

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' here.

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* form is a variant of the word *arllwys* 'to pour out, emptying'; as in the flowing of the *Wysg* through the mountains. The early roads did not follow the course of the river in the gorge below, probably too wet and wooded, it also seems that the Roman Road, marked on the maps, followed the course of a prehistoric trackway through the hills.

Bwlch ar y Fan SO 032205 599m

An ancient trackway utilises this pass; the antiquity of this route is also referred to in the stream name *Nant yr Hen-heol* (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 Brecon. There are a number of pre-historic and historical remains to be found along the route of this track; some of the cairns to be seen date from the Bronze Age.

Bwlch Bach 262288 SO 645m

Not a true *bwlch* 'col', more of a shoulder on the ridge.

Bwlch Bach ar Grib SO 187308 395m

The *crib* 'crest' in question is the obvious ridge running down from *Pen y Maenllwyn*. 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*. *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, 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 pass was probably the shallow col found on *Fan y Bwlch Chwyth*. The name refers to how windy this very open area really is, as *chwyth* 'blast, breeze, wind'.

Bwlch Cerrig Duon 856227 476m

Cerrig is the plural of carreg, while duon is the plural form of du 'black, dark; bitter'. Bwlch y Cerreg Duon 1828 Greenwood map.

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'; rather, 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.

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

One of the ancient paths 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 (226350).

Bwlch y Dinas SO 173300 323m

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; 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 053203. The meaning of the name is quite straightforward, dwy 'two' (feminine form of the word dau) + allt 'cliff, hill, rise, slope'.

One would expect this name to perhaps describe two slopes rising on either side to meet up and forming the hillsides below a bwlch 'pass'; this one is slightly different. 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 (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 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 Bwlch yr Efengyl in Welsh. A later and misconstrued attempt to explain the similar sounding y Fingel, which may also 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 is 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 its head. Otherwise, the first element of the name is could be the mutated form of min 'mouth, brow, edge, rim'. The second element is likely to be the term cul 'narrow, thin' rather than a corruption of the word cil 'nook, recess'; or, cêl 'hiding, concealment', or a mutated form as is found in - ar gêl 'being hidden, concealed'.

Bwlch y Giedd SN 828214 728m

Above Llyn y Fan Fawr, named after the river Giedd; this 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. 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. Bwlch 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. The word can imply a good route way and one can see by the many trackways and defensive sites in the area, that this was an important junction at one time.