

HEBOG & NANTLLE

This area of hills to the west of Beddgelert and Rhyd Ddu boasts two fine ridges, what are known as the Hebog ridge and the Nantlle ridge, almost enclosing the magnificent valley of Cwm Pennant. To the North, across the Nantlle valley is the outlying Mynydd Mawr with its little group of hills. The whole area is rather quieter than the main walking areas of Eryri and provide spectacular views of Yr Wyddfa and the coasts.

Moel Hebog 782m 564470

The generally accepted sense now associated with the term *moel* in the landscape is that of the adjective *moel* 'bald, bare, blunt'. Because of this, the word *moel* in a name is generally assumed to be a term for hills that are rounded, smooth and bare of trees. Unfortunately, this is far too simplistic and very often wrong, there are far more meanings than this associated with the word. Apart from the smooth, rounded and treeless mountain definitions, one also has *moel* 'top of a hill or mountain, summit' [sometimes referring to a pointed shape] as well as *moel* 'heap, mound' [with an inference towards a conical form]. These meanings were also to be seen in an early Welsh dictionaries, for example: '*Moel or y Foel doth also signify a heap of corn, butter and of other things of the like sort, when raised up like a pyramid above the brim of the vessel in which it is contained*' Antiquae Linguae Britannicae (1753).

The Dictionary of the University of Wales (GPC) gives the other meanings to the word *moel*, namely: 'top of a hill or mountain, peak'; 'a mound, a spike'. Unfortunately they are usually ignored.

Care must be taken to assess the shape or form of the mountain or hill feature with the term *moel* in the name as there are many names where the 'alternative' or 'forgotten' set of meanings for the name element *moel* fit the shape of the feature better. These interpretations are still being ignored, whether in books or articles about the mountains. It is not always a simple matter to decide which interpretation fits a name, but it is better if some effort has been made to try and assess a feature. The difficulties involved can be seen in judging the meaning of the *moel* element in the name of this particular mountain.

Moel Hebog can certainly be interpreted as bare topped and fairly smooth and even looks rounded from some points of the compass, mainly from the west. So for many this a straightforward *moel* 'bare' name [but all high mountains have bare tops]; also, the *moel* 'smooth' interpretation is rather tenuous as that from most other aspects, Moel Hebog has a large conical form and this would fit the *moel* 'summit, conical heap' interpretation. The decision as to which is the best fit for that name then becomes a personal determination.

The first form of this name, recorded in 1269, was Morleheadauc; namely *moel* 'conical hill' + *ehedog*, *ehedawg* 'birds, flight', Cornish *edhen* 'bird'; rather than hebog 'hawk'. This suggests that the mountain name should perhaps be interpreted as Hill of the Birds rather than Hill of the Hawk. The hawk interpretation is probably due to the form highlighted as Moel Hapock in 1781. This is a corruption of the is the word *hebog* 'hawk'; and it is this version which continues in use today. Hebog is seen as *hebauc* 'hawk, falcon' in Middle Welsh; derived from the Old English word *heafoc* 'hawk'; these were probably confused with the original Welsh *ehedog* 'flying, able to fly'. However, in his book Tours of Wales 1810 Thomas Pennant has Moel Hedog, thus linking it back to the earliest form. The mountain could be associated with birds; whether real or legendary; or, when viewed from the West, the ridge seems to be shaped like a bird with outspread wings. Moel Hebog 1838 OS.

A stunning bronze shield made up of concentric rings, about 1m in diameter and dated to the late Bronze Age, was found on the slopes of Moel Hebog during peat cutting in 1784. This may hint at some form of sacred significance linked to the mountain at one time.

Craig Cwm Silyn 734m SH 526503

If the *craig* 'crag' and mountain is named after the lake, the first part of the name may be *sil* 'young fish, fry' is borrowed from the Irish *sil* 'seed'; Old Welsh *hil* 'to breed'. This perhaps gives *sil* + *llyn* 'lake' to perhaps imply 'lake of spawning', 'lake of the small fish'; or even, 'the source lake'. However, for most, it is merely the usage of a personal name Silin, Silyn seen in a number of names, such as Carn Silin and Llansilyn. On the first OS map of 1838, the form Craig-cwm-silyn is seen.

Trum y Ddysgl 710m SH 545517

Topographically a very descriptive name; due to the bowl shape of the cwm below the term *dysgl* 'a round or oval dish, bowl' is apt. Whereas the meaning of *drum*, *trum* 'a ridge or spur reaching out from a hill' is also apt; from the Old Welsh *drum*, Cornish *drum*, *trum* and comparable to Irish *druimm* 'ridge, slope, mountain'. Trum y Ddesgil 1781 Myrddin Fardd, Trum-y-ddysgl 1838 OS.

Y Garnedd Goch 700m SH 511495

The word *carnedd* is derived from *carn* 'cairn, barrow, tumulus or mound' + *-edd*; the *-edd* ending can be a plural ending; or, a nominal/special ending. The word *carnedd* is quite common in mountain names; here though, the change to a letter 'g' shows that there should be a definite article, namely a 'y' before the word. One finds the incorrect form Garnedd Goch 1887 OS, the definite article 'y' needs to be in the name for the lenition to take place. This incorrect lack of the definite article continues in the present OS map series.

The word *carn* can indicate more than just a man made feature. In the landscape the term can also refer to a rocky top, a crag strewn hill, scree features or even a cairn shaped mountain. Y Garnedd goch 1838 OS.

Mynydd Mawr 698m SH 540547

Mynydd Mawr is simply 'large mountain'; here the meaning of *mynydd* as 'mountain, hill' rather than 'mountain pasture, sheepwalk'. This is a prominent mountain when viewed from the coastal lowlands and because of its nearness to Caernarfon looks larger than others. The word is linked to Cornish *meneth*; Old Breton *mened*; and Old Welsh *minid* from the Brittonic **monedo-*. The meaning of *mynydd* has altered with usage; initially the term meant 'a prominent hill or ridge'. It is at a later stage that the word extended to indicate 'tracts of upland, moorland, heathland'; later still the term came to be used for 'common unenclosed pasture', not necessarily on high ground. There is a 22m wide Bronze Age cairn on this summit, much disturbed over the years, that can be seen from quite some distance. Mynydd Mawr Thomas Pennant Tours of Wales 1810, Mynydd mawr 1838 OS.

Mynydd Drws y Coed 697m SH 549518

As a topographical term *drws* 'mountain gap or pass' is very descriptive and is seen in a number of areas; Old Irish *dorus*, Brittonic **drust*; both words probably developed from the Celtic **duorestu* 'pass or gap in the mountains'. This one denotes the presence of *coed* 'woodland' in the area of the pass at one time. The name was taken from a couple of the farms in this area and then transferred to the mountain as the *mynydd* here probably refers to their mountain pasture or sheepwalk. The name does not need the archaic hyphenation sometimes used by the OS.

Moel yr Ogof 655m SH 556479

Moel 'conical hill' + *yr* 'the' + *ogof* 'cave'; the word *ogof* is comparable to Cornish *gogo*, *fogo*, *ogo* 'cave'; the name is seen on the first OS maps in 1838. Apart from its rather conical form, there is a prominent feature high up on the face of the cliff below the summit; this damp cleft is the *ogof* 'cave, cleft'. One early name may have been Moel Ogof Elen, that of Elen (Helen), the wife of

Macsen Wledig. The cave at 559478 may not have been that of Owain Glyndwr, his may be one on the crag called Y Diffwys on the northern spur of Moel Hebog.

Mynydd Tal y Mignedd 655m SH 535514

The valley of Dyffryn Nantlle was far wetter at one time, with more than one lake and an area of boggy ground above the lakes. The farm name is Tâl y Mignedd; so one finds *tâl* 'end, edge' + *y* 'the' + *mignedd* 'bogs, marshes'; the singular is *mign*. This mountain is again a reference to sheepwalk or upland pasture of a farm, the name does not need to be hyphenated. Tal Mignedd 1781 Thomas Pennant.

Moel Lefn 638m SH 553485

A *moel* 'rounded hill' + *lefn* 'smooth' (*lefn* is the lenited feminine form of the word *llyfn*) and this is certainly a moel with smooth slopes and a rounded top when viewed from the South, and most of the valley of Cwm Pennant. Some of its other aspects does not conform to its name as being smooth, with some very rough and craggy slopes to be found. Moel Lefain is the form of the name seen on the early 1840-80 6" OS maps; however, this may be an error. The term *llefain* 'cry, shout', is sometimes seen in landscape names such as Carreg Lefain 'echo rock'.

Y Garn 633m SH 551526

The meaning of *carn* 'cairn, barrow, tumulus or mound', however, in landscape meanings it usually refers to a rocky hill, similar meanings are found in Breton *karn*; Cornish *karn*; Irish *carn* 'pile of stones'. Although the term does not always represent a place where a cairn; a pile of rough stones stacked up to form a pre-Christian burial mound. They are present here, there are indeed two Bronze Age cairns to be found.

Mynydd Craig Goch 609m SH 497486

This mountain is probably given the name because of *craig* 'rock' + *coch* 'red'; this could be due to the presence of iron or other mineralisation. Otherwise, the southern and western slopes of this hill are covered in bracken, giving way to bilberry then tawny mountain grasses higher up; any one of which would be viewed as *coch* 'brown' in the autumn and winter. A little south of the summit, on the south facing slopes there is a scattered complex of ruined structures and enclosures. This shows that at one time this area, even at this height, was occupied. Craig goch 1838 OS, Mynydd Craig-coch 1887 OS.

Y Foel Rudd 573m SH 549544

Rudd is the lenited form of the word *rhudd* 'red, crimson', linked to Old Cornish *rud*, Middle Irish *riúad*; that developed from Celtic **roudos* and ultimately from the Indo-European **reudh-* 'red'. However, on the OS maps, ever since the 6" 1888-1915 edition, the name is given as *rúdd*; this does not exist as a word in Welsh.

Unfortunately, although *rhudd* 'red, crimson' is quite likely, the corruption of the words *Yr Hydd* 'the stag' could be an alternative. With a later rudd/rhudd concealment of the real meaning. It is a difficult choice and there is no absolute certainty; the spelling given on the OS maps is not an answer to this rhudd/yr hydd conundrum; these conflicting forms are recorded in a number of locations in Wales. Moel y rhudd 1838 OS, Moel Rhudd 6" 1840-80 OS, Foel Rudd 1888 6" OS.

Moel Ddu 553m SH 579443

The slopes of this *moel* 'conical hill' are certainly *du* 'black, dark' because of the rock colour as well as the shaded slopes.

Bryn Bannog 519m SH 576456

Although *bryn* 'hill' is a relatively rare as a name, it is cognate with Cornish *bren*, from the Brittonic

**brunniā*, which is similar to Old Irish *bruinne* 'breast, brow'. The accepted interpretation for the term *bannog* 'high, elevated, eminent' may be here; though an alternative *bannog* 'peaked, horned' could be in place. Although relatively low in height this is certainly a fairly obvious feature with some steep slopes rising to its long crest. Cornish *ban* 'height', Irish *benn* 'mountain, horn, peak'. Brynbannog 1641 Wynn Papers.

Moel Tryfan 427m SH 516563

In many places it is difficult to see the original form of the hill, due to the quarrying and the dumping of waste slate. However, when viewed from the north, the hill is quite smooth and rounded; it would seem to be a good example of the descriptor *moel* 'rounded hill' rather than a *moel* 'conical hill'. One would then think that the *tryfan* 'peaked ridge, crested top' term is an anomaly, however, on closer inspection, one finds that this bare and rounded hill has a rocky crest or jagged tor along its top; therefore, the name is quite apt for this little mountain. Moel-y-Tryfan 1838 OS.

Castell 388m SH 562495

The meaning of *castell* 'castle' is fairly straightforward for a buttress that reminds one of fortifications or battlements. However, the name on the 1838 OS map was Y Graig Ddu'; this would have served as a counterpoint for the sunnier Y Graig Wen on the other side of the valley, at 594507.

Mynydd y Cilgwyn 347m SH 498543

In its use in the landscape, the word *cil* 'nook, recess' + *gwyn* 'white' could denote a frosty hollow or conversely a hollow facing the sun. Cornish *kyl* 'nook, back part', Old Irish *cail* 'corner, recess'. Pen y Cilgwyn is the other term on the OS maps. Cilgwyn Common 1813 & Mynydd gilgwyn 1821 Porth yr Aur Manuscripts, Mynydd y cilgwyn 1838 OS.

Moel Smytho 343m SH 521577

Locally, the name used is either Smytho or Smythaw, a personal name to some; although in the past a derivation from the Middle English *smothe* 'smooth' has been put forward. If the term used in the name is (*e*)*smwythau* 'to ease or abate, make easy', this may have been as a descriptor of an easier ascent to the upland. Moel smythaw 1838 OS.

Clogwyn y Garreg 336m SH 557538

The term *carreg* 'stone' is comparable to Cornish *carrag* 'stone, rock'; Breton *karrek*: while the Irish *carraig* is borrowed from the Welsh. A very common word in the landscape and this little hill is covered with rocks, as well as many steep little crags. Although rather low, it is still quite striking, especially when viewed from Dyffryn Nantlle. On an old Estate map of 1777 the hill is shown as being called Carreg Lefain 'echo rock'.

Bryn Bugeiliaid 306m SH 483497

This bryn 'hill' has the straightforward name bugeiliaid, which is the plural of *bugail* 'shepherd'; this is cognate with Cornish *bugel*, the Middle Welsh *bugeil*. The bugelydd spelling in the first series of the OS maps is a rather old form of the spelling. Bryniau-bugelydd 1838 OS.

Bryn Ffynnon 303m SH 477493

This is a straightforward name, the bryn 'hill' is the location for a *ffynnon* 'spring, well'; it can be seen on the maps.

Moel yr Erw 290m SH 561449

The *moel* element is followed by a reference to *yr* 'the' + *erw* 'acre, area', which is the name taken from the farm Erw Suran. This is probably a late stage of usage of the word *moel*, where the

meaning is either 'hill' or 'mountain pasture'. The name has been written on the OS maps as Foel yr Erw since the 1888 6" series.

Moelfryn 277m SH 569512

This little hill is now covered by forestry does have a seeming *moel* 'bare, rounded hill' form; although right at the summit it becomes a bit more pointed with a rocky knoll, so *moel* 'peaked, summit' might be supposed. However, close by, on the present OS map is the name Y Gader, a name which was much closer to the actual top in the early OS maps. Furthermore, the hillside below was called Parc y Gader (now Parcygadair) and it is likely that the name Y Gader was this hill name at one time.

This may mean that this top is one of the **cader* 'stronghold' locations and there are stone walls to be found around the rocky knoll or top. The stone walls can be seen on the old OS 6" maps and some are still shown on the present 1:25,000 OS maps. Some of the walls around the knoll are similar to those seen as field boundaries in the area; other, stone walls have been built up against the rocky knoll. It is difficult to see why a rocky knoll would be used for a stock enclosure, these are not typically the walls of a sheepfold, with the rocky top taking most of the space. This would be a good location for a defensive site as it would control North-South movement between Beddgelert and Rhyd Ddu, as well as the ancient track over to Cwm Pennant. However, as the area is deep in a forest one cannot be certain, much has been changed with huge uprooted trees affecting the site and destroying some walled areas.

Was there some form of stronghold here; or, was this just a buarth or corlan that looked like a old stronghold? It would not be impossible to accept that multiple uses would have taken place; it would be an easy matter to convert a defensive site into a stock enclosure and vice versa. This area has been referred to many times over the years as *cader* or even *cadair* 'fortress', even though indirectly sometimes by referring to the lake.

'Linne dan cader erechiugui a quarter of a myle every way': The Itinerary in Wales; J Leland (1536-9).

'A little higher up South-East is a lake called Llyn y Gader 'Lake of the Fortress': Observations on the Snowdon Mountains; William Williams (1802).

'Llyn Cadair yr Aur Vrychyn, near Quellyn pool, on the road from Caernarvon to Beddgelert': The Cambrian Register (1818).

'Tradition speaks of a fortress which stood on the highest point of the hill, now turned into a plantation, which is on the left-hand side of the road, and a little way from it. This hill is called "Y Gadair", and the lake immediately beyond it has received its name from it — Llyn y Gadair. Edward Llwyd, the learned antiquary of Oxford, was of opinion that "Caer" was only an abbreviation from "Cadair". If so, and it is likely enough, we have here the Welsh word for fortress in its unabbreviated form. As the old Roman road passed this way, it is quite probable that this fort guarded this portion of it.': Bedd Gelert - its facts, fairies and folk-lore; DE Jenkins, WB Jones (1899).

'Llyn y Gader gynt Cadair-yr-Eurwrychyn': Y Llenor; WJ Gruffydd 1938. It is given as Llyn Cadair yr Eurwrychyn in the Melville Richards Archive.

Craig y Gesail 273m SH 545443

The *cesail* 'nook, corner' is a dogleg corner in the cliff, the hill has taken the name from this cliff.

Y Bengam 267m SH 555444

The hill has a curved top hence the name *pen* 'head' + *cam* 'bent'; the name shows a consonant shift because of the definite article.

Moel y Gest 262m SH 544389

It is difficult to decide which form of the word *moel* is in place, if it is reasonably early, then *moel* 'conical hill' is probable because of its shape, otherwise it may be a later generalised 'upland' meaning. The earliest name to be found for the hill was Y Gest; the term *cest* 'belly, paunch' is a good descriptor of this hill rising up from the estuary flatlands. There is a pre-historic hillfort at the summit. There was a description given, probably derived from E Lhuyd's work: '*Kest, the Belly, as y Gest in Merionithshire, Hergest (an legendum Hir-gest), i.e. Long Paunch in Herefordshire.*' *Glossarium Antiquarium Britannicum*. (1719) Gest 1306/7, Gest 1352 Revue Celtique, Gest 1562 Brogyntyn Manuscripts, Gest 1569 Tanybwllch Manuscripts, Y Gest c.1600 Llyfr Baglan, Moel-y-gest 1838 OS.

Clogwyn Melyn 235m SH 486537

When looking at landscape names with colours in their name, it is difficult to now decide why that colour was chosen or even what colour was being described. The colours in the landscape change with the seasons; also, colours change through the day. The differences in farming and farming practices also makes it harder to decide on what was being referred to. The term *melyn* 'yellow', has a range of colours going from pale yellow through orange to brown. Here, the word *clogwyn* 'cliff, crag' probably refers to rocky outcrops rather than a cliff.

Bryn Ystymcegid 190m SH 514419

A name taken from the original farm/dwelling: *ystym* 'bend, turn' + *cegid* 'Hemlock, Keck': *Conium maculatum*. Ystymcegid 1601 Dolfriog Manuscripts, 1627/8 Brogyntyn Manuscripts, Ystymcegid 1765. However, an old name would probably have been the same as the name for an old farm close to the hilltop, namely Cefn y Fan; Kevyn y Fan 1589/90 Dolfriog Manuscript, Cefn y Fan 1838 OS.

Bryn Du 184m SH 592466

The word *bryn* 'small mountain' is fairly common landscape name; seen in Cornish *bren*, Irish *bruinne*. The *du* is a reference to darkness of the rock or its aspect; though there is no need for the circumflex on the letter 'u' as is seen on the present day OS map name.

Bryn Hywel 159m SH 515418

The name is probably *bryn* 'hill' + Hywel a personal name; it has also been suggested that the hill was used as a mariners mark and that *hywel* 'visible, conspicuous' can be inferred.

Moel Ednyfed 136m SH 503393

This prominent little top, also known as Mynydd Ednyfed, suggests *moel* 'pointed, conical hill' + Ednyfed, a Welsh personal name. The name was in fairly common usage at one time; the Middle Welsh forms *lutnimet*, *Idnyuet*, *Edynyuet* from the Brittonic **Jüdonemetos* 'noble lord' or 'lord of the sacred place'. Ednyfed Fychan, for example, was the ancestor of the Tudor Dynasty. There is an enclosure around the summit.

Moel y Gader 67m SH 522392

There are a number of hilltop locations with the possible term **cader* 'defensive site' rather than the *cadair* 'chair'. In the chaos and strife of the late Roman occupation and the early Middle Ages, even a lowly hill such as this might have had some form of defence built upon it to repel raiders. However, there does not need to have been an actual hillfort there, the resemblance to a fortified site is enough. This little hill certainly has a summit that resembles a hillfort, with rocky scarps and

steep banks; though without archaeological investigation it is difficult to be certain about what might have been there.

Although *cadair* 'fortification' is in the GPC dictionary; it seems to some to be a later definition or interpretation of the word which they have argued (and some still argue) should be *cader*. One should note that John Davies wrote in his *Dictionarium Duplex* (1632) '**Cader, Septum, Castrum, locus munitus; ut Cader Idris, Cader Ddinmael*'. Also one finds the description: '*Cader (Castel) diffynfa. A strong or fortified place.*' *Y Gymraeg yn ei Disgleirdeb*; Thomas Jones (1804).

The 1837 OS map shows the nearby farm named as Bron y Gader, but another farm close by is noted as Ysteddfa i.e. *eisteddfa* 'seat, throne'. In the Mellville Richards Archive one finds a Bron y Gader recorded here in 1448 and the Eisteddfa in 1582. Is the *eisteddfa* 'seat, throne' name an erroneous back link or assumption; or, does it refer to the original reasoning behind the hill name, that it was a place of eminence.

However, it is not a particularly striking little hill and one now has a number of decisions to make. Was there an initial pre-historic **cader* 'defensive site' on the hill top. Was there a post-Roman fortification here because of the attacks and raiding. Has there been a later interpretation of the hill shape as having been fortified at one time. Has there been a mistaken back interpretation of a site of eminence; or, has the hill always been associated with a *cadair* 'seat, throne'? The choice of which element is to be found here is dependent upon personal choice and determination.