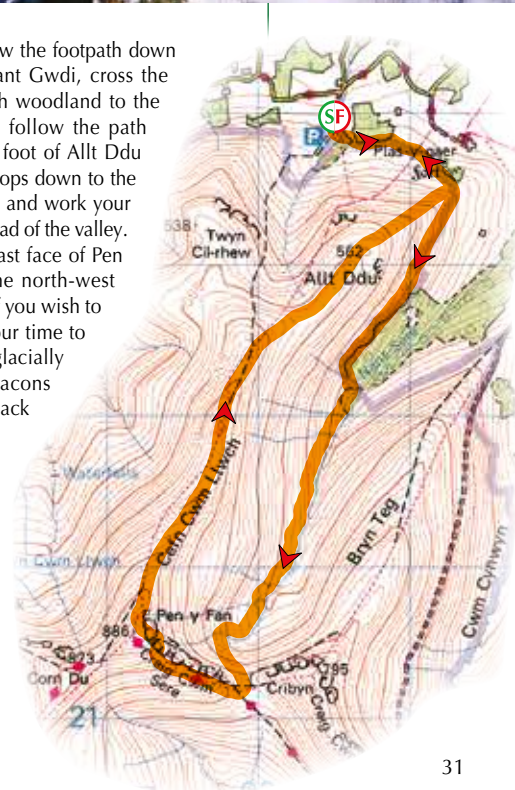
This fulfilling mountain route explores one of the most spectacular and wildest valleys in the Beacons and includes sections that can be demanding in snow and ice conditions. The lower reaches of the valley are well wooded and lead into an amphitheatre created by the steep northern slopes of Cribyn and Pen y Fan. There is a steep ascent of the headwall, and the upper parts of the route can be quite challenging in poor weather or winter conditions but the valley route is a less demanding option. The main features of interest include geomorphology and glaciology, panoramic views and archaeological sites.



From the main car park follow the footpath down into the stream valley of Nant Gwdi, cross the bridge and climb up through woodland to the open hillside. Turn left and follow the path above the fence around the foot of Allt Ddu into the valley, to where it drops down to the stream. Pick an easy descent and work your way along **Nant Sere** to the head of the valley.

The spectacular north-east face of Pen y Fan is on the right and the north-west face of Cribyn is on the left. If you wish to just enjoy the valley, take your time to savour the most impressive glacially cut valley in the Brecon Beacons before retracing your steps back to the start.

Once in the basin below Cribyn, strike across towards the foot of the north-east face of Pen y Fan and from here climb the headwall on the track which starts from bottom right and continues to top left. You will cross piles of stones brought down the gullies by winter frosts. The





• **Mynydd Du, Fforest Fawr, Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains** • Pen y Fan and other summits • rich history, geology and plantlife

The Brecon Beacons are a place of diverse landscapes. Mynydd Du has some of the remotest upland wilderness in Wales, while Fforest Fawr, a former royal hunting ground, has both upland and deeply incised river gorges and waterfalls. The Brecon Beacons are the highest summits, while the Black Mountains are gentler. The national park is home to both the highest mountain and the tallest waterfall in south Wales.

Even if you think you know this popular walking area, these circular routes will take you to attractive sylvan gorges and high valleys that few are aware of.

- walks mainly explore less frequented areas in wooded gorges and upland valleys



- routes suitable for year-round walking, although mountain and ridge walks can be challenging in poor weather
- the landscape of each walk is explained and illustrated with information about geology, history and plant life

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