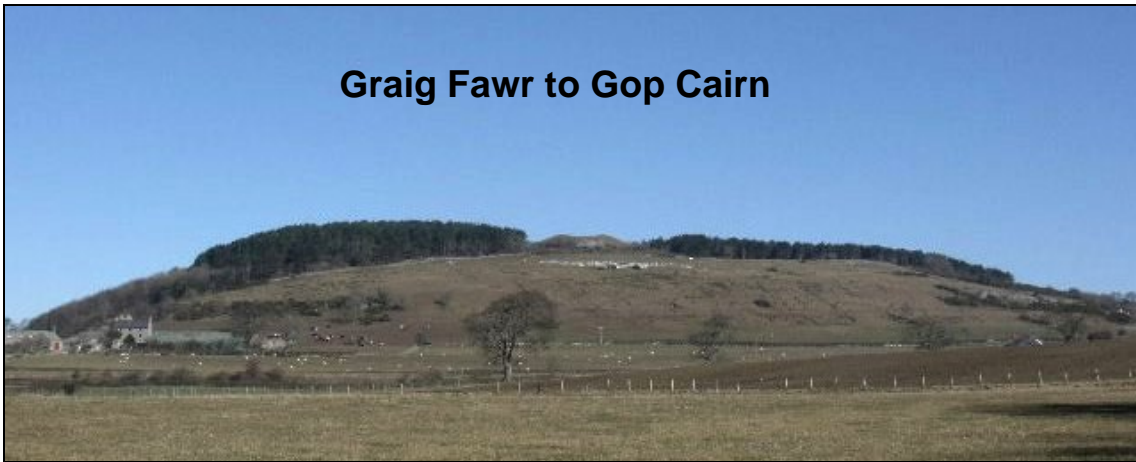


Graig Fawr to Gop Cairn



Walk Information:

Maps: OS Explorer 265

Distance: 6.5 miles / 10.5 kilometers

Duration: Allow around 4 to 5 hours

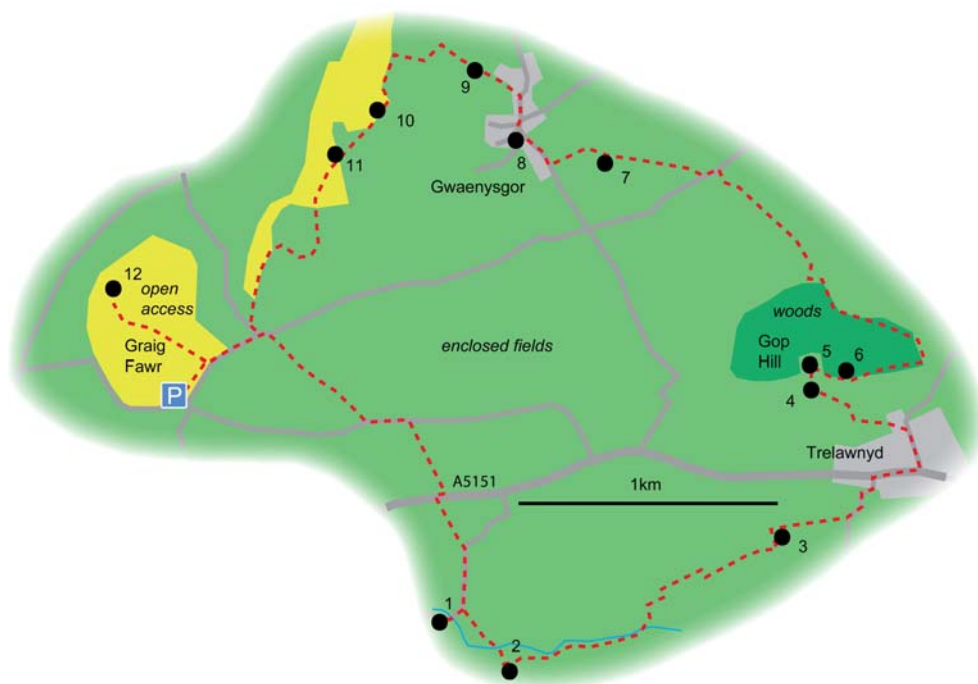
Difficulty: easy to medium. There is one short, steep descent on rough ground. A map might be useful, but not essential.

Start and finish: Graig Fawr car park **SJ 06208002**.

Walk summary

The walk takes advantage of public footpaths, permissive paths and short sections of road. From the car park the walk largely follows the Offa's Dyke footpath down to a valley with the ruins of two watermills, before taking an old trackway which twists and turns towards Trelawnyd. From the village there is a short ascent to Gop Hill, a prominent local landmark and site of the largest Neolithic cairn in Wales.

Descending from Gop Hill a series of footpaths lead through woods and across farmland to Gwaenysgor, beyond which the route rejoins the Offa's Dyke path along the edge of a limestone escarpment with good views, returning to the start via Graig Fawr.



Introduction

The limestone plateau of north-western Flintshire is a landscape of undulating farmland which ends dramatically with limestone cliffs overlooking the coastal plain on either side of the River Clwyd.

This area is rich in evidence for past human activity. Neolithic (4,300 – 2,300 BC) skeletons were found in Gop Cave, above which is the largest man-made cairn in Wales, which is assumed to belong to the same period. There are also numerous Bronze Age (2,300 – 1,200 BC) burial mounds on the plateau, several of which are visited during the walk.



The view from Gop Cairn looking towards Moel Hiraddug and distant Snowdonia

Although this is now a very rural area, during the 18th and 19th centuries in particular this was partly an industrial landscape, with extensive lead mining below Graig Fawr, at Talargoch, as well as lime quarrying and burning, and a number of watermills.

The Walk

There is a small car park at the southern end of Graig Fawr, between Meliden and Dyserth, accessed via a lane on the eastern side of the A547. From the car park go through the gate and onto the access land, which is owned and managed by the National Trust. Bear right, through an area of small-scale limestone quarrying, until reaching a gate leading onto a lane. Turn left and follow the lane to a stile on the right, just after the speed limit, signed for Marian Cwm. This is part of the Offa's Dyke path and crosses fields, over three stiles, before descending to cross a fourth stile onto another lane. Turn left and continue along the lane to a stile on the right, crossing a field to a further stile with views eastwards to Gop Hill. Continue alongside the fence to reach the main road (A5151).

Turn right and then cross the road, continuing over a stile, again following the Offa's Dyke path. This leads to another lane, where you turn right, descending into the valley. To the left are views of the Iron Age hillfort on Moel Hiraddug, the northern end of which has now been lost to quarrying.



Moel Hiraddug Iron Age hillfort

At the hairpin bend follow the lane around to the right and over a bridge to the ruins of **Grove Mill (1)**. The flour mill was built in 1815 and closed in 1912, reopening again in 1920 only to close five years later. The waterwheel was on the west side of the building and the arched culvert which supplied the water can still be seen. The embankment behind the mill was constructed for a branch of the London and North Western Railway's Prestatyn and Cwm line, although it appears to have remained uncompleted.



The ruins of Grove Mill (1)

Return across the bridge and turn right along a track, again signed for Marian Cwm. Follow the track to a junction with the remains of **Felin Fawr (2)** opposite. This was one of several mills which were collectively known as the Marian Mills. Although most of the flour mill has gone the remains of the large waterwheel can be seen, which was supplied by water from Ffynnon Asaph, now part of a small waterworks.

Turn left and follow the bridleway along an old lane, crossing a stream on a stone flagged bridge, after which the lane narrows to a sunken track. The many twists and turns reflect the pattern of narrow medieval fields which formerly flanked the lane.

At the next junction turn left and then soon cross a stile into a field on the right. On the opposite side of the fence is the low earthwork mound of a Bronze Age **burial mound (3)**. Follow alongside the fence, across a second field, before reaching a lane, where you turn left and continue into Trelawnyd. Cross the main road and turn right, then left, signed for Llanasa. There is a small shop and the Crown Inn further along the main road, beyond the Llanasa turn.

Follow the Llanasa road uphill and take the unnamed lane on the left after Bron Haul, at the end of which is a stone stile into a field. Follow the path to a signpost by a bench and turn right, uphill, between the patches of gorse. Head diagonally upslope to a prominent rock outcrop, at the base of which is **Gop Cave (4)**. The entranceway forms a natural shelter, leading to a cave beyond, both of which appear to have been used at various times from the Palaeolithic to the Neolithic. The site was excavated in 1886 and 1908 by Boyd Dawkins, and again in 1953 and 1962. A number of Neolithic skeletons have been found associated with pottery and a stone axe.



Gop Cave (4)

Continue upslope to a gate which leads to **Gop Cairn (5)**, the largest Neolithic cairn in Wales, from the summit of which there are spectacular views west to Snowdonia, south-west to Moel Hiraddug hillfort, and south-south-east to the Clwydian Range. The man-made cairn, which is around 14 metres high and 100 metres by 70 metres across, was investigated by Boyd Dawkins in the late 19th century, excavating a shaft through the centre of the cairn, giving the site its cratered appearance, along with two tunnels also driven in at the base. Although he found no evidence for a burial chamber it is generally assumed that the cairn may be similar to the Neolithic passage graves of Ireland, or possibly the much larger mound at Silbury Hill in Wiltshire.



Gop Cairn (5)

From the summit descend eastwards, noting a small Bronze Age **burial cairn (6)** immediately on the left before entering the woods. Continue to a gate where you leave the woods and turn left to follow the wall downhill. Turn left at the next gate to re-enter the woods, following the marked path leading to Carn-y-chain farm.

Turn right at the farm, through the yard and along the drive to a lane, turning left and then climbing steps on the right to a gate. After crossing two fields you will come to a low grassy mound which is another **burial cairn (7)** in the third field. From here the path bears right to a stile onto a farm track which leads left to the road. Turn right into Gwaenysgor village, passing the farms of Ty Isa and Ty Uchaf on the left, which are among the oldest buildings in the village.

A short detour on the left, along Ffordd Llyn Goch, leads to the **Church of St Mary Magdalene (8)**, which is recorded in Domesday Book, although the present building is later, possibly Norman in origin. Go through the churchyard and turn right into the village centre. For the Eagle and Child inn turn left by the phonebox, although the walk continues ahead, turning left along Ffordd y Ffynnon, which becomes a grassy lane leading to a **well (9)**, which was the main source of water for the village until after the First World War when standpipes were introduced.



The Church of St Mary Magdalene (8)

Continue ahead, through a gate and follow the path around the base of the hill to cross a stile and join the Offa's Dyke path, turning left. There are extensive views of the coastal plain around Prestatyn and Rhyl, with Snowdonia in the distance.

Graig Fawr to Gop Cairn

Descending slightly the path then rises to a small summit which has a **burial cairn (10)** hidden in gorse. There is then a short but steep descent on rough ground, passing the ruins of **Pant y Fachwen (11)** on the right. The two-roomed cottage was built at least 200 years ago but the ruins remained lost until the 1990s when they were uncovered during work on the footpath.

Continue along the path, following signs for Bryniau, around the top of a quarry and eventually meeting a lane. Turn left, uphill and then right onto a road, retracing the outward route back to the carpark. There is the option of an ascent of **Graig Fawr (12)**, a prominent local landmark and an important area for nature conservation. From the summit there are excellent views on a clear day.



The summit of Graig Fawr (12)



