

FFOREST FAWR

The meaning of the term fforest 'forest' can initially seem quite puzzling in an area so bare of natural indigenous tree cover; with now, just a few conifer plantations. The usual name for this group mountains is however Fforest Fawr; however, this forest is not the borrowed version of forest 'woodland', rather the old version of the word forest 'rough land, remote, mountainous, hunting ground'; it was used in an archaic legal sense as royal hunting ground. This area of hunting land was established about 1100 and the right to hunt animals was restricted to the local marcher lord Bernard de Neufmarche, the Norman lord of Brecon. A further area of land was added in the 13th century, this was known as Fforest Fach [fforest vechan 1531 Penpont Deeds]. The hunting ground passed to the Crown in 1521; it was sold in 1819 to raise income for the Crown after the Napoleonic Wars. This is the area between Afon Tawe and the Taf.

Y Fan Fawr 734m SN 970193

A seemingly simple name to decipher, the mutated form of the word mawr 'big, large' shows that this is indeed a high mountain. However, which meaning of the word ban is to be accepted; this may be a personal preference and may vary, depending on location. One has to judge whether the term ban means 'mountain, peak', the usual understanding of the term; or, the slightly different interpretation of ban 'point, promontory, spur'. The name of the mountain on the early OS maps was Y Fan Dringarth, a name that can now be seen on the other side of the valley, at (941193). There is a marker stone at the summit named Maen y Nod; nod 'mark, sign', stones or posts were often used along boundaries.

Y Fan Gyhirych 725m SN 881191

A rather complex name to decipher, but probably named after the river. One sees the river name as Nant Gihirych; one also finds forms such as Y Fan Gihirach 1813 OS and a little later Pont Gihirâch 1832 OS, now Pont Gihirych. There was at one time a pool named Llŵch Cyhirych, showing that cyhirych was the radical form, which is mutated after the feminine fan and nant. The local vocalisation of the stream name is Ciherych.

The name may be corruption of one of the following forms cyhyr, cehyr, cyr 'muscle, sinew, flesh; brawn, strength' + -ich/-ych [variants of the -ach ending]. If named after the stream, this would be a good term if the stream of Nant Gihirych was braided, it would give the sense of being sinewy. Unfortunately, the stream is not braided, though it may have been in the past. Otherwise, there are many small feeder streams in the upper reaches of this small valley which may give a sense of a sinewy stream. Some suspected an Irish source, such as cíorach 'combed, crested'

Others give the meaning more towards the strength in the of flow in the stream, with a corruption of cyhyrŵch 'brawniness, strength' may be present with the same base meaning as cyhyr, this might indicate fierce flow during periods of flood. One must remember the word caerŵrch 'roebuck' and its plural, namely ceiriyrch; if it is a corruption of this, it would indicate an area where deer were prevalent. Gurcieth c.1120-34 Llandaf Charters Cyhoret pre 1250 Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin, Ban Gyhyrych 1804 Theophilous Jones, Van Gyherech 1819, Cyherich 1841 Census, Ban Cyhyrych 1908.

Y Fan Fraith 668m SN 887184

This ban 'point, summit' + fraith - the mutated feminine form of the Welsh word brith 'mottled, stained', Breton *breiz* from the Celtic **mrikta* 'mottled'. There may be a number of reasons why a mountain may be termed brith/braith. The variation in vegetation between grassland, bracken and heather perhaps; or, the differences in the colour of rock outcrops. Y Fan ffraith 1832 OS, Van Vraith 1834 Greenwood Map.

Y Fan Nedd 663m SN 914184

Named after the river, Afon Nedd. The name given by the Romans, as seen in the Itin. Ant. was the Nidus. There are a number of other rivers with names similar to the Nedd, namely the Nidd near Ripley in Yorkshire as well as six others in Europe. The etymology of the name remains rather uncertain, with a number of different arguments being put forward. However, the name is either Celtic or Pre-Celtic, with a derivation from Early Celtic **nido-/a-* meaning either 'flow' or 'shine, brilliant' brilliant or shining has been suggested; others have it linked to either Indo-European **nedi* 'river'; or, to the Indo-European **neig-t* 'washed'.

Y Fan Llïa 632m SN 938186

To many, the name is derived from the river name Afon Llïa, some have linked it to a vocalised corruption of the word *lleiaf* 'smallest; or, others have postulated a corrupted form of *llif*: *lli* 'water movement, flow'. A few have linked it to linked to *llïo* 'to lick, to lap up' probably due to a local legend that links the rocks of the Maen Llïa area to a nighttime stroll to drink or lap up the water from the stream. The river was recorded as Afon Llïa 1608 Tredegar Manuscripts; one also finds earlier forms such as *Tir blaen llya* 1567 and *tir aberlya* 1590 being recorded.

However, it may be that both the mountain and the stream name element Llïa has been taken from the prominent standing stone of Maen Llïa (924192). One could form a link between the Old Irish *lia* 'stone, slab' [seen in *Lia Fail* 'Stone of Destiny', Tara] and the Cornish *leg*h [sometimes recorded as *lay*, *lea* and *lee*]. The Old Welsh *lech* 'carreg, llech' and the Cornish term are derived Brittonic **liaccā-*.

This massive slab of conglomerate is located at the head of a pass between Y Fan Llïa and Y Fan Nedd. It lies alongside an ancient trackway, later Roman Road, it measures 3.61m high, 2.75m wide and 0.46m thick. It is supposed to bear faint traces of a latin/ogham inscription; the ogham would show the Irish influence in the area. However, what has been proven is that it has a geometric relationship with other nearby Bronze Age monuments in the area, this upland was of great importance at one time. Van Llïa 1828 Greenwood

Y Fan Frynych 629m SN 958227

For some, the probability is that the name, with the originally Irish *-ach* ending [or its variants of *-ech*, *-ich* and *-ych*], is simply the personal name Brynach. There is indeed a Llanfrynach to the South East of Brecon, at (0725). Conversely, there has also been a suggestion that the name is due to an influx of Bernicians, fleeing from the destruction and subjugation of the Old North. One finds the forms: *kraig Verenigh* 1575 a *Kraig Vrynygh* 1602 Penpont, *Brenech ycha* 1692 and *Brynich* 1726 Tredegar Manuscripts, *Brynich* 1813 Cambrian Travellers Guide, *Van Vrynich* 1828 Greenwood Map, *Y Fan Frynach* 1832 OS. There is another river, East of Brecon (074283) with the name *Brynich/Brynych*.

However, it is probable that the name of this hill is probably linked to the river Nant Frynych, flowing northwards through Cwm Frynych from Blaenbrynich, just below the hill. Perhaps derived from a corrupted or early form of *braen* 'putrid, rotten' + *-ach*. *Braen* is a fairly common term in the landscape and is linked to Cornish *brÿn*, *breen* 'corrupt, mouldy', Old Breton *brin* 'rotten, putrid'; Old Irish *brén* 'putrid, stinking, rotten' and could be a term used for marshy or boggy ground and stream. Because of fluvial changes such as drainage, the ground may no longer be marshy and putrid; making it challenging to realise the presence of this characteristic today.

Rhos Dringarth/ Craig Cerrig Gleisiaid 629m SN 961217

Today, the name of the mountain is some distance from the top, on the early OS map 1832 Rhos Dringarth was on the summit, on the Greenwood Maps of 1828 this name was also at this top. In Welsh the word *rhos* 'flat mountain land, intake or moor'; it is derived from Old Welsh *ros*; linked to Breton *ros* 'hill covered with heather', and the Irish *ros* 'promontory, woodland'. The shape of

the mountain when approaching from the South is much gentler and gradual than other aspects.

The northern face of the mountain is topped by a crag, *Craig Cerrig Gleisiaid*; it is the name of this cliff that is now used as the hill name. The word *gleisiaid* 'grills, young salmon' is the usual translation for these rocks, in doing so accepting that these very high mountain streams would have salmon in them. Alternatively, people state that the name is a corruption of a term for the bluish grey rocks or figuratively resembling the cloaks of priests or monks. However, it is probable that a corruption of the word *cleisiau*, the plural *clais* 'ditch, fissure, groove' has taken place; probably referring to the broken and gullied appearance of the steep northern face of this hill.

Y Fan Dringarth 617m SN 941193

It should be noted that the name seen on the maps today corresponds to the main descriptor in Cwm Dringarth and Nant Dringarth; and further up the valley is Rhos Dringarth. Unfortunately, this is probably not dring 'rise, rising' + garth 'hill, ridge, promontory'.

Looking at the early forms of the name, the first element seems to be different. In 1578 on the Saxton maps the river is noted as *Trangarthe flu*, similarly noted in 1596 as *Trangarth* and *Blaen Trangarth*, while the *Trangath* is found in 1610 on a John Speed map. Also, one finds the form *r. Tringarth* 1588 (*Tredegar Manuscripts*) and *Blaen Tringarth* is seen today, at (943163). One could therefore link the first element to *tran-* or *trin-* and not *dring-*.

It is probable that a corrupted *tren* 'fierce, rapid, powerful'; linked to Middle Irish *trean* 'strong', that is to be found here, this could be used as an element in a river name. With less conviction, one could postulate: *tran-* 'end' + *garth*, as the name because of the cul-de-sac formed by the valley; if *trin-*, it may be an anglicised form of *trian* 'third part, a land division term' was this a name for ownership of a particular parcel of land in the valley. *Van Tringarth* 1828 Greenwood Map, *Y-Fan-dringarth* 1832 OS.

Yr Allt 604m SN 906201

The use of the definite article *yr* makes the word *allt* 'hillside steep slope' special; and that is what one finds at the head of this glacially deepened valley, an exceptionally steep slope,

Y Fan Bwlch Chwyth 603m SN 913216

Ban 'peak, point' + *bwlch* 'gap, pass' + *chwyth* 'gusty, windy'; a good descriptor for a pass, as they are generally very windy spots. One wonders if the name originated at the shallow saddle at 909214, as the early OS name spanned this hill and the lesser top of 592m to the South-west. *Y-Fan-bwlch-y-chwyth* 1832 OS.

Bryn Du 575m SN 979195

The word *du* 'black, dark' as a descriptor for this *bryn* 'hill' could infer dark peaty soils; however, it is usually used to describe the effect of aspect. A slope with a northerly aspect will be in the shade of the sun for most of the day, thus it will look dark or black to anyone viewing from the North.

Cefn Perfedd 570m SN 942207

Cefn 'back, ridge, spur' + *perfedd* 'central, amid'. This long ridge leads north from Y Fan Dringarth and is a good example of a *cefn*; Middle Breton *queyn*, Old Cornish *chem*, Gaulish *cebenna* [note that Cevennes is derived from the Gaulish term]. The word *perfedd* 'central, middle' is not such a good descriptor here, a better understanding as a location name may be as *perfedd* 'in the depths of, among'.

Twyn Dylluan Ddu 493m SN 968237

This is a great name, even though not being much of a 'twyn' hill, it is really just a rise in a spur

extending down from Fan Frynych. Tylluan is Welsh for an owl and the meaning 'black owl' could derive from the dark form of this area of scarp looking like the outstretched wings of a bird?

Cadair Fawr 485m SN 978123

One has to decide which meaning is present in the landscape, while also remembering that all the meanings can be used metaphorically. Here, one could have the cadair 'chair, throne' explanation for this site, there is a kind of south facing hollow near the top; also, there are a number of cairns associated with the hill, a place of eminence perhaps. The *cader/cadair 'fort, defensive site' could also be present metaphorically for a height, there are no physical indications of a fort. Even the cadair 'dwelling, settlement' meaning could be supported as one finds a number of folds, house platform and long huts in the area to the east. Y Gadair Fawr 1526 Tredegar Manuscripts, Cader Fawr 1832 OS.

One could question the use of a cadair 'chair, seat, throne' in names, a word borrowed from the Latin *cathedra* 'seat, throne', instead of a postulated Brittonic *cader 'stronghold' as a term for denoting what are high status features in the mountains. Particularly as many of the Brittonic *cader 'stronghold' and Gaelic/Irish *cathair* 'stone fort' forms are to be found in areas with little or no Roman influence, let alone usage of Latin by the local populace.

In the book **Irish Names of Places**: publication date 1869-1913 PW Joyce, states for **cathair**: 'This word, which is pronounced caher appears to have been originally applied to a city, for the old form cathir glosses civitas in the Wb. MS. of Zeuss. It has been, however, from a very early period - perhaps from the beginning - used to designate a circular stone fort; it is applied to both in the present spoken language.'

These ancient buildings are still very common throughout the country, especially in the south and west, where the term was in most general use; and they have given names to great numbers of places. In modern nomenclature the word usually takes one of the two forms, caher and cahir; and there are more than 300 townlands and towns whose names begin with one or the other of these two words, all in Munster and Connaught, except three or four in Leinster - none in Ulster.'

WJ Watson in discussing the distribution of cathair in his book **The Celtic Place-names of Scotland** 1926, writes: 'With us it is very rare, and on the west it does not occur. On the east the furthest north instance I have met is Corncattrach, for Coire na Cathrach 'Corrie of the Cathair,' adjacent to Shanquar, for Sean-chathair, 'old fort', Gartly, Aberdeenshire.'. He continues with other examples of cader/cathair forms to be found north of the Antonine Wall.

Carn y Goetre 458m SN 946144

Goetre is a fairly common descriptor throughout Wales for a farm or settlement in the woods. The word is interesting as it shows a hardening of the consonants, so coed 'wood' + dref 'settlement' becomes coetre [note the farm Y Goitre below 940143]. There are many meanings to the word carn, it can denote 'rock, hill, mountain, summit' or 'cairn, barrow, tumulus, mound, rock; heap, pile'.

Gwaun Cefn y Garreg 457m SN 946137

This is the only name to be found on the present OS maps, gwaun derives from Old Welsh *guoun* 'cors, corsdir'; similar to Old Cornish *guen*, Breton *gueun* 'marsh'. It later became a general term for a rough upland, through association to generally poor mountain pasture; for example, there is no real area marshland on this limestone hill. Cefn 'ridge, spur' + carreg 'stone, rock'. However the name is a bit too far to the South, on the first series OS maps of 1832 one can see the name for the top as Carreg Fawr, while this name is given as Gwern Cefn y Garreg. Another name on this hill, this time for a cairn, is Carn Prydydd; a prydydd was a trained bard or poet.

Carn y Botel 456m SN 954145

Botel may be a corrupted form of the Middle English word bothel 'hut, shelter'; or, a mutated form of the Welsh word potel, which is borrowed from the English bottle, referring to the shape of a kiln perhaps, see Twyn yr Odynau below.

Twyn Groes Gwallter 450m SN 949145

The twyn 'hillock'; was probably the site of a boundary marker, a croes 'cross' here denoted the edge of 'Gwallter' [i.e. Walter's] lands. There were numerous Anglo-Norman landowners with the first name Walter; also, the Walter family based mainly in Pembrokeshire had lands all over South Wales; or, Sir Walter Rice 1562-1636 an ancestor of the lords of Dinefwr.

Y Gareg Fawr 450m SN 973117

The mutated Gareg is a variant form of carreg rock'. The name Gareg Fawr is now seen further to the West, it is now found at a location that was previously named Twyn Du on 1888 OS map.

Twyn yr Odynau 450m SN 954152

The word odynau is the plural for ody 'kiln', in areas such as this, limestone was heated in the kilns in order to produce quicklime. This could then be blended with materials such as sand or clay to make lime plaster and lime mortar, it also had a number of other uses.

Carn Ganol 450m SN 950145

This is translated as the Middle Cairn; however, the usual name for this hill of clustered rocky tops is Mynydd y Garn. The presence of many prehistoric features including a settlement and field systems show that, at one time, this south facing hillside was a prime location.

Penmoelallt 422m SO 005096

Pen 'head, top' + moel bare' + allt 'slope' is the name of the little tops, now in the forestry, also the name for the farm at one time. On the early OS maps the name for the hill was written as Oen 'lamb' + Llwyn, a mistaken form of Onn Llwyn 'Ash Woods'. Also, the name for a large area of upland at one time was Pen Mallard Hills 1729 Bowen Map of South Wales, Mynydd Penmailard 1832 OS.

Cefn Sychbant 419m SN 989108

This is the name for the cefn 'ridge' above Pant Sychbant, an area of upland limestone where such a sych 'dry' + 'pant' hollow would be quite good for pasture; as any surface water would percolate through quite quickly and the valley stream, Nant Cadlan is only intermittent. There are a number of prehistoric features in the area showing that this location was a favoured place.

Twyn Cerrig Cenau 415m SN 897226

Twyn 'hill, hillock, mountain', while cenau refers to 'the young' of a number of animals ranging from - bears, cats, dogs or even wolves. Twyn Crug 1832 OS, Twyn Cerrig-ceneu 1888 OS.

Maes y Gawnen 405m SN 900136

Cawnen is the feminine singular for the word cawn 'reeds'. Maes y Gawnen 1832 OS.

Maen Gweddiau 400m SN 886133

There is no name for this low hill on the present day OS maps; Maen-gwdduau 1832 OS, Maen Gweddiau 1888 OS. The maen 'stone', could have been part of a boundary, difficult to note if there is a stone as the area is now forestry. If gweddiau is correct, which is also noted as the name in the Mellville Richards Archive, it is the plural of gweddi 'invocation, worship' this may give a religious connotation to the rock. However, the name may be a corruption of gwyddiau, the plural of gwyddi 'hedge, shrubs'.

Cefn Llechid 400m SN 942275

Given as Cefn-llechyd 1832 OS; although Llechid could denote a personal name, this example may refer to the presence of rock llech 'stone, rock, slab' on this ridge.

Garn Ddu 400m SN 958113

Carn 'top' or 'cairn' + du 'black, dark'. A much quarried hilltop

Carnau Gwynion 398m SN 922145

Gwynion is the plural of gwyn 'white' which reflects the plural of carn 'cairn, mound' at the start of the name. There are a number of Bronze Age features such as cairns, round barrows and a hengiform monument in the immediate area, invariably built out of the local limestone and of a pale grey or white colour. This was an important site in the Bronze Age; but later clearance cairns and limekiln workings have made for a very confused landscape. Karne gwynion 1558 Cawdor Manuscripts, Carnau-gwynion 1831 OS.

Onllwyn 398m SN 996087

Onn is the plural of the word onnen 'ash tree' + llwyn 'copse, grove'; one also sees Old Cornish *onnen*, Breton *o(u)nn*, all from the Celtic **onno-*. The Book of Llandaf border crosses the slopes of this hill and reads: 'o deri emreis y cecin clysty, cecin clysty ny hyt bet blain frut y guidon,' from deri emreis to cecin clysty, along cecin clysty to the source of frut y guidon,'. Frut y guidon is the stream of Nant Ffrwd (0107) today; Cecin Clysty probably refers to a cegin 'ridge' + closty 'enclosed cottage'. The 1832 OS map has the name Bryn Cwrw in the area, this may be related to the hill names Cwrwm found in the Euas.

Cefn Esgair Carnau 390m SN 982143

Cefn 'ridge' + esgair 'spur' + carnau 'cairns'. There is an extensive ancient cairnfield along this ridge coupled with barrows and enclosures; as well as an important ancient trackway through the mountains.

Mynydd y Glog 389m SO 982088

The meaning of the word clog is 'cliff, precipice'; similar to Cornish *clog* 'steep rock', Irish *cloch* 'rock, stone'; it is from this word that clogwyn 'cliff' is derived. This is a very rocky area and there are also a number of prehistoric cairns. Named as Mynydd Penmailard 1832 OS.

Bryn Bugeiliaid 382m SN 859137

Bryn 'hill' + bugeiliaid - one plural of bugail 'shepherd'; linked to the Cornish and Breton *bugel* 'child, shepherd', Irish *buachaill* 'shepherd, child' from the Celtic **boukolios*.

Fforest Fach 381m & 382m SN 916277 & SN 918264

Once again the term fforest; this offshoot of the hills was added to the main hunting area in the 13th century and was termed the 'lesser forest'. So was immediately termed fforest 'rough land, remote, mountainous, hunting ground'; one would like to think there was an older name to this double topped hill.

Allt Lom 381m SN 966270

Allt 'hillside' + lom - a mutated form of llom, a variant form of the word llwm 'bare', Cornish *lom*.

Moel Penderyn 371m SN 939089

It is possible to link the form of this hill to moel 'conical hill' rather than moel 'rounded or bare hill' as it has a generally conical shape. For many, the second part of the name is derived from pen 'head, top' + tarren 'hillock, steep hill, scarp, rocky hill'. In his book History of the County of Brecknock Theophilous Jones stated that Pen y Daren was "an appellation frequently given to roky cliffs".

However, when looking at examples such as: Pennyderyn 1291 Calendar of Chancery Rolls, Penn y deryn 1376, Calendar of Patent Rolls, Penyderyn 1468 & 1547 Brittonic Museum Manuscripts, Penyderyn 1482 Tredegar Manuscripts; it can be seen that the main element here is (a)deryn 'bird'. It certainly is a steep and rocky little hill; though there is probably an association with birds, of some kind.

Mynydd Illtyd 367m SN 979273

The mynydd 'sheepwalk, upland pasture' here is a quite late usage of the word, while Illtyd is a personal name. At Mynydd Illtyd, not only is there a ring cairn and stones named Bedd Gwyl Illtyd, there is also a church Llanilltyd (971271). The area has been named after the St. Illtyd, the Breton founder and abbot of a 6th Century centre of learning at Llanilltyd Fawr; he was also known as Illtyd Farchog and Eltut. Eltid Mountain 1729 Emanuel Bowen Map of South Wales.

This is a relatively flat ridge of open rough pasture and marshy ground; a seemingly remote spot it is in fact a meeting place two ancient trackways, which then follow the ridge down towards what is now Brecon. One trackway leads to the Senni Valley, then after going through the hills past Maen Llia it follows the Afon Llia southwards. The other trackway leads from Mynydd Illtyd past Fan Bwlch Chwyth and then heads towards Glyntawe. These roads have been important features in the landscape for a long time, their pre-Roman importance is highlighted by the prevalence of standing stones and other prehistoric features along the routes. The Pre Roman trackways were cut down to bedrock in chalk or limestone areas, while in other areas the bedrock would have a gravel bedding. These trackways were often re-used by the Romans, but did not have the same layered structure as their roads. A great many roads were named Sarn Elen 'Helen's road'; though others propose that this is a corruption of Sarn y Lleng 'Road (of) the Legion; or, Sarn Halen 'Salt Road'.

Twyn y Gaer 367m SN 990281 and 343m SN 923263

Twyn 'hill, hillock, mountain' + caer 'defensive site', Cornish *ker* 'stronghold, town', from the Brittonic **kagro* 'a settlement within an enclosure'; that is either, an enclosed stronghold, defensive site or castle. When one studies the OS map one can see the defensive enclosures at these sites would have both been on a prominent and very good defensive position.

Carn yr Onnen 320m SN 885167

Carn 'cairn' + onnen 'ash tree', the feminine singular of onn 'ash trees'; see Onllwyn above. In the past, the Mountain Ash was harvested for food as well as being used for medicinal use; Also, the wood of the tree is elastic and strong and it was cut for a number of uses from basket-making and fish-traps to cart wheels and utensils. A number of boundaries meet up at this point and a marker stone is to be found.