

MOELWYNION & MIGNEINT

This large area of upland to the south of Dyffryn Mymbyr, between Penrhyndeudraeth and Betws y Coed, is an area with some quite accessible mountains as well as a few remote spots, the peat covered western hills of the Migneint are also included here. Some of the mountains stand out as outliers, while the Moelwyn group forms an impressive front when viewed from the South, the huge dome of Manod Mawr dominates the eastern area.

Moel Siabod 872m SH 705547

A very obscure name, with conflicting explanations as to the meaning. It is now termed Carnedd Moel Siabod on the modern OS maps; the *carnedd* is a large and much disturbed Bronze Age Cairn at the summit.

In his early placename book *Enwau Lleoedd Sir Gaernarfon*, 1928, Prof. J Lloyd-Jones, who was from Dolwyddelan, noted that the name was often explained as being Moel Siabad, this being derived from a shortening of either Moel Las Abad; or, Moel Lys Abad. He wrote that the espousal of the idea that there was a link to *abad* 'abbot' in the first element of the name may have been due to the use of the term *offeiriad* 'priest' in the landscape, at the nearby at Sarn yr Offeiriad (SH 733543). Professor Lloyd-Jones also stated that it was impossible to arrive at siabod from either *(la)s + abad* or *(ly)s + abad*, via *sabad* to *siabad* forms. However, in the Melville Richards Archive database, the name is recorded in one case as being Moel Siabad, perhaps a reflection of the error. Instead, Lloyd-Jones proposed that there may be a link the Middle English *shabbed* 'scabbed'.

He also put forward the theories of others, a corruption of *jabot* 'cotton ruff, neckwear'; a term borrowed directly from the French *jabot* 'frill', also a fish name derived from the French *shabot*(?). Others have espoused *siad* 'crown, top' [a word borrowed from the Middle English *shad* 'parting of the hair' and also seen in watershed] + *ôd* 'snow'. The word *siad* is to be seen in the works of Guto'r Glyn (c.1412-93) 'Eisiau dur i'r siad wrol' [in reference to a helmet].

One other interesting term to keep in mind is the Welsh word *cabôd*, *chabôd* 'capote', from the French *capot* 'hood'; this was a long hooded cloak that almost came down almost to the ground. Did this peaked outline remind people of the sharp and pointed outline of Moel Siabod when seen from some aspects? French words would be assimilated quite early on and quite easily into the Welsh language. The result of many Welsh soldiers fighting as mercenaries in France; both for the English and for the French, a practice especially prevalent in the Hundred Years War. Moel Shabbowe 1552 Calendar of the Caernarfonshire Quarter Sessions, Moel Siabot c.1700 Parochialia, Moel Siabod 1719 Glossarium, Moel Shiabod 1795 John Evans Map, Moel Shiabod 1834 Greenwood Map, Moel Shabot 1840 Tithe Map.

Moelwyn Mawr 770m SH 659449

Once again one needs to discuss the moel form depending on the location from which it is viewed, this moel looks like a 'conical hill' i.e. from the South and East; while from the West it resembles a 'round heap'. The name is quite difficult to decipher fully because of other factors. With the definite article 'y' before an unchanged moel in the earliest examples given, this shows that at the time, the interpretation of the name was attempting to reference a bare or barren top.

The second element is a masculine (*g*)wyn 'white' not the feminine form (*g*)wen that one would generally associate as the element form to follow the word moel. This unusual combination has given rise to the suggestion that the mountain name may be derived from a reference to a person; perhaps as a form of nickname rather than a personal name. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know if this is either a mythological reference; or, a reference to a historical person. In 1352 an inhabitant of the valley of the Conwy, was recorded as being names Dafydd ap Moylwynn: the ap shows he was the son of Moelwynn.

Others have suggested that the name is simply an anomalous use of *moel* and *gwyn* (just to denote a mountain being frequently capped by snow). Another idea put forward in the past is that a personal name such as Gwnion may have been linked to these mountains to give something like Moelwynnion and later corrupted.

In his book *Enwau Lleoedd Sir Gaernarfon 1928*, Professor Lloyd-Jones outlined the usage of *moel* and similar terms in Ireland. He noted that although the word *moel* was often used in the landscape, there were differences in the mountain shapes. In the book his observation translates as: '**Moel** - It is the same word as the adjective *moel* 'bald' in its root, and the same development is found in Irish. Compare other than the adjective, *maol* 'promontory, hill, or ridge', *maoil* 'hill, mound, head', *maolán* 'bald head of a man or mountain'. The word must be as old as a name because of its gender and the number of examples.'

Note that there were also a number of further variations in usage, spelling and meaning to be seen in Ireland, this is probably due to the different Irish dialect forms such as - *moil*; *maoile*; *mul*, *mula*, *mulu*. If there is a lost link to an Irish term, a corruption of *maoileann* 'a brow, a black eminence, a beacon, summit or ridge of a hill'; or, perhaps Professor Lloyd-Jones' *maolán* might be suggested?

lleychweth y moyle wyn c.1592 PRO, *y moelwyn bychan a mawr c.1700 Parochialia*, *Moelüyn 1719 Glossarium*, *Moelwyn 1838 OS*.

Moelwyn Bach 711m SH 660437

The form of Moelwyn Bach is quite different to Moelwyn Mawr, the higher hill has either a rounded form, or a conical form; depending on where it is viewed from. These are the shapes that resemble what may be seen as being the accepted *moel* shape. However, Moelwyn Bach has a flat top and a very angular outline; it certainly has a bare top, but all mountains in Eryri have bare tops. This hill shape helps in the argument against a *moel* 'smooth' name interpretation for the mountain and perhaps a differing usage is taking place. *Moelwyn 1795 John Evans Map*, *Moelwyn-bach 1838 OS*.

Allt Fawr 697m SH 681475

Today, for most users of the language in the North, the sense conveyed by the word *allt* is 'slope, incline; bluff, cliff'; earlier, the other meanings of *allt* 'woods, wooded slope' that were generally used in South Wales were also used far more often. The general meaning in the Brittonic languages of a name form such as Allt Fawr would have been more akin to Steep Height.

Cnicht 690m SH 645466

The term knight only developed a sense of military follower, armoured horseman, from about 1300 onwards. The word is derived from the Old English *cniht* 'boy, servant' and cognate with the German *Knecht* 'servant, bondsman'. What is interesting is that although the Middle English *cnight* 'knight', looks very similar to the modern spelling, the pronunciation of the word at that time was very much the same as used for the mountain in Welsh today. The name may have arisen because of the mountain's pointed shape; with either a similarity to the pointed mediaeval felt hat commonly worn at the time; or, one of the many peaked shapes of mediaeval helmets. *Y Gynhycht, Pen Kynycht, Kynycht c.1700 Parochialia*, *Cynicht 1838 OS*.

Moel Lledr 672m SH 667481

This is the name on the Tithe maps for this location, on the OS maps the name has moved to 682491. A name that has been taken from the name of the valley and river, Afon Lledr. Looking at the early forms Afon Kledder and Glinne Kledr 1536-9 Leland; the name probably shows a link to the *caled*, *clad*, *clet* 'strong, vigorous' based river names found in Wales. *Moel Leder 1838 OS*.

Ysgafell Wen 662m SH 664485

The *ysgafell*, *sgafell* 'rim, sill, ledge' + (*g*)*wen* 'white' – in its feminine form; is a ridge leading up North from Moel Lledr. The word *ysgafell* is probably a word borrowed from the Latin *scabellum* 'ridge'. Ysgafell 1795 John Evans Map, Ysgafell-wen 1838 OS.

Manod Mawr 658m SH 727448

The general explanation of the toponym Manod is that of a place with *mân* 'little, small; fine' + *ôd* 'snow, snowflakes; falling snow'; perhaps for an area noted for fine drifting snow, the kind that blows about in high winds. While some have put forward the word *man* 'location' + *ôd* 'snow' as giving a sense of the place of snow or a place of snow in the past. However, *ôd* 'shining white'; is a further definition in the GPC dictionary; could this be a contributing descriptor here, a reference to the large areas of light coloured scree slopes to be seen on the flanks of this hill. In dry periods, and in the full sun, the slopes become even brighter and 'whiter' than usual.

However, if the early form noted in the Public Record Office is correct, namely *y mannad*, one must keep in mind the word *mannad* 'mass, lump, pat (of butter)' as a possibility, to describe a big rounded mound. Mannod 1586 William Camden Britannia, y Mannod 1591/2 Bachymbyd Manuscripts, y mannad c.1592 Public Record Office, Mannod 1722 William Camden, Britannica, Manad-fawr 1838 OS.

Moel Druman 656m SH 670475

The word *drum*, *trum* 'mountain, crest, ridge' is a fairly common topographic word. *Drum* + the diminutive ending *-an* gives the sense of a smaller ridge; the hilltop does have a short ridge. Moel-druman 1838 OS.

Moel yr Hydd 647m SH 672455

Another *moel* 'conical or pointed hill'. It is probable that the word *hydd* 'deer' is the main descriptor for this moel. However, there may be some confusion between the word *rhudd* 'red' and the descriptor *yr hydd* 'the deer'; this happens a great deal in the recording of the names. Moelwyn yr Hydd 1783 Thomas Pennant, Moel y Rhudd 1837 OS.

Y Cynniau 640m SH 660486

The word *curn*, *cyrn* 'heap, mound; cone, pyramid, spire; rick' is a feminine singular and should not be confused with another term *cyrn*, which is a plural of the word *corn* 'point, cairn'; the plural of *cyrn* is usually *cyrni*, *cyrnau*. One can find numerous heaps and mounds in this area, of various heights and sizes.

Moel Penamnen 2044ft 623m SH 716484

This hill is above the *pen* 'end, head(waters)' of the river named Nant Beinw, developing from a corruption of *pen* + *nant* + *beinw*. Although the name is not now seen on OS maps, the name forms Aber-beinwy and Aber Beinw are to be found on the 1840-80 6" map of the area. Although the cwm is very enclosed, forming cul de sac, the name probably does not come from the term *amner* 'purse, bag'; or, another older meaning of *amner* 'to be enclosed' as was supposed at one time. Pennamayn 1557, Penamnen 1655 Elwes Manuscripts, Moel Penamnen 1838 OS.

Moel Meirch 607m SH 661504

When viewed from many angles, the *moel* here could easily refer to a 'conical hill'; while *meirch* is a plural of *march* 'horse, stallion, steed'. The word *meirch* could be used to denote an area where horses were grazed; or, on hot Summer days when biting insects get too much, horses are often seen grazing high up to catch any breeze available. Moel-meirch 1838 OS.

Y Foel Boethwel 602m SH 652477

The descriptive term found for this *moel* 'hill' is *poethfel*, *poethwal* 'partially burnt gorse, heather, turf (for fuel)'; each of which was an important form of fuel at one time. Even in quite recent times, people used dried gorse for kindling, as it catches light very easily; however, it is quite likely that this was an area to collect turf for fuel at one time.

Y Ro Wen 594m SH 744497

Here the word (*g*)*ro* 'gravel, shingle, scree' + (*g*)*wen* 'white' is used to describe the river bed rather than rocks or scree with a white lichen. There are a number of prehistoric features on this hill that lead archaeologist to class it as probably being a Bronze Age cairn cemetery. Y Ro 1838 OS.

Carnedd y Cribau 591m SH 676537

Cribau is a plural of *crib* 'crest, ridge'; the term may denote the rocky ridges on the Western slopes leading up to the main *ridge*. The *carnedd* 'cairn' may be the one found further south at Y Cribau, which is noted on the present day OS map as the *maen* 'stone' + *pig* 'pointed' at Bwlch Maen Pig grid ref. SH 674531. Looking at the Aberconwy Charter 1198 one sees that the old name for this hill was Cerrig yr Ych, as it is the first height along the ridge after Llyn Llygad yr Ych.

Yr Arddu 589m SH 674507 & Yr Arddu 388m SH 627426

The Early Celtic **ardū*, Celtic **ardwo-* 'high'; which led to the Brittonic **ardu* 'high' and later Welsh *ardd* 'a height, a hill', Cornish *arth*, Old Breton *ard*, *art*, as well as Old Irish *ard* 'high, tall'; these forms are all derived from the Proto Indo-European **h₂erdu-*. Usually, the hill or mountain is quite distinguished by its stature or positioning; either set apart or quite striking when compared to others in the vicinity. Both of these hills, when viewed from a number of aspects in the valleys below, are quite imposing.

Moel Farlwyd 577m SH 707486

The same name is seen in the nearby lakes Llynau Barlwyd. Here the elements that make up the name are *bar* 'head, top, summit, crest' + *llwyd* 'grey, brown'. The term *bar* is associated with Cornish *bar*, from the Brittonic **barro-* 'end; summit', Old Irish *barr* 'top, summit, crest'; any of the possible meanings of this word would fit this location. For others, it is a name that describes a *marl* 'a grey clay', but it is difficult to see how to link a *marl* 'lime clay, loam' with this area of igneous or metamorphic rocks. Moel-farlwyd 1838 OS.

Cerrig Cochion 550m SH 663511

Cerrig 'rocks' + *cochion* a pluralised form of *coch* 'red'. In the Aberconwy Charter (1198) the names noted for this hill area was Ban Carw and Bankarw. In Middle Welsh *bancarw* was a term for deer antlers and also as a metaphoric term for spears; again used figuratively for an area of many points, hummocky perhaps. Otherwise, if not some kind of link to *ban* 'height, peak, promontory' + *carw* 'deer, hart'; some have sought an explanation as it being a reference to a *banc* 'bank' + (*g*)*arw* 'rocky, rough'. Cerig-cochion 1838 OS.

Y Foel Ddu 534m SH 670460

A straightforward name, denoting a *moel* 'hill' that is *du* 'black, dark' because of the colour of the rocks or peat; or, otherwise has flanks that are shaded.

Y Ro Lwyd 547m SH 758507

The word *gro* 'gravel, shingle' can also be used for areas of 'scree'; while *llwyd* could at one time be used to describe a brownish colour rather than the more modern interpretation of *llwyd* 'grey'. Y Ro-llwyd 1838 OS.

Moel Dyrnogydd 520m SH 695492

Probably named after the lake Llyn Dyrnogydd, as the name may refer to a plural form of the term

dyrnogyn 'perch'. However, the early lake names noted on the OS are very close to the plant name *danhogen*, *dannog* 'betony'; one of the common betony plants is Wood Betony: *Betonica officinalis*. Dynogydd. Llyn-dannogen 1838 OS, Llyn Dynogun 1840 Tithe map.

Manod Bach 511m SH 714448

The name is seen as Mannod in one of the archives; also, the 1838 OS map has the name as Manod bach but the larger hill as Manad-mawr. Manod bach

Moel Marchyria 487m SH 759466

March-yr-ia was one tentative suggestion for this name by Professor J Lloyd-Jones, with *march* 'horse, steed' + yr 'the' + *ia* 'ice' perhaps giving a sense of a mythical horse of the mountains.

However, if one looks at the numerous forms recorded over the years, it is difficult to choose a definite candidate for the name as they are so divergent.

What might support the presence of *march* 'horse, steed', is that this term is to be found in the valley below. The name of the bridge in the valley is Pont Rhyd y March (SH 763477), this *pont* 'bridge' is named after the *rhyd* 'ford' + y 'the' + *march* 'horse', is at the very foot of this hill. Some have suggested that there could be a corruption of *marchyrfa* 'horse race[ing]' in the name; or, a vocalised change of *march* 'horse' + (*g*)*yrria(d)* 'to drive (animals), course' taking place.

If the *mochurie* example of the name is correct, then it may be linked to a *mochyria*, *mochyria* 'to brim, to grunt', Middle Welsh *mocherya* '(of a boar) pursuing a sow'; this may be derived from a *moch* 'swine, boar' + (*g*)*yrria(d)* 'to drive' perhaps. These could even refer to the presence of wild boars in the area at one time? The suggested use of the old term *mach* 'field' + a corruption of (*c*)*yrriau* 'border, edge' may be possible but unlikely. In the past, other thoughts include a *mach* 'bond, surety', *merch* 'girl, woman'; perhaps coupled with an old form of *erw* and *erwaint*.

Moel y mercherie 1586 Wigfair Manuscripts, Mercherau 1658 Rowland Vaughan, Moel Merchere 1776 Caernarfonshire Land Tax Assessment, Moel Machyria 1838 OS, Voil *mochurie* and Voel *machyrie* 1859 Penrhyn Manuscripts.

Moel Llechwedd Hafod 471m SH 759487

Hafod is a common term in the mountains, the word is derived from *haf* 'summer' + *bod* 'dwelling' was where the shepherd would live with his family when caring for his flock during the summer months. Some were just small shelters, others were big enough for the family to move into; a number of these larger and lower *hafodau* became permanent farmsteads. Lleighweith yr havot 1541 & Llechwedd Havod 1656 Coleman Deeds.

Y Drosogl 455m SH 756766

This is a variant of the word *trwsogl* 'difficult, rough' is common in the landscape of Eryri and is seen in a variety of forms for a variety of difficult ground. The term could be used for land which is difficult to farm; or, for terrain that is difficult to cross.

Pen y Benar 431m SH 731502

It is expected that the original form here is *benar(dd)*; with *ben* 'top' + *ardd* 'high, height', Cornish *arth* 'height'. Pen y bennar 1838 OS.

Moel y Dyniewyd 382m SH 613477

Dyniewyd is a plural for the old term *dyniawed* 'yearling, young bullock, steer'. This hill was not a rounded *moel*; rather, *moel* 'pointed or conical hill' was closer to the shape of this hill. It would have been where the steers would roam. *moeldyniewyt* 1198 Aberconwy Charter, Moel y Dyniewydd, Moel-y-diniewed 1838 OS.

Y Grib Ddu 318m SH 496484

Y 'the' + *crib* 'crib, ridge' + *du* 'black, dark' does have a shaded north facing side and is quite a prominent feature when seen from the Llyndy end of Llyn Dinas. Crib Ddu 1838 OS

Mynydd Sugn 298m SH 486475

This is probably the Gorsedd ressygynt seen in the Aberconwy Charter 1198 (*ressygynt* = *ros sygyn*), if not exactly at this top it was probably the name for the whole ridge-line. The OS *Sygyn* may have been derived from local variations to the spelling; the farm and later copper mine are named *Sygun* today; the term *sugn* 'mire, boggy ground' could have described the upper slopes or the valley flatlands below. *Sygun* 1796 Cambrian Register.

Mynydd Llyndy 293m SH 626486

Named after the farmstead of Llyndy which probably owned the whole hillside at one time. This hill is marked as what seems to be *Moel tonyyn* on the first series OS map of 1838. If *tonyn*, one has to decide between *ton*, *twyn* 'broken surface' + *-yn* 'a diminutive suffix'; or, the other forms - *ton* 'uncultivated land'; or, *ton* 'crust, peel'.

Bryn Castell 250m SH 622485

This *bryn* 'hill' + *castell* 'castle' would almost certainly be the one mentioned in the Aberconwy Charter of 1198 as '*..... ad monticum qui in similitudinem castelli*' [to the hill that resembles a castle]. The little knoll forming this hilltop does resemble a Norman motte [on top of which a fortified tower would be built if it were a real motte]. In the charter, the next hill named is **Carrecereryr**, which would give *carreg* 'rock' + *yr* 'the' + *eryr* 'eagle'; this name is not on the OS maps. However, the 343m top seen at 618481, between Bryn Castell and Moel Dinewyd is almost certain to be the hill mentioned.

Moel Dinas 189m SH 626424

Another hill in a prominent position with a *dinas* 'defensive site' at its summit. Many such sites were re-fortified because of the depletion of occupying 'Imperial' troops for various reasons. The final exit was in 407 and the chaos that followed was a threat to a great many peoples. The source of these threats were varied, with local brigands and strongmen competing for overlordship in their areas. Irish septs or clans were also sailing around the western shores looking for booty; while there seems to have been raiders coming down from what is now Southern Scotland. There may also have been an invitation for some to fill a power vacuum in the area; invited or not, the Laigin of Eastern Ireland did become settlers in these Western lands. In a number of areas one can even see evidence of the development of fortified farmsteads, and not just along the coast, also one sees the re-fortification of other sites. Moel y Ddinas 1838 OS.