

Low Level Walking *in & around Snowdonia*



Glaslyn walk (Photo: Ray Wood)



www.snowdonia-active.com

“*...there is also a vast network of wonderful low level walking routes throughout the area.*”

Introduction

Whilst north west Wales is perhaps most famous for the iconic peak of Snowdon, there is also a vast network of wonderful low level walking routes throughout the area. From the beautiful mountain valleys, with their serene lakes and riverside walks, to the old slate quarries and woodland trails, down to the breathtaking beauty of the coastal fringes of the Llŷn Peninsula and Anglesey there is enough variety to ensure something for everybody.

The area is well served with a broad spectrum of outdoor orientated businesses: outdoor shops, accommodation providers, campsites, cafes and rural pubs.

Walking is easily the most popular and accessible form of outdoor recreation. It is a healthy pastime which strengthens both body and mind and is enjoyed by millions of visitors to Snowdonia. The basic requirements are boots, warm clothing, waterproofs, spare clothing and a rucksack to carry it in, a large-scale map - and your imagination.

History

Traditionally, people came to the mountains to climb them; Thomas Johnson made the first recorded ascent of Snowdon in 1639. Low level routes were undertaken over a thousand years earlier, notably by pilgrims to Bardsey Island off the Llŷn Peninsula, the resting place of 20 thousand saints. Drovers navigated their way through the mountains and miners created routes from their communities to quarries and mines. These historical routes left an intricate web of footpaths over the countryside which were, by their nature, corridors of communication for postmen, farmers and local trade. In comparatively recent times these rights of way have become increasingly popular as recreational routes and, by linking and tailoring them to individual preferences, wonderful low level walks can be created.

Getting Started

Equipment

Boots are preferable to shoes or trainers because of the support they give to the ankles. They should have a 'Commando' or 'Vibram' type sole to ensure good traction on grassy or muddy slopes. If the boots are reasonably waterproof it helps, but above all they should be comfortable.

Clothing is a personal choice. A layering system is advised, where one can adjust the body temperature by adding on or stripping off as required. Jeans are not recommended because denim, when wet and cold, tends to conduct heat away from the body.

Changeable weather conditions make waterproofs an essential part of your kit. Modern waterproof fabrics combine durable water repellence with breathability; generally the more you pay for the garment, the more comfortable you will be in wet or humid conditions.

Essential spare clothes should include a synthetic 'fleece' jacket or jumper, socks, gloves and a hat. These can be kept dry in a plastic bag at the bottom of your rucksack. The rucksack would also contain food and drink to sustain you on your walk and, just in case, emergency rations, a torch and a whistle. ▶



Summer ramble with Cnicht in the distance
(Photo: Ray Wood)

“ The disused slate quarries, such as Rhosydd, to the west of Blaenau Ffestiniog in the Moelwyns, are fascinating places.

There are a number of guide books and leaflets available describing walks in Snowdonia, but these should always be used in conjunction with an Ordnance Survey Map scale 1:50,000 or better still, for more detail, the 1:25,000.

Planning your walk

Be sure that the route you are planning is within your capabilities. What you plan on the map in the comfort of your home may appear easy enough as you trace your finger up one valley, over a little col and down another; only a few inches. But a few inches on a 1 to 50,000 scale map may well turn out to be an all day, strenuous, undertaking. Begin modestly and by gaining knowledge, fitness and experience, you will extend your horizons with greater enjoyment and safety.

When you have become competent at reading a map you can progress to learning about its complimentary partner the compass. For low level walks along rights of way, navigation skills involving the compass are not absolutely necessary. However, it is always good practice to carry a compass and if nothing else it will show you how to orientate the map.

Always check the weather forecast. The Met Office is the principal source and the information they give out after radio and TV news bulletins is essential knowledge when planning your walk.

A Snowdonia forecast is also available on:

Mountain Call Snowdonia 09068 500 449 (premium rate call 60p per minute).

A forecast is also available from:

www.metoffice.gov.uk/outdoor/mountainsafety/snowdonia

Safety

Accidents can and do happen to anybody at any time, even on seemingly simple low level routes. Never underestimate the risks involved and follow these guidelines:

- Plan your route before setting out.
- Give details of your route and expected time of return to a responsible person.
- Make sure your fitness matches the route.
- Check the Weather Forecast. Amend the proposed walk accordingly and if the weather worsens, turn back in good time.
- Wear warm, wind and waterproof clothing; and strong footwear with good tread.
- Make sure you know how to use your map.
- Carry a rucksack containing spare clothing, gloves, hat, torch, whistle, food and drink.
- In the event of an accident, keep the casualty warm and dry and try to call help using the international distress signal 6 blasts on a whistle, shouts or flashes on a torch, repeated after a minute's pause. (The reply is 3)
- If you have to fetch help, leave someone with the casualty. Phone 999 and ask for the police.
- If you are using a mobile phone, ask for the North Wales Police. Give details of the accident site, injuries and weather conditions. Do not turn your mobile phone off, and wait for the rescue team.
- Remember, winter conditions can prevail from November to April. Even easy footpaths can be difficult to follow. During the winter months, start early and allow for less daylight.





Llyn Idwal (Photo: Ray Wood)

“If you fancy an excursion in the woods then Coed y Brenin, provides for walks of varying distances



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Regional Breakdown

The areas covered by the 'Explorer' series, 1:25,000 (4cm to 1 kilometre) OS maps in this corner of Wales are:

- Snowdon, Glyderau, Carneddau and Moel Hebog groups - Map OL17
- Moelwynion, Arenig and Y Rhinogydd OL18
- Arans and Cadair Idris OL23
- Llyn Peninsula 253 (West) and 254 (East)
- Anglesey/Ynys Môn 262 (West) and 263 (East)

The northern groups of Snowdon, the Glyderau and the Carneddau are the big boys, the haunts of hardy mountaineers testing their skill, strength and stamina on the lofty peaks, exposed ridges and steep cliffs. Don't be put off - you don't have to climb to their summits to enjoy the pleasures of the mountains. In fact the finest views of the majestic summits are experienced from the lower, safer slopes from which you can look up at them.

A forty minute leisurely walk from the car park at the top of the Llanberis Pass along the Miners Track, a broad, comfortable way along which it is even possible to push a pram, will bring you to Llyn Llydaw, a beautiful lake in the very heart of Snowdon. Be humbled in the embrace of the Snowdon Horseshoe and enjoy the company of nature from the safety of the lower levels.

A similar experience, though not possible with a pram, can be enjoyed in the Ogwen Valley by going up to, and around Llyn Idwal. Above this lake at the head of the cwm are the dark, imposing, striated walls of the Devil's Kitchen. At the head of the lake are the Idwal Slabs, where many budding rock climbers have put their nerves to the test. You can watch their progress whilst perhaps picnicking at the lakeside in this dramatic arena.

The central group of the Moelwynion, Arenig and Y Rhinogydd are rounder, lower hills, but still their summits reach up to over 2000 feet, and even in mid-summer, if the weather turns nasty, they can be cold desolate places. However, a perusal of the OL 18 map will show many interesting low level routes and if you fancy an excursion in the woods then Coed y Brenin, central to this area, provides for walks of varying distances. Coed y Brenin also boasts some of the finest mountain biking circuits in the country.

The disused slate quarries, such as Rhosydd, to the west of Blaenau Ffestiniog in the Moelwyns are fascinating places, surrender to your mind's eye and you can almost visualise the quarrymen of yesteryear walking proudly among the ruins that are today a monument to their Herculean achievements.

Do not wander too far from the footpaths as abandoned quarries are dangerous places; wet slate is very slippery and there may be hiddenshafts. Never enter underground workings unless as part of a competently-led party.

The southern area is where the massifs of the Arans and Cadair Idris rise steeply from the Diffwys and Mawddach rivers, and is sometimes referred to as the 'Golden Triangle' because of the gold mining industry that once flourished here. Treasures of a different kind can be discovered from a wonderful low level walk called the Mawddach Trail, a disused railway line that runs along the southern bank of the estuary; you can easily take a push-chair along its length.

The RSPB have made innovative use of the old signal box by turning it into a bird hide, from where it is possible to observe the wild life of the estuary with an inspiring backdrop of mountain and sea. Part of this trail has been designed for use by wheelchair users.





Lon Goed (Photo: Ray Wood)

Bardsey Island, a place of pilgrimage for over 2,500 years, is a marvellous day out.



The Llyn Peninsula, the finger of Wales that juts out into the Irish Sea, has several short walks that lead to sandy beaches and rocky coves. Excellent countryside for exploration, 'Y Lon Goed' is a fascinating tree-lined avenue that reaches inland from the southern coast for about seven kilometres, through rural farmland.

Y Lon Goed

*Breuddwyd a dychymig ddwy ganrif yn ol
Gwythein gyfareddol yn rhedeg o'r mor
Yn cludo cynholaith a calch i'r ddol.
Y gwraidd nawr yn plethu dan fy nhroed
Boncyffion praff yn gymorth naill law
Y dail yn dawnsio ar y brig uwch ben.
Twnel o egni ysbrydol yn troelli am denu ymlaen.*

The Tree Road

*A vision and a dream of two centuries ago
A remedial artery running from the sea
Conveying sustenance and lime to the fields.
The roots now twining beneath my feet
Strong stout trunks either side of me shield
Leaves dancing in the branches above my head.
A tunnel of spiritual energy twisting enticingly ahead.* by Sam Roberts

Bardsey Island, a place of pilgrimage for over 2,500 years, is a marvellous day out. In the summer months a fishing boat takes today's 'pilgrims' across the treacherous sound to the island, an adventure in itself.

Anglesey, the 'Mother of Wales', so called because of her rich fertile soil, ideal for farming, sustained the nation in days gone by. The island is steeped in history. A 10 kilometre circuit from Moelfre on the east coast will take you past a burial chamber dating back to 2500 BC, an enclosed hut group from Roman times known as Din Llygwy and above the treacherous rocks that witnessed the sinking of the 'Royal Charter' in 1859 with the loss of 400 lives and a substantial amount of gold. On the west coast, Llanddwyn Island, a plug of the oldest rock in Britain, sticks out into Caernarfon Bay. From the old lighthouse, superb views, stretching from Bardsey Island on the tip of the Llyn Peninsula, through Yr Eifl, Snowdon, Y Glyderau to the Cameddau, can be absorbed and enjoyed. All of this is reached by a low level walk of some two hours there and back.

Further information

The Ramblers' Association was formed in 1935 by the federation of various walking clubs. Two of its constitutional aims are: to help all persons to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside and to promote walking.

The Ramblers' Wales Office is on the 4th floor, 1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff. CF11 9HA. Tel 02920343535. www.ramblers.org.uk.

The North Wales area of the Association is very active throughout the year, with local groups organising a variety of walks suiting all levels of ability. For further information contact:

- Ron Williams Tel 01352 715723, E-mail ronanol@macunlimited.net
- Colin Yarwood Tel 01248 430654, E-mail colin@penybont-dwyran.fsnet.co.uk

There are other regional groups which offer walks and company in the countryside. They usually advertise themselves in the local papers.

The Snowdonia National Park Authority website has a walks section: http://www.eryri-npa.co.uk/recreation/walking_1/index.php

The National Park Warden Service is also a source of information and advice, not only on different walks but also on ground and weather conditions.





Lion Rock in Padarn Country Park
(Photo: Ray Wood)

“ Treasures of a different kind can be discovered from a wonderful low level walk called the Mawddach Trail.



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The Warden Centres are found at:

Pen y Pass, Llanberis	01286 872555
Ogwen, Bethesda	01248 602080
Betwsy Coed	01690 710022
Beddgelert	01766 890522
Penrhyndeudraeth	01766 770965
Bala	01678 520624
Dolgellau	01341 422878

The Forestry Commission has created walks on its land, with illustrated leaflets to describe them, and they are not all in woods! For details about forest walks contact:

Forestry Commission, Gwydyr Uchaf, Llanrwst, Gwynedd, LL26 0PN. Tel: 01492 640578. Dolgellau 01341 422289 or visit <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/walking>

The three local County Councils have Countryside Departments; their staff will be very happy to give advice about walking routes. Some have taken the initiative to create their own network of low level walks. For further information:

Gwynedd - Tel. 01286 831877 visit www.gwynedd.gov.uk/countryside

Conwy - Tel. 01492 575200 or visit www.conwy.gov.uk/countryside

Ynys Môn - Tel. 01248 752300 or visit www.mentermon.com

Tourist Information Centres have staff that can advise and offer leaflets on walks in their neighbourhood.

The Wales Tourist Board produces a Walking Wales magazine, which includes descriptions of numerous walking routes in the area. There is also an accompanying website (<http://walking.wtb.lon.world.net>) that provides further information and route suggestions.

The National Trust own and manage various sites and historical properties in the area. Leaflets describing walks at these locations are available from Tourist Information Centres and National Trust visitor centres such as Craflwyn Hall, Beddgelert.

The Countryside Council for Wales is the statutory adviser to government on sustaining natural beauty, wildlife and the opportunity for enjoyment of wildlife throughout Wales and its inshore waters. Try their web site: www.ccw.gov.uk

There are plenty of guide books and leaflets describing other routes. Listed below is a selection of the longer ones:

‘North Wales Path’ - the path follows the coast or lower mountain slopes between Bangor and Prestatyn. It is 60 miles long and commands stunning views of the mountains and the coast. A set of 8 maps (scale 1:25,000) with information to help you on your way has been produced by the Countryside Department of Conwy Council. (Tel: 01492 575200, www.conwy.gov.uk)

‘The Four Valleys Path’ - an 18 mile walk through the former slate mining valleys of Nantlle, Gwyrfai, Padarn and Ogwen. Local circular walks are also included in this guide. This is an initiative of Gwynedd Council; for more information telephone 01286 672255 or e-mail RuralServices@gwynedd.gov.uk

‘Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path’ - a 125 mile path circling the coastline of Anglesey (at present 90% complete). Visit: www.angleseycostalpath.com

There is a proposal in hand, or should it be on foot, to create low level circular walks around the principal massifs of Snowdonia. The ‘Scales of the Dragon’ is the metaphor used to describe the individual circuits.





(Photo: Ray Wood)

“ During spring and early summer, a coastal walk around Holy Island or on the Llyn Peninsula, for example, will pass through wonderful drifts of flowering plants accompanied by the sound of thousands of seabirds nesting on the steep coastal cliffs.

Specialist publications:

Walking Wales - quarterly publication focussing on routes in Wales.

Country Walking - Britain's best-selling walking magazine, includes Down Your Way, a unique British Walking guide with route maps, where to eat and what to see at each location. Plus health, holidays, wildlife and gear tests.

Walk - the quarterly Rambler's Association magazine covering a wide range of interest to walkers. Free to RA members.

TGO - formerly The Great Outdoors, is recognised as Britain's most authoritative outdoors magazine for hill walkers, backpackers, trekkers and scramblers. Every month there is a variety of features from home and abroad, up to date and informed news coverage of the outdoor world and in depth gear tests.

Trail - the magazine for the adventurous walker - full of route descriptions, advice and gear tests. Plus: articles giving coverage to UK locations and abroad.

Access and Conservation notes

Most of the countryside in Wales, including National Parks, is privately owned and often used for farming. Since May 2005 we have had the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW), governing rights to walk-on defined 'access land'. Under the Act there are rights of access to most common land, public forests, mountain, moor, heath and down. Public Footpaths, Bridleways, and permissive paths provide further means of access. Ordnance Survey maps show Public Rights of Way in green and open access areas as a yellow wash. For up to the minute Information and interactive maps showing countryside access in Wales, go to www.ccw.gov.uk/countrysideaccesswales. Farmers who are part of the Tir Cymen and Tir Gofal schemes also permit access as part of their farm agreements.

By respecting these agreements and keeping to Rights of Way, you will minimise disturbance to farmers and their livestock, wild animals, birds and plants.

North West Wales is blessed with a wide range of landscape and wildlife, from the heights of Snowdon, to the impressive coastal scenery of Anglesey and the Llŷn Peninsula. Much of the region and its landforms have been influenced and moulded by ice during the last glacial advance, producing the cwms, aretes and moraines which are so important geologically and which form the backbone supporting the wildlife interest of the area. Most of the land you will walk through is managed for agriculture, mainly for sheep grazing with some cattle and a few crops, however, it is not too difficult to see the birds, other animals and plants for which this part of the world is famed. During spring and early summer, a coastal walk around Holy Island or on the Llyn Peninsula, for example, will pass through wonderful drifts of flowering plants accompanied by the sound of thousands of seabirds nesting on the steep coastal cliffs. Chough can be seen and heard screeching overhead both on the coast and inland, where they are often accompanied by the more sonorous croak of the raven. Signs of water voles or otters may be found by the rivers, or if you are very lucky, perhaps even a sighting. In the mountain valleys, the oak woodlands with their moss covered boulders scattered beneath the gnarled old trees are a delight at any time of the year, but particularly during the spring when some woodlands support sheets of bluebells, drifts of wood anemones or fragrant ramsons.

Some of this wildlife is specially protected or occurs in sites where management is geared towards its maintenance and protection. It would have been far more extensive in previous centuries, but years of agriculture, development and pollution have threatened its existence and reduced its extent to the places we see today. However, it is resilient and with current protection and management we hope to conserve the remains and even extend some of the woodlands and meadows for example. Most is readily accessible and on practically all low level walks in this area, you will see something of interest. ▶



Evening view of Snowdon (Photo: Ray Wood)

There is a plethora of books written about Snowdonia and its wildlife, the titles of which can be obtained from a web search or from any good bookshop. More detailed information about particular sites or conservation issues can be obtained from organisations such as:

The Countryside Council for Wales in Bangor

Tel: 01248 672500

www.ccw.gov.uk

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in Bangor.

Tel: 01248 363800

www.rspb.org.uk

The North Wales Wildlife Trust.

Tel: 01248 351541.

www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/northwales

The National Trust.

Tel: 01492 860123

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Countryside Code:

Respect – Protect – Enjoy

- Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep your dog under close control
- Consider other people



Snowdonia-Active website

www.snowdonia-active.com provides a whole host of information about local activity providers, instructors and guides, accommodation and campsites, outdoor shops and cafes. Check out the Directory, a geographically specific database covering outdoor orientated businesses in the North-West Wales area. The site is host to a whole range of downloadable activity and area guides written by field experts. It also has links to numerous weather forecasting websites.

Public Transport

Although the Snowdonia area is well served with a modern road network there are many alternatives to travelling by private car. The Snowdonia National Park, the Llŷn Peninsula & Anglesey are criss-crossed with a network of local & regional buses, and rail links. In the northern part of the National Park the special Sherpa bus service connects the most popular walking & climbing areas to adjacent towns and villages.

UK Public Transport Information

<http://www.traveline.org.uk> gives links to public transport providers. Click on the map for information about coach, bus, rail, air & ferry services for North Wales & beyond.

Disclaimer

The writer and publishers of this leaflet accept no responsibility for the way in which readers use the information contained therein. The descriptions and recommendations are for guidance only and must be subject to discriminating judgement by the reader. Advice and training should be sought before utilising any equipment or techniques mentioned within the text or shown in any of the photographic images.

Climbing and hillwalking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

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Sam has lived in Caernarfon for most of his life, enjoying the activities that the sea, the mountains and the skies of North Wales have to offer. Sailing and windsurfing gave way to rock-climbing and mountaineering; complemented, more recently, by paragliding. He is a world traveller, and has been a member of several expeditions three to Mt. Everest. Since 1973 he has been a National Park Warden with responsibilities in Northern Snowdonia.