

BANNAU PASSES

The word *bwlch* is generally used to denote a mountain pass, through which access can be made; sometimes the word is used to denote a little notch in the skyline or a col where no path exists. However, by association, it can also be used as a general term for a route through the mountains, one that may actually follow high ground all the way, but being more of a waymarker for a passage through. Because of the physical layout of the rivers and their valleys, most of the *bylchau* 'passes' to be found in the area form the highpoints of some important North-South route-ways. Because so few *bwlch* 'pass' names have survived, they have not been separated into areas; the list is in alphabetical order.

The word *bwlch* is cognate with Breton *boulch*, Irish *bealach*, Early Irish *belach*; from the Celtic **bolko* 'entrance, gap, notch, pass through the mountains'. There is no use of the terms *drws* 'door' or *adwy* 'entrance' in this area.

Bwlch'r Allwys SO 148221 235m

Bwlch is the name of the little village but on the 1832 OS map one finds the name *Bwlch'r Allwys*. The *allwys* 'to pour out, emptying' form of the word is a variant of the word *arllwys*; the 'emptying' sense might be the straightforward descriptor. This could denote the flowing of the Afon Wysg (River Wye) out through the mountains. Otherwise there could be a *allwys* 'wide, open' interpretation, to denote a coming out of the mountains, the end of an enclosed valley. The early roads did not follow the course of the river in the gorge below, as it was probably either too wet and too wooded. It seems that the Roman Road, as marked on the OS maps, followed the course of a prehistoric trackway through the hills. *bulche yr arlloys* 1524, *Bulch yr Arllwys* 1609 Tredegar MS, *Bwlch y Allwys* 1832 OS.

Bwlch ar y Fan SO 032205 599m

Bwlch 'pass' + *ar* 'on' + *y* 'the' + *ban* 'peak'. An ancient trackway utilises this pass; the antiquity of this route is also referred to in the stream name *Nant yr Hen-heol* (SO 031198). This would have been an important North-South route at one time as although being quite high, it was the closest breach in the mountains to the Brecon. There are a number of pre-historic and later historical remains to be found along the route of this track; some of the cairns to be seen date from the Bronze Age. *Bwlch-ar-Fan* 1832 OS.

Bwlch Bach 262288 SO 645m

Not a true *bwlch* 'col', more of a shoulder on the ridge, but if this was used regularly for passage or herding animals across the ridge, it could be deemed to be a *bwlch*.

Bwlch Bach ar Grib SO 187308 395m

The *crib* 'crest' in question is the obvious ridge running down from Pen y Manllwyn. This little pass is the highest of three passes allowing North-South access to the East of Mynydd Troed. However, it would have been a very useful pass if following the old route-way into the valley of the Grwyne Fechan.

Bwlch Blaen Twrch SO 816217 652m

The pass at the *blaen* 'end, source' of the river Twrch. The element *blaen* 'summit; point, end, source' is a common term in South Wales, derived from a possible Brittonic **blacno-* 'point, end, top'. The *twrch* 'boar' is linked to the river because of the mythical association of the animal with ferociousness and strength; the boar was also the symbol of hunting cults.

Bwlch Bryn Rhudd 870195 345m

The name in 1840-80 was *Bwlch Pen y Rhydd*; however, it is probable that the name is nothing to do with the word *rhydd* 'loose, free'. Instead, once again, one must decide whether it is the presence

of either: *rhudd* 'red, crimson'; or, the coalescence of the words *yr hydd* 'the stag', this form is recorded in a number of hill names in North Wales. Bwlch pen-y-rhudd 1832 OS.

Bwlch Chwyth 909213 585m

The *bwlch* 'pass' + *chwyth* 'blast, breeze, wind' is probably the shallow col found on the hill named Fan y Bwlch Chwyth. All passes are windy spots and the name refers to how very windy this open area really is.

Bwlch Cerrig Duon 856227 476m

Cerrig is the plural of *carreg*, which has to be followed/confirmed by *duon*, the plural form of *du* 'black, dark; bitter'. Note that the colour *du* does not have to infer black, dark green pines and fir trees were known as *coed duon* 'dark trees' in Welsh. Bwlch y Cerreg Duon 1828 Greenwood map, Bwlch-y-cerrig-Duon 1832 OS.

Bwlch Duwynt SO 005209 812m & SN 902196 564m

This *bwlch* 'pass' has the descriptor *duwynt*, but the first element here is not *du* 'dark, black'; instead, it is probably an alternative meaning of the word namely *du* 'angry, bitter' + (*g*)*wynt* 'wind'. This gives a sense of a windy pass or gap in the mountains that is particularly prone to harsh conditions. Bwlch-y-duwynt 1832 OS.

Bwlch Isaf SO 266278 602m

This particular *bwlch* is *isaf* 'lower' in comparison to Bwlch Bach on the same ridge.

Bwlch Rhiw Wen SO 220346 620m

This is one of the ancient routeways through this scarp. At the head of Cwm Bach a number of paths converge to ascend steeply to this pass and then into the valley of Nant Bwch. *Rhiw* 'slope' + (*g*)*wen* 'white' are the terms used; however, it is difficult to decide if this is the correct and original name or a quite recent one. Because the name Rhiw Wen on the 1887 OS map is the name given to the mountain, then also named The Tumpa, to the North East (SO 226350).

Bwlch y Dinas SO 173300 323m

Bwlch 'pass' + *y* 'the' + *dinas* 'fort', the fort would have been in a prime location to control any movement through the pass. There are some early forms of the name such as Bulkedinas 1233 and Bulkedenas 1275.

Bwlch y Ddeuwynt SN 787173 425m

A simple enough name to decipher and a very apt one; here we have *deu* [the dual form of the word *dau* 'two'] + *gwynt* 'wind'. The name signifies the fact that at the pass, there would often be a strong wind blowing from one valley or the other.

Bwlch y Ddwyallt SO 058206 735m

The grid reference given above, refers to the position shown for the pass on the early OS maps circa 1840-80; on today's maps, the name has moved to a rather incongruous position at SO 053203. The meaning of the name is quite straightforward, *dwy* 'two' (feminine form of the word *dau*) + *allt* 'cliff, hill, rise, slope'.

This is a name given to an ancient means of access through the mountains, following a long steady ridge climb of Ffordd Las or Bwlch Main up from Llanfrynach south towards the mountain/height that should be known as Y Fan Las 954m (SO 054203). Just before the hilltop is a col, with very steep slopes on either side, the old path follows the edge of the deep valley to descend the ridge of Craig y Fan Ddu. Bwlch-y-ddwy-Allt 1832 OS.

Bwlch y Fingel SO 236352 538m

This is the name on the early OS maps, for what is now denoted as Gospel Pass; this form is probably derived from a translation of what was wrongly recorded as Bwlch yr Efengyl. This was a later and rather mistaken attempt to explain the similar sounding Bwlch y Fingel. This interpretation may have been influenced by the proximity of Capel y Ffin and Llanthony Abbey. The name was recorded as Bwlch y Fingil 1828 Greenwood map, Bwlch-y-fingel 1832 OS. In his historical map of

the 14th century, South Wales and the Border, the historian William Rees places the name Vincul at the pass; this is the anglicised form of the name Fingul. Uyncul c.1120-34 Book of Llandaf.

There is a word *myngyl* 'narrow or slender neck'; seen in the lake name Llyn Myngul in North Wales; this could be a reference to the narrowness of the valley at the pass. With the elements *min* 'mouth, brow, edge, rim' + *cul* 'narrow, thin' rather than a corruption of the word *cil* 'nook, recess'; or, *cél* 'hiding, concealment'.

Bwlch y Giedd SN 828214 728m

Above Llyn y Fan Fawr, named after the river Giedd; this *bwlch* 'pass' is very steep on its northern side.

Bylchau Blaen Clydach SN 805266 358m

A name for the *bylchau* 'passes' at the head of the Clydach river. If one followed the river up to its source, one would find a number of little passes through to the upper Afon Wysg (Usk) for example.

Bylchau Rhos Fain SN 753177 525m

Initially one would think that the name was straightforward, with *bylchau* as the plural of the word *bwlch* 'pass' + *rhos* 'moor' + *fain* 'thin'. However, one look at the OS maps of the area will reveal that neither the moor nor the pass is narrow; note also the earliest OS recording of the name. The likeliest explanation is that here, as in other parts of Wales, the word *main* is probably retaining an old spelling of *maen* 'rock'; it must be noted that there are numerous outcrops of limestone scattered around this pass. Bwlchau-rhos-faen 1832 OS.

Pen y Bylchau SN 814302 394m

Due to the location of the name on the map, it is hard to decide whether or not this is a name for the hill or for the passes. As has been noted, the word *bylchau* is the plural of *bwlch* 'pass'; however, the use of the term *bwlch* does not always mean a gap in the topography. It can imply a good route or way; one can see by the many trackways and defensive sites in the area, that this was an important junction at one time.