

Nant Tarw stone circles and Fan Foel burial cairn



Walk Information:

Maps: OS Explorer OL12

Distance: 4 or 8 miles / 6.5 or 13 kilometres

Duration: Allow at least 4 hours for the shorter walk, or 7 hours including Fan Foel

Difficulty: medium to hard. Includes rough ground without paths and stream crossings. Only to be attempted in good visibility. Map and compass essential and GPS useful.

Start and finish: SN 82002714

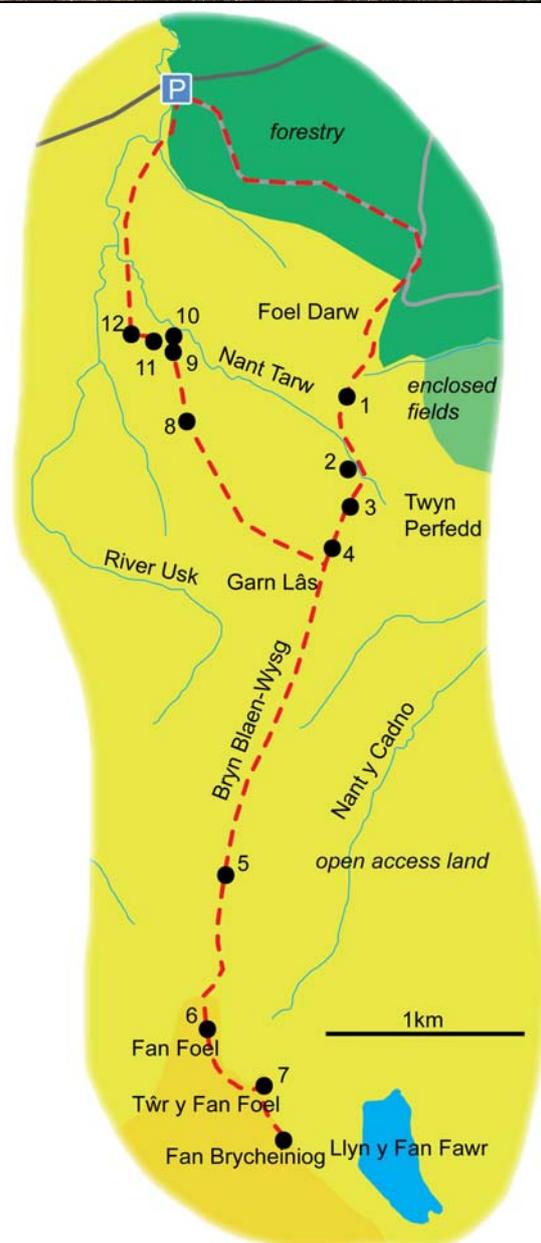
Walk summary

The walk takes advantage of forestry roads and open access land, visiting prehistoric burial cairns, and two stone circles. The ascent of Fan Foel is optional, but gives spectacular views across the Brecon Beacons.

The summit plateau consists of Old Red Sandstone which gives much of the Brecon Beacons its distinctive appearance. The rocks were formed during the Devonian age 416-359 million years ago. This area lies within the Fforest Fawr Geopark:

<http://www.breconbeacons.org/fforestfawr>

The walk follows a forestry road before taking a footpath onto the open moorland. A series of often narrow and indistinct paths lead to a large burial cairn from where there is the option of continuing to the summit of Fan Foel or heading directly to the Nant Tarw stone circles across moorland with no paths.



Introduction

The upland ridge of which Fan Brycheiniog is the highest summit at 802m is an impressive landscape and a distinctive local landmark. The steep northern edge falls dramatically to Llyn y Fan Fawr, while the southern side descends gently to the valleys of South Wales.

The Brecon Beacons as a whole has a wealth of archaeological sites and both Fan Foel and Tŵr y Fan Foel have Bronze Age burial cairns on their summits. The moorland which stretches north towards the Usk Reservoir is particularly rich in important prehistoric sites, the most impressive sites of which are the two stone circles which lie between Nant Tarw and the River Usk. Like the burial cairns, these are thought to have been built in the Bronze Age (2,300 – 1,200 BC).



Fan Brycheiniog and Fan Foel viewed from the north

The Walk

The walk starts from the Glasfynydd forestry car park near the Usk Reservoir, to the west of Trecastle (SN 82002714).

From the car park go around the barrier and onto a forestry road which leads through dense conifers. Eventually another road joins from the left and the route continues ahead for another 100m before bearing right to a gate onto open access land (SN 83132613).

Bear left and continue parallel to the forestry, avoiding the reeds, to join a rough track. Follow this S, passing the corner of the forestry and descending to a stream. Ascend the opposite bank heading SW, following vehicle tracks to reach a large stone slab which may be a fallen **standing stone (1)** (SN 8283925563).



The possible fallen **standing stone (1)**

Continue along the track which leads into a small valley with the stream on the right, passing the ruins of a large dry-stone walled **sheepfold (2)** on the opposite bank. Just beyond the sheepfold the track reaches the stream at SN 8294925146. Cross the stream and instead of following a rough path, head upslope to the SSW to a small **Bronze Age burial cairn (3)** on a natural terrace (SN 8286025004) on the slopes of Garn Lâs.

A further 230m to the SSW is a second, more impressive **burial cairn (4)** around 19m in diameter at SN 8277424793. There are extensive views from here with Pen y Fan and Corn Du to the E and the military range at Sennybridge to the NNE with its distinctive conifer plantations. It is not unusual to hear the sound of gunfire from the range and troops also frequently use the Brecon Beacons during training exercises.



The large **burial cairn (4)** on Garn Lâs

From the cairn there is the option of extending the walk to include an ascent of Fan Foel, before returning to the cairn to continue to the stone circles. The ascent should only be undertaken in good weather as the route may be difficult to follow and involves 360m of ascent, taking at least 3 hours there and back.

For Fan Foel take a grassy path heading SSW which heads directly for the N ridge of the mountain, ignoring any paths diverging to the right. After around 500m a path joins from the left, which is marked as a dashed line on Ordnance Survey maps. Follow this SSW along the side of Bryn Blaen-Wysg. The path becomes less distinct as it approaches an area of peat exposures but continue ahead to the SSW heading directly for the ridge.

The Ordnance Survey map marks a **stone circle (5)** at SN 82242312, although this is now thought to be just a natural scatter of boulders.

The final ascent of the ridge is steep and can be slippery, particularly during the descent. On reaching the summit of Fan Foel the path leads to a large **burial cairn (6)** (SN 82142234) which was partially excavated by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust in 2004. The excavations uncovered a kerb of stones around 11m in diameter surrounding a low stone cairn with a stone cist near the centre. The cist contained the cremated remains of an adult, a child and an infant, together with pottery and flint tools. A secondary cremation was also uncovered nearby, consisting of an adult and a juvenile.



The excavated **burial cairn (6)** on Fan Foel

More information on the excavations is available at:

<http://www.cambria.org.uk/projects/fanfoel.htm>

It is a short distance from Fan Foel to the summit of Tŵr y Fan Foel, which also has a small **burial cairn (7)** beneath a modern walkers' cairn, and then on to the trig point on the summit of Fan Brycheiniog (802m). The northern edge of the ridge is dramatic, falling steeply to Llyn y Fan Fawr and views from here are extensive in all directions: N to Plynlimon with Cader Idris beyond, E to Pen y Fan and Corn Du, W to the distant Preseli mountains and S to the Bristol Channel.

The descent retraces the route down the N ridge of Fan Foel and along Bryn Blaen-Wysg to the large **burial cairn (4)**.

From the cairn the walk heads W, following the N side of a fenced enclosure (no path) to a corner with a gate at SN 82322492. From this point head NNW, downslope, to a **standing stone (8)** at SN 8204125429. The large triangular slab of sandstone, which has split into two, is aligned roughly E-W, pointing in the direction of the large stone **(1)** seen earlier in the walk.



The summit of Fan Brycheiniog looking towards Tŵr y Fan Foel

Continue NNW towards the Nant Tarw stream to a **stone circle (9)** at SN 81972579. This is the eastern of two circles and has 16 surviving stones forming a circle 19m in diameter. The spacing of the stones suggests that there may originally have been 21 stones. Around 80m to the N, close to the stream, is a large spread of stone which marks the site of a disturbed **burial cairn (10)**.

The second **stone circle (11)** (SN 81872584) is also around 19m in diameter and lies about 110m to the W of the cairn. This has 18 visible stones although there could have been as many as 28 originally. It may be significant that from here, on a clear day, Pen y Fan is visible in the dip between Foel Darw and Twyn Perfedd. Both circles have their largest stones on the SE side.



The western stone circle (11) at Nant Tarw with Foel Darw on the left and Twyn Perfedd on the right

Around 100m to the W is a very large block of sandstone with two small upright stones to one side (SN 8176625878). The large stone may once have been upright, forming the end of a short **stone row (12)**.

Nant Tarw stone circles and Fan Foel burial cairn

The complex of Bronze Age monuments at Nant Tarw is unusual and clearly indicates the importance of this area at that time. This is not the only complex in the area and the Cerrig Duon stone circle (SN 8511420609) which lies 6km to the SE, close to the road between Trecastle and Glyntawe, is also well worth a visit. In addition to the circle, there is also a large standing stone, Maen Mawr, and an avenue of small stones.

To return to the carpark head roughly N from the stone row, following a vague path to cross the Nant Tarw stream at SN 81732624. The path then follows the E bank of the Usk for a short distance before bearing right towards the forestry and, after crossing a small stream, leads to a stile and on to a forestry track leading back to the carpark.



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Turn left, parallel to the forestry, to join a rough track. Follow this S, passing the corner of the forestry before crossing a stream. Ascend the opposite bank heading SW, following vehicle tracks to reach a large stone slab which may be a fallen **standing stone (1)** (SN 8283925563).

Continue along the track into a small valley with the stream on the right, passing the ruins of a **sheepfold (2)** on the opposite bank. Cross the stream at SN 8294925146 and head upslope to the SSW to a **Bronze Age burial cairn (3)** (SN 8286025004) on the slopes of Garn Lâs.

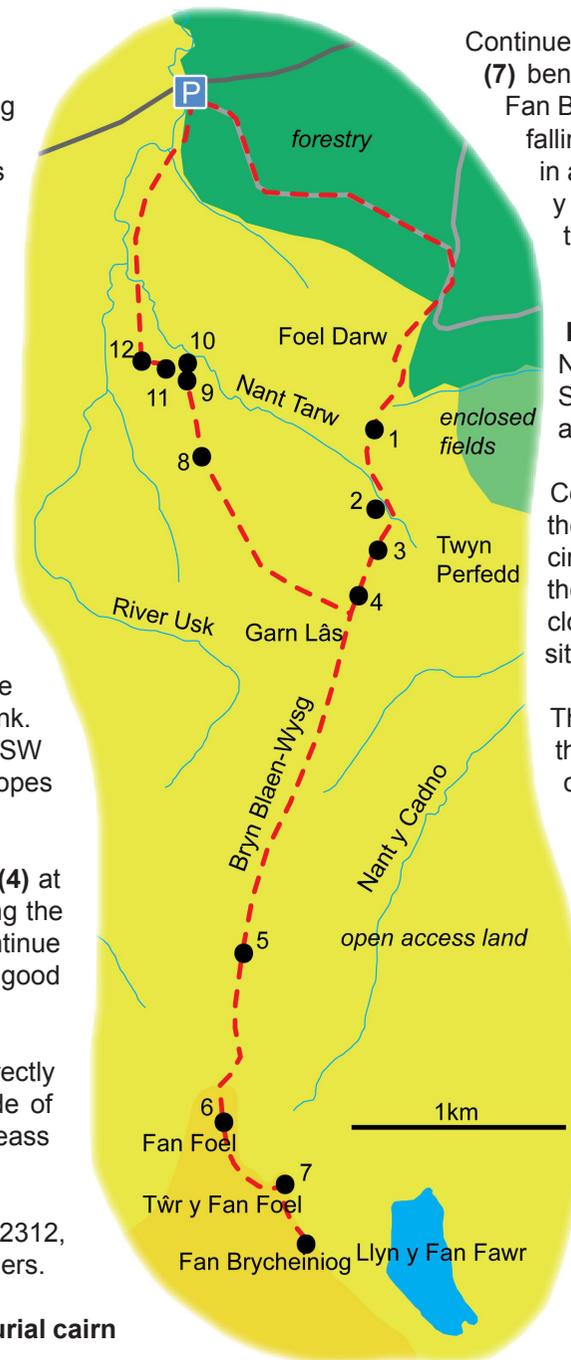
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On reaching the summit of Fan Foel the path leads to a large **burial cairn (6)** (SN 82142234).

For a fuller description of this walk see www.cpat.org.uk/walks



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