

Cribarth Geotrail

Quarries and crags, folds and fractures

FFOREST FAWR
G E O P A R K

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GEPARK WALK

A 5.25km / 3.25 mile walking trail exploring the rocky slopes of a spectacular hill rising above Craig-y-nos Country Park in the upper Swansea Valley (Cwm Tawe). This landscape has been carved by water and ice from folded layers of sandstone and limestone. A legacy of quarrying adds detail and drama to the scene.

Start Craig-y-nos Country Park (OS grid reference SN 839155) (postcode SA9 1GL)
Ascent About 250m / 800ft
Time Allow about 3.5 hours to fully enjoy the walk
Map Use OS Explorer map OL12 'BBNP western area'
The initial ascent (and later descent) through woodland is steep. Several sections of the trail follow abandoned or unfinished sections of 19th century industrial tramroad which offer relatively easy walking.
Warning There are numerous areas of steep ground and loose rock on Cribarth though this trail avoids these difficulties. Some sections of path are wet. Both rocks and grass slopes can be slippery particularly after rain – beware! Unless you're an expert, navigating Cribarth's complex terrain in mist or low cloud can be difficult – save this walk for a good day!
Route Several sections follow abandoned or unfinished sections of 19th century industrial tramroad which offer relatively easy walking.

Getting there

From Brecon
Turn off the A40 at Sennybridge and take the A4067 towards Swansea to reach Craig y nos Country Park after 19 miles/26 mins.
From junction 45, M4 nr Swansea

Take the A4067 up the Swansea Valley to reach Craig y nos Country Park after 16 miles/26mins. Pay and display parking.

Information staff at the National Park Visitor Centre near Brecon (and at other seasonal centres at Pontneddfechan and Llandovery) can advise on purchasing detailed walking maps of the area. Visit www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/shop

More information on the route can be found at www.fforestfawrgeopark.org.uk

START

Leave the car park and turn left along the main road. Beware of traffic as you walk south for about 350m. Across the road from a large layby on the left is a gate leading to a broad track.

Once through the gate, stop to view rocks and drams on display.

1 Follow the concessionary route as it runs up through privately owned woods for 90m. Do NOT continue ahead to the old quarries with their hazardous cliff faces; instead, turn sharp right up a narrower footpath with steps in places.



Stop to enjoy the view up the Tawe valley at an open area by a fence.

Continue up more steeply beside a fence to a ladder stile.

The upper part of Cwm Tawe was carved through the Old Red Sandstone by ice. Blocks of this rock can be seen along this path. Their chestnut-brown colour contrasts with the grey Carboniferous Limestone which forms the bedrock of this hillside.

2 Turn right to follow an often rough path beside the wall/fence for over 400m. As you descend a couple of rocky sections, notice that the beds of limestone dip steeply to the northwest (see front cover photo). Approaching a field gate on your right, venture about 50m up the grassy slopes on your left to take a closer look at the rocks.



Chert-filled burrows in limestone
Unlike the rocks you passed earlier, the limestone here is almost horizontal and contains oddly shaped lumps of a different rock type within it.

This is **chert**, a variety of silica not unlike flint, filling burrows created by organisms when these rocks were still soft sediments.



3 Return to the fence/wall and follow it to the left for 100m as it starts to climb a short bank. Halfway up the bank you cross what looks like a rough ditch running at right angles to the fence.

Remains of rottenstone workings appear as mounds beside a 'ditch'.

These are abandoned mineral workings from the 19th century where a layer of 'limestone shale' had weathered over millennia to form rottenstone. This rock was so extensively quarried along its outcrop for use as an industrial polish that no trace of it remains today. The humps and hollows resulting from its quarrying can be seen here and elsewhere on this walk.



Prominent beds of Twrch Sandstone dipping steeply NW to right

Immediately above these workings are scattered blocks and bedrock outcrops of the **Twrch Sandstone**. At the top of the bank, the remains of a **'ty-un-nos'**, a hastily erected building, are built into the wall. A prominent band of very steeply dipping Twrch Sandstone extends away to the left.

4 Start by following the outcrop of this rock directly away from the wall/fence, then continue walking southwest along the crest of the broad ridge, passing a shallow pool on your left after 250m as the ridge broadens. Meet a rough track after a further 100m – the remains of a half-finished tramroad.



5 Turn right, following the twisting track for 100m as it drops down into a gully which cuts across its route.

The distant Old Red Sandstone peak of Fan Gyhirych is seen down the gully

This gully is the result of 19th century quarrying for 'silica rock'

as the Twrch Sandstone or Basal Grit is sometimes known. Normally a very hard rock, it has been shattered in this area by movement along a geological fault which cuts NE-SW through the area and left it easier to quarry with the hand-tools available to our forebears.

Continue for another 100m beyond the gully to a stile and gate in the fence/wall ahead.

From here you can follow the line of the unfinished tramroad with your eye as it curves to the right. It was built to provide access to a large area of ground where rottenstone was quarried though the tramway was never completed. You can also see numerous shakeholes, large and small, which reveal that limestone beneath has been dissolving away.

6 Retracing your steps, go back across the gully to the point at which you joined the tramroad (5). Continue along it as it curves uphill to the right and then back left.

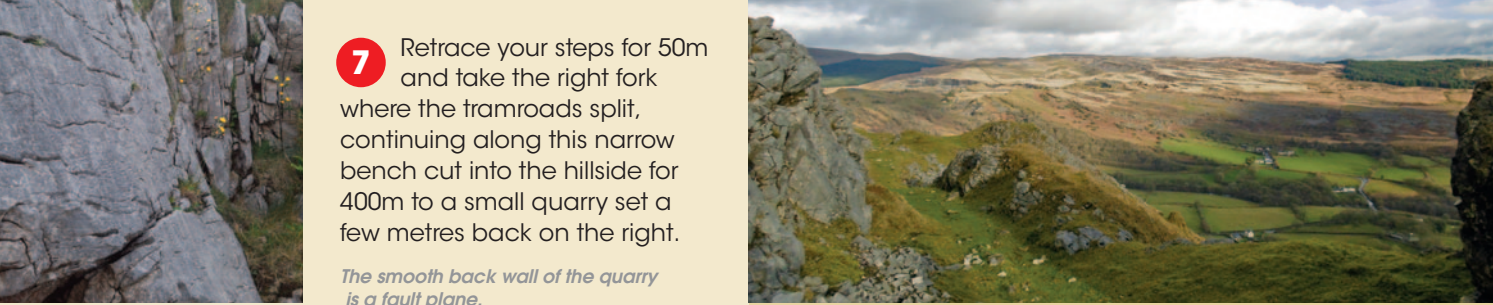
Notice further rottenstone workings down to the left below the tramroad before passing through a field of Twrch Sandstone boulders scattered down the hill from the cairn-topped summit above.

The unfinished tramroad flattens out before joining another former tramroad coming in from the left.

Continue beyond the junction of the two tramroads up a further 50m into an embayment immediately beneath the rocky knoll which forms Cribarth's highest point (428m above sea level).

Note the beds of limestone dipping in the direction from which you have come.





7 Retrace your steps for 50m and take the right fork where the tramroads split, continuing along this narrow bench cut into the hillside for 400m to a small quarry set a few metres back on the right.

The smooth back wall of the quarry is a fault plane.



As you follow this tramroad note how the dip of the rock strata has changed - you are now on the south-eastern flank of the main Cribarth anticline. The rocks dip steeply to the southeast in contrast to earlier stops where they were dipping to the northwest.

The anticline is part of the Cribarth Disturbance, a set of major geological faults and folds stretching from Swansea Bay northeast up Cwm Tawe, through this hill and on towards Brecon.

10 Continue beyond the quarry in the same direction and, as you head down a grassy slope, the wall/fence which you followed earlier, comes into view. Head for the ladder-stile you crossed much earlier. Retrace your steps carefully down the steep hillside to the road. Beware if wet, it is more slippery going downhill! Return to the Country Park, mindful of traffic on the road.

Facilities at Craig-y-nos Country Park include:

- Pay & display parking
- Toilets
- Café
- Walks
- Geopark and National Park displays

More information at
www.breconbeacons.org/craig-y-nos-country-park

Fforest Fawr Geopark is grateful to The National Showcaves Centre for Wales for use of the permitted path through the woodland.

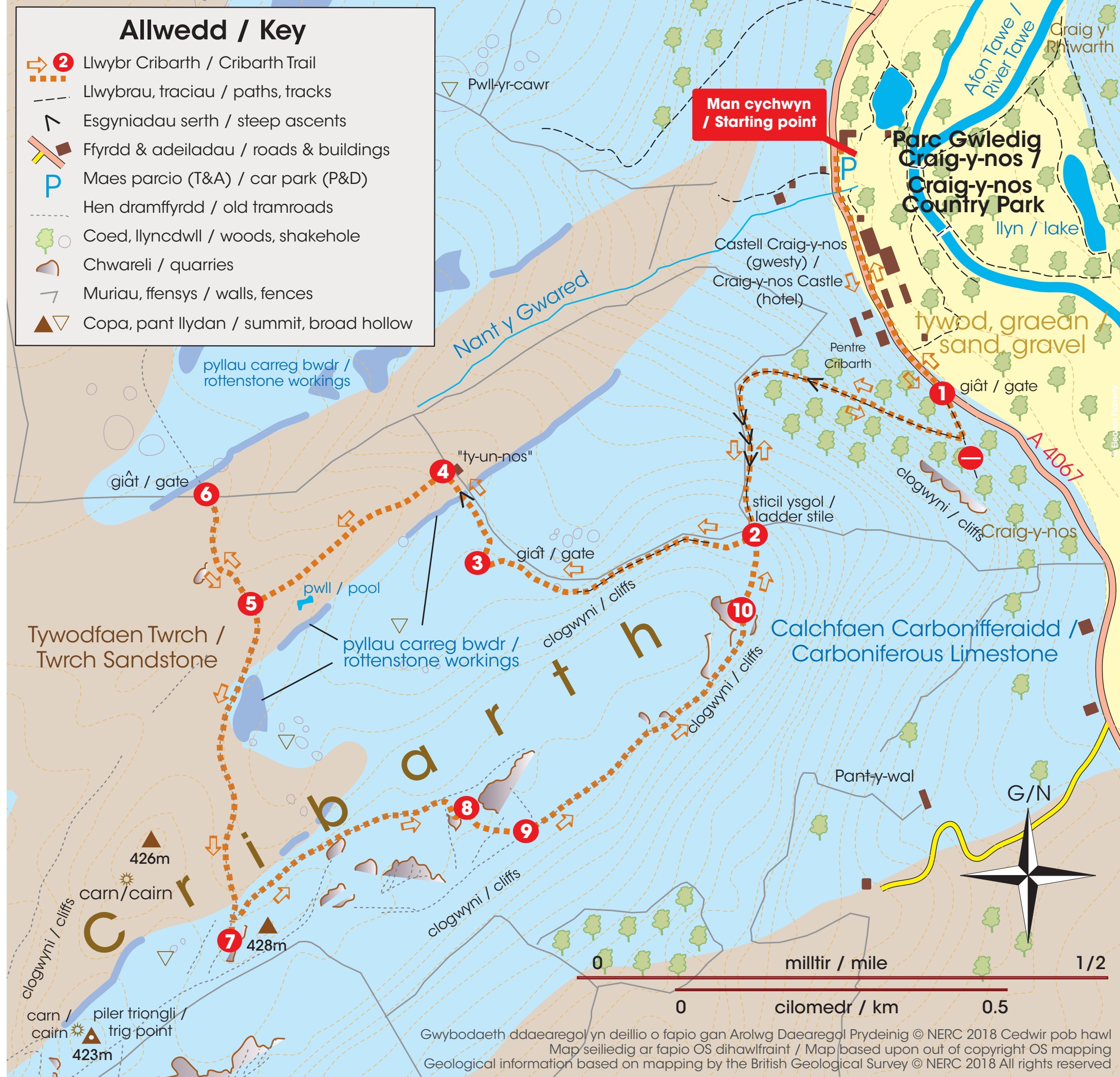


Please follow the Countryside Code

This land is grazed by sheep and horses - please keep dogs on a short lead on the hill.



A new simple geology map of Fforest Fawr Geopark is available from National Park information centres to help you understand the landscape you're walking through.



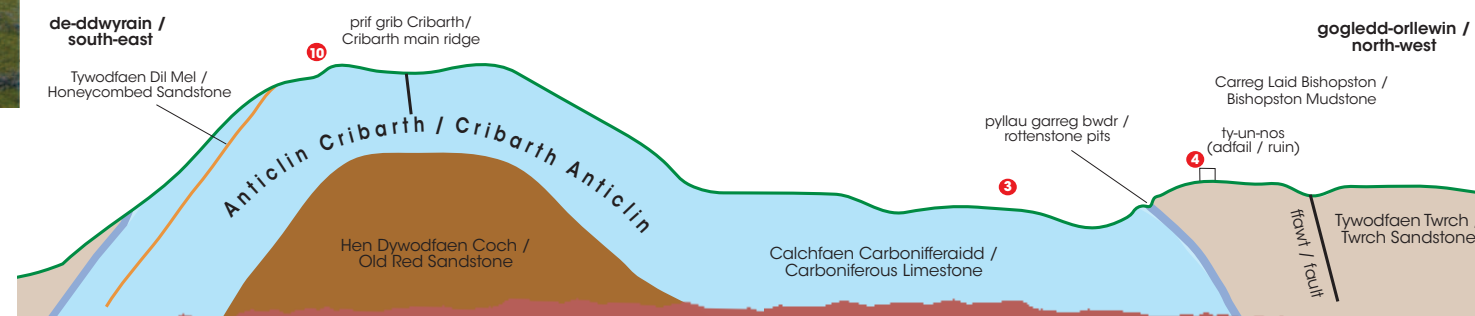
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Mae'r croestoriad yma'n dangos y creigiau o dan eich traed wrth i chi ddringo'r inclen tua'r gogledd-ddwyrain o'r man cychwyn. Mae'r graig hynaf a welir ar yr wyneb ar y daith yw'r Calchfaen Carbonifferaidd a ddyddodwyd oddeutu 350 miliwn o flynyddoedd yn ôl mewn moroedd trofannol. Y rhai ieuengaf yw cerrig llaid a thywodfeini'r Cystiradau Glo a ffurfiwyd mewn deltâu afonydd oddeutu 310 miliwn o flynyddoedd yn ôl.

BELOW This cross-section shows the rocks under your feet as you ascend the incline northeast from the start. The oldest rock seen at the surface on the walk is the Carboniferous Limestone laid down around 350 million years ago in tropical seas. The youngest are the Coal Measures mudstones and sandstones formed in river deltas around 310 million years ago.

UCHOD 300 miliwn o flynyddoedd yn ôl, perodd pwysedd ochrol i haenau'r graig blygu a hollti. Golygai'r craciau hyn fod calchfeini'r Cribarth yn haws eu cloddio na chreigiau gorweddol mewn mannau eraill.

LEFT Three hundred million years ago, lateral pressure caused rock layers to fold and crack. These cracks made Cribarth's limestones easier to quarry than flat-lying rocks elsewhere.



Mae map daeareg syml newydd o Geoparc y Fforest Fawr ar gael gan Ganolfannau Gwybodaeth y Parc Cenedlaethol i'ch helpu i ddeall y dirwedd rydych yn cerdded drwyddi.