



COED-Y-BRENIN

Distance: 10.8km (green),
50.6km (red), 76.8km (black)

Percentage singletrack: 70%

TRAIL RATINGS

Beginners: ★★★★★

Intermediate: ★★★★★

Advanced: ★★★★★

**BEST
BRITISH TRAIL
CENTRES**

Coed-y-Brenin

The first of the modern trail centres, Coed-y-Brenin constantly evolves to offer some of the most varied and challenging riding the UK can offer

Words and photos: Roger Trent

Coed-y-Brenin is where trail centres began in the UK. Until that time ours was a growing but very much niche sport with riders heading out, maps in hand, to create their own routes. Everyone rode a hardtail and there was no such thing as a bike park. But that was then, this is now and Coed-y-Brenin currently has seven waymarked routes that range in grade from easy to expert. Despite the modern and airy visitor centre and the extended trail network, Coed-y-Brenin retains something of an old-school feel about it.

THE TRAILS

Coed-y-Brenin's signature trail style is rock slab causeway, and with the exception of Yr Afon (the green route) you do need to apply a level of commitment to get the best out of the trails. That's not because they are necessarily technically difficult in the newly accepted sense of purpose-built separate 'features' and artificially created obstacles, but because the rocky, rooty gnarliness happens through the flow of the trail itself. It gets tiring both physically and mentally because there's nothing like see-sawing between the pain of a steep climb and the adrenaline rush of a pounding singletrack descent to drain you of any last remaining drop of energy.

The Tarw is the original trail — and it's been through a few changes over the years — but it remains technically challenging with some of our favourite sections ever. Our advice is to ride it with fresh legs as you will need all your fitness. The Temtiwr is a good warm-up and taster for all that CyB has to offer. At only 8.7km it nevertheless packs in the required technical difficulty to get your eye in and your legs ready, plus enough singletrack to make you smile and hanker for more.

And if by more you always mean very much more, the Beast of Brenin at 38.2km should be high on your list. Taking in most of the best of the rest it will make demands on your fitness and your skills but



Tree-lined trails are absorbed into the forest



Tarw Trail: the original CyB trail still riding great

the fast, floaty singletrack is payback enough. Dragon's Back is almost as long, at 31.1km, and it also features tough strength-sapping climbs, but the screaming singletrack descents it shares with The Beast will make you (almost) forget the pain in your legs.

If you're stuck for time, or want add a quick lunchtime loop in before heading home, Cyflym Coch can be ridden in less than two hours and puts together some nice singletrack via some relatively short climbs. The **mbr** trail (yep, we leapt at the chance to sponsor a trail, way back in 1988) has been described as 'a mix tape of Coed-y-Brenin's best bits' — well, we would say that — and at 18.4km is a shade under half the distance of The Beast, so in terms of time is more accessible. Don't be deceived though, it is graded black and the stiff climbs still

Unashamedly hardcore cross country with a capital XC

need to be ridden and the rock sections come complete with drop-offs that require commitment, technical ability and confidence.

Coed-y-Brenin is for us, unashamedly hardcore cross country with a capital XC. It rewards fitness and if you want it to, will push you to your limits. At the same time there is some family and easy riding



LOCAL HERO

Dafydd Davis, pioneer trail-builder

The development of the very first man-made mountain bike trail at Coed-y-Brenin and the subsequent proliferation of centres throughout the UK is down to one man: Dafydd Davis. An outdoor instructor who was working as a ranger for the Forestry Commission in the 1990s, Dafydd was charged with finding a way to increase visitor numbers to the forest. Working with volunteers and no one's enthusiasm except his own, Dafydd built the first trail and the rest, to overwork a phrase, is history. Visits to Coed-y-Brenin went from just over 10,000 to more than 150,000 a year and it was used as a model for the strategy that saw Wales establish itself as a mountain biking destination and other areas follow suit soon after.

Dafydd now works as a trail consultant across the world in locations as diverse as Japan, Canada and the Czech Republic, but living just down the road from Coed-y-Brenin, he still gets out to turn the pedals over his first ever trails when he's home. It's probably not an overstatement to say that without Dafydd and his stubborn perseverance we wouldn't have access to the extensive miles of purpose-built trail at mountain biking centres we have in the UK today. So if you spot him blasting round a linked route of his own making, give him a wave and a thank you.



Old school rock and roll riding proves timeless

It's a rock drop roller coaster



MBR!

Coed-y-Brenin is considered the first of the modern trails centres, and sports the handsomely-named and recently refurbished MBR trail

The variety of riding remains some of the most challenging you'll find at any centre

along the Yr Afon trail, and with judicious walking, riders wanting to advance their skills can take on the red routes. The interlinking loop system of trails means that once you get to know the place you can join trails or skip right to your favourite bits and it will be a long time before you run out of dirt to ride or feel boredom creeping in.

Improvements and updates seem to be a regular feature at Coed-y-Brenin and when we visit we usually find something new or bettered — so if you haven't been for a while it's one to put on the list again for summer. If you've never been at all, well you should. And not just because you owe it to your sport to see where it started, but because the variety of riding remains some of the most challenging you'll find at any trail centre, without recourse to perilous North Shore or an uplift, a full face helmet and many inches of travel.

Why not make a weekend of it? Machynlleth is just down the road, as is the natural ride around Pont Scethin and the big-mountain challenge of Cadair Idris. Start packing the car now.

FACTFILE

Getting there

Coed-y-Brenin is in North Wales on the A470 five miles north of Dolgellau. Coming from Dolgellau the visitor centre is on the right. For sat-nav use LL40 2HZ.

Car Park

Pay and display.

Cafe

The cafe is housed in what old-timers call 'the new visitor centre' and what everyone else just calls the visitor centre. Open 9.30am-5pm in summer, 9.30am-4.30pm in winter.

Getting clean

There's a jet wash for your bike and showers for you. Disabled and baby changing facilities are also available.

Shop

Beics Brenin is situated in the visitor centre and has a workshop as well as stocking clothing and a full range of spares. There are hire bikes available and it acts as a demo centre for Summit Cycles, stocking Orange, Santa Cruz and Trek. Call 01341 440728 or visit www.beicsbrenin.co.uk.

Where to stay

There's a good range of accommodation close to Coed-y Brenin. But cast your net a little wider and you're at the coast or the village of Portmeirion making it a great weekend location not only for mountain bikers, but non-riding friends and partners. www.mbwales.com has details, and also try www.parcnet.com for bike-friendly places to stay.

What to ride

The seriously constructed nature of the Coed-y-Brenin trails together with some of the more technical rocky sections mean that you'll take less of a pounding on a short travel full susser. That's not to say you can't ride it on a hardtail, just make sure you've got big tyres. Wear pads if you're new to rocks, too.

When to go

The surfaced and mostly sheltered trails means that Coed-y-Brenin is rideable all year and the tree cover is so dense you often don't notice the rain.

Other stuff

There is a play area, animal puzzle trail and all-access route to the riverside as well as extensive walking in the forest.