

The Black Mountain – Y Mynydd Du (Glyntawe Circular)			The Black Mountain (return via Shake Holes Route)		
1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check	1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check
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## The Black Mountain – Y Mynydd Du (Glyntawe Circular)

**Start & Finish:** Glyntawe, Field Study Centre Bus Stop

Glyntawe, Field Study Centre Bus Stop, map reference SN 846 167, is 248 km west of Charing Cross, 208m above sea level and in the Tawe (or Swansea) Valley (Cwm Tawe in Welsh) in **Powys, Wales**.

**Length:** 21.9 km (13.6 mi), of which 200m are on tarmac or concrete.

**Cumulative ascent/descent:** 1006m.

For a shorter walk, an alternative start and an alternative return route, see below **Walk Options**.

**Toughness:** 8 out of 10

**Time:** 6 ½ hours walking time.

**Transport:** Glyntawe, Field Study Centre Bus Stop is on line T6 (Swansea- Neath - Brecon), with a roughly hourly service Mon-Sat and 6 on Sundays and Bank Holidays, and a journey time of 40 mins from Neath (and 35 mins from Brecon). The journey time by train from London to Neath is from 2 ½ hours.

**Saturday Walkers' Club:** This walk is doable as a daywalk from London with a very early start or if you have motorised transport. Accommodation is available nearby in Craig-Y-Nos, Pen-Y-Cae or Abercraf, and further along the bus line in Ystradgynlais, Sennybridge or Brecon.

**OS Landranger Map:** 160 (Brecon Beacons)

**OS Explorer Map:** OL12 (Brecon Beacons National Park)

### Walk Notes:

The Black Mountain/Y Mynydd Du, in the Western Brecon Beacons, is often referred to as the last wilderness in the Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park, and a walk along it as South Britain's best ridge walk. It traverses a series of high peaks along a sequence of steep dramatic escarpments and features some of the most spectacular upland scenery in Britain. The route involves remote and rugged terrain, with a couple of glacial lakes and superb mountain views and leads almost entirely through open country. From the Tawe Valley you rise steeply up a grassy hillside onto the first ridge, Fan Hir, and soon follow its edge with some far views to the two famous peaks in the Central Beacons: Pen y Fan and Corn Du. After dropping into a saddle, you re-ascend to Fan Brycheiniog and then onto the northerly top Fan Foel. The views of the moorland and open country to the north are spectacular, and reveal the isolation of the range. Turn west through a deep saddle to conquer the even more spectacular ridge of Bannau Sir Gaer. The return route along the bottom of the steep escarpments, past some glacial lakes and moraines, reveals a different and fascinating perspective of the high buttresses and some steeply carved valleys below. Shorter circular or out-and-back options, as well as a start from near the northerly end, are described. An alternative return route from the last top initially leads through open pathless, sometimes boggy, moorland, then through a veritable moonscape of shake holes, swallow holes, pot holes and limestone pavement before dropping back into the Tawe Valley/Cwm Tawe.

Note: The Black Mountains (plural) are a range of hills in the Eastern Brecon Beacons.

## Walk Options

**An out-and-back steeply onto the ridge then to any of the peaks:** from 10.9 km/6.8 mi.

**An out-and-back steeply onto the ridge then to any of the peaks, but descending from the Bwlch Giedd (saddle) onto the main walk's valley return route:** from 12.0 km/7.5 mi.

**An Alternative Ascent Route**, recommended in wet and/or windy conditions: walk along the foot of the Fan Hir escarpment and then late onto the ridge at the Bwlch Giedd (saddle), this cuts 110m ascent.

**A Short Circular Walk:** cut out the Bannau Sir Gaer ridge by descending the flank of the northerly peak Fan Foel to join the main walk's valley return route: 15.6 km/9.7 mi with 720m ascent, rated **6/10**.

**A Medium Circular Walk:** cut out the Bannau Sir Gaer ridge by descending from the Bwlch Blean-Twrch between Fan Foel and Picws Du to join the main walk's valley return route: 17.4 km/10.8 mi with 730m ascent, rated **6/10**.

**An Alternative Start from the north** (motorised transport needed): this adds 1.0 km/0.6 mi distance and 94m ascent, but the pubs in Glyntawe become possible lunch stops, ca. 10.0 km/6.3 mi into the walk. You can also combine this start with one of the alternative ascents to the ridge for a short or medium circular walk (picnic lunch only though). For details see the write-up.

**An Alternative Return Route** leads on a westerly loop from the last top on Waun Lefrith via an area of Shake Holes and Swallow Holes to Glyntawe, total length: 20.4 km/12.7 mi with 873m ascent, rating **7/10**.

**[!]** This includes a stretch of pathless walking through a grassy boggy hillside and requires good map-and-compass skills or a reliable GPS-led device, and is not recommended in poor visibility. **[!]**

A Diversion to **the beautiful Sgwd Ddu** (Black Waterfall) on the Afon Haffes (the Haffes River) adds 0.6 km and 42m ascent to this route.

## Lunch:

Picnic.

**Tea** (details last updated 20/10/2023)

**Tafarn Y Garreg** A4067, Glyntawe, Swansea, Powys, SA9 1GS (01639 731 415, <http://www.tafarnygarreg.co.uk/>). Open Tue-Thu 16.00-22.00, Fri 13.00-23.00, Sat 12.00-23.00 and Sun 12.00-18.00. Food served from 18.00 on Fridays.

**The Gwyn Arms** A4067, Glyntawe, Swansea, Powys, SA9 1GP (01639 730 310).

A roadside pub in a picturesque valley with a large garden, offering good value pub food.

## Welsh Glossary

aber: estuary, confluence, river mouth; afon: river; allt: hillside, cliff; aran: high place; ban/fan/bannau (pl): peak, beacon, crest, hill, mountain; big: peak; blaen: source of river, head of valley; bod: dwelling; bre: hill; bron: hill-breast; bryn: hill; bwlch: gap, col, pass; cadair: chair; cae: field; caer/gaer: stronghold, fort; capel: chapel; carn/garn/carnedd/garnedd: cairn/heap of stones, tumulus; carreg/garreg: stone, rock; castell: castle; cefn: ridge, hillside; celli: grove, copse; cerwyn: pot-hole; cist: chest; clwyd: hurdle, gate; clog/clogwyn: cliff; clun: meadow; clydach: torrent; coch/goch: red; coed: wood; craig/graig: rock; crib/cribyn: crest, ridge, summit; crug: mound; cul: narrow; cwm: hanging valley, corrie, bowl, dale; cyfrwy: ridge between two summits (saddle); ddinas: fort; dibyn: steep slope, precipice; diffwys: precipice, abyss; dim: no; din: hill-fortress; disgwylfa: place of observation, look-out point; dôl: meadow; du/ddu: black, dark; dwfr/dŵr: water; dyffryn: valley; -dyn: fortified enclosure; eglwys: church; eira: snow; eisteddfod: meeting-place, assembly; esgair: ridge; fach/bach: small; fawr/mawr: large; fechan: smaller; ffald: sheep-fold, pound, pen, run; ffordd: way, road; ffridd: pasture; ffrwd: stream, torrent; ffynnon: spring, well; gallt: wooded hill; ganol: middle; garth: promontory, hill, enclosure; glan/lan: river-bank, hillock; glas: green, when referring to grass, pasture or leaves; or blue, when relating to the sea or air; glyn: deep valley, glen; gors: bog; gorsedd: tumulus, barrow, hillock; gwyddfa: mound, tumulus; gwylfa: look-out point; gwyn/gwen: white; gwynt: wind; hafn: gorge, ravine; hafod: summer dwelling; hen: old; hendre(f): winter dwelling, old home, permanent abode; heol: road; hesgyn: bog; hir: long; is: below, lower; llan: church, monastery; llawr: level area, floor of valley; llech: slab, stone, rock, rock; llther: slope; lluest: shieling, cottage, hut; llwch: lake, dust; llwybr: path; llwyd: grey, brown; llwyn: bush, grove; llyn: lake; llynwyn: pool, puddle, moat; isa(f): lower, lowest; maen: stone; maes: open field, plain; mawn: peat; mawnog: peat-bog; melyn: yellow; merthyr: burial place, church; moel/foel: bare, bald/bare hill; mynydd: mountain, moorland; nant: brook, stream, dingle, glen; neuadd: hall; newydd: new; ogof/gogof: cave; pant: hollow; parc: park, field, enclosure; pen: head, top, end, edge; penrhyn: promontory; pentre(f): homestead, village; perfedd: middle; perth: bush, brake, hedge; plas: hall, mansion; pont/bont: bridge; porth: gate, gateway, harbour, bay, landing-place, ferry; pwll: pit, pool; rhiw: hill, slope; rhos: moor, promontory; rhudd: red, crimson; rhyd: ford; sarn: causeway; sgwd/rhaeadr: waterfall; sticill: stile; sych: dry; tafarn: tavern; tâl: end, top; talar: headland (of field); tan/dan: below; tarren/darren: escarpment; tir: land, territory; tor: break, gap; tre/tref: settlement, hamlet, town; twlch: tump, knoll; twll: hole, pit; tŵr: tower; tŷ: house; twyn: hill; uchaf: upper, highest; uwch: above, over; waun/gwaun: moorland, meadow; wen/wyn: white; y, yr, `r: the; ynys: island, holm, river-meadow; ysgol: ladder, formation on mountain-side/school; ysgwydd: shoulder (of mountain); ystafell: chamber, hiding-place; ystrad: wide valley, holm, river-meadow.

## Notes:

### Glyntawe

Glyntawe is a hamlet between elevated mountains on the upper reaches of the River Tawe in Powys. It has always been sparsely populated. There is evidence of a prehistoric lake side settlement at Waun Figen Felen, now a large upland peat bog, passed on the alternative finish.

Today Glyntawe attracts tourists for outdoor activities in the Brecon Beacons National Park and for caving. It contains the National Showcaves of Wales at Ogof yr Esgyrn cave. This 17-kilometre-long cave is part of a very large system of solution caves under the Cribarth plateau to the west of the upper Tawe and it is claimed to be the largest in Europe. Discovered in 1922, it was excavated 1923-1950. Finds date from the post-glacial period through the Roman era to historic times. The cave, used for habitation and for burial in pre-history, later served as a location for the *Doctor Who* serial *The Pirate Planet*.

In a 2005 poll of *Radio Times* readers, Dan yr Ogof was named as the greatest natural wonder in Britain. The former village school is now the Glyntawe Outdoor Centre, an activity centre run by Dulwich College. In 1878 opera singer Adelina Patti made her home at nearby Craig y Nos Castle.

### River Tawe/Afon Tawe

The Tawe flows for some 48 km (30 mi) from its source below Moel Feity in the Old Red Sandstone hills of the western Brecon Beacons to the Bristol Channel at Swansea. Its main tributaries are the right bank Upper and Lower Clydach Rivers and the Afon Twrch. The Tawe Valley (*Cwm Tawe* in Welsh) is more commonly known as the Swansea Valley.

The lower part of the valley was intensely industrialised in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and was especially impacted by metal refining and working. The quality of the river has now greatly improved. Large salmon swim up the river to spawn, whilst trout are in abundance.

### Beacons Way/Ffordd-y-Bannau

The Beacons Way is a 159 km (99 mi) linear waymarked long-distance footpath running east to west across the Brecon Beacons National Park. It passes many of the most important landmarks and mountain peaks in the range, but has limited waymarking, especially on open hill and moorland sections, meaning navigation skills are essential. First established in 2005, the route was revised in 2016.

### Cambrian Way/Taith Cambria

The Cambrian Way ('The Mountain Connoisseur's Walk') is a very challenging 479 km (298 mi) linear long-distance high-level footpath traversing much of the highest and wildest parts of Wales. It runs coast-to-coast from Cardiff Castle to Conwy Castle over the Black Mountains, Brecon Beacons, Carmarthen Fan, Plynlimon, Cadair Idris, the Rhinogs, the Snowdon massif and the Carneddau and is unmarked in the higher mountain areas. Navigational skills are therefore of paramount importance.

<http://www.cambrianway.org.uk/>

### Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park

Home to spectacular landscapes, a rich variety of wildlife and fascinating cultural and geological heritage, the Bannau Brycheiniog ('banau brə'χəɪnjɔg') National Park in Mid-Wales boasts a magnificent array of Old Red Sandstone peaks, open moorland and green valleys, spanning 1,344 km<sup>2</sup> (520 mi<sup>2</sup>). Pen y Fan within the Central Beacons is perhaps the best-known summit but there are many others in the five distinct parts of the National Park (Black Mountain (Y Mynydd Du) in the far west, Fforest Fawr, Central Beacons, the Llangattock and Llangynidr Hills, and the Black Mountains to the east). <https://bannau.wales/>

### River Twrch/Afon Twrch

The Twrch is a river which rises in the Black Mountain in South Wales. It forms the boundary between the counties of Powys (the former county of Brecknockshire) and Carmarthenshire. The name derives from Welsh *afon*/'river' and *twrch*/'boar'. In common with other rivers of the same name, it is believed to refer to the burrowing or snouting action of the waters of the river. The headwaters arise on the southern slopes of Bannau Sir Gaer (Carmarthen Fans) and Fan Brycheiniog and are joined by the waters of the Twrch Fechan.

### Shake Holes and Swallow Holes

Shakeholes (or sinkholes or dolines) are a depression or hole in the ground caused by some form of collapse of the surface layer. Some are caused by karst processes, for example, the chemical dissolution of carbonate rocks or suffusion processes. They tend to occur in karst landscapes, which can have up to thousands of sinkholes within a small area, giving the landscape a pock-marked appearance. These sinkholes can drain all the water, so that there are only subterranean rivers in these areas.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

[For a start from the Blaenau Car Park at the northern end of the route go the end of this text and pick up the directions under **Alternative Start from Blaenau Car Park.**]

Alight from the bus in **Glyntawe** at the Tawe Bridge and walk along the road's pavement in a south easterly direction (i.e.: against the direction of travel if coming up from Swansea/Neath, but in the direction of travel if coming down from Brecon). Cross the **Tawe River/Afon Tawe** on **Tawe Bridge** and *turn right* immediately through a metal field gate along an unsigned car wide footpath, with the river on your right (signed 'Thoroughfare to Ty Henry'). You walk through a couple of metal field gates and in 650m reach **Ty Henry** farm (on the OS map). *Veer right* through the right of two metal field gates (i.e.: not towards the farm house) with a **Beacons Way/Ffordd-y-Bannau** marker 10m ahead on a tree down into a grassy field and in 40m *turn right* towards the river on your right, on a dog leg.

You walk to the right of an electricity pole with markers on it and in another 55m go through a fence gap (a missing gate) to emerge on a wide grassy riverside path with a wooden two-railed bridge on the right. *Turn left* along the riverside path with a wire fence on your left and in 180m *turn left* through a metal gate with a Beacons Way marker, now along a car wide track between fences, then drystone walls. In 100m walk through a rusty metal field gate and *turn right and in 30m left* towards some sheep pens. In 10m go through a metal gate with Beacons Way and **Cambrian Way/Taith Cambria** markers into a steep open moorland hillside by a **Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park Access Land** sign.

### Here you have a choice:

**For the least exposed route to the peaks**, along the valley bottom fork off the Beacons Way, *turn right* along the fence on the right and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Ascent to the Peaks via Valley Route.**

**For all other versions of this walk** continue along the sheep pen wall and then in the same direction steeply uphill, initially along a rough path through bracken (260°), with views opening up over the valleys to the right and back over Glyntawe. In 210m the route *turns right* (335°), as you leave the bracken behind, and in 230m it turns to a wider grassy path, in 100m it *turns left* and in 25m right again, as the path narrows again for a stretch (this stretch is a streambed after rain). In 400m continue in the same direction (ignore a right fork) and in another 100m the path temporarily levels out at about 450m above sea level (**Allt Fach** on the OS map) where it curves right, with first views ahead of the escarpment to conquer (in most weathers, on 330°). The path is generally – but not always – well-defined, sometimes only by quad bike or sheep tracks, and passes a few boggy stretches, where close attention is required.

In 750m it joins a wider track on the left. In another 1.4 km you have the steep drop of the stunning sandstone escarpment on your right (a very good picnic spot) and get views on the right in the distance of the distinct tops of **Pen y Fan** and **Corn Du** on a bearing of 100° about 25 kilometres away (SWC Walk 85 and 278) and **The Black Mountains** to the left of these. Down on the right at the foot of the escarpment you see the return route along a small whale-back shaped ridge. This ridge (**Fan Fechan**) is a **rare phenomenon**: a **moraine**, caused by a glacier leaving behind debris of soil and rock along the edge of its ice block. Further to the right you can see the Upper **Cwm Tawe** (the Tawe Valley). In 1.9 km you cross the first summit of the walk: **Fan Hir** ('Long Beacon', at 760m above sea) and descend from there to the low saddle of **Bwlch Giedd** (706m above sea) where – in 500m – an engineered path joins from down right from along the shores of **Llyn Y Fan Fawr** ('Lake of the Big Peak'), a glacial lake.

**This is the alternative ascent route as well as the shortcut descent route** for any out-and-back walks avoiding the return along the ridge route. If you take this route downhill, by the lake at the bottom *turn right* up a grassy slope without a clear path and pick up the directions below at the quadruple asterisk \*\*\*\*).

\*) Continue in the same direction along the ridge up the steep path and in 600m you reach the highest top of the day, **Fan Brycheiniog** ('Brecknock Beacon') at 802m above sea, with its storm shelter and trig point. From here, on a clear day, you can get views as far as Exmoor across the Bristol Channel, Cardigan Bay, Snowdonia and the coasts of the Gower Peninsula and Pembrokeshire. Follow the escarpment curving right to another cairned subsidiary top (**Twr Fan Foel**, at about the same height as Fan Brycheiniog), where there are some dramatic drops *on both sides*. *Turn left* and follow the ridge to the next top, **Fan Foel**, the escarpment's northern top, whose large plateaued top you reach in 500m (the rock-lined top is in fact what's left of **an early Bronze Age** (ca. 2000BC) **round barrow**).

This top is flatter than the previous ones, but still offers far views in a northerly direction. [The boundary between Powys and Carmarthenshire runs through it]

**Here you have a choice:**

**For a short circular walk**, cutting out the following stunning ridge of Bannau Sir Gaer, continue along a clear path down the hill on a bearing of 335° and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Shortcut Descent from Fan Foel**.

**For the Main Walk**, you *turn sharp left* from the top (230° initially) and in 300m follow an engineered path down to a saddle (the **Bwlch Blaen-Twrch**) between **Fan Foel** and the **Bannau Sir Gaer** range ('**Carmarthen Fans**'), providing for some truly stunning views along the range. In 770m you reach the saddle floor (at 650m above sea), cross a stream, and re-ascend up a grassy slope. In 10m a faint path turns right to then descent steeply down the mountain side.

**Here you have a choice:**

**For a medium circular walk**, cutting out the following stunning ridge of Bannau Sir Gaer, *turn right* along the faint zigzagging path and steeply descend to the base of the escarpment at a path T-junction. *Turn right* along the path and pick up the directions below at the double asterisk \*\*).

**For the Main Walk**, you walk up 100 height meters over 500m distance (i.e.: at a 20% gradient) to the top of **Picws Du** (at 749m above sea), the summit of the **Bannau Sir Gaer**, the highest point in Carmarthenshire and the site of **another Bronze Age round barrow**, with more incredible views along the ridge in both directions.

Continue in the same direction along the ridge with a few dips and ascents, with **Llyn Y Fan Fach** ('Lake of the Small Peak', another glacial lake) nestling below in a curve of the ridge, and *turn right* with the ridge past one of several clefts in the red sandstone rock to – in 1.6 km – reach the last cairned top, point 677 (metres above sea) on **Waun Lefrith** ('Milk Bog', about 40m away from the edge by a small pond), from where you have more splendid views back along the ridge just walked.

This is your last chance for an out-and-back walk, returning the way you came, **as here you have a choice:**



**For the Alternative Shake Holes and Swallow Holes Return Route**, pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Alternative Return Route via the Shake Holes and Swallow Holes**.

**For the Main Walk**, continue along the ridge, gently descending. You follow the engineered path *curving right downhill* and ignore all tracks and paths forking off to the left through the grassy hillside. The path descends more steeply down into the valley towards the lake and in 1.2 km from the top you reach the lake dam at a T-junction with a car wide gravel track at a bend, just before crossing its overflow channel.

**Here you have a choice:**

**For a finish at the Blaenau Car Park**, *turn left* along the car wide track in a broadly northerly direction and reach the car park in 2.2 km, en-route using a parallel higher footpath to the right of a wall to circumvent some gated **trout farm** buildings.

**For the Main Walk**, you *bear right* to cross the lake outflow and continue along the car wide track past a rescue shelter along the reservoir dam and in 100m *curve left* as the track narrows. In 30m you continue along **a leat** (catchwater/channel), which diverts some of the flow of the **Afon Sychlwch** into the lake. In 70m the waterside path curves right and in 90m you *turn right* over a concrete slab bridge over the channel. On the other side you *veer left* along a usually clear path up the grassy (and boggy in places) **Waun Sychlwch** (80°) in the general direction of the distant nose of **Fan Foel**.

In 250m you pass some boggy ground and *turn half right* (110°). In 35m you pass another boggy patch to continue in the same direction along a narrow but clear path. In 25m you *fork right* along the more prominent of two paths (120°) and in 200m the terrain levels out. In 50m you go between some boulders and in 40m, where another grassy path (a bridleway) joins from the left, the path *veers right* (120°), now above the valley of the **Afon Sychlwch**. In 160m the path forks: the faint left (grassy) fork is a good – and also shorter – route, but it crosses a few areas of boggy ground, so is not encouraged outside of very dry periods.

*So, continue along the upper right-hand fork*, an earthen track, gently ascending, some way up the valley wall. The route continues along the bottom of the very steep escarpment wall with views of **a small whale-back shaped linear ridge** below on the left. This ridge is another example of a **moraine**, caused by a glacier leaving behind debris of soil and rock along the edge of its ice block. In 450m the path *curves left*, as you ford a stream coming down from the saddle (the **Bwlch Blaen-Twrch**) between **Fan Foel** and the **Bannau Sir Gaer** range, where a faint path joins from above.

**\*\*)** Stay on the higher path whenever a fork leads down to the left and in 330m you pass remnants of a sheep pen some way below (on the OS map). The path clings to the steep buttress on your right (if you are veering away from the steep hills, you are on the wrong path), gently ascending, and in 430m *bears right* (55°), where it temporarily levels out. You are walking on an earthen track with a steeply dropping grassy hillside to your left. In 170m you have very fine views back on the left of the steep valley of the **Nant Gwelyn**, and – to the right of it – the **Disgwylfa** ('watchtower') ridge carrying the route of the **Alternative Start** from the Blaenau Car Park, with the **Usk Reservoir**, surrounded by forests, behind it.

In 250m you reach a distinct five-way junction of paths (although the *two* forks ahead may not be all that obvious at first). The path from the left is the **Alternative Start** from the Blaenau Car Park, the path from the right the **Shortcut Descent from Fan Foel**. *Continue in the same direction* along either of two forks (they converge in 50m).

\*\*\*) You now follow the contour line of **Fan Foel** round to the right, soon again with a steep drop on your left, and in about 700m reach a last promontory overlooking the glacial lake **Llyn y Fan Fawr**, seen earlier from the ridge. Follow the path down to the left edge of the lake (i.e.: ignore a right fork along the way) and in 600m *turn left* and in 120m *turn right* to follow a clear path around the left-hand side of the lake. In about 700m, at its far end, you ford the lake outflow and continue in the same direction away from the lake shore (190°). In 30m *turn right* at a T-junction to in 50m cross some boggy ground. [!] *Turn left* immediately up a grassy slope without a clear path. [**The alternative descent** route from the ridge above joins from down the path.]

\*\*\*\*) In 20m the path becomes clearer as you walk up the grassy slope (due S). The path eventually levels out and in 350m you start the long descent to Glyntawe. You have the beginnings of the valley of the **Nant Tawe Fechan** stream on the right and some boggy ground and the wide Upper **Cwm Tawe** (the Tawe Valley) to the left below, as you walk along the now more defined whale-back shaped ridge. This is **Fan Fechan**, the **moraine** seen earlier from Fan Hir. Ignore all tracks to the left towards the boggy ground and keep close to the stream on the right, as the path zigzags down some steeper stretches. You ford several streams joining from the left (invariably in boggy ground) and eventually *turn right* to ford the **Nant Tawe Fechan**.

In 20m [!] *turn left* off the defined earthen path (which veers up to the right) along a more indistinct grassy path to follow the stream on your left. In 60m is a good spot to turn left to the stream and look back at the waterfall just passed. Continue downhill, broadly following the stream, sometimes some distance from it, sometimes close by, sometimes with a fence and/or a crumbling drystone wall to your left, fording several more streams in the process. In 1.3 km, by a drystone wall corner with a yellow marker on it and with a padlocked metal gate on the left in the wall, you continue in the same direction to the right of the wall. In 400m you *turn left* through a metal gate by a sheep pen to leave the **Access Land** and retrace your steps from the morning to the bus stop.

**In more detail:** go down the path and in 15m *turn right* in a drystone wall corner. In 15m *turn left* through a rusty metal field gate with a **Beacons Way** marker along a car wide footpath between drystone walls and with **Ty Henry** farm on the right across a field. In 110m walk through a metal field gate and *turn right* along a grassy riverside path along the **Afon Tawe**. In 160m *turn right* through a (missing) field gate into the pasture towards Ty Henry.

[But for the **Tafarn-y-Garreg** pub, cross the footbridge over the river and follow a path through a couple of gates to emerge in a car park with a signpost on the left (Llwybr Cyhoeddus/Public Footpath, also with a Beacons Way marker) and find the pub opposite on the other side of the **A4067**.]

Head to the left of an electricity pole with some markers on it and in 75m *turn left* towards a metal field gate 35m away. Go through the gate and continue along Ty Henry's driveway. In 80m walk through a metal field gate and continue with the river now again on your left. In 300m, where the open grassy area on the right ends, you walk through another metal field gate and finally go through a last metal field gate and onto the A4067, with **the bus stops** on the left on the other side of **Tawe Bridge**, and **The Gwyn Arms** a little to the right.

**Alternative Start from Blaenau Car Park**, 2.4 km east of the village of Llanddeusant  
**(add 1.0 km/0.6 mi and 42m ascent)**

**For a short circular walk:** from where you meet the main walk route (at the five-way junction of tracks), do not turn left along the bottom of Fan Foel, but rather head up the flank of Fan Foel and pick up the main walk at the top of Fan Foel, turning right to – and then along – the Bannau Sir Gaer.

---→ 9.8 km/6.1 mi.

**For a medium circular walk:** from where you meet the main walk route (at the five-way junction of tracks), do turn left along the bottom of Fan Foel with the main walk route, but at the end of the glacial lake Llyn Y Fan Fawr head up the escarpment to the saddle of Bwlch Giedd and pick up the main walk again there.

---→ 13.3 km/8.5 mi.

From the car park walk in a broadly easterly direction along a car wide gravel track towards a walled bridge over a tributary to the river on your right-hand side. In 80m, **[!]** just before that bridge, *turn left* – without too clear a path – up the steep rise to the left. In 50m, up on the ledge, *bear right* to continue on a bearing of 80° gently up the slope, in the general direction of the lower end of a large area of gorse higher up the slope, and with the stream on the right below. In 220m you reach a broad gravel track along the bottom of the area of gorse and *turn right* along it (60°).

In 60m you *fork left* to continue in the same direction along the wider of two gravel paths (now through the gorse), ignoring the right fork down the slope. Ignore another right fork in 35m and another one in a further 100m, where the area of gorse ends. Continue in the same direction through the grassy hill side and in 50m, where the broader track peters out, you *fork right* along a narrow grassy track to cross a stream bed in 10m. You now continue in the same direction (25°), following the line of the **Sychnant** stream on your right, without hugging it closely, for 500m, crossing a few indistinct animal tracks in the process.

Near the very top of the stream bed on your right (just before it turns right), and 35m after crossing a clear grassy track and at the corner of some reed beds on the right, **[!]** *turn up right* along a mostly clear path towards the distant obvious prow of **Fan Foel** (130°) a couple of kilometres away. First though you head towards a nearby top (**Disgwylfa** on the OS map), while the path initially curves a little to the right. In 600m you pass some scattered boulders in a grassy clearing and in 70m the path nearly levels out for a while. In about 150m you get first views on the right of the glacial lake **Llyn Y Fan Fach** in a bend at the bottom of the **Bannau Sir Gaer** escarpment.

In 230m you cross the upper reaches of another stream and in 240m, at a faint four-way junction with a large (ca. 20m in diameter) stone field on the left and just before crossing another stream bed gully, **[!]** *fork left* to walk between that stone field and the stream (120°). In 170m you *bear right* at a T-junction with a track running along the top of this ridge (170°), and in 75m *fork left* (135°). In 60m you continue in the same direction at a crosspaths and in 120m *bear right* with the path, towards some rocky outcrops higher up the slope.

In 80m you walk through the rocks along a clear path and *veer left* with it afterwards. In 80m cross a first track but in another 20m, where a track joins from the left, you *turn up right* towards the prow of Fan Foel. In 60m reach a track at a distinct five-way junction of paths (although the two forks on the left may not be all that obvious at first). The path opposite is the end of the **Shortcut Descent from Fan Foel**, the path from the right is the **Main Walk**. *Turn left* along either of the two forks (they converge in 50m) and pick up the directions in the main walk text at the triple asterisk \*\*\*).



## **Ascent to the Peaks via Valley Route (cut 110m ascent/descent)**

In about 350m you get first views of the escarpment the main walk ascends to: **Fan Hir**. The fence on the right intermittently has a drystone wall running parallel with it, as you broadly follow a stream on the right below. In 250m the path briefly levels out as the scenery opens out to a wide valley. In 320m and in another 220m you ford a couple of streams running down from the escarpment and in 290m you pass remnants of a sheep pen on the left. The terrain gets steeper and in 350m you see a small waterfall ahead on the right.

In 100m, at a T-junction with a sheep trod, *turn right* to in 20m ford a stream just above the waterfall. On this next stretch, on a clear day, you have good views on the right of the distinctive tops of **Pen y Fan** and **Corn Du** 25 km away. In 800m you *fork left* to stay with the stream, towards a distinct whale-back shaped small ridge below the escarpment. This ridge (**Fan Fechan** on the OS map) is a rare phenomenon: a **moraine**, caused by a glacier leaving behind debris of soil and rock along the edge of its ice block. Ascend the ridge and continue in the same direction along its grassy top.

The scenery turns to wide open moorland and eventually the path levels out, not far from the glacial lake **Llyn Y Fan Fawr**. In 200m reach a T-junction with a footpath, about 70m from the lake shore. The lake outflow is 140m on the right, but you *turn left* along the path, in 140m ignore a faint path forking right along (but high above) the lake shore, to continue up the steep side of the escarpment along an engineered path. In 300m you reach a saddle in the escarpment (**Bwlch Giedd**, 706m above sea) at a T-junction with a path. *Turn up right* along the path and pick up the directions in the main text at the asterisk \*).

## **Shortcut Descent from Fan Foel (cut 6.3 km/3.9 mi and 280m ascent/descent)**

In 35m the path *veers right* (355°) and in 40m starts its gradual descent down the flank of **Fan Foel** and in 40m *veers right* again (10°). In 440m, where the steepness has lessened notably, you reach a distinct five-way junction of paths (although the *two* forks on the right may not be all that obvious at first). The path opposite is the end of the **Alternative Start** from the Blaenau Car Park, the path from the left is the **Main Walk**. *Turn right* along either of the two forks (they converge in 50m) and pick up the directions in the main walk text at the tripe asterisk \*\*\*).

## Alternative Return Route via the Shake Holes and Swallow Holes (cut 1.2 km/0.7 mi and 240m ascent)

[!] This route requires confident navigation skills with map-and-compass or a reliable GPS-assisted handheld device or an altimeter, as the first stretch of several hundred metres is pathless and with very few landmarks to handrail along. [!]

*Turn left* (pathless) through the grassy and boggy mountain top, **either on a bearing of 215° or due S**: both routes make use of some rock bands running southerly down the hillside, but the one picked up on a 215° bearing is more pronounced and a better orientation help. [To continue on an accurate bearing, take a bearing with a compass, note a feature such as a distinctive clump of grass or rock that is on the bearing, and walk directly towards it. Repeat the procedure as you approach the distinctive feature.]

**If walking on a bearing of 215°**: In 700m at a height of 627m above sea level, you walk over some rock slabs. These run southerly down the hill, first intermittently then as a continuous band. [!] *Bear left* along the rock bands. You have a shallow valley developing to the right-hand drop of the rock, with some tussocky grass growing in it and the infant **Nant Gwili-foel** developing in it. In about 500m at 575m above sea level, with some scattered areas of tussocky grass amongst the rock outcrops, you meet a faint grass path running right-to-left (on the OS map). *Turn left* along it (100°). In 220m you cross the infant **Nant Menyn** (at 560m above sea level) and in another 70m a tributary of it. In 40m you walk through an area of limestone boulders and in 100m cross a rock band running down the hillside. The other descent option joins along it.

**If walking due S**: in about 150m you begin to see a clump of low rocks and some rough grass directly ahead (behind you, due N, the cairn will still be visible). In a further 50m you should begin to see a faint trail leading directly ahead. In a further 40m you pass the first of the low rocks (a small square boulder on your left). In 120m you cross the first small, narrow section of rock pavement – keep heading south. By now there should be a bit of a drop off to the left-hand side – keep to the right of this where the going is easier. In about 500m the rocky outcrop is notably wider. In another 350m the band of rocks on your left comes to an end by a small area of tussocks. Continue for 30m to reach a narrow grass track at a T-junction, where you *turn left*.

In 60m *veer right* (150°) to descend towards the **Afon Twrch** (the Twrch River) in a prominent double bend. In 300m a boggy stretch begins as you *veer left* (130°) to avoid the worst of it. In 170m *bear right* with the path with the **Nant Llestau** tributary below to the left in a cut. In 60m *turn left* to ford the tributary stream and follow a clear grass path (115°) up a bank and somewhat to the left of the Twrch River. In 180m you reach a bend in the Twrch, with the onwards path clear on the far side, going steeply uphill. **Ford the river at a safe and convenient spot**, usually found about 25m upstream (but quite a bit further upstream when the river is in spate) and pick up the bridleway again on the south side of the river and continue on a bearing of 130°. The path includes some boggy stretches on the ascent, but is mostly clear.

In about 300m you pass an area of scattered limestones either side of the path. In 200m *bear right* with the path (160°). In 250m you *veer left* at a white pole in a base of loose rocks (130°), where an indistinct path veers right (this is the bridleway fork shown on the OS map). The path curves left and in 160m you pass an area of **shake holes** on the left. In 600m you get to a ford across the **Afon Giedd** (Giedd River). The onwards route will eventually continue in the same direction, but not before *turning right* along the river for a **highly recommended detour** to some **swallow holes** where the river you are facing disappears into the earth (you will re-join this path about 300m further along, on the other side of a tributary stream): *Turn right* on this side of the river and in 120m, where it curves away to the left, rise up to the higher bank.

Continue across a plateau on a bearing of 200° and in 180m you have the river below on your left at a bend. Descend to the river, where it turns sharply right, and you find the first (dry period) swallow hole. *Turn right* with the riverbed and follow it on either side until in 420m and in another 60m you reach the (wet period) swallow holes, the **Sinc Giedd**, where the **Afon Giedd** disappears to continue sub-surface and **to then re-appear** near the end of the walk in the Dan-yr-Ogof cave system **in Glyntawe** (i.e.: not in the misnamed Afon Giedd further south). From here you ascend up the flank of the raised easterly riverbank and *turn left* along it, in about 300m *veering away from the river* on a bearing of 40°, staying to the right of a tributary stream but to the left of a couple of water-filled shake holes to – in 300m – reach the bridleway path again at a T-junction, about 30m to the right of a ford over the tributary stream.

*Turn right* along the path and ascend gently past a deep, broadly tear-shaped, water-filled shake hole and then rounding **Disgwylfa** (hill) on your right. The scenery changes to a grass and limestone terrain riddled with **shake holes**, potholes, streams and even the odd **limestone pavement**, phenomena usually associated with the **Yorkshire Dales**, and eventually with a large **upland peat bog (Waun Fignen Felen)** below on the left in the valley of the **Afon Haffes**. In about 1.0 km from the last water-filled shake hole, as you pass **Carreg Goch** (hill) on the right, you have a wire fence about 100m away on the left below around a peatland restoration project. The path (now with some sandy stretches) *veers left* towards the far fence corner in just short of 200m.

**Here you have a choice:**

**For a diversion to the Sgwd Ddu** (adds 0.6 km/0.4 mi), a very scenic waterfall on the **Afon Haffes** (the Haffes River), *turn left* off the broad sandy track to follow the fence line along a narrow grassy path and pick up the directions below under **Diversion to the Sgwd Ddu ('Black Waterfall')**.

**Else continue in the same direction along the sandy track**, which soon curves right, to continue through very similar scenery for a while, with first **Carreg Goch**, then **Castell y Geifr** (hills) on the right. In about 600m the bridleway turns into a more traditional car wide track through an area often populated by **Wild Hill Ponies** and in 100m starts to descend with fantastic views into the **Cwm Tawe** (the Tawe Valley), to the distinct top of **Fan Gyhirych** on the left opposite as well as a large **disused quarry** straight ahead and to **Craig-y-Nos Castle** on the right (all on the route of SWC 307 Fforest Fawr Traverse). In about 700m you pass a scattering of limestones on the left with a weather-beaten solitary low tree growing in the midst of it. In a further 100m you have another weather-beaten solitary low tree on your right-hand side and another area of limestone pavement away on the left on the slope of **Twyn Du** (on the OS map). The **Diversion to the Sgwd Ddu** joins from the left down the slope.

**\*)** In 300m you reach an indistinct fork in the path. Ignore the right fork (the continuation of the bridleway) and *fork left*, initially curving around a (last) shallow shake hole, then in 160m continuing as a steep grassy descent (while staying to the right of an area of bracken), and in 150m *turn sharply left* with a wooden signpost along a fence when reaching a wood's fringe.

In 55m *turn sharply down right and immediately left again* to continue in the same direction and in 320m, when meeting the steep cleft of the valley of the **Afon Haffes** (by a marker post on the left and where the path turns down right towards a metal gate to the left of a metal field gate 30m away), you walk to the steep drop above the river and **[!]** *turn down left* into the valley along a bridleway on a steep valley wall above the river (340°). In 80m (with some lovely views up **the boulder-strewn Haffes Valley** on the left) *turn hard right* down along the riverbank for about 20m to identify the best

crossing spot and then **ford the Haffes River**, initially just a short distance across to a river island, then across the island on a clear path.

[In spite **this crossing may be too dangerous** to contemplate, in which case: return up the hill flank and follow the bridleway through the metal gate to the left of a metal field gate down between trees along a fenced path to a tarmac lane by a caravan park at a T-junction in 260m and then *turn right* with a footpath signpost through parts of the **Dan-Yr-Ogof National Showcaves Centre** and in 160m *turn left* to reach the **A4067** through Glyntawe in 120m and *turn left* along it to pub or bus stop.]

In 40m you reach the other side of the river and *veer right* to a metal gate 15m away, go through it (or over the stile to the right of it) and continue along a fence on the left with a wood on the right (110°), in 100m go through a metal gate to the right of a metal field gate and *turn right* through a paddock towards a farm. In 30m go over a stile to the right of a metal field gate and follow a tarmac drive and in 50m go over another stile to the right of a metal field gate and *turn right* at a T-junction by the red sandstone **Carreg Haffes** farm and follow the drive for 180m through three metal field gates (or over stiles to the right of them) to a T-junction with the **A4067** through **Glyntawe**. *Turn left* along the grassy verge of the **A4067** and in 170m pass **The Gwyn Arms** on your right, in 40m cross the **Tawe Bridge** (the Main Walk joins from the left just before it), and reach the bus stops in a further 60m/90m. The **Tafarn-y-Garreg** pub is a further 350m along the road.

### **Diversion to the Sgwd Ddu ('Black Waterfall')** **(add 0.6 km and 42m ascent)**

Continue along the clear path with the fence on your left and in 150m, at a fence corner, continue in the same direction (65°). In another 150m you pass a **swallow hole** at the end of an impressively carved valley on your left-hand side. You *veer slightly to the left* (50°) as you rise gently to cross a small hill to the left of its top and then gradually descend to a bend in the now obvious deep valley of the **Afon Haffes** (the Haffes River). At the river bend continue a little steeper downhill to the right-hand side of the river for the best views of the waterfall (**Sgwd Ddu**).

To connect back to the Shake Holes and Swallow Holes Return Route, you can either retrace your route the way you came (longer), or (looking down river to a right turn in the river and with the waterfall on your left) *turn right* away from the waterfall on a bearing of 150° in the general direction of the notable top of **Twyn Du** (on the OS map), about 1.1 km away and to the right and above the very impressively carved lower Haffes Valley. The path is mostly clear, although over rough ground and criss-crossed by many other (animal and vehicle) tracks and it crosses a few boggy sections, but does not constitute any major challenges. As you get closer to Twyn Du you will recognise a **solitary half man-sized boulder** on the plateaued top of it. Head for this, but *bear right* down the slope *just before* reaching the boulder, on a bearing of 205°. Keep to the right of an area of limestone pavement with a solitary low weather-beaten tree in it and **head for another solitary low weather-beaten tree** at the bottom of this gentle descent. In 270m you reach a clear path at a T-junction just before the tree.

*Turn left* along the path and pick up the directions above in the Alternative Return Route text at the single asterisk \*).