

## **Welcome to Caban Coch / Croeso**

Caban Coch is situated in a woodland glade on Cwmllywi Uchaf Farm. Here are a few tips and explanations that will help you make the most of your break at Caban Coch. If there are any queries or concerns please contact us on any of the following numbers:

Dafydd & Ceri 01650 511495

Dafydd Mobile 07970 511875

or call at the house

### **Lighting the Wood Burning Stove**

By the stove there is a metal box containing firelighters. Take two or three of these blocks and form a pile above the blocks with kindling wood. Open the air vents and light the fire lighters. After the kindling begins to burn add the firewood. The stove and the pipe can get very hot... so be careful. Do not hang clothing or cloths near the stove and fluepipe!

### **Firepit and Candles**

A firepit is provided for outside fires and barbeques. Please do not light any fires or candles in any other locations and make sure the fire is turned in at the end of the night.

### **Water Supply**

Water supply is from a nearby spring and is pumped to a holding tank. This is filtered for particles. However the unwell, elderly and the very young should not drink untreated spring or borehole water. There is a seperate tap in the Kitchen for drinking water.

### **Hot Water and Electricity**

Hot water is provided by a on demand LPG water heater. The flow is limited and may struggle if more than one hot water tap is used simultaneously. Due to the caban's location the amount of electricity is limited to lights and low power applicances such as chargers, laptops and ipod docks etc. Please do not use high power applicances such as hairdryers and other electric haircare appliances.

### **Fridge**

There is a small fridge inside the Kitchen Cupboards.

## Recycling

A box is located under the bed for recycling paper. Outside by the coolbox a container for recycling glass and metal is provided.

## Composting Loo

For the urine separation to work **males must sit to urinate** Apart from this use the toilet in the same way you would a WC. After you have finished add a handful of **soak** material to the inner container. This is kept in a container in the toilet cubicle. Toilet paper can be dropped into the inner container of the toilet - **It is not necessary to add soak material to the vault if you have only urinated.** Simply close the lid! The toilet lid should always be left in the closed position as failure to do so could compromise the toilet ventilation system and will increase the likelihood of flies entering the vault.

## Walking and Mountain Biking around Caban Coch

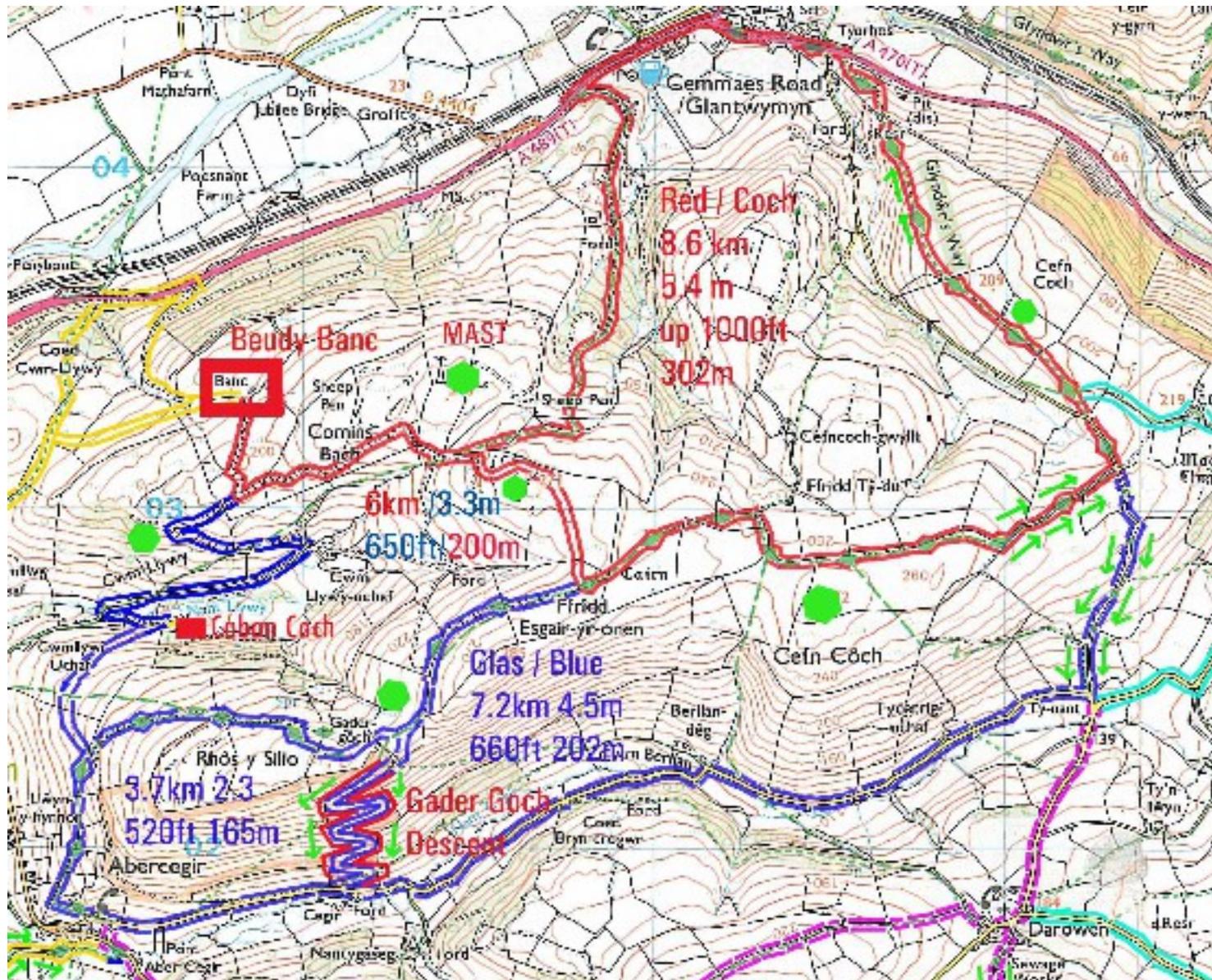
We have created a number of walks and trails in and around the farm. Links with public footpaths are also shown for longer walking trips. A walking trip to the highest point on the map and a loop through the woodland are recommended. Many of the trails link to Glyndwr's way and other bridleways for walking and mountain biking suitable for all abilities. This is a working farm and we would ask that you ensure that dogs are kept on a lead at all times.

Cader Idris is visible from the farm's highest point and is one of the best walks in the UK for its topography and panoramic views. One of the main paths up is the Minffordd path which starts from Tal Y Llyn, about 8 miles from Machynlleth. Allow 5-6 hours for the circular walk to the Summit and back.

## Mountain Biking.

As well as the trails in and around Caban Coch Machynlleth is a great area for mountain biking and the Trans Wales Enduro recently crossed the bridleway to the North of caban coch. Machynlleth also hosts the famous Howies Dyfi Enduro in May. There are also four waymarked trails around Machynlleth, Mach 1,2,3 and Climach. For families and younger children the Mawddach trail running along the estuary from Dolgellau to Barmouth is recommended.

For further information and bike hire please contact Jon or Tegid at the local bike shop **The Holey Trail**, 31 Maengwyn Street, Machynlleth, Powys, SY20 8EB [mail@theholeytrail.co.uk](mailto:mail@theholeytrail.co.uk) **Tel:** 01654 700411



## **Fishing**

The fishing on the Dyfi is controlled by the New Dovey Fishery Association, based in Machynlleth. Fishing is allowed from 1 Apr-17 Oct, and they have very strict conservation rules: Y Plas, Plas Machynlleth, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8ER Tel: **01654 702721**

## **Horse Riding**

Our neighbouring farm [Carreg Dressage](#) can offer livery & guided rides for those who like to bring their horses on holiday. There are miles of quiet country lanes, wooded bridleways & ancient drovers' roads to explore while looking down on the Dyfi River, often with views of the Irish Sea. Only 12 miles away are miles of golden beaches to race along. Further information available.

## **Beaches**

Both Aberdyfi and Ynyslas Beaches are around 12 miles away. They are both miles long and suitable for a wide range of activities. Aberdyfi has other amenities such as shops, pubs restaurants etc. Ynyslas beach is accessible by car. The sea in Aberdyfi by the village gets deep quickly, there are shallower waters about a mile further on opposite the main Hotel. Morfa Bychan near Porthmadog, about 45minutes away is popular with young families due to it's shallow waters.

## **BEUDY BANC: WALKS AND DRIVES**

### **DRIVES**

From here, you can find pretty much every kind of landscape to suit just about every kind of weather and inclination. Within half an hour of leaving Beudy Banc, you could be climbing a craggy mountain, squelching your way across remote moorland wilderness, basking on some beautiful beaches, swimming in the sea, a river, a lake or underneath a waterfall, wandering through woods of beech, birch, ash and oak, exploring old mines and quarries, or ambling along quiet country lands and paths through gentle pastureland. There really is a landscape to suit every mood. Here are some of our favourite local spots.

### **Going to the coast**

Two options here, really: north or south of the Dyfi estuary. It's impossible to say which is best – read this information, and decide what you think sounds most appealing for your needs. Incidentally, sea swimming on the Cambrian coast is wonderful – we've had

visitors who haven't swum in the British sea for decades, but who have successfully tried (and loved) it here. The shallow sea and big, sandy beaches mean that, between June and September, even early October, the sea is surprisingly un-cold (it would perhaps be pushing it a little too far to describe it as 'warm'), especially at high tide when it's rolled over hundreds of yards of hot sand.

These are lovely routes, full of interest (and lots of non-coast stuff – waterfalls, estuaries, woods, villages, towns, sights), so are good even on those rare occasions when it's not exactly a bikini-on-the-beach kind of day.

## Going inland

The county of Powys is huge. It occupies a quarter of the landmass of Wales, but is home to less than five per cent of its population – it's that big and empty. And beautiful: although you can go north into Gwynedd for the proper mountains, Powys has its fair share of glowering peaks and rolling hills, stacks of lakes, clear rivers, woods and forests, together with countless cheerful little villages (plus, let's be honest, a few miserable ones) and spirited market towns. Because people tend to pass through on their stampede to the seaside, the big, green interior of Wales is relatively unspoilt. The routes given here will take you around some of the best places the middle of Wales has to offer. Not the absolute best, of course – you'll have to ply us with a few beers to get that kind of information out of us..

### COAST CIRCUIT 1 (North)

#### **Machynlleth – Aberdyfi – Tywyn – Abergynolwyn – Corris – Machynlleth (35 miles)**

From Beudy Banc, head into Machynlleth. Take a right at the clock tower, head out of town and over the Dyfi bridge. Take the left hand turn at the end of the bridge signposted for Aberdyfi. The A493 on the north side of the estuary is a beautiful road – sit back and take it slowly (you haven't got much option on that), for it will reward you. It goes through the village of **Pennal**, three miles from the Dyfi Bridge at Machynlleth, where you'll find a fascinating little church (the landscaped churchyard is particularly worth seeing) and, just at the end of the village on the left, the leisure resort of Plas Talgarth, where you can pay a day rate to use the swimming pool, sauna, solarium, steam room and gym, or book yourself a massage.

A mile after Pennal, a small lane heads to the right (signposted Cwm Maethlon / Happy Valley). This is a gorgeous back road to Tywyn, though not a short cut – you will almost certainly have to do a bit of give-and-take reversing at some point, and it's a slow road throughout. The lane rises up around some sharp bends and up to the National Park car park for **Llyn Barfog** [Bearded Lake], whose name comes from the carpet of lilies that cloak the water in the summer. The circular walk up to the lake, and then west along the

ridge above it and back down to the valley and car park, takes a couple of hours and is wonderful – the views over the estuary are spectacular.

Don't take this route if you want to go to **Aberdyfi**, however – stay on the main road for that. Aberdyfi is a lovely place, with a thriving harbour, lifeboat station, some cute shops, cafes and pubs; it can get very busy on a sunny summer weekend. The best beach here is between Aberdyfi and Tywyn: it's a three-mile stretch of perfect sand, backed by dunes, with good, shallow swimming. As it's west-facing (and slightly south too), it gets the sun all day, including some fabulous sunsets if you want to wait around, collect some firewood and have a bit of a beach fire or barbeque (don't forget to take your rubbish away; too many people don't bother). The easiest access is either from Tywyn town or from the parking area opposite the cemetery about a mile out of Aberdyfi on the main A493. From there, you walk across the golf course to the beach. The beach in town at Aberdyfi is nice enough, but gets very busy and is NOT safe for swimming, as it is subject to dangerous estuary currents.

If Aberdyfi is a cream tea with doilies, then **Tywyn**, four miles further on, is a big bag of salty chips. Take your pick! There are a few interesting diversions in Tywyn: the seventh century stone in the massive parish church of St Cadfan that contains the oldest inscription in the Welsh language (considerably older than anything in English!), the narrow-gauge steam Tal-y-llyn Railway (see below) and the cutesy, old-fashioned cinema. If you're a fan of such nostalgic diversion, the town also hosts Wurlitzer organ concerts in the Neuadd Pentre [village hall] on Brook Street – ask locally for details.

From Tywyn, you have a decision to make: continue along the coast road (detailed in Coast Circuit 2), or go on this route for a shorter, but stunning, round trip back to Machynlleth along the valley of Tal-y-llyn: take the B4405 that forks off right on the main road a mile north of Tywyn in the village of **Bryncrug**. This is a classic run and a place to get a real flavour of Welsh history: stop at the **Dolgoch Falls** hotel three or four miles along for a walk through the woods and waterfalls above it. A little further on, you come to the old slate quarrying village of **Abergynolwyn**, with an excellent pub (The Railway Inn), famous for its Sunday lunches, and a superb café in the village hall opposite. Walk up the steep lane that passes the village hall to lots of waymarked walks through the woods, with rivers and streams tumbling in all directions. If you continue to the top, you'll reach the massive old Bryn Eglwys quarry, with lots of derelict buildings, dramatic spoil tips, waterfalls and wild flowers in stunning mountainous surrounds. Just above Abergynolwyn in the woods is **Nant Gwernol station**, the terminus of the **Tal-y-llyn Railway** (the world's first preserved steam line; the society that saved it was formed in 1950) – it's a lovely run from here to Tywyn (where there's an easy interchange with the Cambrian coast main line from Machynlleth – Pwllheli).

Back in the middle of Abergynolwyn, a great diversion is to take the lane that goes from the middle of the village, signposted to Castell-y-Bere. After just over a mile, you come to a crossroads – go left for a mile or so to park up and climb **Craig Aderyn** [Bird Rock], the inland cliff that dominates the valley and provides home to many different birds, including Britain's only inland-nesting cormorants, who

haven't yet realised that the sea vanished a few thousand years ago! Back at the crossroads, turn right for the highly atmospheric ruins of **Castell-y-Bere**, a native castle of the Gwynedd princes that was built c.1220. This was the last Welsh castle to fall to the English king, Edward I, in his sustained assault on Wales. From the castle, continue down the lane for a couple of hundred yards to the delightful church of **Llanfihangel-y-Pennant**. It's long been a place of significance, as you can guess from its circular churchyard, something that normally indicates a pre-Christian site. In the vestry of the church, there's a stunning 3D cloth map of the valley, built by twenty local volunteers. Each took a square kilometre, walked it, drew it and then built it in cloth, before the whole lot was slotted together. It's a brilliant way to get a handle on the local topography – as well as to admire some ingenious ways of using old t-shirts and tights!

From the little car park opposite the church, there are some lovely walks up through the oak woods, alongside the tumbling river, or you can tackle **Cadair Idris** from here – the 2930 feet (893m) mountain that dominates the southern end of the Snowdonia National Park. You'll already be very familiar with Cadair, having seen it numerous times, in numerous moods, from Beudy Banc. It's a fabulous mountain, a spent volcano that's dripping with legend and home to numerous impressive glacial lakes, and well worth a day's climb. The route from Llanfihangel-y-Pennant (the Pony Path) is the steadiest ascent, but not as dramatic (nor as steep) as the far more impressive climbs from Minffordd, on the southern flank of the mountain, or Tŷ Nant, above Dolgellau, on the north.

From back in Abergynolwyn, continue along the B4405, past the shimmering lake of Tal-y-llyn (you can get a fishing boat from the Tŷ'n-y-Cornel hotel; it's also good for food), past the Cadair Idris car park at Minffordd, and to the junction with the main A487. Take a right here to head back towards Machynlleth, climbing upwards and into **Corris**. After going through Corris Uchaf (the upper village), you'll pass the Corris Craft Centre – a decent café with some rather twee old tourist tat stalls attached. Worth a stop though for **King Arthur's Labyrinth** – a good option for a rainy day. It's an audio-visual thingy deep within an old slate mine – the first part of the tour is on board a boat through the flooded tunnels, which is amazing. If the idea of the mine intrigues you more than the stagey tableaux of the Labyrinth, then you can book fascinating underground mine tours which explore some of the rest of the old Braich Goch [red arm] quarry. In that one hill alone, there are twenty miles of tunnels from the 150 years when it was burrowed out from within to provide slate that roofed the world.

Slate completely defines Corris (and the other villages of this Afon [river] Dulas valley), as you'll see from the mountains of grey spoil looming over the village. There are some good pubs hereabouts: the Slaters' Arms down in Lower Corris has a huge open fireplace and real ales. The Braich Goch on the main road is open at the weekend and often hosts gigs and events. A mile nearer Machynlleth, just off the main road, is the village of **Ceinws** (a.k.a. Esgairgeiliog): the Tafarn Dwynant pub by the bridge in the middle of the village is great, and does fine food. Ask in any of the pubs about local walks – there are some cracking ones. For mountain bikers, the longest continuous descent in Wales (known, rather tortuously, as the Cli-machx Run) can be found on the mountain above Ceinws. A mile beyond Ceinws, again on the back lane, is the world-famous **Centre for Alternative Technology** – another old slate quarry. C.A.T.

has been there since 1974, and there are some interesting displays about renewable energy, some very impressive buildings, a good cafeteria and shop. Visitor reports vary: some find it hugely inspirational, others a little tired. One highlight is the new WISE building (Welsh Institute for Sustainable Education). The Daily Telegraph's building of the Year in 2010 and a RIBA Award Winner. A couple of miles later, you're back in Machynlleth.

## **COAST CIRCUIT 2 (North)**

### **Machynlleth – Aberdyfi – Tywyn – Fairbourne (Barmouth) – Dolgellau – Cross Foxes – Corris – Machynlleth (54 miles)**

From Beudy Banc, head into Machynlleth. Take a right at the clock tower, head out of town and over the Dyfi bridge. Take the left hand turn at the end of the bridge signposted for Aberdyfi. The A493 on the north side of the estuary is a beautiful road – sit back and take it slowly (you haven't got much option on that), for it will reward you. It goes through the village of **Pennal**, three miles from the Dyfi Bridge at Machynlleth, where you'll find a fascinating little church (the landscaped churchyard is particularly worth seeing) and, just at the end of the village on the left, the leisure resort of Plas Talgarth, where you can pay a day rate to use the swimming pool, sauna, solarium, steam room and gym, or book yourself a massage.

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From Tywyn, you have a decision to make: continue along the coast road in this route, or cut inland at this point for a shorter, but stunning, round trip back to Machynlleth along the valley of Tal-y-llyn (Coast Circuit 1). If you've got the time and inclination for this longer stretch, back at Tywyn you can stay on the main A493, which goes inland for a few miles. Shortly after the road bends sharply right as it comes back to the coast, there's a couple of big lay-bys: park up here to walk down the lane that goes seawards to the beautiful old church of **Llangelynnin**. It's ancient and unspoilt: inside you can see a horse bier, used to transport coffins from outlying farms to their funerals, as well as pews marked with the names of the farmers and their farms from the mid eighteenth century. Carry on through the village of **Llwyngwril** and then along the amazing coast road as it climbs higher before descending to the **Mawddach estuary** (easily one of the finest in Britain: John Ruskin called it "the most beautiful walk in the world"). The slightly bizarre little village of **Fairbourne** (it was built as a ready-made holiday resort by the MacDougals of flour fame), lies on the south side of the estuary, just off the main road. Here, you'll find a fine beach, a tiny toy railway that chugs a couple of miles to meet the passenger ferry over to Barmouth, the best Indian restaurant in mid Wales (the Café Indiana, run by a genuine Bollywood star, Mayur Verma, better known as Raj). On the other side of the main road, up in the old quarry, is a spectacular flooded pit known as the **Blue Lagoon**, from its startling mineral-hued water. It's a fabulous, but blinking cold, swim.

It's a long detour by car, but you can cross the estuary to **Barmouth** in three other ways: take a train on the mainline Cambrian Coast railway from Fairbourne or Morfa Mawddach, a mile further on, or walk over the railway bridge from Morfa Mawddach (it's 2253 feet long and has 113 wooden spans), or take the little foot ferry from the terminus of the tiny Fairbourne Railway. Barmouth has the arcades and fun pubs that you expect in a seaside resort, as well as numerous shops and caffs, a great beach, and lots of fine walks up into the surrounding hills (the viewpoint, Dinas Oleu, above the town was the very first acquisition of the nascent National Trust in 1895). The name 'Barmouth', by the way, is a corruption of the Welsh name 'Aber-mawddach'. Aber – which you'll see in many Welsh names – means 'at the mouth of' and refers to rivers, so that Aber Mawddach simply means 'at the mouth of the River Mawddach'. Remember that 'dd' in Welsh is pronounced as a hard 'th', 'aw' as 'ow', so run the name by and you can see how it became Barmouth. The coast north of Barmouth, accessed by the railway or the A496, is fabulous: an eight-mile sandy beach, the middle mile being Wales' only official nudist plot, runs to **Shell Island**, where the coast turns eastwards and heads towards **Harlech**, home to the most atmospheric of all Edward I's massive castles. Inland from the Barmouth-Harlech coast are the **Rhinog Mountains**, wonderful

walking country. From Harlech, continue on the railway line, or across the toll bridge by road, to the dazzling fantasy village of **Portmeirion**.

Back at Fairbourne, the old railway that snaked along the southern side of the Mawddach estuary from Morfa Mawddach station is now a popular walk and cycle path. There's an RSPB information place in the old signal box at **Penmaenpool**, a few miles along, where there's also a rickety wooden toll bridge that provides the shortest road route from Fairbourne to Barmouth, and the beautifully-positioned George III pub. The "most beautiful walk in the world" is also stunning on horseback – the folk at Bwlchgwyn Farm (01341 250107) will take you out, including a chance to gallop along the sands at low tide. Continue along the A493, where shortly you'll come to a T-junction with the A470 (the main north-south road in Wales; it goes all the way from Llandudno to Cardiff. This little stretch of dual carriageway, by the way, is less than a mile long, but it's the only dual road anywhere for miles around!).

This road is the **Dolgellau** by-pass: turn right and then follow the signs to get into town itself. It's well worth it, for Dolgellau is a handsome place of thick-set stone buildings hunkered down beneath the northern flank of Cadair Idris. There's some cracking little shops here, and, in the main square, a new centre – called Tŷ Siamas – for traditional music, including regular gigs and jams. The main pleasure of Dolgellau, however, is what lies around it: some of the most stunning countryside in Britain. You're in the thick of the Snowdonia National Park now, in Gwynedd (or the old county of Meirionnydd – Dolgellau was the county town for 438 years until the county was abolished in 1974): this is very definitely north Wales, rather than mid. Accents – and even some words in Welsh – have changed, the houses and buildings look very different, the contours are sharper and there's an extra something hanging in the air. Get a good map (the Ordnance Survey orange covered Explorer is best) or ask at the tourist office in the main square for information on some great local walks. There are famous Victorian promenades such as the Precipice Walk (great upland views with very little climbing) and the Torrent Walk (wood and waterfalls), walks up past old gold mines above Bontddu and in the woods near Ganllwyd or some proper mountain hikes around Cadair Idris and the Cregennan Lakes. Basically, just go in any direction from Dolgellau and start walking! It's all good.

The huge forest north of town – the **Coed-y-Brenin** [King's Forest], from its days as a royal hunting ground – contains some spectacular waterfalls, innumerable beautiful paths through woodland and along peaty rivers, as well as some of the finest waymarked cycle rides both for those who like to take it leisurely and those who prefer to hurtle down sheer slopes and through muddy streams on mountain bikes: you can hire bikes at the swanky new visitor centre (which also has a great café and a fab kids' play area) six miles north of Dolgellau, signposted off the A470.

From Dolgellau, follow the A470 east and upwards (the Torrent Walk, by the way, heads off a couple of hundred yards along the B4416 Brithdir road that you'll find a mile or two along the A470). A mile later, you'll reach the junction at the Cross Foxes inn; take the right (A487), signposted to Machynlleth. This is a fine run: the road climbs before you crest the lip of the hill and see the lake at Tal-y-llyn

far below at the bottom of the pass. This has to be the most stunning bit of A-road in Wales – enjoy it! You could take a right at the bottom to explore the Tal-y-llyn valley and Abergynolwyn, or climb Cadair Idris from Minffordd (all detailed on Coast Circuit One), or continue towards Machynlleth, climbing upwards and into **Corris**. After going through Corris Uchaf (the upper village), you'll pass the Corris Craft Centre – a decent café with some rather twee old tourist tat stalls attached. Worth a stop though for **King Arthur's Labyrinth** – a good option for a rainy day. It's an audio-visual thingy deep within an old slate mine – the first part of the tour is on board a boat through the flooded tunnels, which is amazing. If the idea of the mine intrigues you more than the stagey tableaux of the Labyrinth, then you can book fascinating underground mine tours which explore some of the rest of the old Braich Goch [red arm] quarry. In that one hill alone, there are twenty miles of tunnels from the 150 years when it was burrowed out from within to provide slate that roofed the world.

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[Incidentally, if you've done the Tal-y-llyn pass once and fancy a fascinating alternative route home from Dolgellau, take what looks like a farm track – it's signed for bikes as Cycle Route no 8 – going off left at the end of the long, straight stretch from Cross Foxes, just before the main road starts to wind and climb up to the pass. It's not much of a road, and there's a few gates to go through too, but it's tarmaced all the way up and then down into the slate valley and village of **Aberllefenni**, good for a stop and a wander through the oak woods or the mountains of slate spoil, and to gawp at the huge mining hole blasted out of the side of a hill. Turn right through the village, and along the back lane to Corris, where you can re-join the main road, or continue on the back lane through Ceinws and past the Centre for Alternative Technology.]

### **COAST CIRCUIT 3 (South)**

#### **Machynlleth – Ynyshir – Tal-y-bont – Aberystwyth – Borth/Ynyslas – Glaspwll – Machynlleth (40 miles)**

Each to their own, but if I want a proper trip to the beach, I'd nearly always head to Ynyslas on the south side of the Dyfi estuary. This trip takes you there, and calls in at the upbeat 'capital' of mid Wales, Aberystwyth, too.

From the clock tower in town, bear left on the A487. Stay on this main road for the full eighteen miles into Aberystwyth, though you might want a stop or two on the way. The first village you come to outside Machynlleth is **Derwenlas** [green oak], where you'll see the Black Lion pub on your right. Hard though it is to believe now, this was, until the arrival of the railway in the 1860s, the port for Machynlleth and the slate quarries to its north: a horse-drawn tramway brought the slate down to the quayside from as far as Aberllefenni, ten miles away. The quay has vanished now: the river was re-routed to accommodate the railway. A couple of miles later, you cross the county boundary into Ceredigion and then come onto the narrower bit of road through another old river port, **Glandyfi**, though it's much easier to imagine here as the river still sweeps by in an extravagant loop. Out in the middle of the bog is the splendidly isolated railway station of **Dyfi Junction**, where the Cambrian Coast line splits for Aberystwyth one way and Pwllheli the other – surely one of the only stations in Britain off the road network. This is where the old Welsh kingdoms of Gwynedd (the north-west), Deheubarth (a.k.a. Dyfed, the south-west) and Powys (the interior) meet, and have done so for 1500 years. The beating heart of Wales is a deserted railway station that hardly anyone ever uses: what a country!

Just after the narrow stretch of road alongside the estuary, you'll go through the village of **Eglwys Fach** [small church]. At the end of the village, there's a lane going right to **Ynyshir** [long island!] – the name of both a flash (and pricy) hotel-cum-restaurant and the superb RSPB reserve, with its hides dotted around woods and along the estuary shore. It's a brilliant place in any season (though best in spring and autumn). Back on the main road, just by the Ynyshir turn, you'll find the parish church of St Michael. Legendary Welsh poet R. S. Thomas was the vicar here in the fifties and sixties: he and his wife (an artist) refurbished the church's interior, and it is very much the physical manifestation of one of his poems – pared down, severe even, dark yet dazzlingly effective.

A couple of hundred yards further along the main road, you'll cross a river by a huge old waterwheel. The building is the eighteenth century Dyfi furnace, which became such a landmark that the whole village has come to be known as **Furnace**. Look to your left as you go over the bridge to see a stunning waterfall; if you want to get out and explore a bit, there's a car park along the lane that forks off the main road immediately after the bridge, enabling you to visit the furnace or take a walk along the lovely wooded valley above it. Follow either of the lanes that head up from the main road, one either side of the river bridge, to get up there. The valley is known as Cwm Einion (the river is the Einion) or Artists' Valley: rock god Robert Plant has a place up here, and you may even see some of his sheep in the vicinity branded with his initials!

Continue south along the A487, dropping down slowly towards the sea and the village of **Tre'r-ddôl** [town of the meadow]. If you're in a rush to get to the beach, take a right here opposite the petrol station, on the B4353 which bounces across the peat bog to the sands at Ynyslas (more details below). Otherwise, continue through the villages of Tre-Taliesin, Tal-y-bont and Bow Street before cresting Penglais Hill and dropping down into **Aberystwyth**. With a university, the National Library and the best Arts Centre in Wales, there's a real swagger in Aber's step: by English standards it may not be very big, but here, it's the biggest place for at least seventy miles in any direction.

There's lots to see and do in Aberystwyth. It's a great town for strolling in: try a walk along the handsome promenade – continue up to the top of Constitution Hill, at the northern end of the prom, for a spectacular view of the town and – on a clear day – the whole of Cardigan Bay (if you don't fancy the walk, an 1896 cliff railway clanks its way to the top). There's also a caff and a Camera Obscura (a kind of strange Victorian webcam) on the summit. South of the pier are the remains of the castle, which is a grand spot for a picnic. In town, there's stacks of shopping and numerous great cafes, pubs and restaurants – this is a town that likes a pint and a pasty, or even something a little classier these days. There's plenty of cultural diversion too: all ages will find something to ooh and ahh over at the brilliantly varied Ceredigion Museum, housed in an old Edwardian music hall behind the tourist office. Touring exhibitions of everything from ceramics to photography are invariably good at the Arts Centre (up on the University campus on Penglais Hill), while temporary exhibitions, plus stuff from the extensive fine art collection of the University of Wales, is shown at the School of Art gallery, a lovely Edwardian building with a landmark cupola a hundred yards north of the train station. Best for exhibitions – art, history and wider culture, usually with a Welsh bent – is the National Library, the imposing Portland stone building on Penglais Hill, just below the university. By the railway station is the terminus of the steam Vale of Rheidol railway, which makes for a very pretty ride into the hills and the ever-popular beauty spot of Devil's Bridge.

If you've got the energy, the six mile coast walk from here to **Borth** (it's easy to get the train or bus back) is spectacular: it takes about three hours. Just climb Constitution Hill, as above, and carry on. If you're driving, the most stunning road is the B4572: take a left to Clarach and Llangorwen at the crossroads at the top of Penglais Hill, just past the uni, on the way back out of Aberystwyth. After a few miles of twists and turns, you'll crest the final hill and see the whole of the Dyfi estuary spread out before you, including the vast, flat peat bog Cors Fochno. From here, you drop down into Borth: basically, one thin line of colourful houses wedged between the bog and the beach. It really is a one-off of a place that people either adore or hate: there's something very Wild West about Borth, as you'll soon discover if you have a night in one the village's three pubs – try the beachside beer garden of the Victoria Inn as the sun sets.

On a hot day, Borth is really hard to beat: the beach is superb, although the best stretch is a mile further north, by the dunes of **Ynyslas**. Where the B-road heads inland, there's a car park by the beach – this is about as near to the estuary mouth as you'd be advised to swim. At low tide, walk from here along the beach back towards Borth and you should see the amazing remains of a

petrified forest in the sands. These are trees that died around 5000 years ago, fuelling all the legends about lost cities in the bay. Alternatively, continue along the shore road to reach the nature reserve (and very good visitor centre) at the lane's end right by the estuary: park up on the sands (though do check the tide times – high tides around full and new moon can flood the area. I know from very bitter experience what happens when sea water meets vehicle here!). Boardwalk paths through the dunes take you to the beach, past rare orchids, rabbits by the score and chirruping seabirds.

Once you're beached out, continue along the B4353 as it heads inland, crossing the railway and then the vast peat bog where timber trackways over a thousand years old were discovered recently. This road re-connects with the A487 back to Machynlleth in Tre'r-ddôl (there are good Sunday car boot sales / markets in the summer here). From there, head back to Beudy Banc all (hopefully) sunkissed and salty. One lovely detour en route is to drive along the exquisite valley of the Afon Llyfnant through the scattered village of **Glaspwll**. The turn is unsignposted, and comes shortly after the estuary-hugging part of the A487 by Dyfi Junction station. After passing the sign for the station, the main road goes straight for a few hundred yards. At the end of that, just as the road starts to swing round slightly to the left, you'll see a right turn – take that. This lane (which has a couple of gates on it, and one narrow section that needs care) takes you along the rushing waters of the Llyfnant, through woods and rocks that look primeval. It's one of the most picturesque roads anywhere. In Glaspwll village, you could stop for a great walk, or continue through and back to Machynlleth.

## INLAND CIRCUIT 1

### **Beudy Banc – Llanbrynmair – Staylitttle – Llyn Clywedog – Llanidloes – Hafren Forest – Dylife – Machynlleth (45-50 miles)**

This is a glorious run that just gets better and better. From the bottom of the track up to Beudy Bank, take a right eastwards, and then the A470 to Newtown (second exit) at the roundabout in Glantwymyn (Cemmaes Road). Follow this for a few miles into the village of **Llanbrynmair**, where the Machinations museum of automata models is an unexpected surprise. They also have a café and kids' play barn if the youngsters need to let off steam.

After the Wynnstay pub, the road veers round to the right, where you should then take the right turn, on the B4518 to Staylitttle and Llanidloes. When you come into Staylitttle, you've got a choice of route around **Llyn Clywedog**, a reservoir built in the 1960s: stay on the B-road to head round the northern shore, or take the right turn signposted 'Scenic Route' and Llwynygog, for a prettier – and slower – route. There's a great viewing area overlooking the reservoir's enormous dam – at over two hundred feet high, it's one of the most massive in Britain. You should then go round to the dam's base, where you'll find the substantial remains of the Bryntail lead mine, a reminder that, for all its apparent bucolic nature, Montgomeryshire has been plundered for all manner of minerals – lead and silver in particular – over the centuries.

The two routes then meet up and progress into the beautiful town of **Llanidloes**. This is the first settlement on the River Severn (Afon Hafren in Welsh): a bustling, self-assured little place with some excellent local shops (notice too how many of them display such lovely signage). The town's main four streets meet at a crossroads. Sitting square in the middle of that crossroads is the gorgeous half-timbered market hall, which has cast its steady eye over the affairs of the town for four hundred years. The local museum, round the side of the town hall on Great Oak Street, is fascinating (check out the stuffed two-headed lamb!), as is the parish church of St Idloes, with its medieval hammerbeam roof and glorious millennium window. There's a fabulous branch of that great Welsh institution, the National Milk Bar, on Great Oak Street, as well as the superb wholefood Great Oak Café, and an embarrassment of fine pubs too. Notice the many half-timbered buildings and the pavements here – the old Montgomeryshire tradition of cobbled stone laying is alive and well in Llanidloes.

The Severn rises to the west of Llanidloes, on the side of the mountain of Pumlumon or Plynlimon (2468 foot): this is also where you'll find the source of the River Wye. Head out of Llanidloes on Short Bridge Street, the other side of the market hall from Great Oak Street, and follow the signs for Old Hall, Rhydybenwch and Hafren Forest. Even if you don't intend to climb up to the source of the Severn, it's still a fascinating route. Deep in the heart of the forest, you'll find the **Rhydybenwch** picnic site, from where trails fan out

in all directions. The circular route to the source of the Severn is quite a slog (it takes a good 4 hours), but well worth it, although don't expect to find Britain's longest river rising in a tinkling silver pool – it oozes out of a peaty, mossy sponge of a bog (though new stepping slabs through the worst bit make it an easyish walk). You can continue the walk for another hour or two and get to the top of Pumlumon Arwystli, which is well worth it for the views (and sense of smugness). If you're not feeling quite that energetic, try the far easier stroll downstream from the picnic area to the Severn-break-its-neck waterfall.

Continue along the lane from Rhydybenwch; the road ploughs on through the massive forest, eventually coming out once again by Llyn Clywedog and then on to the B4518 at Staylittle once more (the odd name, by the way, reputedly comes from the old village blacksmith, who was lightning fast in his work, thus meaning that you only had to 'stay a little' time there. The Welsh name is Penffordd-las [the end of the green road]. Continue northwards on the road on which you came southwards earlier, but not for long. Shortly, there is a left turn signed to 'Machynlleth via mountain road'; take this turn. Within a few hundred yards, there is a large lay-by on the right – a good place to stop and take in the views down the sheer-sided valley of Cwm Pennant below. Carrying on along the road, the scars of industry start to show themselves: this is **Dylife** (pronounced something like 'duh lever'). In its nineteenth century heyday, this was a lawless lead mining boom town of around 1500 people. Now it's nearly all gone: just a few farms and cottages and the wind-blasted Star Inn left. If you like rusty old remnants of industry, Dylife is heaven – there are numerous adits, shafts and ruins to be wandered around (be careful etc.), as well as the really quite spooky remains of the village church above the little car park where the phone box is.

As you continue on your way back to Machynlleth, you'll shortly realise not just how isolated this Klondike community at Dylife was, but also how elevated – a harsh combination that fed its uniquely hard-living existence. The road climbs up a little more, before hurtling around a corner where an enormous view opens up: you're about 1600 feet up at this point. On a good day, it feels like you can see for ever. Down on the first bend is a slate-carved toposcope showing many of the mountains and features that you can see from here; it was placed here as a memorial to effervescent broadcaster and writer, Wynford Vaughan Thomas. It's quite similar to the view from Beudy Banc – just lots more of it. And so down, down, down into the valley and back into Machynlleth. After this trip, perhaps you can see why one of the great local expressions is about the 'mwynder Maldwyn' – the 'mellowness of Montgomeryshire'.

