

SNOWDONIA: SOUTH 30 LOW-LEVEL AND EASY WALKS

**FROM FFESTINIOG TO THE DYFI, AND BALA
TO THE COAST**

by Alex Kendall

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Front cover: Looking out over the Mawddach estuary from the New Precipice Walk on an autumn evening (Walk 11)

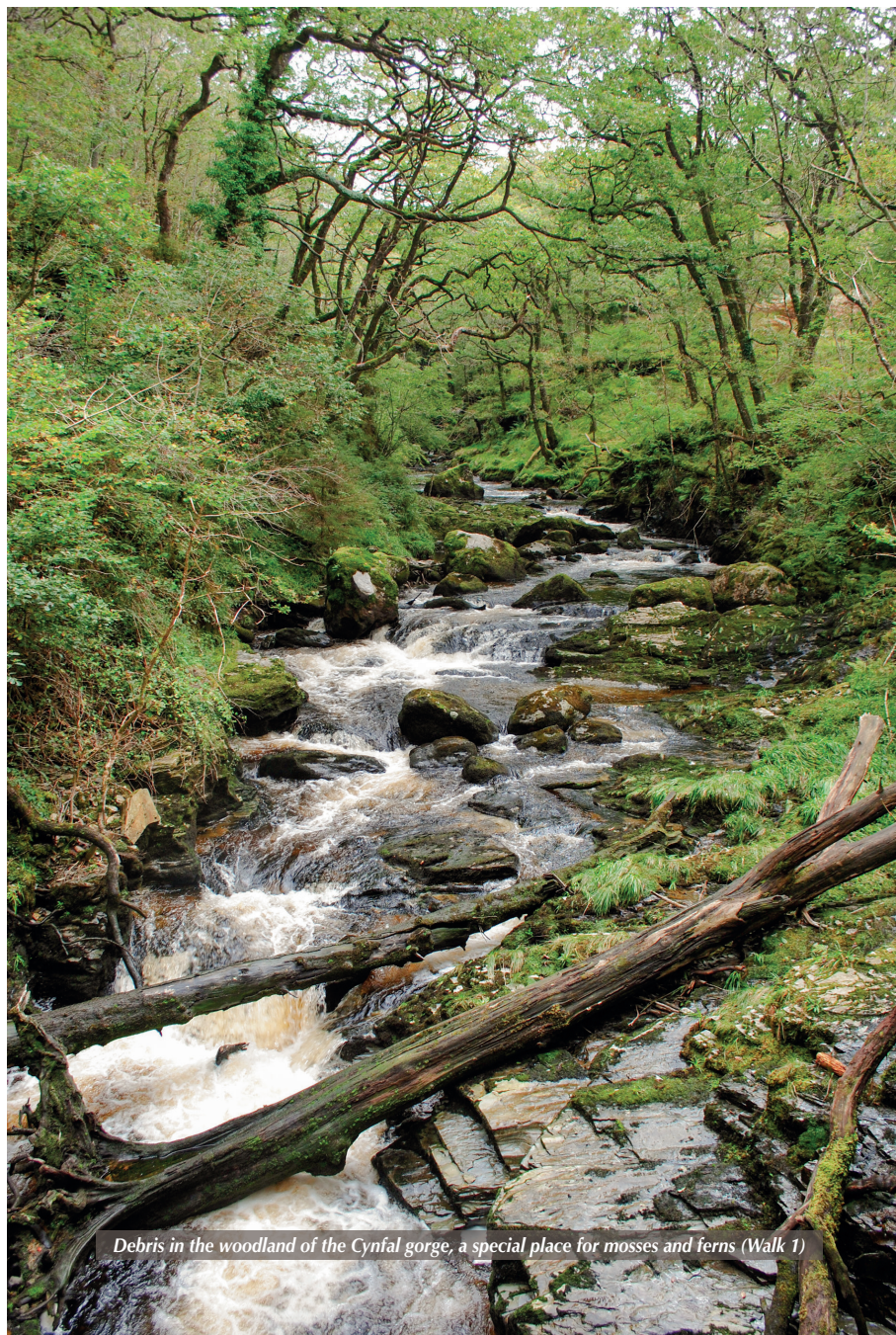


CONTENTS

Map key	5
Route summary table	6–7

INTRODUCTION	9
The walks	10
Landscape	10
History	13
Wildlife	16
When to go	18
Getting there	18
Accommodation.	19
What to take.	19
The Countryside Code	19
Maps and GPS	20
What3words.	20
Understanding Welsh placenames	20
Safety	21
Using this guide	21

AROUND THE RHINOGYDD	23
Walk 1 Ceunant Cynfal	24
Walk 2 Rhaeadr y Cwm	29
Walk 3 Tomen y Mur.	34
Walk 4 Llyn Trawsfynydd.	39
Walk 5 Harlech.	43
Walk 6 Llanbedr	48
Walk 7 Black Falls.	54
Walk 8 Pistyll Cain	59



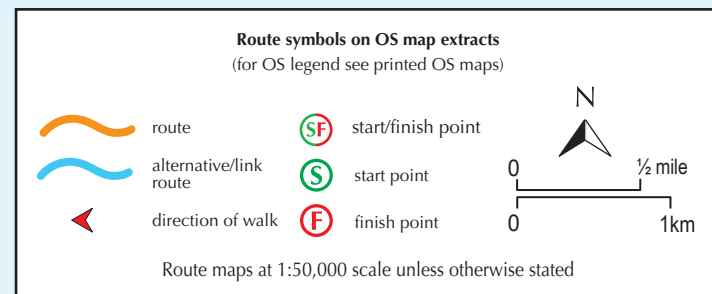
Debris in the woodland of the Cynfal gorge, a special place for mosses and ferns (Walk 1)

THE MAWDDACH ESTUARY	63
Walk 9 Barmouth	64
Walk 10 Mawddach to Ysgethin	69
Walk 11 New Precipice Walk	74
Walk 12 Precipice Walk	80
Walk 13 Foel Offrwm	83
Walk 14 The Mawddach Estuary	86
Walk 15 Morfa Mawddach and the Blue Lake	92

BALA TO DOLGELLAU	97
Walk 16 Brithdir	98
Walk 17 Foel Caernwch	103
Walk 18 Afon Melau	107
Walk 19 Llyn Arenig Fawr	112
Walk 20 Afon Lliw	117
Walk 21 Gwastadros	122
Walk 22 Bala Lake/Llyn Tegid	125

CADAIR IDRIS TO THE DYFI	131
Walk 23 Cwm Cywarch	132
Walk 24 Castell y Bere	137
Walk 25 Abergynolwyn	141
Walk 26 Birds' Rock	145
Walk 27 Dolgoch Falls	149
Walk 28 Cwm Ratgoed	152
Walk 29 Aberdyfi	157
Walk 30 Machynlleth	161

Appendix A Useful contacts	166
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Walk no	Walk	Start	Distance	Ascent	Walking time	Page
Around the Rhinogydd						23
1	Ceunant Cynfal	Llan Ffestiniog	5.5km (3½ miles)	350m	1hr 45min	24
2	Rhaeadr y Cwm	near Llan Ffestiniog	7km (4¼ miles)	220m	2hr 15min	29
3	Tomen y Mur	near Trawsfynydd	9km (5½ miles)	240m	2hr 45min	34
4	Llyn Trawsfynydd	Trawsfynydd	12.5km (7¾ miles)	100m	3hr 15min	39
5	Harlech	Harlech	8.8km (5½ miles)	200m	2hr 30min	43
6	Llanbedr	Llanbedr	8km (5 miles)	200m	2hr 30min	48
7	Black Falls	Ganllwyd	6km (3¾ miles)	220m	2hr	54
8	Pistyll Cain	near Ganllwyd	3km (1¾ miles)	50m	1hr	59
The Mawddach Estuary						63
9	Barmouth	Barmouth	9km (5½ miles)	340m	3hr	64
10	Mawddach to Ysgethin	Bontddu	12.5km (7¾ miles)	500m	4hr	69
11	New Precipice Walk	Llanelltyd	12km (7½ miles)	450m	3hr 45min	74
12	Precipice Walk	near Dolgellau	5.5km (3¼ miles)	50m	1hr 30min	80
13	Foel Offrwm	near Dolgellau	4 km (2½ miles)	100m	1hr 15min	83
14	The Mawddach Estuary	Penmaenpool	18.5km (11½ miles)	350m	5hr 15min	86
15	Morfa Mawddach and the Blue Lake	near Fairbourne	13km (8 miles)	360m	4hr	92
Bala to Dolgellau						97
16	Brithdir	near Brithdir	12km (7½ miles)	450m	4hr	98
17	Foel Caerynwch	Brithdir	3.4km (2¼ miles)	170m	1hr 15min	103
18	Afon Melau	Rhydymain	11km (6¾ miles)	340m	3hr 15min	107
19	Llyn Arenig Fawr	near Llyn Celyn	10km (6 miles)	130m	2hr 45min	112
20	Afon Lliw	near Llanuwchllyn	12km (7½ miles)	340m	3hr 45min	117
21	Gwastadros	near Bala	6km (3¾ miles)	200m	2hr	122
22	Bala Lake/Llyn Tegid	Llangower	7.5km (4¾ miles)	250m	2hr 30min	125
Cadair Idris to the Dyfi						131
23	Cwm Cywarch	Dinas Mawddwy	11km (6½ miles)	160m	3hr	132
24	Castell y Bere	near Abergynolwyn	7km (4½ miles)	120m	2hr	137
25	Abergynolwyn	Abergynolwyn	8.3km (5¼ miles)	290m	2hr 45min	141
26	Birds' Rock	Dolgoch	10.5km (6¾ miles)	270m	3hr 15min	145
27	Dolgoch Falls	Dolgoch	2.6km (1¾ miles)	120m	1hr	149
28	Cwm Ratgoed	Corris	13.3km (8¼ miles)	200m	4hr	152
29	Aberdyfi	Aberdyfi	13km (8 miles)	300m	4hr	157
30	Machynlleth	Machynlleth	14.5km (9 miles)	300m	4hr 15min	161



The ruined wall of 13th-century Castell Carndochan with Llyn Tegid on the horizon (Walk 20)



A range of sand dunes covered in marram grass stands between Harlech and the sea (Walk 5)

INTRODUCTION

Snowdonia National Park encompasses the highest mountains in Wales, hugely popular for walking and climbing. But the area is far more than just the high peaks. Far below the soaring summits are beautiful woodlands, tranquil valleys and rambling paths to thundering waterfalls. And perhaps the most surprising thing for people who have only ventured here to climb Snowdon, is that these hills are a coastal mountain range, with miles of sand dunes, unspoilt beaches and cliffs.

The southern part of the national park is a wild place, less visited than the north, but bigger, with vast moorlands and mountain crags interspersed with incredible views, where lowland walkers can discover the beauty of the

area just as much as people who head to the summits. The nature of low-level walking is that it can be done at any time of year, in pretty much all weathers, and normally within easy reach of a way out. On a grim day after rain the sight of a thundering waterfall is much easier to appreciate than a hilltop covered in fog.

You'll also find history and culture in the landscape, from cairns dating back thousands of years to the Bronze Age, to Iron Age forts and the remains of the Roman occupation. From the middle ages, Welsh castles defend the valleys, while English castles hug the coast, and old estates are still haunted by memories of rebellions. Into the modern era, we see mines on the hillsides, now slowly

being taken over by vegetation, and the success of the modern tourist industry in bringing people and investment to the area (which means of course pubs and cafés!). But this is a landscape still moulded by sheep farming and forestry, where traditions continue that have been going on for hundreds of years.

The region encompassed in this book formed the old county of Meirionnydd, dissolved in 1996 and now part of Gwynedd. The area within this guidebook has a northern boundary at the Vale of Ffestiniog. Moving south it includes the vast upland of the Migneint and the mountains of the Arenig range in the north-east, across Bala Lake and over the Aran range in the south-east. In the west it follows the coast around the Rhinogydd and includes the Mawddach and Dyfi Estuaries, separated by Cadair Idris and the Tarrens. The southern boundary is the edge of the national park, including Machynlleth. It is a big place, and the walking opportunities are endless. These 30 walks give a brilliant flavour of the area, head to all the famous points as well as some infrequently visited haunts. It will immerse you in the wildest and roughest landscape in Wales.

THE WALKS

The terms 'low-level' and 'easy' can mean different things to different people. In general what these walks always aim to do is explore the valleys

and lowlands, rather than heading up mountains. However, there are some stretches of the walks that run over hillsides and moorland, and there are even a few minor hilltops reached. The gradients and exposure on these walks is still far less than you'd experience up a mountain. What these walks are not, however, is flat. They are steady and mostly straightforward to navigate, but we are in mountainous country after all!

The aim in deciding which 30 walks to include comes from trying to spread them as equally as possible over southern Snowdonia, while including famous spots that I didn't want people to miss. A few are creations from scratch, where a general area seemed too beautiful to miss out, but where an established walk isn't obvious. These are often the ones that include one or two fiddly directions!

The result is a series of walks that will take people interested in exploring the valleys and coast of Snowdonia on 30 adventures with something new on each one. Whether you are looking for an hour or a day out, and whether you're a keen lowland walker, a mountaineer on a bad weather day, or a family out for a stroll, there are many places in here for you to explore.

LANDSCAPE

What you see when you look out over the mountains of Snowdonia is a landscape that has been affected by

thousands of years of human activity, and millions of years of geological turmoil.

The oldest rocks in Snowdonia are the Rhinogydd, a key range of the southern part of the national park and an inspiring set of dark craggy towers. The sandstone, siltstone and mudstone that make up these peaks was deposited under the sea in the Cambrian period, from 528–508 million years ago. The following period, the Ordovician, which began around 485 million years ago, saw volcanic activity that created all the mountains that surround the Rhinogydd. Beginning with Rhobell Fawr, the first volcano in this cycle, all of the distinctive mountains that form the heartland of the area are Ordovician in origin.

To understand what followed, it's important to appreciate that Cambrian

rock still lies underneath all the Ordovician mountains we see today, and that Ordovician rock used to lie on top of the Cambrian Rhinogydd.

Next came the Silurian period, where yet more rock was laid down. It was during the period after this – the Devonian, 419–358 million years ago – that pressure was applied on an enormous scale to raise these beds of rock up to become mountains. Initially Himalayan in height, the centre of this giant region of uplift was known as the Harlech Dome. The higher peaks at the centre of the dome were weathered faster, their rock being washed into the sea as sediment, and as the younger rock from the Silurian was exposed at the top, this was eroded first, followed by the Ordovician rock underneath. We are currently living at a time where



HISTORY

People have been living in Snowdonia for thousands of years; from when the standing stones were lifted and the burial cairns were built on the prominent peaks and passes, such as Bwlch y Rhiwgyr. The climate back then was warmer and drier, and the trees grew right up to some of the mountain summits. As the Bronze Age became the Iron Age, Celtic tribes such as the Ordovicians moved in from the east, creating the hill forts that form such familiar features of the summits of Foel Offrwm and Pared y Cefn hir.

The Iron Age tribes were a brief match for the Romans, who begun their invasion of Wales in 48CE and completed it in 78CE with the final conquest of the north and of Anglesey, the power base of the druids. The Romans created a series of forts and roads, which in this area can

especially be seen at Tomen y Mur and Brithdir. Despite governing Britain for hundreds of years, the Romans left at the end of the 4th century to leave Britain in what has become known as the Dark Ages.

The next few hundred years saw the arrival of the Saxons, who pushed the Britons west into Wales and Cornwall, and the start of Viking raids. The Romans had introduced Christianity, which flourished, and was supplemented in Snowdonia by the arrival of missionaries from Ireland. Wales then was not a united kingdom, but rather a series of principalities with individual power bases.

When the Normans invaded England in 1066, they did not find it easy to subjugate Wales. The fort at Tomen y Mur was thought to be a Norman response to Gruffydd ap Cynan's uprising in 1095, and



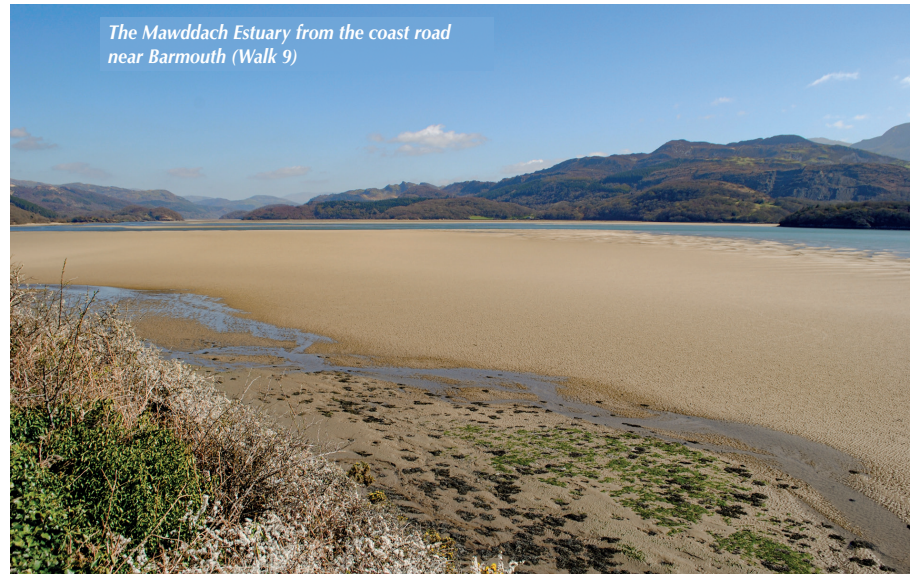
The head of Cwm Cywarch is dominated by crags of Glasgwm (Walk 23)

there is almost no Silurian rock at all left in Snowdonia, and the Ordovician rock has gone from the central part of what was the Harlech Dome, now the Rhinogydd.

The most well-known big scale events of this weathering and erosion are the Ice Ages. We have had quite a few Ice Ages in the past few million years, each leaving its mark and gouging further into the mountains. Glaciers spill down from the mountains and take rocks far from their sources. Cwms and arêtes are formed, and the depressions left by the heads of glaciers form upland lakes. The pressure released by the melting ice caused rock-falls from cliffs that still go on to this day, assisted by continuing freeze-thaw, and can be seen in the large piles of rubble beneath crags.

Alongside the eye-catching forms of the high peaks, geology has left Snowdonia with many side effects of the different rock types and Ice Ages. The plateau moorland of the Migneint is where the ice cap is thought to have rested, leading to the lack of prominent peaks. The alternation between hard and soft rock in bedding planes, combined with the uplift of the land has led to the beautiful waterfalls and streams that cut through the valleys. Fault lines like that running south-west from Bala have eroded faster, leading to great valleys and ribbon lakes. And the golden estuaries have been formed by this eroded rock being deposited as Wales' well-known rainfall transports the mountains bit by bit into the sea.

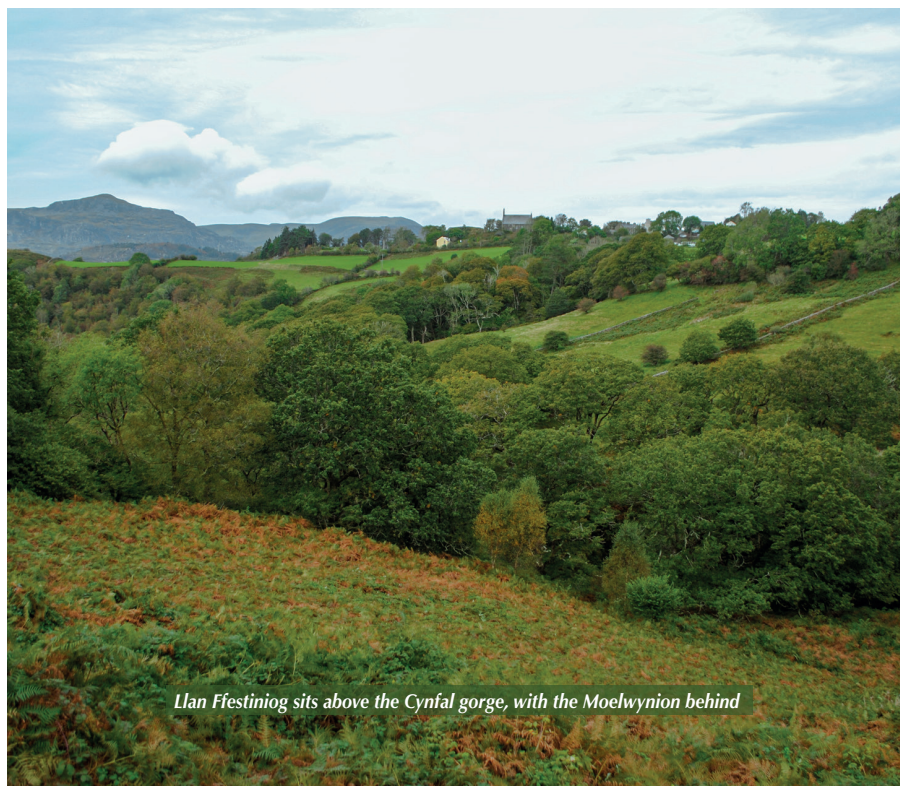
The Mawddach Estuary from the coast road near Barmouth (Walk 9)



Walk 1

Ceunant Cynfal

The gorge of Ceunant Cynfal plunges down through Ffestiniog, almost hidden from the road, and is a key sanctuary for wildlife. The wooded hillsides hide the Afon Cynfal, and this walk extends the simple out-and-back advocated by most websites into a better and slightly longer exploration of the lower gorge. Following paths through the woods, with the river below, it leads to Pont Tal-y-bont and back up through the woods on the far side before crossing the river again and visiting the famous Rhaeadr Cynfal waterfall, a famous tourist spot for the Victorians.



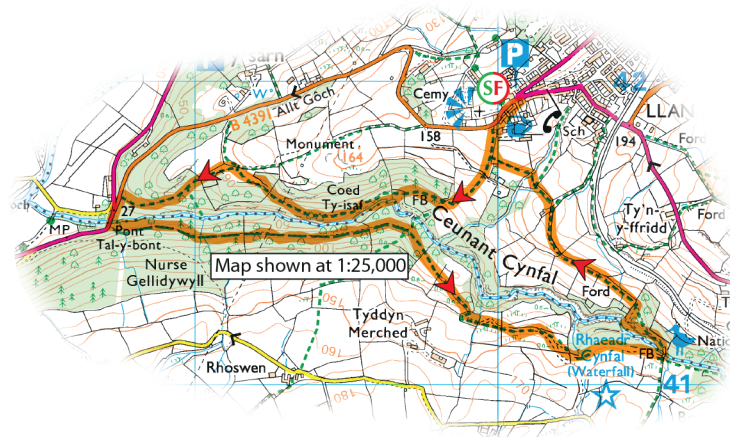
Llan Ffestiniog sits above the Cynfal gorge, with the Moelwynion behind

Start/finish	Y Pengwern, Llan Ffestiniog /// elbowed.rifled.theory
Distance	5.5km (3½ miles)
Ascent	350m
Time	1hr 45m
Terrain	Mostly small paths, with some sections of track
Maps	OS Explorer Map OL18 Harlech, Porthmadog & Bala/Y Bala
Access	Llan Ffestiniog lies on the A470 between Trawsfynydd and Blaenau Ffestiniog. The pub Y Pengwern has on-street parking outside and can be found at LL41 4PB.
Facilities	Llan Ffestiniog has a pub and a corner shop. More shops and places to eat are available in Blaenau Ffestiniog.

From the outside of the Y Pengwern pub in **Llan Ffestiniog**, head to the main road, the **B4391**, and turn right to walk downhill on the road, with the church on the right. After 50m, when the road bends right, go ahead onto a footpath, next to the 14% road sign. There is a signpost to the falls.

Soon, cross a track and go through a gate, continuing ahead straight down the field. Half-way down there is a footpath post and waterfall sign on the left – ignore these and continue straight down and through another gate, over a track and through the gate opposite.

Head down the next field, heading to the bottom right-hand corner. Go through two black metal gates and follow the level path through the trees (not the one going downhill). Follow this path for over 500m through **Coed Ty-isaf**, where there are views of the gorge in **Ceunant Cynfal** on the left. [The gorge is a haven](#)





The trail takes you deep into the woodland of the Cynfal gorge

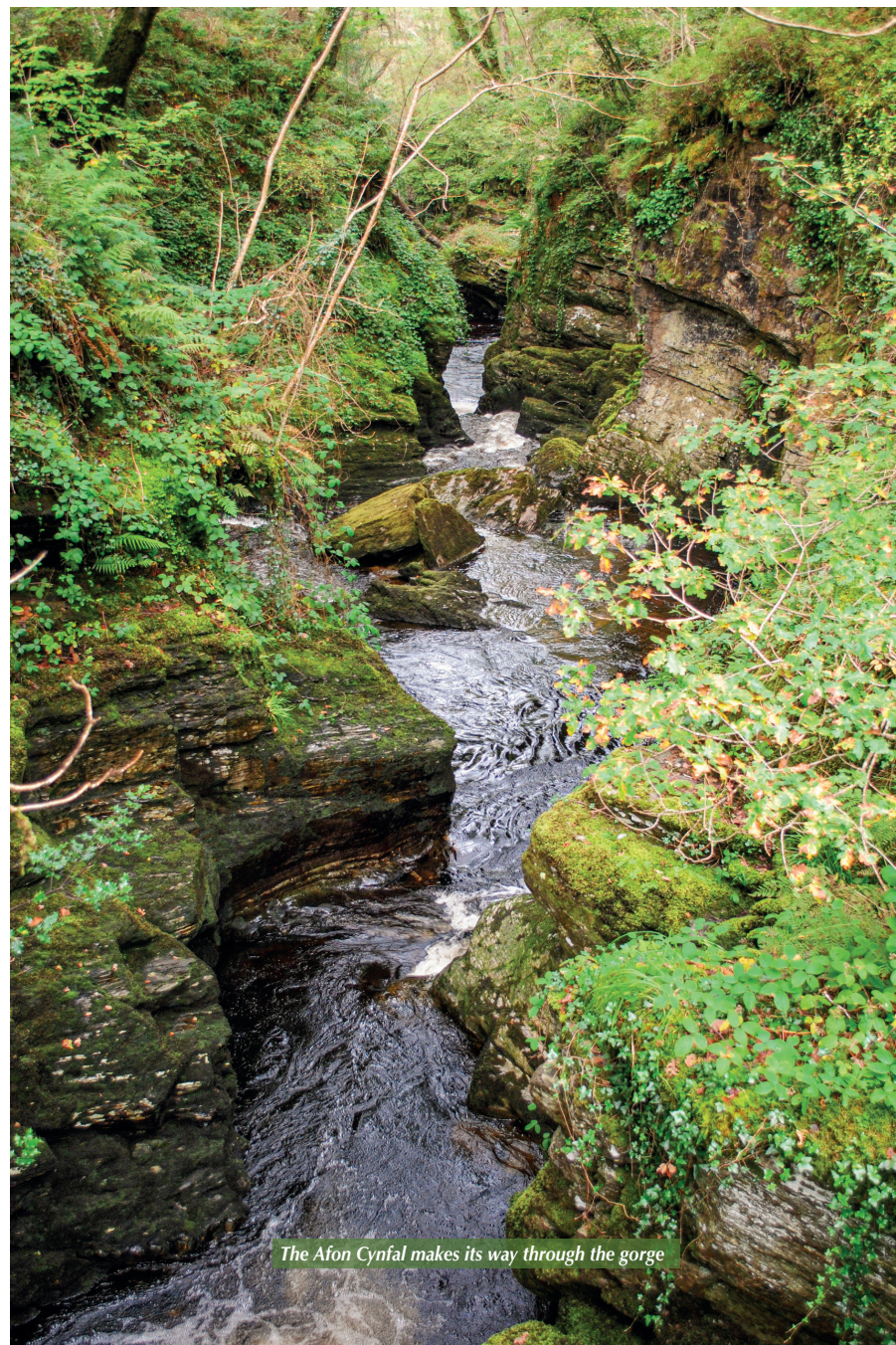
for hundreds of mosses, ferns and liverworts, many of which you will see as you make your way to the waterfall.

The path is level, then rises to leave the wood via a gate into a field. Cross the field, keeping the fence on the left. The field drops down the hill and a wall appears ahead; bear left when the fence does the same, keeping the wall on the right to head down to a stile. Cross it back into the woodland. The peak ahead is Moelwyn Bach, the most southerly hill of the Moelwynion range, which stretches all the way from here to Capel Curig.

Follow the path ahead, which soon joins a wider path downhill. After a few hundred metres, arrive at the road, the A496. Turn left onto the road to cross the bridge of **Pont Tal-y-bont** over the Afon Cynfal (be careful as there is no pavement). Turn left onto the path immediately after the bridge, where there are some fantastic chestnut trees in **Nurse Gellidwyll**.

This path continues on for around 1km until reaching a junction, where a footbridge is visible on the left. Continue straight on, staying on the right-hand side of the Afon Cynfal. The path leaves the woods but continues traversing. There are a few gates to pass, and you'll cross a small stream.

Eventually the path reaches a junction, with a footbridge over the Afon Cynfal on the left. Turn left and cross the bridge, continuing up the steps opposite and



The Afon Cynfal makes its way through the gorge

SNOWDONIA: SOUTH – 30 LOW-LEVEL AND EASY WALKS

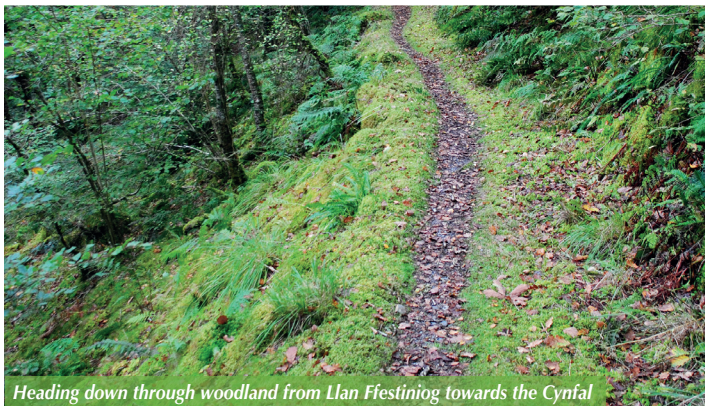
following the path ahead. After 50m there is a faint path on the left, starting beside a 'steep drop' sign. Take this path, which leads along the top of the gorge to the viewpoint of the **Rhaeadr Cynfal**.

Upstream from the waterfall stands **Huw Llwyd's pulpit**, a pillar of rock in the river. Huw lived around the 16th century and managed, according to local legend, to maintain the dual roles of clergyman and wizard, combining Christian teaching with an ability to cast spells. People would come and hear him as he sat on the pillar and preached, his voice able to miraculously carry above the sound of the thundering water. He would also cast out demons, who would be dashed against the rocks below the waterfall, giving it the alternative name of the Black Falls.

Beyond the waterfall, continue on the path up to the T-junction and turn left. Soon the path exits the woods via a gate beside an information board.

Go through the gate and follow the rising path up through several fields to a set of gates by a small barn. Go through the first gate, then follow the fence on the left to a small gate, where Llan Ffestiniog's church is visible ahead.

Go left, through the gate, and follow the path ahead to a small metal gate 100m away. Descend the path and cross the stream; beyond the gate, head onwards and up 50m to a footpath post in the field and continue on across the field to another metal gate. Once through this gate turn right, uphill, to return to Llan Ffestiniog.



Heading down through woodland from Llan Ffestiniog towards the Cynfal

Walk 2 Rhaeadr y Cwm

Exploring the moorland and gorge around the waterfall at Rhaeadr y Cwm, this walk visits Llyn Morwynion, mentioned in the Welsh myths of The Mabinogion, before dropping down to the Afon Cynfal. It follows the river upstream, and then after one steep climb gives a fantastic view up the ravine where the water plunges down from the Migneint. This is a reasonably straightforward walk with lots of interest and a far-reaching view down the Vale of Ffestiniog. Some paths can be obscure.



Crossing moorland above Cwm Cynfal, with the Moelwynion hills in the distance