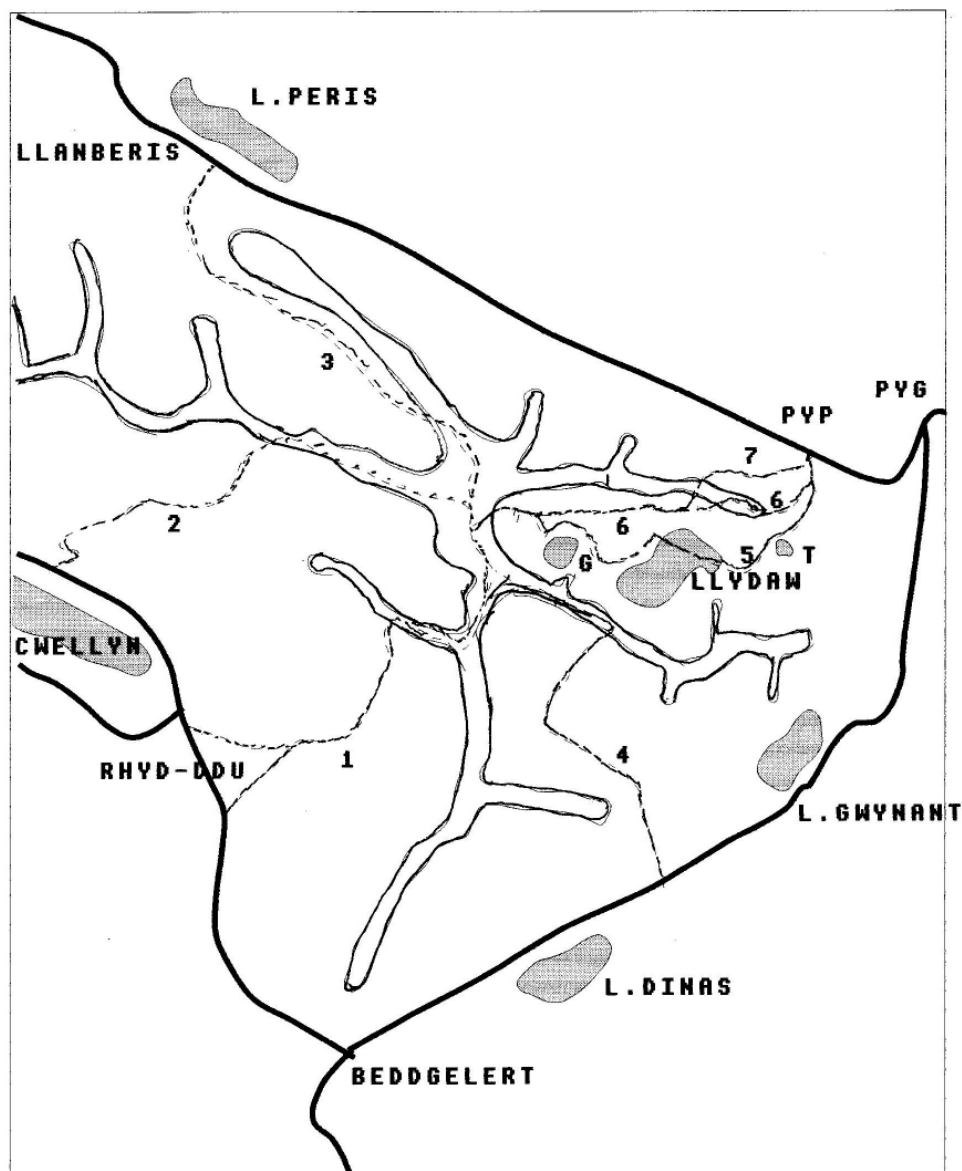


THE CAPEL CURIG FOOTPATHS UP SNOWDON.

A brief history by G.Lindsay Jones, M.A,PhD.

TRACKS

- 1. BEDDGELERT**
- 2. SNOWDON RANGER**
- 3. LLANBERIS**
- 4. SIR EDWARD WATKIN**
- 5. PEN-Y-GWRYD**
- 6. PEN-Y-GWRYD UPPER PONY TRACK (PIG TRACK)**
- 7. PIG TRACK**



THE CAPEL CURIG FOOTPATHS UP SNOWDON.

Some important dates. (* indicates an approximate date)

- 1639 First recorded ascent of Snowdon by Thomas Johnson, using the Beddgelert route from Caernarvon. The Beddgelert route via Ffridd-uchaf and the Llanberis route were in use. Guides and ponies available.
- 1682 Survey of Snowdon by Caswell: 1240 yards (3720 ft.)
- 1773 Pennant quotes later survey : 1189 yards 1 foot. (3568 ft), above quay at Caernarvon.
- 1773 Pennant ascends Snowdon from Llanberis via Bwlch y Maes-cwm and du'r Arddu ridge and by several other routes. Mentions Gorphwysfa, the Resting-place.
- 1795 Snowdon copper mines opened. Ore carried up zig-zags to Bwlch Glas and onto the sledge path, made for the miners, to the road at the Saracens Head Inn, near Llyn Cwellyn, which became the Snowdon Ranger Inn, opened by a guide, John Morton.
- 1801 Bingley describes Gorphwysfa as "an eminence, four miles from Llanberis, that overlooks a considerable part of this vale."
- 1801* Horse-path made to Glaslyn copper mines from Gorphwysfa.
- 1810* Pen y Gwryd built by John Roberts of Pen y Bryn, Llanberis.
- 1819 First shelter on Snowdon built by guides.
- 1827 Large cairn erected on Snowdon by Ordnance Survey team.
- 1830 New road built over the Llanberis Pass to replace rough track.
- 1831 Rev.John Parker describes an ascent over Bwlch Moch by what is now the Pig Track.
- 1838 Thomas Roscoe climbed up Cwm Dyli to Llydaw, past the mines, and up the zig-zags onto Snowdon and down to Llanberis.
- 1838 First hut built on Snowdon, a second built a year later.
- 1843 Small ale house and two cottages built at Gorphwysfa.
- 1847 Harry Owen buys Pen y Gwryd and guides travellers up Snowdon.
- 1853 Llydaw water level lowered by 12 feet. Causeway built and wide path made around the shore.
- 1854 George Borrow climbed Snowdon by Llanberis track.
- 1856 Prehistoric dug-out canoe found in the mud of Llydaw.
- 1856 Miners barracks built on shore of Llyn Teryn.
- 1860 Prof.Tyndall and Prof.Huxley ascend Snowdon by the Pig Track
- 1869 Railway from Caernarvon to Llanberis opened.
- 1873 New dam at Glaslyn and cart-track round it built. Road to Pen y Pass rebuilt.
- 1873 First Ward-Lock series guide book published.
- 1881 Railway from Caernarvon to Snowdon Ranger and South Snowdon (near Rhyd-ddu) opened.
- 1892 Sir Edward Watkin Path from Nantgwynant to Snowdon opened.
- 1896 Snowdon Railway opened. 1898 Station built and ownership of huts transferred to the railway company.
- 1898 Britannia Copper Mine Ltd. build mill on shore of Llyn Lydaw.
- 1901 Pen y Pass hotel rebuilt. 1903 Occupied by the Rawson Owens.
- 1906 Cwm Dyli Power Station opened.
- 1916 Copper mines close.
- 1936 New Snowdon Summit station and hotel built.
- 1940 Snowdon Ranger Hotel bought by Y.H.A.
- 1942 Wartime research on Snowdon ended hotel being residential. Subsequently, all accommodation required by enlarged staff.
- 1947 Pen y Gwryd Hotel under management of Chris and Jo Briggs.
- 1967 Pen y Pass Hotel closed. It was bought and enlarged by Y.H.A.
- 1971 Pen y Pass Hostel opened.
- 1989 Snowdon Summit hotel refurbished.
- 1989 New pipeline for Cwm Dyli power station constructed.
- 2009 New summit building opened.

Early Tourist Ascents of Snowdon.

The development of the Capel Curig Paths was influenced by five factors; the operation of the copper mines, requiring access; the building of the road over the Llanberis Pass; the opening of hotels at Pen y Gwryd and Gorphwysfa; the extension of the railway from Caernarvon to Llanberis; the building and operation of the Cwm Dyli power station.

One of the first recorded ascents of Snowdon was that by Thomas Johnson in 1639, by the Beddgelert route. Guides were available from Llanberis and from Beddgelert, from where the ascent was made via Ffridd-uchaf and Bwlch y Main. In 1773 Pennant ascended from Llanberis to Bwlch y Maes-cwm and along the ridge above Clogwyn du'r Arddu to the summit which he also reached by several other routes. He quotes the survey by Caswell in 1682 giving the height above the quay at Caernarvon as 1240 yards (3720 ft.), and a later survey as 1189 yards 1 foot (3568 ft.). He describes a crossing of the Pass of Llanberis and an exploration of Cwm Dyli.

"The ascent from hence is either over loose stones, or solid stair-case, and is exceedingly steep. It is a singular road, lying in a stupendous chasm, bounded for about a mile by nearly equidistant precipices of prodigious height; those of the Glyders being on one side, and on the other those of Snowdon. We refreshed ourselves on a spot called Gorphwysfa, or The Resting-place." After descending to Cwm Dyli and ascending to Llyn Lydaw, "We continued our walk ascending a narrow path above the lake as far as the extremity; then, descending, reached the opposite side in order to encounter a third descent as arduous as the preceding. This brought us into the horrible crater immediately beneath the great precipice of the Wyddfa, in which is lodged Ffynnon Lâs."¹ "We descended from this dreary scene on the other side of the hill, above Llyn Llydaw, having the tremendous red precipices of Crib Goch high above us, rising into a mere ridge, serrated or rather herissée, its whole length. The face of many of the rocks were marked with large veins of coarse white crystal, and others, especially Crib Goch, were varied with the deep green of the dwarf Alpine juniper. On attaining the tops of the hills above the lower end of the lake, we descended to the Gorphwysfa where we found our horses and returned once more into Nant Gwynen."

¹[Footnote in the 1810 edition. "About two hundred yards above the lake are some copper mines belonging to Sir Robert Williams Bt. the produce of which is carried in bags on the backs of men, nearly a mile, over one of the highest ridges of Snowdon, till it reaches a road accessible to sledges."]

This referred to the creation of the Snowdon Ranger sledge path made for carrying the produce of the mines, opened in 1795, to the road at the Saracens Head Inn near Llyn Cwellyn. This became the Snowdon Ranger Inn, opened by the guide John Morton, who was there when George Borrow passed by in 1854. Gorphwysfa is also mentioned by Hutton in his 1787 visit to Bwlch y Gwyddyl between there and Pen y Gwryd.

Rev. Bingley, in his 1801 tour, describes Gorphwysfa as "An eminence, four miles from Llanberis, that overlooks a considerable part of this vale. It also commands a view into the mountain vale that joins Nan Hwynen and the vale of Capel Curig." This pass top featured two large cairns.

Bingley climbed Snowdon by the Llanberis route from Dolbadarn Castle past Ceunant Mawr, over Cwm Brwynog, and onto the ridge above Clogwyn du'r Arddu, and he also climbed by six other routes including one up the Clogwyn du'r Arddu rock face. His account, published in 1814, states that the copper mine "a few years ago started at the foot of Clogwyn y Garnedd. Ore is taken up Cwm Glas Llyn zig-zags to Bwlch Glas and sledge path to Cwellyn." He also describes the construction of the first Miners Track, as it is now known, sometime about 1810. "Two Denbighshire gentlemen, who are also partners in this concern, have caused a tolerably good horse-path to be made from Gorphwysfa, beyond Llanberis, to the copper mine. This will render the ascent to the summit of Snowdon from Capel Curig and the village of Llanberis perfectly easy." At about this time John Roberts of Pen y Bryn, Llanberis, built the farmhouse at Pen y Gwryd.

In 1805 there was a small cairn on Snowdon, surrounded by a low wall, which was dismantled for the building of the first shelter by guides in 1819. In 1827 a large cairn was erected by the Ordnance Survey, and in 1841 it was rebuilt 15 feet high.

In 1830 a new road was built over the Llanberis Pass to replace the "rocky staircase" described by James Bransby in 1845. "a few years ago, before the opening of the new line of the road, the traveller had to pick his steps as he could with difficulty and suspicion, the path being irregular and rough and full of quagmires." This further improved access to Snowdon from Llanberis and Capel Curig. There is an account by Rev. John Parker, in *The Passengers*, of an ascent in 1831 over Bwlch Moch by what is now the Pig Track. In 1838 Thomas Roscoe climbed from the bottom of Cwm Dylli to Llydaw, past the mines, and up the zig-zags to Bwlch Glas and Snowdon, descending to Llanberis.

In 1837, a few years before John Roberts sold out, Bennett stayed at Pen y Gwryd which he describes as "a small public house, with a sign signifying nothing....It possesses a small parlour, carpeted, with half a dozen hair-bottomed chairs and a mahogany table." After supper he "ascended by a ladder-like staircase to a kind of cock-loft which was divided into two compartments, one for the family, the other fitted up for travellers." Later in the night, "a loud crash roused me from my slumber, and I found myself with my knees doubled up to my chin upon the floor__the bedstead having broken in the middle." In 1843 a small ale house and two cottages for miners were built at Gorphwysfa, and in 1847 Harry Owen bought Pen y Gwryd and, as a guide, conducted travellers up Snowdon, so these became the bases for climbing Snowdon from the Capel Curig side. The tourist era had begun and the popularity of Snowdon was expressed by an anonymous writer in 1857, "North Wales is thronged this summer by tourists__Snowdon is ascended by everyone because it is the highest top; no one seems to ascend the other mountains but the shepherds of the country. Snowdon is the Rhigi of Wales, with a trifle worse inn at the top."

In 1853 the water level of Llydaw was lowered by 12 feet to enable the building of the causeway and the track around the shore. In the mud thus exposed was discovered a prehistoric dug-out canoe in 1856. In that year the miners' barracks were built on the shore of Llyn Teryn, but, because of the wet site, they were soon abandoned. The remains are still to be seen.

The famous ascent by George Borrow was made from Llanberis in 1854. In 1860 Prof. John Tyndall, with Prof. Thomas Huxley and guide Robert Hughes, used the Pig Track on his "Alpine" ascent of Snowdon.

In 1873 the first of the Ward-Lock series of guidebook was published and these began to take the place of the pioneer writings of the kind described above. Although guides were still available, the traveller could find his own way using these books and the maps. New tracks were made and given names. This development is discussed in a later section.

In 1838 and 1839 the first two huts were built on the summit of Snowdon by guides and became popular residential hotels for tourists who ascended hoping to witness sunrise. They were taken over by the railway company in 1896 and the last entries in the surviving visitors books are dated September 1885 and October 1889. There are some interesting ascents described. In June 1865 William Saville described the "perilous and dangerous route of Pen y Gwryd", and in July 1865, Rev. I. R. Brown, climbing without a guide, left Pen y Gwryd at 5.30 p.m. and was benighted on this route, finishing the climb next day. In July 1884, T. C. V. Bastow and David Clark ascended Crib Goch, Crib y Ddysgyl, Snowdon, and Lliwedd, an early "Horseshoe". In January 1886 T. G. Creak, with Robert Owen, proprietor of one of the summit huts, climbed from Pen y Gwryd up the east edge of Crib Goch, along the ridge, over "the last great tooth", to Bwlch Glas, and down via Cwm Glas in snow and ice conditions using an axe. This was followed next day by W. E. Corlett who completed the horseshoe, having approached the climb of Crib Goch by the "Upper path of Capel Curig".

Further improvements in access and accommodation followed. The railway from Caernarvon to Llanberis was opened in 1869 enhancing this village as a tourist centre and a starting point for the ascent of Snowdon from there or from Gorphwysfa, and in 1881 the narrow gauge railway to Snowdon Ranger and South Snowdon was opened giving access to the Snowdon Ranger path and the Beddgelert route which could be joined from this station near Rhyd-ddu, thus creating the present Rhyd-ddu route. The Sir Edward Watkin Path was opened in 1892 giving another route from Beddgelert via Nantgwynant.

The most significant development was the opening of the Snowdon railway in 1896 giving easy access to the summit for those unable or unwilling to climb on foot. A station was built and the existing huts taken over by the railway company for accommodation and refreshment of tourists. This unsightly collection of huts on the summit was demolished and replaced by the present combined station and hotel in 1936 to the design of Clough Williams Ellis, better known for his creation of Portmeirion. This so-called hotel was residential until 1942 when it was occupied for experimental radio work, and after the war the increased staff required all the sleeping accommodation. It was modernised internally in 1989.

The last addition to the copper mines was the mill and manager's house on the shore of Llydaw in 1898 before the mines finally closed in 1916; the ruins are still to be seen. The Pen y Pass hotel was rebuilt at the turn of the century and succeeded Pen y Gwryd as the principal climbing centre under the management of Owen Rawson Owen and his wife. For a time his son earned his living by collecting a fee of one shilling from motorists who used the car park as the base for climbing Snowdon. When the Youth Hostel Association purchased and enlarged the building, and opened the hostel in 1971, a new cafe was built on the car park which is now administered by the National Park Authority. The Y.H.A. had already bought the Snowdon Ranger Hotel and established hostels near the start of all the tracks up Snowdon, so accommodation became readily available for young people and others not wishing to stay at the more expensive hotels.

When Chris and Jo Briggs moved into Pen y Gwryd in 1947 this hotel reverted to the principal climbing hotel. Chris Briggs ran a mountain rescue service until it was replaced by the Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team which is assisted by helicopters from R.A.F. Valley and Search and Rescue dogs. This hotel gained further fame from its associations with the 1953 Everest expedition, and, still under the same family ownership, it continues its tradition as the most well known climbers hotel in Wales.

The Cwm Dyli power station was opened in 1906 and it influenced the use of the Miners Track. The water level in Llydaw fluctuated according to the balance of rainfall and use of the water so that the causeway was sometimes under water, necessitating an awkward detour round either shore of the lake. Eventually the causeway was repaired and the water level controlled thus removing this problem and this track and the Pig track have been rebuilt in recent years to repair the severe erosion caused by the enormous increase in numbers ascending Snowdon. Now the only evidence of the power station is the disfigurement of Cwm Dyli by the feed pipe. When this was installed to replace the old twin pipes in 1989, the opportunity to place it underground was not taken.

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Acknowledgement.

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CAIRNS AND BUILDINGS ON SNOWDON SUMMIT.

Date	Ref.	
1798	1,2	Comparatively flat space, some 40 to 50 feet in circumference, surrounded by a low wall of stones.
1805	2	A small cairn appears with low wall, dismantled in 1819 to build the first shelter.
1819	3,7	First shelter, Snowdon Cottage, built on E. side of summit, 10 yards below apex, by William Lloyd, a Beddgelert guide. It was round, beehive shape with walls loose fragments without mortar. Used by workmen who built the cairn in 1827. They slept in it for a fortnight.
1827	3	Cairn built by Ordnance Survey team. Four thick and long planks nailed together on large mound of stonework.
1838	7	Stone hut built on the Nantgwynant side of Snowdon by Morris Williams who was employed in the copper mine at Clogwyn Coch. He sold it to his brother Phillip who engaged John Roberts of Llanberis as partner.
1839	7	Phillip Williams and John Roberts built a second hut. John Roberts obtained a licence to sell alcohol.
1841	6	Large cairn built, 15 ft. high with 18 ft. pole. The pole was there in 1877 but had gone by 1887.
1870	6,7	At this time there was a building to the west of the cairn about 35 ft. by 15 ft. by 8 ft. high with additions. Central part had a gabled porch, enscribed: Bazaar. Refreshments. Well Aired Beds. Ham and Eggs. Choice Beverages. Roberts and Owen, Proprietors. The other building was larger, 30 ft. square, 12 ft. high, pointed roof, and porch with a gable end. On the south side there was a considerable outbuilding attached by a common wall, with pointed roof and an iron chimney, possibly the original hut of John Roberts.
1887	6	Photograph shows large cairn with metal framework on top which may have held a pole.
1887	4	Bass and Guinness cost one shilling a pint bottle.
1889		Last entry written in summit hotel visitors book.
1896	7	Snowdon railway opened.
1896	7	Owen and Roberts hut destroyed by thunderstorm.
1898	7	Hotel rebuilt, replaced some of the huts including John Roberts' 1839 hut.
1902	7	Snowdon Mountain Tramway took over the huts and rebuilt them.
1913	5	Guide book states that there are a refreshment house and a little hotel where one can pass the night.
1922	6	Photograph shows station and four large huts.
1923	7	The 5 or 6 remaining huts were demolished and a new station built.
1936	7	New station building designed by Clough Williams Ellis replaced all huts and station.
1989		Hotel refurbished with double glazed windows, etc.
2009		New summit building opened.

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