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Snowdonia & North Wales's Top 10

From its rugged mountains, dark forests and glorious coastlines, to its medieval castles, slate caverns and vintage railways, here are the top attractions of this beautiful corner of Wales.



▲ **Blaenau Ffestiniog and Slate Caverns.** Atmospheric Victorian village high in the mountains, where visitors can go deep underground to explore the slate caverns. See page 47.



▲ **Snowdon.** This iconic mountain is the highest peak in both England and Wales, and a magnet for climbers and hill walkers. See page 56.



▲ **Centre for Alternative Technology.** This fascinating centre may date back to the 1970s, but it now seems extremely modern, with its focus on green ways of living. See page 94.

▶ **Portmeirion.** Fantasy Italianate village created by Clough Williams-Ellis and which featured in the original cult TV series, *The Prisoner*. See page 71.





▲ **Bodelwyddan Castle.** Historic house in Denbighshire that's set in pristine parkland and displays original rooms and artworks. See page 17.



▲ **Llandudno.** This Victorian seaside resort is one of the jewels of North Wales, with a fine promenade, pretty gardens and some good shops. See page 18.



▲ **Ffestiniog Railway.** This 19th-century narrow-gauge railway started life carrying slate through the Welsh mountains, but now gives tourists a wonderfully scenic journey. See page 45.

▼ **Caernarfon.** While best known for its magnificent castle, Caernarfon is also a busy holiday town with plenty of attractions and places to eat and drink. See page 51.



▼ **Harlech.** Harlech's castle dominates the hillside town and overlooks a gloriously unspoilt swathe of sandy beach that is ideal for families. See page 72.



▼ **Conwy.** Charming little town with a mighty castle and well-preserved medieval walls, Conwy makes a lovely base for exploring. See page 20.



The path to Tryfan and its twin peaks, Adam and Eve.



Overview

Wild Places of Wales

The craggy mountains and green valleys of North Wales combine to produce some of the most dramatic, and wildest, landscapes in Britain. At their heart is Snowdonia.

When the traveller and essayist George Borrow toured North Wales in 1854, he wrote: 'Perhaps in all the world there is no region more picturesquely beautiful.' A bold claim, yet one not hard to justify – and one

that is surely shared by thousands of visitors today. Elsewhere there may be loftier mountains, deeper lakes, greater forests and swifter rivers but rarely are they found in such unique combinations.

Today, while Welsh Black cattle and the ubiquitous Welsh Mountain sheep share their hillsides with walkers and cyclists, climbers and hang-gliders, farming continues much as it has for generations. Dry-stone walls snaking over ridge and summit date from the 18th and 19th centuries, separating valley from *ffridd* (mountain pasture), one farm from the next.

North Wales may not boast the sunniest weather in Britain, but it might well boast some of the cleanest air, the most pristine countryside, the strongest sense of history – oh,



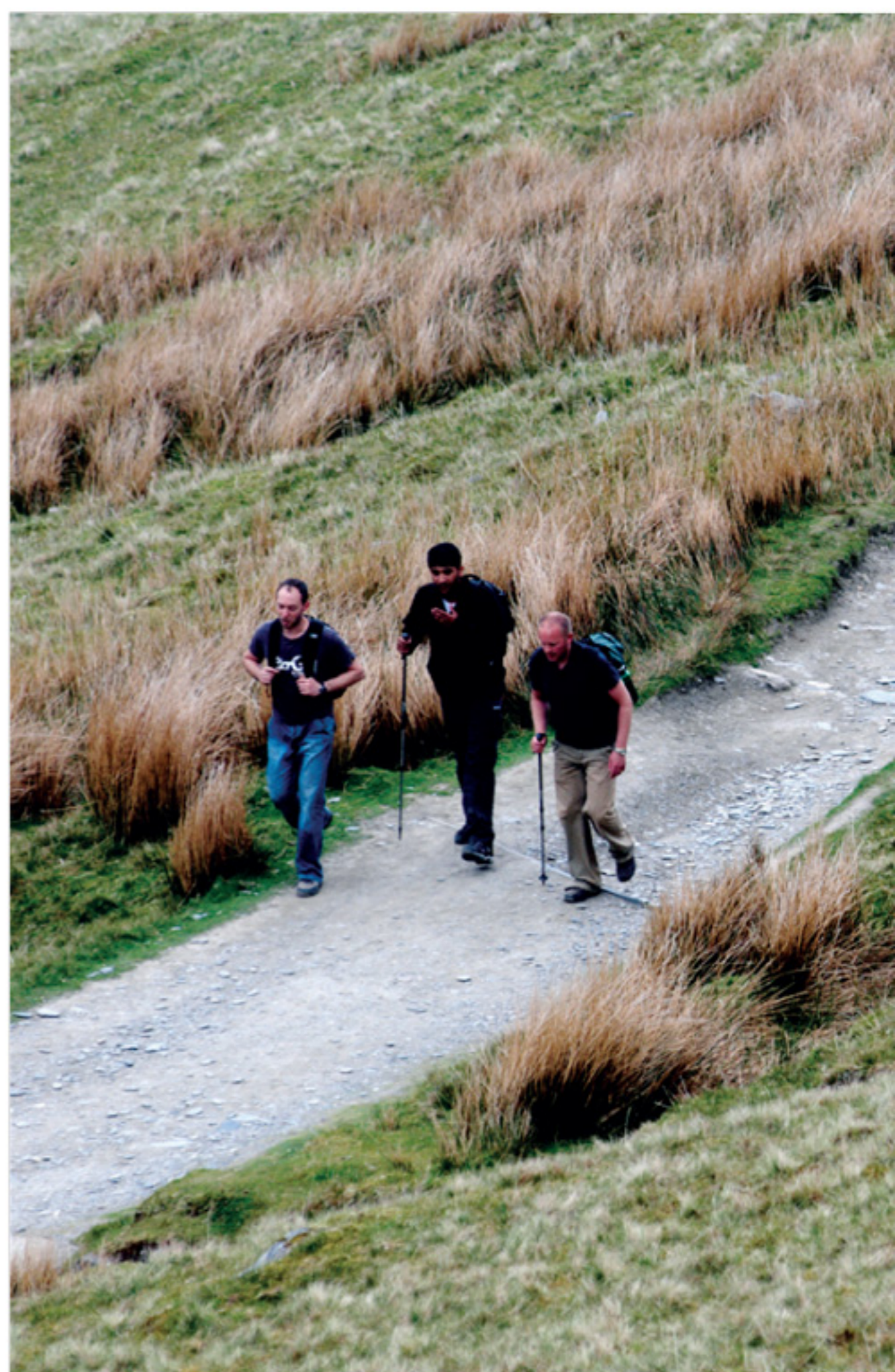


and some of its loveliest beaches. It is undoubtedly a green haven for lovers of the outdoors, especially the northwest corner known as Snowdonia. Eryri's peaks are a thrilling presence: inspirational to explore by road, challenging to those who walk and climb. The great crags and gullies have become associated with Britain's best-known rock climbers and mountaineers. The northeast corner is less dramatic, but contains some gloriously unspoilt villages, pretty market towns and sublime, pastoral scenery.

LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Igneous rock along with volcanic ash, lava and shale from the Ordovician Period makes up much of the savagely beautiful geology around Snowdon and Cadair Idris. Older Cambrian rocks are most evident in the mountains of the Harlech Dome bordering Tremadog Bay. But by far the most striking influence on the entire Snowdonia landscape has been that of glacial ice.

Hiking up Snowdon.





View of Llyn Llydaw from the summit of Snowdon.

The Ice Age which began some 2 million years ago and ended around 10,000 years ago has left an extraordinary and highly visible legacy in Snowdonia. At times throughout that period of very cold climate cycles, great ice sheets thousands of feet thick spread from Scandinavia to Britain. Meanwhile, permanent accumulations of snow on higher ground spawned glaciers which slowly flowed downhill, grinding away the bedrock, smoothing out U-shaped valleys and depositing huge mounds of excavated material called moraines. Steeply hollowed basins known in Wales as *cwms*, usually now filled by lakes and surrounded by cliffs, were left behind in higher locations. The result is a mountain landscape little changed since the last glacier melted.

CLIMATE

Hills and mountains create their own weather. Okay – it's wet. In common with most of upland Britain, there is greater rainfall (snow in winter) here than over the adjacent lowlands. More than 185in (4,700mm) of precipitation have been recorded on the Snowdo-

nia mountains in one year and even in a drought year 100in (2,540mm) is not uncommon. Temperature falls as altitude is gained – about 5°F (3°C) for every 1,000ft (305m). Snow often lingers on north-facing slopes above 2,000ft (610m) well into May. Winds are notoriously fickle, sometimes funnelling viciously through valleys and over passes, at other times disappearing altogether in sheltered locations.

Snowdonia's climate – essentially a collection of mini-climates – is changeable throughout the year, with the best of the weather usually, though not always, to be found on the fringes of the hills. Higher villages and roads may be shrouded in mist for days on end while those in the lee of high ground bask in sunshine. In westerly or southwesterly weather, districts such as the Vale of Conwy and the North Coast are often fine while the West Coast and most of the mountains sulk under cloud and rain. Similarly, east winds produce favourable conditions over Anglesey and the Lleyn.

May, June and September are the driest months in an average year.

ECONOMY

Earning a living from the land in the rugged heart of Snowdonia has never been easy. Only the hardy Welsh Mountain sheep and Welsh Black cattle are able to withstand the harsh

Guide to coloured boxes

Eating

This guide is dotted with coloured boxes providing additional practical and cultural information to

Fact

Green

Kids

Shopping

View

make the most of your visit. Here is a guide to the coding system.

Welsh slate

Much of Snowdonia's earlier prosperity rested upon slate: that impervious, blue-grey stone that splits so conveniently into flat sheets. The industry faded in the late 19th century and long-abandoned slate quarries still scar many a mountainside, particularly around Blaenau Ffestiniog, Bethesda and Llanberis. However, their narrow-gauge railways and workings have long become visitor attractions in their own right. High-quality slates are still produced in limited quantities and are much prized by designers.



Llechwedd Slate Caverns at Blaenau Ffestiniog.

climate and convert rough grazing into profit for the farmer. Lambing extends from March well into April, after which each ewe and lamb will be driven up the hillside to range over its acre or so of ground. Shearing takes place during June and July.

While traditional agriculture continues in the more fertile valleys and lowland fringes, forestry and electricity generation (hydro, nuclear and wind power) contribute their share of regional income. In 2017 the Welsh

Wind turbine blade at the Centre for Alternative Technology.



Government promoted the strategy 'Moving North Wales Forward' to improve transport links and infrastructure in the area and promised investment to further grow such industries such as pharmaceuticals, aerospace and technology. It is hoped this will keep young people in the region, thus keeping alive the Welsh culture and language for the next generation.

ENVIRONMENT

The windy, high ground of North Wales makes it an obvious choice for the siting of onshore wind farms – particularly as much of the area is sparsely populated, and land is relatively cheap. The Welsh Assembly, keen to create a low carbon economy and 'green' jobs, wants to more than double the energy it currently generates from onshore wind farms. Visitors will certainly be aware of their presence, the nature of which divides opinion in both Wales and the UK as a whole: some see them as clean, green and harmless, others as noisy eyesores that can have a negative effect on birdlife.