



Sugarloaf....Photo Hugh McCann

# EXCURSION TO MID - WALES

## A PLACE OF OUTSTANDING AND UNSPOILT NATURAL BEAUTY

by Paul Brett

**From Merthyr Tydfil in the South to Blaenau Ffestiniog in the North, within these extremities lies the area known as Mid - Wales. When I worked in America, people would ask me where I lived. When I told them I resided in Wales, looks of blank expressions would appear on their faces. 'Oh Yeah, 'aint that somewhere in England ?' would be the main answer.**

Everyone knew where Scotland and Ireland was, but not Wales. That in part, is down to the way successive Political quangos have chosen to advertise Wales. I know of no other countries that TV advertises itself as a tourist attraction within it's own borders, as the powers that be in Wales chose to do. It is a country that should be heralded as THE place to visit for British and International Tourists alike. It has a wealth of natural beauty and un-spoilt countryside that hides many interesting customs, attractions, pursuits and people and a language as old as time itself. Since my first article on the Lleyrn Peninsula in North Wales, one business in particular that I briefly mentioned has seen it's booking rise 51% on last year and coupled with an additional video clip on YouTube, is enjoying a surge in visitors, even in the worst recession we have seen.

I have driven the length and breadth of Wales during my years as a professional musician and played in most of the Towns and Villages at some point or another. You could say that mid-Wales is the heart of the Nation as you can't go North or South without travelling through it. And what a journey it is. From the spectacular



coastal scenery which takes in Harlech and it's historical castle, along to the Mawddach Estuary and Barmouth and

then to Aberdyfi, to an altogether different landscape that greets you when you travel inland. Here you will encounter many farming communities with flocks of sheep scattered everywhere accompanied by herds of Welsh Black cattle. Farming has and always will be a major part of Welsh heritage and culture, these in juxtaposition with mining, both slate and coal, where the former is much in evidence in places like Blaenau Ffestiniog. You can even visit a deep mine up there which gives you a great experience of the conditions that people of a different era worked in.

Many activities in the main are geared for a fresh - air break and very stimulating it can be too. The outdoor activities wouldn't suit the 100 a day smoker or the proverbial "couch potato", but then most people who partake of these pastimes and sports probably wouldn't welcome the clean air being polluted! There are also many other things you can do in this vast area including, cycling through forest trails, riding the rapids in a kayak, fishing (my particular favourite), superb Golf Courses, Archery, Shooting or relax and just enjoy the natural beauty that surrounds you. There are other noted events such as The Hay on Wye Book



[www.hiddentrails.com](http://www.hiddentrails.com)

Festival held in July, which has grown into a Global event with many famous authors and even American Presidents wishing to attend. The Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells in August attracts an enormous crowd and is extremely popular with young and old alike. Both these Shows, while different in their contents, are well worth a visit, but you will have to book accommodation well in advance. Llanwrtyd Wells is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the "smallest Town in Great Britain. It is only 12 miles from the Royal Welsh Showground which incidentally, is also used as a venue for Antique Fairs, Horse Fairs and many other events. This area is also famous as an International and National Rally Car venue. The town lies at the centre of one of the last remaining wildernesses with the cleanest air in Britain. Get your hiking boots on and take to the coun-

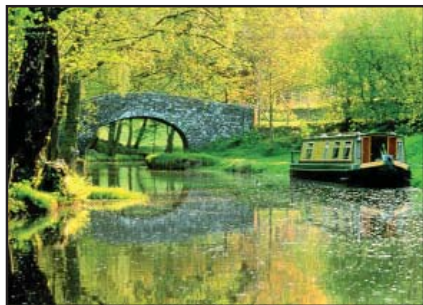


[www.croeso.net](http://www.croeso.net)



[www.offasdyke.com](http://www.offasdyke.com)

tryside for a stroll along **Offa's Dyke** National Trail. You can follow the River Wye taking in some awe inspiring scenery along the way accompanied by Red Kites circling above your head. Load up your back pack with local Welsh produce to sustain you along the way. Welshpool has the superb Light Steam Railway and for boating enthusiasts, the



**Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal** which runs from Newport to Brecon is one of the most scenic canal routes in Britain. It runs for 32 miles (51.5 km) through idyllic scenery in the National Park between Brecon and Pontypool. It then continues to Newport. The canal was built between 1797 and 1812. For the more historical minded among you how about a trip to Brecon Cathedral, Founded as a Benedictine priory, it then became the parish church of Brecon in 1537, a role it held until in 1923 it became the Cathedral for the newly created Diocese of Swansea & Brecon. There are also many excellent Hotels, B&B's Pubs and Restaurants in situ across the whole area too.

You will of course hear spoken of and see



*Brecon Cathedral*

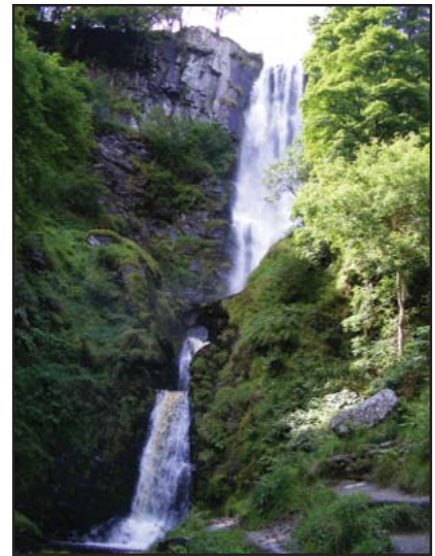
statues in some parts, of legendary Welsh hero



**Owain Glyndwr.** He was born into a family of wealthy Anglo-Welsh landowners and initially studied law in London and fought under the banner of Richard 11 of England in the Scottish wars. Later, events concerning common land disputes with Reginald de Grey, Lord of Ruthin, who was a mate of the new King Henry 1V, led him to denounce his alliance to the English King and thus in 1400AD at Ruthin, he proclaimed himself 'The Prince of Wales' and fought Henry vigorously thereafter. There's

more information on Owain Glyndwr at <http://www.castlewailes.com/glyndwr.html>

At Rhayader, you can visit and wonder at the highest waterfall in Wales. Here's a description from a publicity site:



*Photo by Matt Banks*

"*Pistyll Rhaeadr* is an enchanting waterfall in the Berwyn Mountains, just inside Wales, west of Oswestry and Shrewsbury. At 240ft (80m) high it is the UK tallest single drop waterfall. This much-loved waterfall captivating all who visit her. People have returned, generation after generation to take in the spirit and presence of this Special place. Many visitors mention how quickly they come to a sense of peace and reverence within themselves, seldom found in today's busy and fragmented world It is a great place to explore the Berwyn Mountain and surrounding hills, with many walks on all levels to suit a variety of walkers. "

The Brecon Beacons cover 519 miles and altogether is a unique place. It is a National Park that is heavily involved in sustaining the Green philosophy of life. From Climate Change to Biodiversity, if you truly believe you can offer something in this area visit their website as



The Brecon Beacons

they are looking for volunteers

<http://www.breconbeacons.org/>.

I remember once in the 1960's breaking down in the group's old Bedford van somewhere in the Brecons as the road was impassable with heavy snow. I think we had just played a show in Merthyr and was heading up to Llandrindod Wells when we just stopped. We couldn't see a telephone anywhere (mobiles were not around then), so we slept in the van on the mattress covering the equipment. It was freezing needless to say. We were awoken around 5am by soldiers who had been on overnight exercises in the Brecons, as had we! They towed us to the nearest garage and shared some rations with us for which we were eternally grateful and the garage owner's wife made us some hot tea while her husband fixed the van. So kindness prevailed that day from rather unexpected sources and we were able to travel on to the gig.

There is a recent video that is available which is hosted by TV presenters Iolo Williams and Ben Fogel. It includes the Brecon Jazz Festival, Iron Age hill forts, Brecon Mountain Railway, The Mountain Centre, waterfalls, Brecon Farmer's Market and the British Heart Foundation's inaugural Three Peaks Challenge ! It is Produced by the Brecon Beacons DVD Company Limited, in association with the

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. It was Filmed and directed by Matthew Davies and Andrew Goode. This video is well worth the money and will give you an insight to this beautiful part of Wales which hopefully will encour-

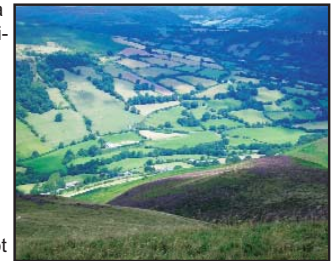


age you to visit the area either for a short break or a longer holiday.

<http://www.breconbeaconsdvd.com/>

I have to mention the **Brecon Jazz Festival** as it has barely scraped through a financial crisis to survive and mount another show this year. The operating company that was responsible for running the festival for 25 years ceased trading in December 08 and there were major doubts whether or not the event would continue. It now appears that the event will go ahead in August 2009, but with a reduced programme of events. The Arts Council of Wales has promised support for 2010 saying "it was still com-

mitted to a "high quality international jazz festival in 2010". There are many Festivals and events, not just in



Wales, that have suffered from the financial crises and one wonders if the money awarded to such doyens of the banking sector such as Sir Fred Goodwin, with his massive pension from RBS for leading the company into one of the biggest banking failures in history, would have been more deservedly spent on supporting events such as Brecon Jazz or other such popular public events. After all, it's all taxpayers money, isn't it, yet Politicians have no hesitation in cutting all sorts of support for such events, whilst rubber stamping vast payments to 'ankers, for monumental failures such as RBS and the like. Strange that, isn't it.

My apologise for omitting many other places, but interested parties will just have to research the many wonders of the area....it's all part of the experience of visiting beautiful and exhilarating - Mid-Wales.



The Brecon Beacons