

Moel Ty Uchaf stone circle and Berwyn burial cairns



Walk Information:

Maps: OS Explorer 255

Distance: 10 miles / 16 kilometres

Duration: Allow 7-8 hours for the circular walk, 2.5 hours for Moel Ty Uchaf only

Difficulty: hard. This is a long walk with 675 metres of ascent to Cadair Berwyn. Sections can be very boggy and stream crossing may be difficult after rain.

Start and finish: Llandrillo **SJ 03523716**

Walk summary

The walk takes advantage of public footpaths, permissive paths and open access land.

From Llandrillo the route follows a tarmac road and then a track, leading to the complex of sites at Moel Ty Uchaf, including a stone circle, four burial cists and a cairn. Passing a second stone circle, the track reaches the Berwyn ridge at Bwlch Maen Gwynedd. There is the option of walking to the summit of Cadair Bronwen, before continuing along the ridge to two burial cairns on the summit of Cadair Berwyn. The descent passes more burial cairns, including an unusual triple ring cairn. There are two stream crossings before following a track and then footpath, to return to Llandrillo.



Introduction

The area around Llandrillo, on the western side of the Berwyns, has been a focus for human activity from prehistoric times to the present day. During the Neolithic period, around 4,400 – 2,300 BC, the first farmers in Wales settled in this area, building chambered tombs near Cynwyd (SJ 04763961) and at Branau Uchaf (SJ 01123752). These tombs would have been built by the local community as ancestral 'houses of the dead', and may have been in use for many hundreds of years.

This tradition of monument building continued into the Bronze Age (2,300 – 1,200 BC), with a range of burial and ritual monuments being built on land above the valley floor, extending to the crest of the Berwyn Ridge at an altitude of around 830m. The majority of these sites are stone-built burial cairns which are typical landscape features of the Welsh uplands and would have been erected over inhumations (usually single skeletons), and sometimes cremations.

Stone circles are perhaps to many people the classic prehistoric monument, evoking images of Stonehenge. In Wales, most stone circles are composed of medium or small upright stones and are often sited in locations which were specially chosen as being either prominent, or else enclosed by the surrounding topography.

The Walk

Starting from the carpark in the centre of the village turn left and follow the road for 130m, taking the lane on the right after the War Memorial. At the end of the tarmac road ignore the turning on the left to Ty'n Cae Mawr and continue ahead, through a gate and then left along an unmade track which contours gently upslope with a boundary on your left. This routeway eventually crosses the Berwyns at Pen Bwlch Llandrillo, providing an ancient link between the valleys of the Dee and Ceiriog.

The track crosses two shallow fords and passes through four gates before reaching a crossroads with a group of conifers beyond. Turning right the walk now follows a track which linked the valleys of the Dee and Tanat, via **Bwlch Maen Gwynedd**. Continue through the gate and around 60 metres before reaching a gate through the fence on the right, near the end of the forestry, leave the track and turn left, directly upslope for 40m to a well-preserved **stone cist (1)** in a small patch of reeds at SJ 05445 37140. This is the best preserved of four such sites which are essentially small, stone-built burial chambers which may be prehistoric or medieval in date.



Cist below Moel Ty Uchaf

Contour around the slope to the ESE for 80 metres to a second, less obvious cist in reeds at SJ 0551137112. Beyond are two further cists, also in reeds, at SJ 0557737076 and SJ 0560037097. The **Moel Ty Uchaf stone circle (2)** is now visible on the skyline to the north at SJ 05613717.

The stone circle is around 12 metres across and is composed of 41 surviving stones which have been set on edge so that most are touching, with a general alternation of a larger stone followed by one or two smaller stones. There are two obvious gaps in the circle, which may be the result of robbing. Inside the circle there is a slight mound up to 5 metres across and 0.3 metres high which has been disturbed, probably by antiquarian investigations. Moel Ty Uchaf is an unusual site which may have had a burial and ritual function. Although it has the appearance of a stone circle, there are also similarities to the kerbs surrounding some of the upland burial cairns, and the central mound may once have covered a burial.



Moel Ty Uchaf Stone Circle

On a clear day the views are extensive, with an impressive skyline: SE to Cadair Bronwen; SW to Aran ridge; W to Arenig; and NW to the Carneddau in eastern Snowdonia.

From the circle head S, downslope to a raised circular **Bronze Age platform cairn (3)** around 16 metres in diameter at SJ 0564537112. This low earthwork is now almost entirely covered by turf but may originally have consisted of a ring bank of stone, possibly retained by a kerb, the centre of which was later infilled with more stone to form a level, circular platform. The function of these sites is uncertain and they may have had both a ritual and burial purpose and excavated examples elsewhere have uncovered cremations sealed beneath the platform.



Cerrig Bwlch y Fedw stone circle

Returning to the track there is the option of either returning to Llandrillo the same way or, for a much longer walk, continuing to the crest of the Berwyn ridge. For the latter, follow the track upslope through three gates, crossing improved pasture. Around 30 metres beyond the third gate leave the track and follow a small stream on the right for 80 metres to a small **stone circle (4)** at SJ 0588236160. There are five upstanding stones, and one fallen stone, and the site is well hidden in reeds. Return to the track and continue around Moel Pearce to a pass at **Bwlch Maen Gwynedd (5)**.

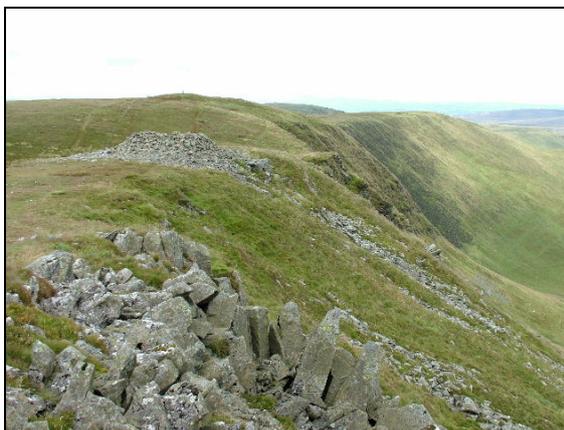
There is the option of a short detour to the summit of **Cadair Bronwen (6)**, which is surmounted by a burial cairn 23 metres in diameter, now partly hidden beneath a modern walkers cairn. A large natural boulder to the south-west is known as Bwrdd Arthur, or Arthur's Table. The views from the summit, and the Berwyn ridge as a whole, are extensive, taking in the Aran ridge to the SW, the Rhinogs, Arenig Fawr and then Snowdonia to the NW, and SE to the Shropshire Plain with the Wrekin in the distance.

Returning to the pass follow the obvious path along the ridge to cross a stile on the first summit, bearing right along the edge of the ridge. The trig point (827 metres; SJ 0722432719) stands on the low remains of a **Bronze Age burial cairn (7)**. Continue to the highest point (830 metres), passing a second, more obvious **burial cairn (8)** at SJ 0718032450 which has been remodelled to form a shelter.



The summit of Cadair Bronwen with the Berwyn ridge behind

Return to the trig point and cross the stile to descend W along an obvious path, which is boggy in places. Cross a second stile and continue ahead. Towards the base of the ridge a prominent pile of stones on the left mark the remains of a large **burial cairn (9)** which has been remodelled to form a shelter (SJ 0482033323).



One of the burial cairns along the Berwyn ridge

Return to the track and a waymark post at SJ 0467933462. An unusual triple **ring cairn (10)** lies immediately E of the post, with a small burial cairn 20 metres to the SW at SJ 0467933439. Continue NW to a ladder stile at SJ 0459833637, crossing the stream and heading through a gateway in the fence close to the sheepfold. The path contours N to a ladder stile at SJ 0472834264, continuing through a boggy area and heading towards a small rocky outcrop. At SJ 04734 34472 there is a small **burial cairn (11)** in reeds immediately right of the path.

Continue to a ladder stile at SJ 0487135100, cross the stream and turn L, following the path through a boggy section to a more obvious, often wet, track. On meeting a more major track go through the gate and through a second gate on the right into a field. A grassy track contours gently downhill, through two gates to meet a track which descends left through forestry. Continue through forestry and then ahead with forestry on right. Leave track at descending hairpin (SJ 0381536395) to follow path along edge of forestry which leads past Llechwedd to join a lane which returns to Llandrillo.



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Maps Ordnance Survey Explorer 255

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Duration Allow 7–8 hours for the circular walk, 2.5 hours for Moel Ty Uchaf only

Difficulty hard. A long walk with 675 metres of ascent to Cadair Berwyn. Sections of can be very boggy and stream crossing may be difficult after rain.

Start/finish Llandrillo SJ 03523716

Turn left out of the car park and take lane on right after the War Memorial. At the end of the tarmac road ignore turning to Ty'n Cae Mawr and continue ahead, through a gate and left along an unmade track with a boundary on your left.

The track crosses two shallow fords and passes through four gates before reaching a crossroads (with group of conifers beyond) where you turn right, uphill with a wall on the right. Continue through the gate and around 60 metres before reaching a gate through the fence on the right, near the end of forestry, turn left, directly upslope for 40 metres to find a well-preserved stone-built **shooting butt 1** in a small patch of reeds at SJ 0544537140.

Contour around the slope to the ESE for 80 metres to a second, less obvious **shooting butt** in reeds at SJ 0551137112. Beyond are two further butts, also in reeds, at SJ 0557737076 and SJ 0560037097. The **Moel Ty Uchaf stone circle 2** is now visible on the skyline to the north at SJ 05613717.

Head S, downslope from the circle to a raised circular **Bronze Age platform cairn 3** at SJ 0564537112 and then return to the track. Either return to Llandrillo the same way or, for a much longer walk, continue upslope through three gates, crossing improved pasture. 30 metres beyond the third gate follow a small stream on the right for 80 metres to a **small stone circle 4** in reeds at SJ 0588236160. Return to the track and continue around Moel Pearce to **Bwlch Maen Gwynedd 5**.

There is an optional short detour left, to the summit of **Cadair Bronwen 6** surmounted by a burial cairn and walkers cairn. The views from the summit, and the Berwyn ridge as a whole, are extensive, taking in the Aran ridge to the SW, the Rhinogs, Arenig Fawr and then Snowdonia to the NW,

and SE to the Shropshire Plain and the Wrekin. Return to the pass.

From the pass follow obvious path along the ridge to cross a stile on the first summit, bearing right along the edge of the ridge. The trig point (827 metres; SJ 0722432719) stands on the low remains of a **Bronze Age burial cairn 7**. Continue to the highest point (830 metres), passing a second, more obvious **burial cairn 8** with a shelter at SJ 0718032450.

Return to trig point and cross stile to descend W along an obvious path, boggy in places. Cross a second stile and continue ahead. Towards the base of the ridge a prominent pile of stones on the left marks the remains of a large **burial cairn 9**, which has been remodelled to form a shelter (SJ 0482033323).

Return to track and a waymark post at SJ 0467933462. An unusual **triple ring cairn 10** lies immediately E of the post, with a small burial cairn 20 metres to the SW at SJ 0467933439. Continue NW to ladder stile at SJ 0459833637, crossing stream and heading through a gateway in the fence close to a sheepfold. The path contours N to a ladder stile at SJ 0472834264, continuing through a boggy area and heading towards a small rocky outcrop. At SJ 0473434472 there is a small **burial cairn 11** in reeds immediately right of the path.

Continue to ladder stile at SJ 0487135100, cross stream and turn L, following path through a boggy section to a more obvious, often wet, track. On meeting a more major track go through the gate and through a grassy track contours gently downhill, through 2 gates to meet a track which descends left through forestry. Continue through forestry and then ahead with forestry on right. Leave track at descending hairpin (SJ 0381536395) to follow path along edge of forestry which leads past Llechwedd to join a lane which returns to Llandrillo.

