Cribarth Geotrail

Quarries and crags, folds and fractures

Geotrail

Cribarth

Cultural Organization

United Nations

Global Geopark

Fforest Fawr GEOPARK 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

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 800m. 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.

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

2. 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.

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

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.

These are abandoned mineral workings from the 19th century which offer relatively easy walking.

4. 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 outcrops of the hillside.

5. Prominent beds of Twrch Sandstone dipping steeply NW to right

Immediately above these workings are scathed blocks and bedrock outcrops of the Twrch Sandstone. At the top of the bank, the remains of a ‘fly-um-nar’, a hastily erected building as it was built to provide access to a large area of ground where rottenstone was quarried though the tramroad was never completed. You can also see numerous shakeholes, large and small, which reveal that limestone beneath has been dissolving away.

6. Return to the tramroad at the point at which you joined the tramroad (5). Continue along it as it curves up 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 calm 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.

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

Getting there

From Brecon

Take the A40 at Sennybridge and take the A4077 towards Swansea to reach Craig y nos Country Park after 16 miles/26miles. Pay and display parking.

From junction 48, M4 or Swansea

Take the A4077 up the Tawe Valley to reach Craig y nos Country Park after 16 miles/26miles. Pay and display parking.

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

START

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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 800m. 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.

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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.

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4. 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 outcrops of the hillside.

5. Prominent beds of Twrch Sandstone dipping steeply NW to right

Immediately above these workings are scathed blocks and bedrock outcrops of the Twrch Sandstone. At the top of the bank, the remains of a ‘fly-um-nar’, a hastily erected building as it was built to provide access to a large area of ground where rottenstone was quarried though the tramroad was never completed. You can also see numerous shakeholes, large and small, which reveal that limestone beneath has been dissolving away.

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

Getting there

From Brecon

Turn off the A46 at Sennybridge and take the A4077 towards Swansea to reach Craig y nos Country Park after 16 miles/26miles. Pay and display parking.

From junction 48, M4 or Swansea

Take the A4077 up the Tawe Valley to reach Craig y nos Country Park after 16 miles/26miles. Pay and display parking.

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Continue behind the quarry and, with a larger quarry to your left, drop down first to one minor bench cut into the hillside for a few metres back on the right.

As you follow this tramroad note how the dip of the rock strata has changed – you are now on the southeastern 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 Bracan.

Return to the Country Park, mindful of traffic on the road. Beware if wet, it is more slippery going downhill!

Retrace your steps carefully down the steep hillside to the wall/fence which you followed earlier, comes into view.

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

Facilities of Craig-y-nos Country Park include:
- Pay & display parking
- Toilets
- Café
- Walks
- Geopark and National Park displays

Craig-y-nos Castle is a 19th-century Gothic Revival mansion completed in 1847, designed by John Nash. It is now a country house hotel.

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.

Gwybodaeth ddaeareg yn deillio o fapio gan Arolwg Daearegol Prydeinig © NERC 2018 Cedwir pob hawl

Mae map daeareg syml newydd o Geoparc y Fforest Fawr ar gael gan Ganolfannau Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales.

Tryblu arwydd / starting point

Beudawd arwydd / middle point

Carcad will / summit

Cennod bwyd / summit track

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