

Pen Cerrig-calch prehistoric cairns



Walk Information:

Maps: OS Explorer OL13

Distance: 8 miles / 13 kilometres

Duration: Allow at least 6 hours for the circular walk

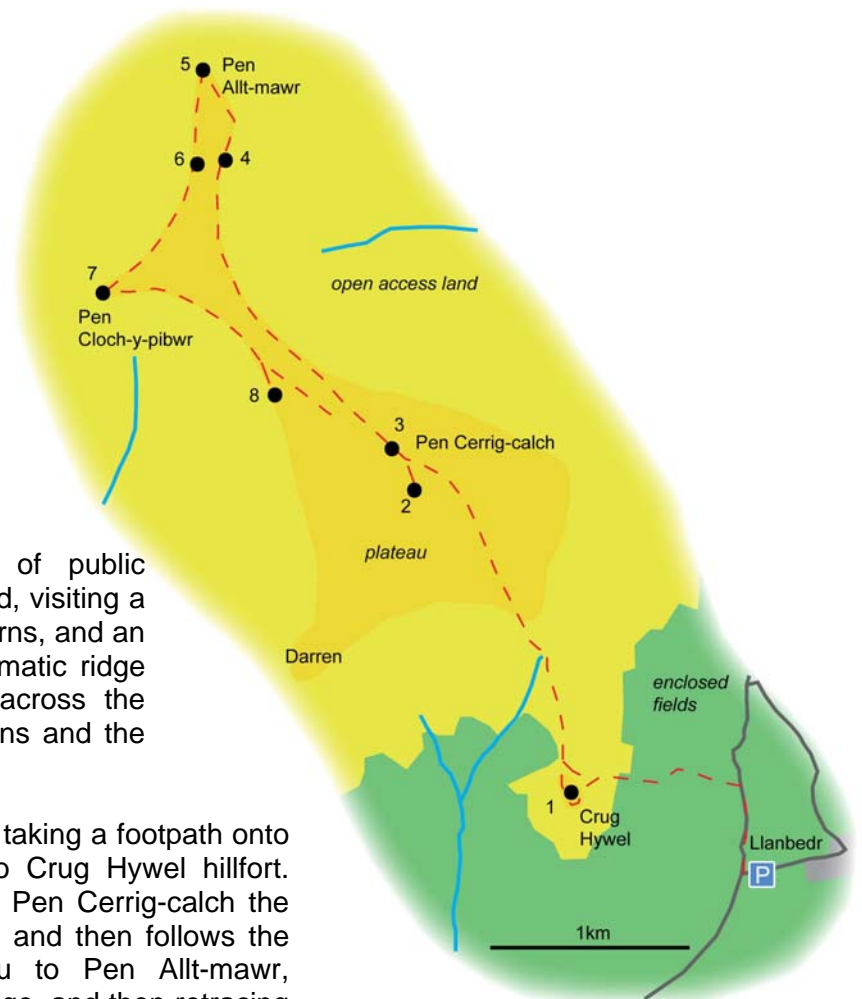
Difficulty: medium. Some narrow paths, occasionally rough underfoot

Start and finish: SO 23422027

Walk summary

The walk takes advantage of public footpaths and open access land, visiting a number of prehistoric burial cairns, and an Iron Age hillfort. This is a dramatic ridge walk with spectacular views across the Usk Valley, the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains.

The walk follows a lane before taking a footpath onto the open moorland and up to Crug Hywel hillfort. Ascending onto the summit of Pen Cerrig-calch the route passes two burial cairns and then follows the eastern edge of the plateau to Pen Allt-mawr, returning along the opposite edge, and then retracing the outward route.



Introduction

The upland ridge which runs from Pen Allt Mawr southwards to Pen Cerrig-calch is predominantly composed of Old Red Sandstone. One notable feature, however, is the outcrop of limestone close to the summit of Pen Cerrig-calch which gives the area both its name and its distinctive character.

This area has a wealth of archaeological sites, the earliest of which are numerous burial monuments dating from the Bronze Age (2,300 – 1,200 BC) which are scattered across the ridge top. The stone-built burial cairns are typical landscape features of the Welsh uplands and would have been erected over inhumations (usually single skeletons), and sometimes cremations. There is some evidence for associated settlement in the form of an enclosure containing a number of small, circular huts. It seems likely that these monuments are connected in some way with the exploitation of upland summer grazing.



Crug Hywel Hillfort

During the Iron Age (1200 BC – 74 AD) the local inhabitants built a defended settlement, or hillfort, on the summit of Crug Hywel (Table Mountain), a prominent outcrop at the southern end of the main ridge.

The lower slopes on either side of the ridge contain evidence of later human activity in the form of stock enclosures, field banks, shelters and 'summer dwellings', or 'hafods', dating from the medieval period onwards. There are also a number of sandstone quarries.

The Walk

There is limited parking on the roadside near Ty Mawr farm. From Crickhowell follow signs for Llanbedr, turning right at the mini roundabout and then first left. Park on the right, immediately after the turning for Llanbedr.

It is also possible to start from the main car park in Crickhowell (SO 21891836), although this would add 2.5 miles to the walk and involves more road walking.

Walk along the road, passing Ty Mawr, and follow the signed route for Table Mountain and Perth-y-Pia along a concrete track. At Perth-y-Pia cross the

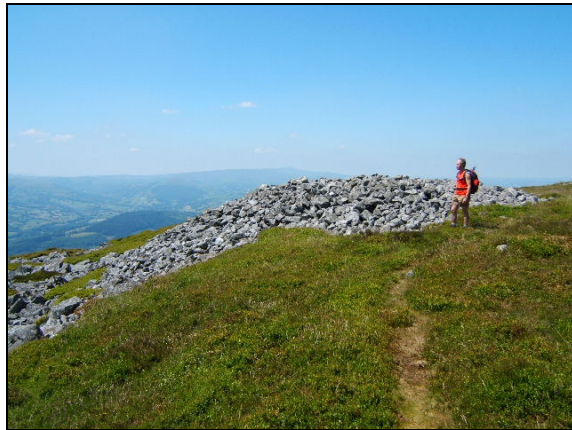


Iron Age hut near the entrance to Crug Hywel Hillfort

stile on the right of the buildings and follow the fence on the right to a gate which leads onto the moorland.

Continue straight ahead up a steep, grassy slope and bear left below a small crag. The path leads upslope to the entrance of **Crug Hywel Iron Age hillfort (1)** (SO 22602068) with its impressive rock-cut defensive ditch. Once inside the hillfort note the low stony bank of an Iron Age hut just inside the entrance on the left, partly beneath a modern shelter. Follow the top of the ramparts around the south and west sides of the hillfort which give spectacular views of the Sugar Loaf, and along the Usk Valley with Crickhowell to the south, as well as north-west towards Pen-y-fan in the distance. A series of levelled platforms inside the western ramparts mark the position of several more Iron Age huts.

Follow a narrow path which descends just to the east of the northern corner of the hillfort. The path crosses a saddle and rises steeply to join a more major track rising from the right at SO 2237421395. Turn left and follow the track, which leads to the summit of Pen Cerrig-calch.



Burial cairn on Pen Cerrig-calch

From the trig point (SO 21708222361) a short detour to the SSE leads to an impressive **Bronze Age burial cairn (2)** at SO 2175222233. Return to the trig point and continue to a second **burial cairn (3)**, now remodelled into a shelter (SO 21662241).

Continue N beyond the cairn and descend to a saddle, following the path around the right hand edge of the plateau, passing a small **stone shelter (4)** at SO 2082123895 and leading to the summit of Pen Allt-mawr (SO 20692433). The trig point and shelter occupy a badly damaged **burial cairn (5)**. There are spectacular views N to Mynydd Troed and Castell Dinas, W to Pen y Fan and E to the Black Mountains.

Head S along a narrow path on the W edge of the plateau, past another prominent **Bronze Age burial cairn (6)** (SO 2064523870) and on to a further **burial cairn (7)** at Pen Gloch-y-pibwr (SO 2020123205). This is believed to be the site where, on 2nd July 1924, the Rector of Llanfihangel Cwm-Du, Rev. W.A. Davies and two companions, took shelter. They removed stones to a depth of 0.75 m and revealed a ruined cist. Returning the following day they removed the covering slab and recovered several sherds of pottery.



Burial cairn on Pen Allt Mawr

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Follow the path E then SE along the plateau edge. At SO 2097022864 take the narrow path on the right which continues close to the edge, passing two **circles of stones (8)** on the left which may represent prehistoric roundhuts (at SO 21012279 and SO 21052271). Return to the main track and continue back to the summit of Pen Cerrig-calch, then retrace the outward path across the summit. Descending towards Crug Hywel hillfort there are a number of path options which will take you back to the field gate at Perth-y-Pia.



Possible prehistoric hut below Pen Cerrig-calch



Pen Cerrig-calch Bronze Age burial cairns

Maps Ordnance Survey Outdoor Leisure 13

Distance 8 miles / 13 kilometres

Duration Allow at least 6 hours for the circular walk

Difficulty Medium. Some narrow paths, occasionally rough underfoot

Start/finish SO 23422027

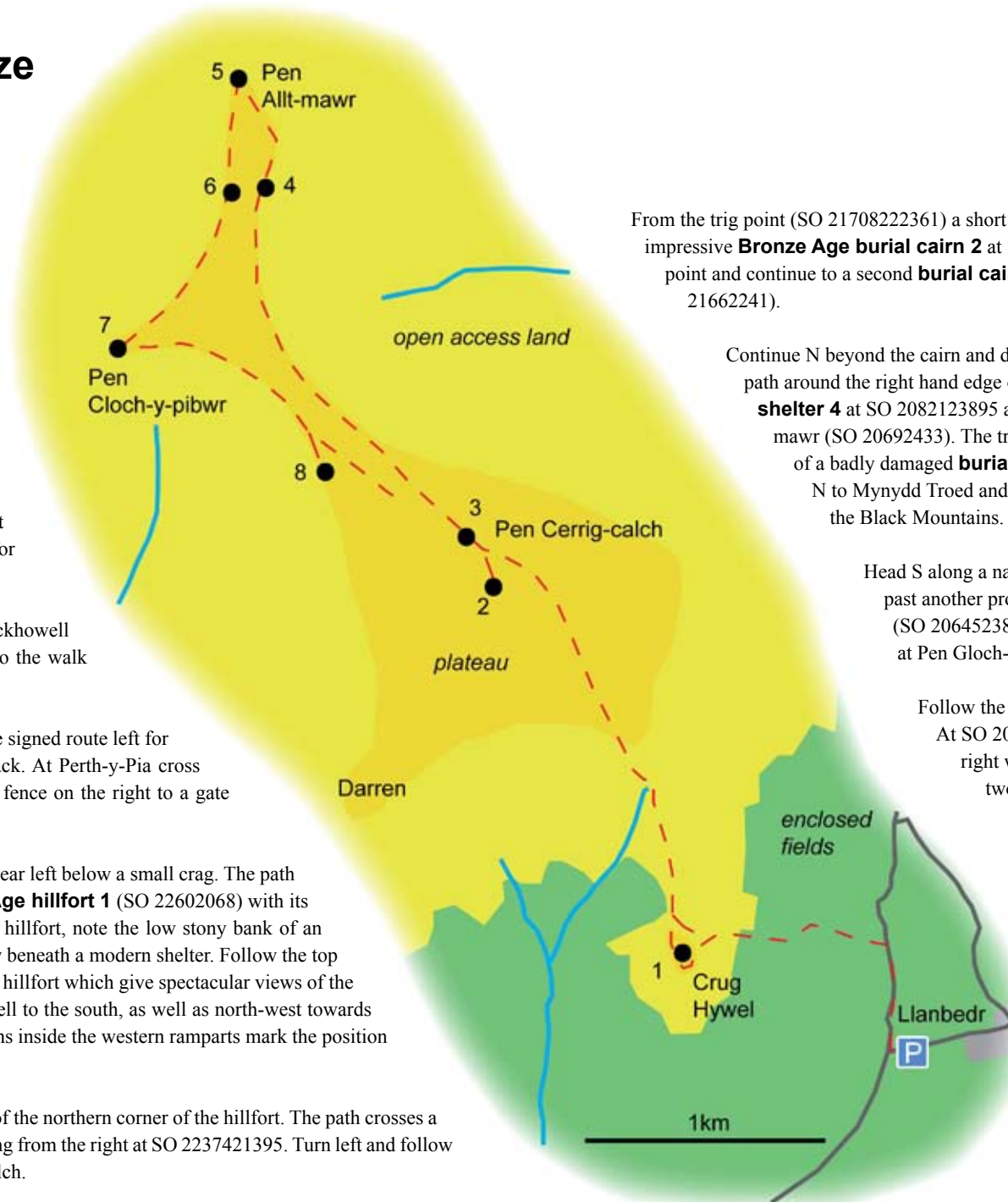
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It is also possible to start from the main car park in Crickhowell (SO 21891836), although this would add 2.5 miles to the walk and involves more road walking.

Walk along the road, passing Ty Mawr, and follow the signed route left for Table Mountain and Perth-y-Pia along a concrete track. At Perth-y-Pia cross the stile on the right of the buildings and follow the fence on the right to a gate which leads onto the moorland.

Continue straight ahead up a steep, grassy slope and bear left below a small crag. The path leads upslope to the entrance of **Crug Hywel Iron Age hillfort 1** (SO 22602068) with its impressive rock-cut defensive ditch. Once inside the hillfort, note the low stony bank of an Iron Age hut just inside the entrance on the left, partly beneath a modern shelter. Follow the top of the ramparts around the south and west sides of the hillfort which give spectacular views of the Sugar Loaf, and along the Usk valley with Crickhowell to the south, as well as north-west towards Pen-y-fan in the distance. A series of levelled platforms inside the western ramparts mark the position of several Iron Age huts.

Follow a narrow path which descends just to the east of the northern corner of the hillfort. The path crosses a saddle and rises steeply to join a more major track rising from the right at SO 2237421395. Turn left and follow the track, which leads to the summit of Pen Cerrig-calch.



From the trig point (SO 21708222361) a short detour to the SSE leads to an impressive **Bronze Age burial cairn 2** at SO 2175222233. Return to the trig point and continue to a second **burial cairn 3**, now remodelled into a shelter (SO 21662241).

Continue N beyond the cairn and descend to a saddle, following the path around the right hand edge of the plateau, passing a small **stone shelter 4** at SO 2082123895 and leading to the summit of Pen Allt-mawr (SO 20692433). The trig point and shelter occupy the remains of a badly damaged **burial cairn 5**. There are spectacular views N to Mynydd Troed and Castell Dinas, W to Pen y Fan and E to the Black Mountains.

Head S along a narrow path on the W edge of the plateau, past another prominent **Bronze Age burial cairn 6** (SO 2064523870) and on to a further **burial cairn 7** at Pen Gloch-y-pibwr (SO 2020123205).

Follow the path E then SE along the plateau edge. At SO 2097022864 take the narrow path on the right which continues along the edge, passing two small **circles of stones 8** on the left which may represent prehistoric roundhuts (at SO 21012279 and SO 21052271).

Return to the main track and continue back to the summit of Pen Cerrig-calch, then retrace the outward path across the summit. Descending towards Crug Hywel hillfort there are a number of path options which will take you back to the field gate at Perth-y-Pia.