

Country Walks Around Wrexham

Route 5 – Nant y Ffrith (5 miles / 2½ hours)

Bwlchgwyn – Nant-y-ffrith – Ffrith – Glascoed – Bwlchgwyn

This walk starts at Bwlchgwyn War Memorial (grid ref SJ263536) on the A525 between Wrexham and Ruthin. There are many fine views of Ffrith Valley and there are impressive waterfalls nearby. The route passes through Black Wood and Nant Wood on its descent to the former Romano-British settlement at Ffrith, returning along a pack-horse trail and over grazing land. Many areas of scenic beauty make the walk worthwhile in all seasons.

Cars: Ample car parking space is available by the memorial.

Buses: On Mondays to Saturdays there is a bus service to Bwlchgwyn. Head uphill on the main road to the starting point of the walk. Bus information: 01978 266166.

Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer map 256 covers the area but the extract supplied will be all you need for the walk.

- *The route is not suitable for wheelchairs, buggies or small children.*

WALK DIRECTIONS

Turn down the narrow lane and 70 metres after passing the buildings look for a path between two concrete posts on the left. From here there are views across the valley to the mountain, **Pen-llan-y-gŵr (1)**

Follow the path downhill, passing a quarry on your left and bear right at the junction. Cross the road and find the descending path.

Go across a forest track and at the lane turn left heading downhill to the bridge. On the other side turn left to see the stables and coach house with an interesting cupola made of pitch-pine and covered in lead. This building was once part of **Nant-y-ffrith Hall Estate (2)** and is now a private residence.

Return to the bridge and, without crossing it, take the track uphill revealing a good view across the valley. The estate introduced trees and shrubs, including red oak and copper beech, which can be seen growing among Forestry Commission conifers. The broadleaved trees help make Nant-y-ffrith a good habitat for bats. Natterer's, Daubenton's and long-eared bats are some of the species that can be seen here at dusk.

At the cross-paths, the way ahead leads to the site of Nant-y-ffrith Hall, now popular for picnics.

Follow the main track bearing to the right through Black Wood and Nant Wood; this path was the old estate road to Ffrith. You eventually come to Nant-uchaf, an 18th century smallholding, which has now been modernised.

Just past the main buildings turn right along the main track for about half a mile, passing Nant Issa on your left. Hazel trees dominate the hedgerow as you make your way towards the railway viaduct. Walk along the road into **Ffrith (3)**.

After looking around the village return beneath the viaduct, then take the track over the river bridge and turn right. Your route now follows an old **pack-horse trail (4)**. Walk under a mineral tramway bridge to reach the early 17th century **Glascoed Hall (5)**. Just beyond here the path angles to the left. The pack-horse trail continued straight on but only remains of this can be found. The trail may have been used by the Romans to carry lead from Minera to Ffrith.

At the road turn left. Pass the prominent stand of black pine and further on, beyond Glascoed Cottage, can be seen Glascoed Lodge. This was originally called Glascoed Hall before the present one was built. Note the different species of tree and shrub in the **hedge (6)** alongside the road.

When you reach the first sharp left-hand bend turn right, leaving the road and cross the stream. Cobbles of coal may be seen in the water showing the location of outcropping seams.

Walk up the embankment to the stile in the top far corner of this enclosed part of the wood. Turn left and cross three fields, in the third a pair of standing stones mark the gateway to a disused ford.

Turn left onto Stryt-y-cefn (street of the ridge). In 170 metres you reach a stile on the right. Take the path diagonally left down the field towards the stile in the far left corner, then go through the second gate on the right towards Waen Farm. The farmhouse, an early 17th century building, was a stop for caravans of pack-horses travelling between Mid-Wales and Chester. Go ahead through two gates into the farmyard then turn immediately left.

At the corner of the field turn left and follow the hedge to the next corner. After crossing a stile continue on the same line for 140 metres and turn right onto Cefn Road. Turn right again into Brymbo Road and after 300 metres right once again onto the main road back to the War Memorial.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- (1) Aerial photographs backed up by archaeological research have revealed a Stone Age settlement on top of Pen-llan-y-gŵr. The footpath leading to the summit passes through the site, where stone hut-circles can still be seen.
- (2) Nant-y-ffrith Hall was built in 1850 by Thomas Fry, a Liverpool tea merchant. The building was designed to be used as a hunting lodge but Fry died shortly after its completion. Mr Peek, another tea merchant, then obtained the lodge and turned it into a country residence, adding many fine features and extending the gardens.

In 1865 it was sold to James Kyrke and later passed to his son who greatly enlarged the estate. Today nothing remains of the building. The woodlands are in private ownership but there is an access agreement in place for those on foot.

- (3) Over the past four centuries there have been a huge number of Roman finds at Ffrith. Twenty-two Roman copper coins, a silver coin, several highly-ornamented fibulae, gold and silver rings, ivory and silver pins, amber and glass beads, part of a lamp, an

altar and several urns were found while levelling Offa's Dyke for roadworks in 1828. When the Council houses were built remains of a Roman villa were found. Local gardens have yielded many artefacts and under the playing fields near the river a circular foundation was discovered.

When old cottages near the Bluebell Inn were demolished more Roman foundations were revealed. Recently a discovery was made at the sawmill behind the inn; the owner was enlarging the yard by cutting deep into the hillside and two Roman kilns were found.

Later ages have also left their mark on this quiet village. A medieval pack-horse bridge can be found over the river next to a ford. The old road makes its way out of the valley towards Cymau and is still open to walkers. The main road is built on Offa's Dyke and many researchers believe that the earthwork here may have used a Roman road as its foundation.

The building to the side of the inn was a miller's cottage; the mill is situated at the end of the lane beside the Poacher's Cottage public house. Only the filled-in-hole for the wheel axle is visible today.

The Time Team archaeologists visited Ffrith in 2006 and their findings can be viewed at www.channel4.com/history/timeteam.

- (4) We are not sure when pack-horse trails were first used but we do know that the Romans used pack-horse trains to transport goods. However, in the hills they often used mules rather than horses because of their surefootedness along dangerous slopes and their ability to carry large loads. Horses or ponies were probably used in the medieval period because they were faster and easier to handle.

Pack-horses had their heyday during the first half of the 18th century. The Welsh economy was kept alive with frequent trips gathering goods from Wales to sell at lowland markets in England and returning with products from the towns.

Pack-horse trains travelled far and wide through the hills. Every horse carried two large baskets, one on each side. A half-circle of cane, with 10 to 15 copper bells attached, formed an arc from head to tail over each animal's back. The bells became customary for a good reason; they set up a soft jingle, not enough to distract the horse, but sufficient to be heard over a great distance as a warning to others of the approaching hazard. The trains had right of way, more by force of numbers than by any statutory right. A traveller going in the opposite direction would have to make way or get pushed off the track. Today we can still see narrow bridges with small recesses built into the parapet walls enabling pedestrians to seek refuge from this traffic.

Throughout Wales pack-horse trails can still be found, now being used as footpaths, bridleways or lanes. The deeply-cut centres were caused by continual use and water erosion. Badly eroded paths were often by-passed; an example can be seen near the foot of this trail from Ffrith.

- (5) Glascoed (greenwood) belonged to Edward Rowland of Gardden in 1783 and after his death became the property of Edward Lloyd Bennion of Ruabon. In 1825 James Kyrke purchased the house together with 83 acres. The house has now largely been re-built and is known as Glascoed Hall
- (6) Hedgerow-dating was developed in southern England and gives a rough estimate of the age of a hedge. The number of species of tree and shrub (not climbing plants) in a

30 metre stretch of hedgerow is multiplied by 100 and the product gives an approximation of its age in years.

However, this method may not be applicable to many hedges in this area and is only included as a pointer towards further research.

FOLLOW THE 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 dogs under close control
 - Consider other people

If you experience any problems on this walk or if you would like to make any other comment please contact Public Rights of Way, telephone 01978 292057.