

RHINOGAU

The Rhinogau range of hills dominates the area between the Mawddach and the Dwyryd Estuaries. It is mainly made up of a ridge line of some quite striking peaks, interspersed with crags, clefts and heather. Travelling through this range of mountains would not have been easy at any time in the past, particularly in the wilderness of the northern hills. It is only towards the South on Diffwys that the terrain becomes easier. The highest mountain is Y Llethr, but the range is named after its most impressive mountains, forming the 'doorposts' either side of Bwlch Drws Ardudwy. There are a number of interesting Pre-historic sites to be found on the flanks of these hills.

Y Llethr 754m SH 661258

There are numerous meanings of the word *lethr* 'slope, hillside or mountain-side, steep ascent'; any of which could all apply to this mountain. The use of the definite article 'Y' makes a common term such as *llethr* special. *Llether* 1795 John Evans Map, *Llethr* 1838 OS. In Ireland the form *leitir* 'hillside' is often anglicised as letter; for example, the anglicized name Letterbreckaun is derived from *Leitir Bhriocáin* 'Breacan's hillside'.

Y Diffwys 750m SH 661234

The word *diffwys* 'precipice' has developed from the element *di-* 'without end' and *affwys* 'abyss'; giving a sense of having steep bottomless cliffs. This would be very apt when looking at its Eastern face. Y Dyfoys et Gweyne y Craye c.1592 PRO, Y Diffwys 1678 Merioneth County Records Office, Dyfwys 1795 John Evans Map, Difws 1795 Cambrian Registry, Diphwys 1838 OS.

Rhinog Fawr 720m SH 657290

Rhinog is a shortened and corrupted form of Yr hiniog, the *hiniog* 'door jamb, door post' is the upright in a door frame. In other words this mountain is one side of the frame of the *drws* 'door, pass' that leads through to Ardudwy know as Bwlch Drws Ardudwy. Yr Hinog Fawr 1795 John Evans Map, Yr Hiniog Fawr 1834 Greenwood Map, Rhinog fawr 1838 OS.

Rhinog Fach 712m SH 665270

This is the lesser or lower '*hiniog*' jamb or door post and is obviously linked to Rhinog Fawr above in framing the striking pass of Bwlch Drws Ardudwy. Yr Hinog Fach 1795 John Evans, Yr Hiniog Fach 1834 Greenwood Map, Rhinog fach 1838 OS.

Y Garn 629m SH 703231

To be simply titled, but highlighted by the use of the definite article 'Y' shows that this mountain does have a special or important resemblance to a *carn* 'cairn, mound, rock pile. Comparable to An Carn, Ireland. Pen y Garn c.1700 Parochialia, Y Garn 1838 OS.

Moel Ysgyfarnogod 623m SH 658346

This *moel* 'bare hill' is named after *ysgyfarnog* 'hare', the plural of which is *ysgyfarnogod*. However, despite the fact that the hares may well have been present, it is much more likely that the name was given because of the resemblance of some outcrops on the ridge skyline to the way that hares hunker down to the ground with their ears flat on their backs. The rocky outline of the crest is quite striking, in this respect, when viewed from Bronaber area (SH 7131). There is no connection to the plant named in Welsh as *Llys Ysgyfarnog* *Coeloglossum viride*. Moel yscyrnogod and Moel ysgyrnogod c.1700 Parochialia, Moel yscyrnogod 1749 Brogyntyn Manuscripts, Moel ysgyfarnogod 1838 OS.

Moel Penolau 611m SH 662348

The recorded forms of the hill name, such as Moel pren iole c.1700 Lhuyd, Moel y panylau 1838 OS may have deflected people from the meaning. The likelihood is that this *moel* 'bare hill' is at the *pen* 'end, head, at top of' + *olau* 'paths'; the element is one plural of the obscure word *ol* 'path'. There

are some ancient trackways and passes all around this hill. To others, it was an easy matter to suppose a link to (*g*)*olau* 'bright, light'; or, that *iole* may refer to an obscure form for holly (derived from Middle English *hollin*(?)). While the early OS form of *panylau* is the plural of *pannwl* 'small hollow' was an attempt to explain the name. The OS Foel Penolau is not a correct form.

Y Graig Ddrwg 596m SH 657332

The area is very rocky and the word *drwg* 'bad, difficult, poor, rough' could certainly be used to describes the rough, broken and rocky terrain found here at this *craig* 'rock'. Y Graig Ddrwg and craig ddrwg c.1700 Parochialia.

Clip 590m SH 654328

The term *clip* 'cliff, steep slope' could both apply here; generally the word *clip* would refer to the cliffs; however, it sometimes denotes the top of an area os steep ground or track, such as Pen y Clip. The word is borrowed from the English *clip* 'rise, cliff', which itself derives from the German *klippe* 'cliff'. In the area, one sees the form y clippyng (c.1592) for the diminutive Y Clipyn.

Moelfre 589m SH 625247

The *moel* element is in quite common usage in its various forms in the mountains; here the meaning of *moel* is probably 'high prominent or conical hill'. The term *bre* 'hill, height; promontory'; from the Brittonic **brigā* 'hill' seems to have been superseded by others descriptors is very early on in the uplands of Wales. Although it does have a long and complex lineage and is present in a number of other names such as Penbre. On the continent there seems to be more to a defensive sense to the element form, as in **briga-* 'hillfort'.

Llawlech 588m SH 631211

It is not the word *llaw* 'hand' or another *llaw* 'little, low, weak' that is present in the name, as both are rather difficult to interpret it as a descriptor for this location. It may be better described by either: a) a corruption of *llaw(er)* 'many' + *llech* 'rock, slab' to give a sense of a slabby or rocky area. Or, b) *llawr* 'floor, platform; ground': there is also a *llawr* 'obvious, pre-eminent', as it is a prominent ridge even though with a *gradual* rise. It is a very difficult name to be certain about as there are so many variables. Llawlech 1838 OS.

There is a Bronze Age Cairn on the ridge, as usual much disturbed. The disturbance of a cairn could have be done quite early on, the looting of funerary cairns for high status offerings would have been too much of a temptation. Later disturbances of cairns took place for the construction of shelters, either for people or sheep; or, for the construction of triangulation platforms. 'Llywllach, the guide of drifts, a mountain.' 1796 Cambrian Register.

Diffwys 577m SH 663351

Another Diffwys in this range, this time the precipice is on the northern flank at the head of Cwm Moch; the elements *di-* 'without end' + *affwys* 'abyss' give the sense of bottomless depths.

Moel y Gyrafolen 535m SH 673353

This *moel* 'hill' is named after a tree known usually as the *criafol* 'Mountain Ash, Rowan'; however, there are a number of other forms of the word, such as *criawal*, *cyrafol* and *cyrawal*. Here there is an *-en* singular ending. Moel-y-gyrafolen 1838 OS.

Y Foel Ddu 473m SH 634284

The word *du* 'black, dark' can be used to denote a hill that is dark because of the colour of the rocks or that certain areas of the north facing slopes are in deep shade in the morning. The hill has a prominent spur running down to the South to form a sort of top at Y Foel Wen, at (SH 635274); this (*g*)*wen* 'white' creates a counterpoint to the *du* 'black, dark'.

Carreg y Saeth 452m SH 644303

The word *carreg* 'stone' is derived from the Brittonic **carreci-* 'stone'. The other descriptor here *saeth* 'arrow, spear' may be a reference to the rather pointed or wedge shape of the hill. It looks somewhat like an arrow head, when viewed from Llyn Cwm Bychan. However, the term *saeth* could be because of a pointed rock or rib; or, with less confidence, *saeth* could also be used to define an area of woodland where the trees were suited to the making of arrows or spears. Birch, beech, elder and oak were all used in the mediaeval period for arrow shafts. The only real preference as to the wood used, was for ash in the making of war arrows, they were heavier as well as stronger. Noted as *karregey sayeth* c.1592 Public Record Office, both Pennant and Bingley mention Carreg y Saeth in their respective tours of Wales.

Craig Aberserw 445m SH 696266

The hill is named after the farm Aberserw, *aber* 'confluence' + *serw* 'sparkling, glittering'; the farm derived its name from the confluence of the river Afon Serw with Afon Eden. Craig Aber-serw 1838 OS.

Craig y Gwynt 431m SH 673363

The name of this *craig* 'crag, rock' celebrates the fact that it is an open place where you would often be affected by *gwynt* 'wind, blast, gale', from the Indo-European **h₂weh₁nto* 'wind' which also led to French *vent*.

Moel y Geifr 427m SH 635349

Plural of the word *gafr* 'goat', synonymous with Middle Cornish *gaver*, *gavar*, Old Breton *gobr*, Old Irish *gabor*; animals that are common in the mountains now, but were originally from the Middle East.

Craig y Ganllwyd 410m SH 708258

This hill and crag is named after the hamlet of Ganllwyd.

Moel Goedog 388m SH 619325

Coedog 'wooded, woody' is a name that has long since lost its cover; there aren't many trees on the slopes around this hill which is certainly *moel* 'bare, rounded' now. No surprise really because of the long history of habitation and use here; this particular hill has a great deal of prehistoric remains on its slopes and tops; which includes cairns, field systems, settlements and hillforts. *y foel goediog* c.1592 PRO, *Voel y Goedog* c.1700 Parochialia, *Moel-y-goedog* 1838 OS.

Mynydd Cwm Mynach 387m SH 677223

The *mynydd* 'mountain' is named after the valley of Cwm Mynach; instead of *mynach* 'monk' some state that there may be a link in the name to *mwyniach*, *mwnach*, *mynach* 'mines, ore' because there were many differing workings taking place in this highly mineralised area. However, there are quite a number of archived mentions of the name in the *mynach* forms, even in 1200 we find *Cwmmeneych* and *Cwmmenaich*; also, one has to remember the presence of Cymer Abbey nearby.

Bryn Brith 383m SH 664154

Bryn 'small hill' + *brith* 'speckled, mottled, multicoloured' is a good term for a hill with rock outcrops; or, a patchwork of vegetation. *Brith* is derived from a probable Brittonic **brixto-* 'speckled'

Moel y Gerddi 380m SH 620316

Moel 'bare hill, mountain pasture' + *gerddi*, the plural of *gardd* 'garden, enclosure'. The gardens to be found here are the patchwork of small ancient fields and enclosures, especially on its southern slopes. Named after the farm of Gerddi Bluog. *Moel y gerddi* 1838 OS.

Moel y Gwartheg 377m SH 678317

This *moel* 'hill' takes its name from the *gwartheg* 'cattle' that would have been found here. Even today, a number of breeds, such as Welsh Black cattle are hardy enough to be kept outside all year round; usually brought down to lower ground in the winter. Moyle E gwarthege c.1592 PRO, Moel y gwartheg 1838 OS.

Craig y Dinas 357m SH 624230

Craig 'rock' + *y* 'the' + *dinas* 'fortress'; although the old meanings that are usually associated with *dinas* 'fortress, fort' may not always be present. A further meaning 'refuge' may be the reasoning behind the name; as at one time, during periods of strife people would take their livestock and valuables up to remote heights, until the danger passed.

Y Gyrn 349m SH 642395

Y Gyrn is a hill that is likely to remind the onlooker of a particular shape: *currn*, *cyrn* 'heap, pile, pyramid'; and this is what is here, it is not fully conical but its rockiness does give a sense of a craggy heap.

Moel Ispri 321m SH 702202

Looking at the 1592 form recorded one might hope that hisbyn is perhaps linked to the term *hesbin* 'young ewe'; but it may simply be an error in transcription. Also, in the earliest record, the element *moch* seems to be a mis-transcribed form for *moel*. All the later forms, despite their own misspellings, apparently point to a recording of the descriptive name as being *is* 'below' + *bry(n)* 'hill'. In that it is below or under the mountains in the main range, it is at the base of a long ridge running down from Y Garn and is a prominent hill.

According to legend, this was the home of one of the giants associated with Idris, the giant's name was Ysbryn. A very similar name to the name of the hill.

Moylesbryn 1209 Cymer Abbey Charter, Moch hisbyn c.1592 PRO, Moel is-bri c.1700 Parochialia, Mollysbryn 1733 and Moilisbri 1743 Merioneth Quarter Sessions, Moel Isprin 1742 Pantlludw Deeds, Moel Ysbri 1761 E Phillmore, Bygones, Moel Ispri 1838 OS.

Y Figra 320m SH 656194

There was a locally suggested link to *bicra*, *bicre* 'attack, contend, quarrel'; or, with even less confidence, *pica* 'pointed, stack of hay'. However, the name is given as Buddugre from *buddug* 'victorious, successful; beneficial' + *gre* 'herd, flock' is alluded to in a Cambrian Register journal 1796 entry; perhaps as being a good area to graze a herd of animals. Perhaps one can accept a *bu* 'cow, ox, head of cattle' + *gre* 'herd'; the element *bu* is sometimes seen as *bi*. Apart from the hill, the name is used on a bridge and a mine that was initially opened to produce copper ore, the Figra (Vigra) mine became one of the more important gold mines in the area and was owned by the same company that ran the Clogau mine. Y Figre 1837 OS.

Bryniau Glo 319m SH 721213

Bryniau 'hills' + *glo* 'coal, charcoal' denotes an area where charcoal was produced rather than coal mines. Brynie Glo 1670 Nannau Manuscripts, Brynnie'r Glo c.1700 Parochialia, Bryniau-glo 1838 OS.

Y Foel Senigl 311m SH 599314

The name seen on the map at one time was Moel y Sensigl OS 1887. One must decide whether the original form was *senigl* or *sensigl*. If *senigl*, *sienigl* 'small piece(s), fragment(s); shattered, tattered'; to describe an area of rough ground; or, small fields perhaps. One should note that there is an area

of distinctive and ancient field system below this hilltop. Otherwise, *sanigl*, borrowed from the Old French or Middle English *sanicle* for the plant Clust yr Arth (Wood Sanicle): *Sanicula europaea*. However, if the OS map form of 1887 is correct and the word form is *sensigl*, *sensegl*, *senseg*; then these are alternative and obscure names for the following plants: Daisy: *Bellis perennis*; Ox-eye daisy: *Leucanthemum vulgare*; (pot) Marigold(s): *Calendula officinalis*.

Craig Gyfynys 270m SH 084382

Gyfynys was the name of the farm; cleared away in the building of Trawsfynydd nuclear power station and its cooling lake.

Moel Tecwyn 240m SH 637382

Tecwyn is a personal name, the church of Llandecwyn is nearby.

Trawsfynydd.co.uk